

TECHNICIANS OF THE SACRED

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Leslie Scalapino Memorial Fund for Poetry, which was established by generous contributions to the UC Press Foundation by Thomas J. White and the Leslie Scalapino–O Books Fund.

TECHNICIANS *of the* SACRED

*A Range of Poetries from
Africa, America, Asia,
Europe, and Oceania*



Third Edition
Revised and Expanded

Edited with commentaries by
Jerome Rothenberg



University of California Press

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University of California Press
Oakland, California

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rothenberg, Jerome, editor, writer of added commentary.

Title: Technicians of the sacred : a range of poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania / edited with commentaries by Jerome Rothenberg.

Description: Third edition, revised and expanded. | Oakland, California : University of California Press, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017007007 | ISBN 9780520290716 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780520290723 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Religious poetry. | Incantations—Poetry. | Rites and ceremonies—Poetry. | Folk poetry. | Folk songs—Texts.

Classification: LCC PN1347 .T43 2017 | DDC 398.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017007007>

26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR DIANE AND MATTHEW

*I*love*my******world*

*I*love*my******time*

*I*love*my*growing*children**

*I*love*my*****old*people*

*I*love*my*****ceremonies*

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THE PRE-FACES



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Something happened to me, now a full half century in the past, that has shaped my ambition for poetry up until the very present. Not to focus too much on myself, it was a discovery shared with others around me, of the multiple hidden sources & the multiple presences of poetry both far & near. I don't remember clearly where—or when—it started, but once it got under my skin—*our* skin, I mean to say—that which we could hope to know as poetry drew in whole worlds we hadn't previously imagined. Nothing was too low—or high—to be considered, but the imagining mind & voice, once the doors of perception were opened or cleansed, were everywhere we looked.

This also tied in to the search to create new forms of writing & thinking & to bring to light experiences & actions heretofore closed to us: a move that began with an earlier avant-garde & that we now repossessed/reclaimed as our own. A result of that—from the beginning, I thought—was an expansion of what we could now recognize as poetry, for which our inherited definitions had proven to be inadequate. In that sense that which was traditional in other parts of the world or buried & outcast in our own came across as new & unforeseen when placed within our own still too narrow framework. For myself, the discoveries, once I opened up to them, proved as rich in possibilities as what we & our predecessors had been creating for our own place & time. That so much of this came from an imagined “outside” or from long outcast & subterranean, often brutally repressed traditions was evident even before we named them as such.

Why did it happen *then*? Why in the 1950s & 1960s when I was first coming into poetry? The old explorers, the avant-gardists from the first

half of the twentieth century who had gotten some of this rolling, had paused or retreated during the war (the second “world war” in the lifetime of some then among us), which in turn had changed everything around us. The early cold war that followed drove things/thoughts underground for some, while for others it brought the reassertion of a more conventional literary/poetic past. (That last was good, by the way, as a prod for actual resistance.) In the underground & at the margins, then, a new resistance was born in which the rigid past was again wiped clean & the new allowed to flourish. (Not the newness of novelty & fashion, as we saw it, but a newness that could change the mind & in so doing change the world—something shared with other arts & ways of thought & mind.) And with that came a kind of permission to remake the order of things & the changes began to come in helter-skelter; & as they did they changed the idea of what poetry was or could be in all times & places. For myself—early along—I turned to “reinterpreting the poetic past from the point of view of the present”—words I used in a manifesto I wrote in those heady times when so many of us were writing manifestos.

With this as my impulse I began to scour areas that had been closed to us as poetry—hidden, outsidéd & subterranean—to discover what was clearly poetry but also forms of languaging that had never been within poetry’s domain. The first area I approached was what had for too long been labeled as “primitive” & “archaic” & that surfaced, when it did, (the “primitive” in particular) in specialized books that took up space in libraries & bookstores (but also in academic curricula) outside of poetry or literature as such. My own discoveries, once they started, came in lightning-quick succession, & as they did, they brought to light works in no sense inferior to what we sought or created as poetry in our own time & finally in no sense inferior to what had been delivered as the poetry & poetics of the normative “canonical” past. Furthermore they provided rich new contexts for poetry—not as literature per se but as a means, both public & private, for experiencing & comprehending the world, by which the visions of the individual (along with their translation into language) were at the same time what Mallarmé had called “the words of the tribe” (& Ezra Pound “the tale of the tribe”), words whose purification Mallarmé saw as the poet’s principal task. That the poems in question were largely oral—free of writing in the narrow sense—made them all the more intriguing & played into the draw we felt in our own work toward a new poetics of performance. (That the “tribe” in this sense was the human in all times & places is another point worth making.)

For this I found the anthology a nearly unexplored/undeveloped vehicle, one too in which I was given unchecked control during the heady days of

the late 1960s, so that I could handle it as I would a large assemblage or a grand collage of words & images. That was what came to me anyway as I assembled *Technicians*, the idea of a book that worked through a series of juxtapositions & with a free hand that was given me to include whatever I thought needed including. And I found myself free as well to create a structure for the book & to include an extensive section of commentaries that could both point to the original/aboriginal contexts & to the relevance & resemblance of those poems or *near-poems* (Dick Higgins' term) to contemporary works of poetry & art, but particularly to newly emerging experimental or avant-garde writing.¹ It was that approach to the works at hand that allowed me to find poetry (or what I came to call *poesis* or poetic word & mind) in acts of language that had rarely been recognized as such. I was also able to drop the notion of the "primitive" as a kind of simplistic or undeveloped state of mind & word, & to begin the pre-face to the book with a three-word opening I can still adhere to: "Primitive means complex."²

2

In the original edition of *Technicians of the Sacred* in 1968, & again in the expanded 1984 edition, the three opening sections end with one titled "Death & Defeat," which I've come to think of as a marker of the tragic if secondary dimension of the original work. The final poem in that section, however, was a small prophetic song from the Plains Indian Ghost Dance":

We shall live again.
We shall live again.

In the years since then, along with the continued decimation of many poetries & languages, there has been a welcome resurgence, in others, of

1. That the book in turn had some influence on the ways in which poetry was made or understood among my own contemporaries & fellow poets & artists was a welcome if unexpected side effect of what appeared here.

2. After the publication of *Shaking the Pumpkin* (1972) & the second edition of *Technicians of the Sacred* (1985) I was able to continue the project of anthologizing & assemblage with a series of new books, *Poems for the Millennium*, all of which continued to give attention to what the earlier volumes had set in motion. These were, in order of publication, volume 1: *The University of California Book of Modern & Postmodern Poetry: From Fin-de-Siècle to Negritude*; volume 2: *The University of California Book of Modern & Postmodern Poetry: From Postwar to Millennium*; volume 3: *The University of California Book of Romantic & Postromantic Poetry*; & volume 5: *Barbaric Vast & Wild: A Gathering of Outside & Subterranean Poetry from Origins to Present* (Black Widow Press). The last of these was of course the most obvious continuation of *Technicians of the Sacred*.

what was thought to have been irrevocably lost. This has taken place both in indigenous languages (sometimes called “endangered” or “stateless”) & in the languages of conquest—in written & experimental forms as well as in continuing oral traditions, & as often as not in forms that show both a continuity & transformation of the “deep cultures” from which the new poetry emerges. It is with this in mind that the old Ghost Dance song becomes a harbinger for me of what can now be said & represented.

My own experience here has been largely with the new indigenous poetics of the Americas, both north & south, but in the course of time I have also begun to explore similar outcroppings across a still greater range of continents & cultures. The new indigenous poets with whom I’ve had direct contact in mutual performance & correspondence write & perform in languages such as Nahuatl, Mazatec, Tzotzil, Zapotec, & Mapuche, among those in the Americas, while I can also draw on others (both poets & translators) in Africa, Asia, Europe, & Oceania, to maintain the global balance that characterized the earlier *Technicians*. I have also chosen to represent pidgins & creoles, as well as poetry written in languages like English & Spanish but tied in formal & semantic ways to the deep cultures from which they emerge.

In all of this it seems clear to me that when I speak here of “survivals and revivals” the reference isn’t to a static past but to works that are open both to continuity, however measured, & to necessary transformation. It is good to remember in that sense that change—of form & vision both—has been at the heart of the older poetics gathered here as well as of our own. As Charles Olson wrote, now some time ago: “What does not change is the will to change,” and it is in that spirit that *revival* appears here as *renewal*: to “make it new,” as Ezra Pound once had it, & the Emperor Taizong T’ang some thirteen centuries before him, & so cited (p. 431). In the paradise of poets, to which I’ve alluded elsewhere, the old & the new are always changing places.³

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A FINAL NOTE. In the world as we have it today many of the indigenous & tribal/oral cultures foregrounded in *Technicians of the Sacred* are

3. In the present revision too I have been aware of changes since then in the common names of cultures & languages and have acted as far as I could to update them, while allowing some earlier namings to stand beside the new ones where doing so contributed to clarity. I have also attended to recent grammatical changes in gender usage—in my own works where possible though not in those of authors past & present from whose texts I was quoting.

again under threat of disruption & annihilation. If the older colonialisms are less apparent than in the past, new forces unforeseen thirty years ago, both ethnic & religious, are threatening to wipe out vestiges of the alternate traditions & to eliminate those who remain their inheritors. In the process the deeper human past has also come under attack, rekindling memories of previous iconoclasm—the smashing of statues & the burning of books brought into a present in which the fear of difference & of change now reasserts itself. At the same time, & much closer to home, we have witnessed an upsurge of new nationalisms & racisms, directed most often against the diversity of mind & spirit of which the earlier *Technicians* was so clearly a part. To confront this implicit, sometimes rampant ethnic cleansing, even genocide, there is the need for a kind of *omni-poetics* that tests the range of our threatened humanities wherever found & looks toward an ever greater assemblage of words & thoughts as a singular buttress against those forces that would divide & diminish us. That the will to survive arises also among those most directly threatened—as a final & necessary declaration of autonomy *and* interdependence—is yet another fact worth noting.

Jerome Rothenberg
Encinitas, California
May Day 2017

PRE-FACE (1984)

When I first entered on the present work, sometime in the middle 1960s, it was my hope to make a fresh start, to begin at the beginning—as if, in the words of Descartes once quoted by the Dada fathers, “there were no other men before us.” That meant not so much a simple rubbing-out of history as its possible expansion; & it meant, against our inherited notions of the past, a questioning of such notions at their roots. The area I set out to explore was poetry: an idea of poetry—of *language & reality* both—that had haunted me since my own first beginnings as a poet. The inherited view—no longer bearable—was that one such idea of poetry, as developed in the West, was sufficient for the total telling. Against this—as the facts, the poems themselves, revealed—was the realization that poetry, like language itself, existed everywhere: as powerful, even complex, in its presumed beginnings as in many of its later works. In the light of that approach, poetry appeared not as a luxury but as a true necessity: not a small corner of the world for those who lived it but equal to the world itself. (For this the works presented herein would be a confirmation.)

Late into the assembling of *Technicians of the Sacred*, I became aware that the work coincided with a series of openings that were newly reappearing in the culture as a whole. My own sources & predecessors—as far as I knew them then—went back 150, maybe 200 years into the Western past, but the personal awakenings for me & others of my generation came in the decade immediately after the second world war. That much at least was clear to me in the several years I was working on the gathering, but what came as a surprise was that by 1966 or 1967, when I was already into it, the desire for a new beginning had spread in a way that we wouldn’t earlier have believed possible. Several correspondents, later friends, out on the West Coast first got the word to me that there was in

evidence there, as Michael McClure put it, “a *massive* return to ‘instinct and intuition’”: terms that I felt then & now as only a part of the human picture, but a part whose reemergence was long due. The equation I saw—& so stated in the Pre-Face to *Technicians of the Sacred*—was of “imagination” as a process of both “energy” & “intelligence”; or, put another way, that the return of what Blake had called “our antediluvian energies” would lead to a transformation of intelligence rather than its virtual obliteration. It was to this “new imagination” that the work was dedicated—as a resource book of possibilities that were often new for us but that had already been realized somewhere in the world.

All of that entered, as McClure knew it would, into the sixties maelstrom. That meant that the book confronted an audience that was already waiting for it, often with more preconceptions about the “tribal” or the “oral”—& so on—than I myself was willing to take on. But it also coincided with a series of experiments & projects, some highly visible & publicized, others carried on outside the media & the art-world nexus, but all related to what Gary Snyder elsewhere names “the real work.” In the post-script to the book’s original Pre-Face, I wrote: “This post-script is an incitement to those who would join in the enterprise; it is in no sense a final word.” By saying that, I was calling for new work by poets & others, & in the years since, I was able to encourage some of that work & to present it in further anthologies such as *Shaking the Pumpkin*, *A Big Jewish Book*, & *Symposium of the Whole*.¹ Even more so, in 1970 I joined Dennis Tedlock in founding the magazine *Alcheringa*, precisely to carry on the work of *Technicians of the Sacred* in uncovering new & old poetries & developing new means for their translation & presentation. (I later pursued this on my own in *New Wilderness Letter*.) At the same time others were documenting & displaying related works: in specialized books & wide-ranging anthologies, in little & large magazines, in film & video, & in offerings at festivals & conferences on ritual poetry & performance.

The point—again—is that the work was now emerging on its own momentum: a condition of our time that carries over to the present. And similar interests—sometimes in fruitful confrontation with our own—were part of those ethnic movements that have marked an ongoing reorganization of values & powers both in the West & in those multiple cultures of the “third world” undergoing rapid transformations. Our

1. *Symposium of the Whole*, edited with Diane Rothenberg, now exists as a companion to the present volume, tracing the enterprise back two centuries & more, & providing detailed descriptions of matters that can only be hinted at here. I have accordingly attempted, where possible, to cross-reference to it through the pages that follow.

ideas of poetry—including, significantly, our idea of the poet—began to look back *consciously* to the early & late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings & intensities through language. As the reflection of our yearning to create a meaningful ritual life—a life lived at the level of poetry—that looking-back related to the emergence of a new poetry & art rooted in performance & in the oldest, most universal of human traditions.

All of that is by now so much a part of the consciousness of late twentieth-century poets & artists that the “news” of the original book is probably no longer news. But the work, by the same token, has hardly begun, & the changed paradigm of where we see ourselves in time & space has received little recognition from the literary brokers. In that sense it remains (like much that is good among us) partly, maybe largely, subterranean.

While *Technicians* has remained the pivotal work for me, I was aware then & now that in first assembling it I had to work within the limits of what was available in the middle 1960s: a tremendous amount of raw material collected by anthropologists & linguists earlier in the century, very few solid or poetically viable translations, & a big gap between the poets & the scholars concerned with this kind of project. Since its publication in 1968, the work on all sides has increased tremendously, part of it, I would like to believe, as a direct or indirect result of what that first gathering had set in motion.

My intention from the start was to be able to return at some point to *Technicians* & to revise it in the light of later work. The strategy for that revision, as I’ve now come to it, has been to keep the structure & approach of the book intact, while adding new material to all the sections & eliminating weaker or more dubious pieces, where that didn’t interfere with the ongoing “arguments” in the commentaries. By the time of *Shaking the Pumpkin*, such new works had clearly begun to appear, & by now (along with older works previously overlooked) they form a constantly expanding source from which to build the present gathering. (That what has opened to us is only a small percentage of the world’s primal poetics is something we would do well to keep in mind.)

The difference from 1968, then, works out largely in favor of the present. As such, it reflects a renewed interest in the collection of traditional poetics & an unprecedented number of translation projects whose main aim has been the re-creation of oral performances in both written & sounded versions. With this has also come a change in quality, a new degree of freedom related to the freedoms won in our own poetry—by which I don’t mean a free & easy approach to the work at hand but

translations & descriptions *freed from* conventional models of poetry & language that allowed us to see only a small part of what was really there. The scholars who have come into it—largely ethnographers & linguists—have developed a closer, more accurate approach to sources, while the poets have shown how translated works can be created that carry the excitement of charged language (poetry) straight over into English. But the two approaches have never been exclusive, & the crossovers between the poets & the scholars (sometimes their active collaboration) have by now blurred what once seemed to be an ironclad distinction.

This revised edition is in some sense a reflection of those fifteen years of renewal & owes more to the new translators than I can ever properly express. On their more technical side, the experiments in translation have involved such scholars as Dennis Tedlock, Dell Hymes, David McAllester, Allan Burns, & Peter Seitel, while the poets have included Nathaniel Tarn, Armand Schwerner, W.S. Merwin, James Koller, Anselm Hollo, Edward Field, Carol Rubenstein, & Barbara Einzig, among many others. The projects have often been extensive in scope & based on firsthand explorations (“seeing for oneself”—C. Olson): the Cree Indian tellings gathered & closely re-created by Howard Norman (a Cree speaker from childhood); the precise translations of Dennis Tedlock from Zuni & Mayan that developed a new model for transcribing oral performances in writing; the works of A.K. Ramanujan bringing us the visionary poetry of Tamil (*bhakti*) saints & madmen; Kofi Awoonor’s firsthand translations of still contemporary Ewe *heno* poets; Judith Gleason’s unravelings of epic Ifa divination poems; Donald Philippi’s translations of the oldest Japanese writings & the story-poems, from almost the present, of Ainu shamans & singers; David Guss’s recent efforts to bring the Makiritare imaginal world into English; Henry Munn’s translations from the extended shamanistic sessions of María Sabina & other Mazatec healers; my own experiments, circa 1970, with “total translations” from Seneca & Navajo; & the continuing work of David McAllester, R.M. Berndt, Miguel León-Portilla, & Ulli Beier.² Beyond the tightness of this or that translation, the versions & workings—still from a variety of approaches—are examples in themselves of that continuation or diffusion of ideas & images that has been—always—a fundamental marker of the human condition.

An assemblage like this one is by its nature an anthology of *versions*.

2. [In the years since I wrote this, other translators & poet-translators have come into the picture, many of them presented in these pages & showing various degrees of experiment & innovation in the process: Stuart Cooke, Richard Dauenhauer, Stephen Goodman, Bob Holman (with Papa Susso), Pierre Joris & Nicole Peyrafitte, David Larsen, Gerry Loose, Stephen Muecke, Erik Mueggler, David Shook, & Wai-lim Yip.]

Among the sources absent from the original *Technicians*, the most conspicuous were those from Europe. Not that I had planned it that way, but I found as I got into it that I was uncertain how to distinguish a non-“literary” tradition in European poetry & was overwhelmed by the task of selection & retranslation. The materials felt too close for me to get a clear image of how they fitted with the others or to separate the European “primitive” from its development by later poets. Beyond that I was aware—& that awareness has continued to the present—of how the old European poetries (the mythologies in particular) had been corrupted to serve the ends of European nationalisms: that Western mythology & folklore in their nineteenth- & early twentieth-century forms were shot through with racist distortions, teutonic fakeries, & so on. The political intention of *Technicians* was in fact to call such European hegemonies into question.

The exclusion of Europe resulted, probably, in the exaggeration of the European difference: not a contrast between “primitive” & “civilized” modes of thought but a European/non-European split that leaves Europe as an entity almost entirely apart. (It also masks the fact that European cultural imperialism began against populations themselves a part of Europe & has continued there up to the present.) In the intervening years I kept going back to Europe & to the necessary sourceworks, devoting the fifth issue of *Alcheringa* to them & first conceiving *A Big Jewish Book* as a roundabout attempt to deal with the European experience through the focus of a Jewish diaspora that merged with multiple European cultures. In the meantime new translations became available from various sources that revealed more clearly than before those instances where mind—& its coming-forth through language—was at its most intense in Europe: where the poetics of the shamans (even where we saw the shamans hunted down as heretics & witches) was still in evidence for all to see & hear.

It now seems clear to me that such a European section—& the interspersing of European materials elsewhere in this book—is not only useful in itself but can have an illuminating effect on the other areas covered. My procedure here is to follow a line that runs from a conjectural tribal/oral past & has been carried forward through a series of subterranean & folk traditions, often magical or mystical in nature. In concrete terms, the work begins with a reconstructed paleolithic calendar count & with some of those Mesopotamian sources (Sumerian, Ugaritic, Hittite) that were geographically Asian but in constant interplay with ancient Europe. From there it moves to early Greek & Roman models that are themselves on the border between an oral & a written poetry, before drawing

(nonchronologically) from a range of sources that include pre-Christian (pagan & shamanistic) mythologies & poetries recovered over the last 200 years from Celtic, Icelandic, Finnish, Anglo-Saxon, Serbian, & so on; works like the Syriac “round dance of Jesus” as an example of a (heretical) gnosticism that reveals a virtual process of open *poesis*; magical texts & soundtexts using—like their counterparts elsewhere—a specialized language of changes & what Malinowski called “the coefficient of weirdness”; & outcroppings of all of these in latterday folk traditions & lores, particularly as they touch the work of romantic & modern poets or affirm a counterpoetics rooted in practices resembling or related to others in these pages. (That even this much of the older work has survived I would take as the sign of a resistance—deeply, even darkly, political—to the conformities demanded by the ruling nation-states.)

Finally, it has been my decision to include a few works from the established (literary) tradition that are connected as well to the old lore insofar as it remained a living presence in the air of Europe. The persistence of such connections explains the appearance here of Rabelais, Saint Francis, Blake, & even Shakespeare—as, less surprisingly, that of Homer & Hesiod—along with my sense that the equals of the old “technicians of the sacred” aren’t only to be found at the margins but at the center of our poetries as generally understood. (It is at this point that the distinction between the margins & the center begins to drop away.) That such ways-of-mind may be more intact in the oral/written work of a Shakespeare than in the more dispersed/fragmented work (however marvelous) of this or that “folk” poet is not a retreat from the proposals of *Technicians of the Sacred* but the strongest affirmation I can give them. The attempt to show this greater “great tradition” is—like much else in this book—only a beginning, & its expansion would take me into a work like what George Quasha & I attempted in *America a Prophecy*: a merging of the literary & the nonliterary toward the presentation of a visionary poetics in *all* its phases.

The intention of the book—its presentation of the world’s “tribal & oral poetries” / of “savage mind” wherever found—is otherwise explained in the original Pre-Face. I have reprinted it here with only some minor modifications, but the event has also opened me to a review of many of the propositions—my own & others’—that remain largely unresolved. It is late in the game by now, but it seems to me (given whatever experience I’ve had with it) that we’re still overwhelmed by preconceptions as we go on with the work at hand. I have tried, myself, to deal with certain of these which I find questionable or disproven by the actual investigation.

And again & again I find that part of my work the hardest to get across.
A few explicit warnings, therefore:

—that we must, above all, avoid clichés about the poetics/ethnopoetics of technologically *simpler* cultures—which led me to begin *Technicians* with an emphasis on the *complexity* of tribal/oral language & (ritual) art;

—that we must question—by investigation—the idea that traditional art & poetry are collective rather than individual—reflective in fact, as Paul Radin wrote, of “an individualism run riot”;

—that we must not assume that it is our culture alone (or those cultures most like our own) that has introduced reflexivity/self-reflection into the creative process, when scholars like Victor Turner have taken such pains to demonstrate the reflexive nature of ritual & art throughout the full range of human cultures;

—that we can no longer assume that the poetry & ritual of traditional cultures aims at stasis rather than at change/transformation not only in a mystical sense but in a social sense as well—for, in Olson’s paraphrasing of Heraclitus: “what does not change / is the will to change”;

& we must be careful not to assume

—that orality totally defines “them” or that writing totally defines “us” (a major attempt of this revision is to explore—even more than in 1968—the universality of writing/drawing as a primal form of language);

nor should we overlook

—that people have thought long & hard—everywhere—about language & its accomplishment through performance;

—that a poetics—a generalized “idea of poetry”—has arisen again & again in the total human story, no more nor less “universal” than the Athenian poetics which gave a start to one such line of thinking in the West;

—that much of what we think of (too easily) as primitive or traditional is the work of our contemporaries & a response—as in many of the poems gathered herein—to a world that they & we share;³

3. [The Survivals & Revivals section of the present—third—edition of this book is a still further indication of how many of the poets presented here are our contemporaries & companions in an increasingly threatened & interdependent world.]

& we must remember to our own good

—that a poetry of the spirit—a visionary poetry—is not only to be found apart from us; that while it pervades many old cultures, it has, since the nineteenth century at least, been a prominent mode among our own poets (& in some sense has likely always been that, as a kind of crypto [hidden] vision).

And knowing that, we have the advantage of observing in the traditional cultures how such modes have permeated whole populations & how they've been carried forward over millennia.

By doing all this, we can also discover forms that we've barely dreamed of, or we can ignore them to our loss & hardly (as far as I can see) to *their* advantage. One result will be that our poetry will cease to be “modern” (as Tristan Tzara, a major forerunner of the present work, long ago predicted) & will emerge, with the dissolution of modernism, as what it was all along: “a state of mind (*esprit*)” . . . not an investment in a “new technique” but “in the spirit.”

Jerome Rothenberg
Encinitas, California
February 10, 1984

Primitive Means Complex

That there are no primitive languages is an axiom of contemporary linguistics where it turns its attention to the remote languages of the world. There are no half-formed languages, no underdeveloped or inferior languages. Everywhere a development has taken place into structures of great complexity. People who have failed to achieve the wheel will not have failed to invent & develop a highly wrought grammar. Hunters & gatherers innocent of all agriculture will have vocabularies that distinguish the things of their world down to the finest details. The language of snow among the Eskimos is awesome. The aspect system of Hopi verbs can, by a flick of the tongue, make the most subtle kinds of distinction between different types of motion.

What is true of language in general is equally true of poetry & of the ritual-systems of which so much poetry is a part. It is a question of energy & intelligence as universal constants &, in any specific case, the direction that energy & intelligence (= imagination) have been given. No people today is newly born. No people has sat in sloth for the thousands of years of its history. Measure everything by the Titan rocket & the transistor radio, & the world is full of primitive peoples. But once change the unit of value to the poem or the dance-event or the dream (all clearly artifactual situations) & it becomes apparent what all those people have been doing all those years with all that time on their hands.

Poetry, wherever you find it among the “primitives” (literally *everywhere*), involves an extremely complicated sense of materials & structures.¹

1. The word “primitive” is used with misgivings & put in quotes, but no way around it seems workable. “Non-technological” & “non-literate,” which have often been suggested as alternatives, are too emphatic in pointing to supposed “lacks” &,

Everywhere it involves the manipulation (fine or gross) of multiple elements. If this isn't always apparent, it's because the carry-over (by translation or interpretation) necessarily distorts where it chooses some part of the whole that it can meaningfully deal with. The work is foreign & its complexity is often elusive, a question of gestalt or configuration, of the angle from which the work is seen. If you expect a primitive work to be simple or naïve, you will probably end up seeing a simple or naïve work; & this will be abetted by the fact that translation can, in general, only present as a single work, a part of what is actually there. The problem is fundamental for as long as we approach these works from the outside—& we're likely fated to be doing that forever.

It's very hard in fact to decide what precisely are the boundaries of "primitive" poetry or of a "primitive" poem, since there's often no activity differentiated as such, but the words or vocables are part of a larger total "work" that may go on for hours, even days, at a stretch. What we would separate as music & dance & myth & painting is also part of that work, & the need for separation is a question of "our" interest & preconceptions, not of "theirs." Thus the picture is immediately complicated by the nature of the work & the media that comprise it. And it becomes clear that the "collective" nature of primitive poetry (upon which so much stress has been placed despite the existence of individualized poems & clearly identified poets) is to a great degree inseparable from the amount of materials a single work may handle.

Now all of this is, if so stated, a question of technology as well as inspiration; & we may as well take it as axiomatic for what follows that where poetry is concerned, "primitive" means complex.

What Is a "Primitive" Poem?

Poems are carried by the voice & are sung or chanted or spoken in specific situations. Under such circumstances, runs the easy answer, the "poem" would simply be the words-of-the-song. But a little later on the

though they feel precise to start with, are themselves open to question. Are the Inuit [Eskimo] snow-workers, e.g., really "non"- or "pre-technological"? And how does the widespread use of pictographs & pictosymbols, which can be "read" by later generations, affect their users' non-literate status? A major point throughout this book is that these peoples (& they're likely too diverse to be covered by a single name) are precisely "technicians" where it most concerns them—specifically in their relation to the "sacred" as something they can actively create or capture. That's the only way in fact that I'd hope to define "primitive": as a situation in which such conditions flourish & in which the "poets" are (in a variant of Mircea Eliade's phrase) the principle "technicians of the sacred."

question arises: what *are* the words & where do they begin & end? The translation, as printed, may show the “meaningful” element only, often no more than a single, isolated “line”; thus

A splinter of stone which is white (Saan [Bushman])

Semen white like the mist (Australian)

My-shining-horns (Ojibwa: single word)

etc.

but in practice the one “line” will likely be repeated until its burden has been exhausted. (Is it “single” then?) It may be altered phonetically & the words distorted from their “normal” forms. Vocables with no fixed meanings may be intercalated. All of these devices will be creating a greater & greater gap between the “meaningful” residue in the translation & what-was-actually-there. We will have a different “poem” depending where we catch the movement, & we may start to ask: Is something within this work the “poem,” or is everything?

Again, the work will probably not end with the “single” line & its various configurations—will more likely be preceded & followed by other lines. Are all of these “lines” (each of considerable duration) separate poems, or are they the component parts of a single, larger poem moving toward some specific (ceremonial) end? Is it enough, then, if the lines happen in succession & aren’t otherwise tied? Will some further connection be needed? Is the group of lines a poem if “we” can make the connection? Is it a poem where no connection is apparent to “us”? If the lines come in sequence on a single occasion does the unity of the occasion connect them into a single poem? Can many poems be a single poem as well? (They often are.)

What’s a sequence anyway?

What’s unity?

The Unity of “Primitive” Thought & Its Shattering

The anthology shows some ways in which the unity is achieved—in general by the imposition of some constant or “key” against which all disparate materials can be measured. A sound, a rhythm, a name, an image, a dream, a gesture, a picture, an action, a silence: any or all of these can function as “keys.” Beyond that there’s no need for consistency, for fixed or discrete meanings. An object is whatever it becomes under the impulse of the situation at hand. Forms are often open. Causality is often set

aside. The poets (who may also be dancers, singers, magicians, whatever the event demands of them) master a series of techniques that can fuse the most seemingly contradictory propositions.

But above all there's a sense-of-unity that surrounds the poem, a reality concept that acts as a cement, a unification of perspective linking

poet & man
man & world
world & image
image & word
word & music
music & dance
dance & dancer
dancer & man
man & world
etc.

all of which has been put in many different ways—by Cassirer notably as a feeling for “the solidarity of all life” leading toward a “law of metamorphosis” in thought & word.

Within this undifferentiated & unified frame with its open images & mixed media, there are rarely “poems” as we know them—but we come in with our analytical minds & shatter the unity. It has in fact been shattered already by workers before us.

Primitive & Modern: Intersections & Analogies

Like any collector, my approach to delimiting & recognizing what's a poem has been by analogy: in this case (beyond the obvious definition of poems as words-of-songs) to the work of modern poets. Since much of this work has been revolutionary & limit-smashing, the analogy in turn expands the range of what “we” can see as “primitive” poetry. It also shows some of the ways in which “primitive” poetry & thought are close to an impulse toward unity in our own time, of which the poets are fore-runners. The important intersections (analogies) are:

(1) the poem carried by the voice: a
“pre”-literate situation of poetry com-
posed to be spoken, chanted or, more
accurately, sung; compare this to the

written poem as score
public readings
performance poetry

- “post-literate” situation, in McLuhan’s good phrase, or where-we-are-today;
- (2) a highly developed process of image-thinking: concrete or non-causal thought in contrast to the simplifications of Aristotelian logic, etc., with its “objective categories” & rules of non-contradiction; a “logic” of polarities; creation thru dream, etc.; modern poetry (having had & outlived the experience of rationalism) enters a post-logical phase;
- (3) a “minimal” art of maximal involvement; compound elements, each clearly articulated, & with plenty of room for fill-in (gaps in sequence, etc.): the “spectator” as (ritual) participant who pulls it all together;
- (4) an “intermedia” situation, as further denial of the categories: the poet’s techniques aren’t limited to verbal maneuvers but operate also through song, non-verbal sound, visual signs, & the varied activities of the ritual event: here the “poem” = the work of the “poet” in whatever medium, or (where we’re able to grasp it) the totality of the work;
- (5) the animal-body-rootedness of “primitive” poetry: recognition of a “physical” basis for the poem within a man’s body—or as an act of body & mind together, breath &/or spirit; in many cases too the direct & open handling of sexual imagery & (in the “events”) of sexual activities as key factors in creation of the sacred;
- (6) the poet as shaman, or primitive shaman as poet & seer thru control of the means just stated: an open “visionary”
- poets’ theaters
jazz poetry
rock poetry etc.
- Blake’s multi-images
symbolisme
surrealism
- deep-image
- random poetry
composition by field etc.
- concrete poetry
- picture poems
prose poems
- happenings
total theater
- poets as film & video makers
- poésie sonore
- dada
lautgedichte (sound poems)
beast language
- line & breath
projective verse etc.
- sexual revolution etc.
- Rimbaud’s voyant
Rilke’s angel
Lorca’s duende

situation prior to all system-making
("priesthood") in which the poet/
shaman creates thru dream (image)
& word (song), "that Reason may have
ideas to build on" (W. Blake).

beat poetry
psychedelic see-in's, be-in's,
etc.
individual neo-shamanisms,
etc., works directly influenced
by the "other" poetry or by
analogies to "primitive art":
ideas of negritude, tribalism,
wilderness, etc.

What's more, the translations themselves may create new forms & shapes-of-poems with their own energies & interest—another intersection that can't be overlooked.²

In all this the ties feel very close—not that "we" & "they" are identical, but that the systems of thought & the poetry they've achieved are, like what we're after, distinct from something in the official "west," & we can now see & value them because of it. What's missing are the in-context factors that define them more closely group-by-group: the sense of the poems as part of an integrated social & religious complex; the presence in each instance of specific myths & locales; the fullness of the living culture. Here the going is rougher with no easy shortcuts through translation: no simple carry-overs. If our world is open to multiple influences & data, theirs seems largely self-contained. If we're committed to a search for the "new," most of them are tradition-bound. (The degree to which "they" are can be greatly exaggerated.) If the poet's purpose among us is "to spread doubt [& create illusion]" (N. Calas), among them it's to overcome it.

That they've done so *without denying the reality* is also worth remembering.

2. [Most of what I've listed here as modern or contemporary modes, circa 1967, have persisted into the present century or taken new forms, some of them still on the outside—"at the margins"—but many now more widely recognized & practiced. In this regard it may be worth noting that the intervening years have brought new technologies into our larger avant-garde practice, to which we should also be receptive. (J.R.)]

The Background & Structure of This Book

The present collection grew directly out of a pair of 1964 readings of “primitive & archaic poetry”³ at the Poet’s Hardware Theater & the Cafe Metro in New York. Working with me on those were the poets David Antin, Jackson Mac Low, & Rochelle Owens. The material, which I’d been assembling or translating over the previous several years, was arranged topically rather than geographically—an order preserved here in the first three sections of texts. The idea for a “book of events” came from a discussion with Dick Higgins about what he was calling “near-poetry” & from my own sense of the closeness of primitive rituals (when stripped-down to the bare line of the activities) to the “happenings” & “events” he was presenting as publisher of Something Else Press. The last four [now five] sections roughly correspond to some kind of geographical reality—not that there aren’t problems of overlap, etc., in a grouping by continents but simply that it provides an alternate way of bringing the materials together. (The reader may think of some others as well.)

While the final gathering is several times its 1964 size, I don’t see it in any sense as more than a beginning. My intention from the start was to find translations that would “translate,” i.e., bring-the-work-across or be a living work in English, & that’s a very different thing from (in the first place) looking for representative “masterpieces” & including them whatever the nature of the translations. I also have (no question about it) my own sense of what’s worth it in poetry, & I’ve tried to work from that rather than against it. I haven’t gone for “pretty” or “innocent” or “noble” poems so much as strong ones. Throughout I’ve kept the possibilities wide open: looking for new forms & media; hoping that what I finally assembled could be read as “contemporary,” since so much of it is that in fact, still being created & used in a world we share. Where there was a choice of showing poems separately or in series (as described above), I’ve leaned toward the in-series presentation. Since I feel that the complexity & tough-mindedness of primitive poetry have never really

3. Throughout the book I use “archaic” [or “traditional” as its virtual, less loaded synonym] to mean (1) the early phases of the so-called “higher” civilizations, where poetry & voice still hadn’t separated or where the new writing was used for setting down what the voice had already made; (2) contemporary “remnant” cultures in which acculturation has significantly disrupted the “primitive modes”; & (3) a cover-all term for “primitive,” “early high,” & “remnant.” The word is useful because of the generalization it permits (the variety of cultures is actually immense) & because it encompasses certain “mixed” cultural situations. My interest is in whether the poetry works, not in the “purity” of the culture from which it comes. I doubt, in fact, if there can be “pure” cultures.

been shown (& since I happen to like such qualities in poems), I've decided to stress them. I've kept in general within the domain of the book's title, though sometimes I did include poems for no other reason than that they sounded good to me or moved me.

The poems are first given without any comments or footnotes, & the readers who like it like that don't have to go any further. (*They won't, no matter what I say.*) Taking poems straight in that sense is like the Australian aborigines who (wrote W.E. Roth) would borrow whole poems verbatim "in a language absolutely remote from [their] own, & not one word of which the audience or performers can understand the meaning of": an extreme case of out-of-context reading but (where the culture's alive to its own needs) completely legitimate. Even so I've provided a section of "commentaries," which try in each instance to fill in the scene or to indicate a little of what the original poets would have expected their hearers to know—in other words, to sketch some of the elements for an in-context reading. These "commentaries," which the reader can approach from any direction he or she chooses, also show what the poems mean to me or to other poets in this century who have approached them out-of-context. In that sense they can be read (particularly those for the first three sections) as a running series of essays dealing with the questions about primitive poetry lightly touched-on in this introduction, or even as an approach to poetry in general. Where it seemed worthwhile I've also printed contemporary American & European poems as analogues to the "primitive" work, sometimes without further comment. As with modern & primitive art, these either show the direct influence of the other poetry or, much more frequently, a coincidence of forms & images arising from an analogous impulse.

I've tried to make the book usable for anyone who wants it. Likely there are places where I've explained too much (here the reader whose special knowledge exceeds my own will simply have to forgive me), & I've sometimes included materials more from the point of descriptive interest (i.e., for the story) than of "scientific" accuracy. For the reader who wants to follow up on what's given here, I've been as straightforward as possible about the sources, providing a running bibliography & cross-referencing where I could. Translations range from the very literal to the very free (there's no one method that insures a decent result in English), & the commentaries often point out how far (or not) the translator has gone. But the limits of any translation, in terms of the "information" it carries, are also obvious. Such "information" concerns the language itself as a medium, & the language of the translator can hardly be a guide, since it should (where he's giving a poem for a poem) also be

working from its own imperatives. Enough to say that the original poetries presented here range from those that lean heavily on an archaic or specialized vocabulary & syntax to those that turn the common language toward the purposes of song—& that the same is true of the verse, which includes everything from the very open to the very closed.

Finally, an appendix to the book presents a series of statements about poetics from a number of poets & song-men, & other such statements are scattered throughout the commentaries. I've hoped by doing this to get across the sense of these poets as individualized & functioning human beings. To this end also I've tried where possible to name the original poets—either those who delivered the poems or the ancient figures to whom the poems were attributed.

Beyond that, it's up to the individual readers who may, like their “primitive” counterparts, enjoy finishing the work on-their-own, i.e., by filling in what's missing.

Thanks & Acknowledgments, etc.

The problem is to remember all who were helpful, & even so there's not enough space to state the ways they were. Here are the names, anyway, with thanks & in the hope they'll understand: Jerry Bloedow, David Antin, Jackson Mac Low, Rochelle Owens, Harry Smith, James Laughlin, Sara Blackburn, Anne Freedgood, Dick Higgins, Emmett Williams, Gary Snyder, Jonathan Greene, David Wang, Stanley Diamond, Flicker Hammond, Michael McClure, Marcia Goodman, Martha Rossler, David P. McAllester, & various friends at the Coldspring Longhouse (Steamburg, NY) who showed me what the sacred was.

Behind the book also are a woman & a child, & I'm reminded again how central the-woman & the-child are to the “oldest” cultures that we know. The dedication of this book is therefore rightly theirs—in whose presence I've sometimes touched that oldest & darkest love.

Jerome Rothenberg
New York City
March 15, 1967

Post-Script to Pre-Face

Once having gotten here the question was WHERE NOW? I've been lucky since then to have been able to work with some of the materials at closer range, moving toward a collaboration with song-men & others who could open the languages to me—& the closer one gets the more

pressing becomes the problem of how to understand & to translate the *sound* of the originals. It now seems possible to do it, to get at those “meanings” which are more than the meaning-of-the-words; possible & desirable too, for the greatest secret these poems still hold is in the actual relation between the words, the music, the dance, & the event, a relation which many among us have been trying to get at in our own work. Every new translation is the uncovering of a hidden form in the language of the translator, but at the same time the rediscovery of universal patterns that can be realized by anyone still willing to explore them. In some future edition I hope to include the results of experimental work (by myself & others) in the *total translation* of these poetries. Because we have so much already, it is at last possible to have it all. *This post-script is an incitement to those who would join in the enterprise; it is in no sense a final word.*

J. R.

Allegany Reservation (Seneca)

Steamburg, NY

September 1, 1967

Praise for Jerome Rothenberg and *Technicians of the Sacred*

“*Technicians of the Sacred* is a seminal world wisdom text, a vibrating compendium of poetry and exegesis that reanimates poetry’s efficacy in the world. This book has elucidated indigenous and shamanic sources as deep orature for several generations of readers. More radically timely than ever in a tormented era of xenophobia, racism, post-truth, and psychic crisis when words are abased; perhaps it will be transmission such as this that reinvigorates imagination and highlights our generative cultural inter-dependence. This is a spiritual book; a book to survive with.”

ANNE WALDMAN

“Jerome Rothenberg’s followed upon a choice variety of studies that no one else had insight or time or energy to research and anthologize simultaneously: Jewish lore, Amerindian poetics, Ethnopoetics, Contemporary world poetics, International sacred poetics, his own poetry & early XX Century Modernist breakthrough poetics among others. He’s certainly done me a favor in collecting specimens in above categories and putting them in all our hands, predigesting masses of readings for immediate inspirational or teaching use. What a lifetime job!”

ALLEN GINSBERG

“A unique, groundbreaking and essential guide to humankind’s spiritual relationship with Earth and the divine. I return to it again and again.”

HOMERO ARIDJIS

“When *Technicians of the Sacred* was published in 1968 it offered nothing less than a redefinition of what poetry could be—or more precisely it established, with a joyful energy, that the number of such potential definitions was and had always been myriad. Jerome Rothenberg’s anthology proposed a poetry spilling over cultural bounds, extending toward the most ancient roots, and still very much in process. It remains an incomparable and inspiring source, a perpetual spur to further invention.”

GEOFFREY O’BRIEN

“Jerome Rothenberg is a DNA spaceman exploring the mammal caves of Now.”

MICHAEL McCLURE

“One of the truly contemporary American poets who has returned U.S. poetry to the mainstream of international modern literature. . . . No one writing poetry today has dug deeper into the roots of poetry.”

KENNETH REXROTH

“Jerome Rothenberg is probably the gateway to more corners of the earth than any poet this century. In the pages of a Rothenberg book . . . the world has a coherence.”

ELIOT WEINBERGER

“Rothenberg in his *Poland* brings us what we much needed—the dialectical imagination that so vivifies what we took to be contradictory dialects that they leap to dance in the comedy of a new multiple identity’s language.”

ROBERT DUNCAN

“Jerome Rothenberg opened the poetry world to multicultural attitudes . . . long before they were considered ‘politically correct.’ . . . He is a multiculturalist equally of the head and the heart, but perhaps, more importantly, of a poet’s sensibility.”

JACKSON MAC LOW

“For us, [Jerome Rothenberg] played (and plays) the role Picasso and Braque did for the painters, and Leiris and Bataille later for the French poets: opening the sparkling world that comes when you crack open literature and see the primal gestures of oral energy and sudden imagery from which it all surges. Kabbalah, cave painting, Iroquois legend, Navajo chant, Hasidic tales, Central Asian epic, German avant-garde, immigrant histories—he summoned us to attend to the deep literature of which the ‘literary’ is only a sheen. . . . He is a great figure, who stands above and beyond the schools and tendentiousnesses of poetics; he has given us, in his poetry, criticism, translation, anthologies, a body of work that exhibits what I suddenly realize is an ethical purity, a touchstone for the genuine.”

ROBERT KELLY

“The significance of Jerome Rothenberg’s animating spirit looms larger every year. . . . [He] is the ultimate ‘hyphenated’ poet: critic-anthropologist-editor-anthologist-performer-teacher-translator; to each of which he brings an unbridled exuberance and an innovator’s insistence on transforming a given state of affairs.”

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

“Mr. Rothenberg’s aim—as is evident in his extraordinary work in ethnopoetics and in the anthologies he has edited . . . is that of rediscovering the ‘archaic’ worlds of myth, vision and revelation, all the while connecting these worlds of mostly oral tradition to the poetic ‘revolution of the word’ epitomized by writers such as Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Charles Olson.”

JONATHAN COTT, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

“I will always like best those poets like Ginsberg and Rothenberg who write about serious, passionate, often doleful concerns, . . . poetry which has historical and archetypal themes, which can be described as representing a culture.”

DIANE WAKOSKI

“Rothenberg’s creative and mediating work with archaic and primitive poetics has helped to define a changing weather, a climate in which a transnational poetry becomes possible. . . . He has been a central and fructifying presence in the spirit of American poetry.”

ARMAND SCHWERNER

“Jerome Rothenberg is an exception to the general misuse of Native America. His book *A Seneca Journal* misses the quality of voyeurism that too often characterizes poetic attempts at Indianismo, and becomes a record of the meaning of life within the American land. . . . This is an example of the kind of borrowing that is possible: one that allows the dignity of giver and taker to remain not only undisturbed, but celebrated, illuminated, made clear.”

PAULA GUNN ALLEN

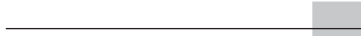
THE TEXTS



Come, ascend the ladder: all come in: all sit down.
We were poor, poor, poor, poor, poor,
When we came to this world through the poor place,
Where the body of water dried for our passing.
Banked up clouds cover the earth.
All come four times with your showers:
Descend to the base of the ladder & stand still:
Bring your showers & great rains.
All, all come, all ascend, all come in, all sit down.

ZUNI

ORIGINS & NAMINGS



Genesis I

by **BILL RAY**

Water went they say. Land was not they say. Water only then, mountains were not, they say. Stones were not they say. Trees were not they say. Grass was not they say. Fish were not they say. Deer were not then they say. Elk were not they say. Grizzlies were not they say. Panthers were not they say. Wolves were not they say. Bears were not they say. People were washed away they say. Grizzlies were washed away they say. Panthers were washed away they say. Deer were washed away they say. Coyotes were not then they say. Ravens were not they say. Owls were not they say. Buzzards were not they say. Chicken-hawks were not they say. Robins were not they say. Grouse were not they say. Quails were not they say. Bluejays were not they say. Ducks were not they say. Yellowhammers were not they say. Condors were not they say. Herons were not they say. Screech-owls were not they say. Woodcocks were not they say. Woodpeckers were not they say. Then meadowlarks were not they say. Then Sparrow-hawks were not they say. Then woodpeckers were not they say. Then seagulls were not they say. Then pelicans were not they say. Orioles were not they say. Then mockingbirds were not they say. Wrens were not they say. Russet-back thrushes, blackbirds were not they say. Then crows were not they say. Then hummingbirds were not they say. Then curlews were not they say. Then mockingbirds were not they say. Swallows were not they say. Sandpipers were not they say. Then foxes were not they say. Then wildcats were not they say. Then otters were not they say. Then minks were not they say. Then elks were not they say. Then jack-rabbits, grey squirrels were not they say. Then ground squirrels were not they say. Then red squirrels were not they say. Then chipmunks were not they say. Then woodrats were not they say. Then kangaroo-rats were not they say. Then long-eared mice were not they say. Then sapsuckers were not they say. Then pigeons were not they say. Then warblers were not they say. Then geese were not they say. Then cranes were not they say. Then weasels were not they say. Then wind was not they say. Then snow was not they say. Then frost was not they say. Then rain was not they say. Then it didn't thunder. Then trees were not when it didn't thunder they say. It didn't lighten they say. Then clouds were not they say. Fog was not they say. It didn't appear they say. Stars were not they say. It was very dark.

Cahto [Kato] (Northern California)

Sounds

1

Dad a da da
Dad a da da
Dad a da da
Da kata kai

Ded o ded o
Ded o ded o
Ded o ded o
Da kata kai

Kakadu (Australia)

2

heya heya heya·a yo·ho· yo·ho· yaha hahe·ya·an
ha·yahe· ha·wena
·ho· yo·ho· yaha hahe·ya·an
ha·yahe· ha·wena
he·yo· wena hahe·yahan
ha·yahe· ha·wena
he·yo· wena hahe·yahan
he he he he·yo
he·yo· wena hahe·yahan
he he he he·yo
he·yo· howo· heyo
wana heya heya

Navajo

3

Ah pe-an t-as ke t-an te loo
O ne vas ke than sa-na was-ke
lon ah ve shan too
Te wan-se ar ke ta-ne voo te
lan se o-ne voo
Te on-e-wan tase va ne woo te wan-se o-ne van
Me-le wan se oo ar ke-le van te
shom-ber on vas sa la too lar var sa

re voo an don der on v-tar loo-cum an la voo
O be me-sum ton ton ton tol a wac—er tol-a wac-er
ton ton te s-er pane love ten poo

By “Jack.” Holy Ground. Oct. 6th 1847.

American Shaker

4

AYAHUASCA SOUND-POEM

‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e
‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e ‘e

Kaxinawá (Brazil and Peru)

Genesis II

[SONG 159]

Go, take that hot stone, and heat it near her clitoris:
For the severed part is a sacred *djuda rangga*. Covering up the clitoris
within the mat, within its transverse fibre, within its mouth, its inner
peak . . .
Go, the people are dancing there, like *djuda* roots, like spray, moving
their bodies, shaking their hair!

Carefully they beat their clapping sticks on the *mauwulan* point . . .
Go, stand up! See the clansfolk beyond the transverse fibre of the mat!
They come from the Sister's womb, lifting aside the clitoris, coming out
like *djuda* roots . . .
Into the sacred shade, the *rangga* folk come dancing from the inner
peak of the mat . . .
Only a few people will be left here: some we shall put into the coarse grass.
We are putting the *rangga* clansfolk . . .

[SONG 160]

Go, put out the *rangga*, making it big: open your legs, for you look
nice!
Yes, take Miralaidj, my Sister. Yes, the mouth of the mat is closed.
Yes, go, rest there quietly, for the vagina is sacred, and the *rangga* are
hidden there, like younger siblings, covered up so no one may see.
Thus, climb up, put it into the mouth of the mat!
What is this, blocking my penis? I rest above here, chest on her breasts!
Do not push hard! The sound of her cry echoes.
Covered up, so no one may see, like a younger sibling . . .
Do not move what is within, for it is sacred!
For it rests there within, like the transverse fibre of the mat.
Blood running, sacredly running!
Yes, they, the *rangga* clansfolk, are coming out like *djuda* roots,
like spray . . .
Go, digging within, causing the blood to flow, sacred blood from the
red vagina, that no one may see!
Very sacred stands the *rangga* penis!

Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Australia)

Egyptian God Names

I

“It is Re who created his names out of his members”

—Chapter 17, *Book of the Dead*

2

These gods are like this in their caverns, which are in the Netherworld.
Their bodies are in darkness.

The Upreared One.
Cat.
Terrible One.
Fat Face.
Turned Face.
The One belonging to the Cobra.

3

They are like this in their coffins. They are the rays of the Disk, their souls go in the following of the Great God.

The One of the Netherworld.
The Mysterious One.
The One of the Cavern.
The One of the Coffin.
She who combs.
The One of the Water.
The Weaver.

4

These gods are like this: they receive the rays of the Disk when it lights up the bodies of those of the Netherworld. When he passes by, they enter into darkness.

The Adorer.
Receiving Arm.
Arm of Light.
Brilliant One.
The One of the Rays.
Arm of Dawn.

5

Salutations to Osiris.

Osiris the Gold of Millions.
Osiris the Great Saw.
Osiris the Begetter.
Osiris the Scepter.
Osiris the King.
Osiris on the Sand.
Osiris in all the Lands.
Osiris at the head of the Booth of the distant Marshlands.

*Osiris in his places which are in the South.
Osiris at the head of his town.*

6

The Cat.

Head of Horus.

Face of Horus.

Neck of Horus.

Throat of Horus.

Ii.

The Gory One.

7

The Swallower of Millions.

Egyptian

Genesis III

When sky above had no name

earth beneath no given name

APSU the first their seeder

Deepwater

TIAMAT

Saltsea their mother who bore them

mixed waters

Before pasture held together

thicket be found

no gods being

no names for them

no plans

the gods were shaped inside them

LAHMU AND LAHAMU were brought out

named

while they grew

became great

ANSAR and KISAR were shaped

Skyline Earthline much greater

made the days long
added the years

ANU was their son
Sky their rival
ANSAR made his first son ANU his equal
Skyline Sky

ANU NUDIMMUD
and Sky got *Manmaker* equal
(EA)

NUDIMMUD
Manmaker
(EA) his fathers' boss
wide wise
full knowing
ANSAR strong

stronger than Skyline his father
no equal among his brother gods

The godbrothers together
stormed in TIAMAT
Saltsea
stirred up TIAMAT's guts
Saltsea
rushing at the walls

APSU
Not Deepwater hush their noise
TIAMAT
Saltsea struck dumb
They did bad things to her
acted badly, childishly

APSU
until Deepwater seeder of great gods
called up MUMMU
Speaker:

MUMMU
Speaker messenger makes my liver happy
come! TIAMAT
Let's go see Saltsea

They went TIAMAT
sat down in front of Saltsea
(talk about plans for their first-born gods):

APSU

Deepwater opened his mouth said
to TIAMAT said loud:

Saltsea

“The way they act makes me sick:
during the day no rest
at night no sleep

I’ll destroy them!
stop their doings!
It’ll be quiet again we can sleep”

TIAMAT

When Saltsea heard this

she stormed
yelled at her husband
was sick
alone:

“Wipe out what we made?!
The way they act *is* a pain
but let’s wait”

MUMMU

APSU

Speaker answered advising Deepwater: MUMMU
bad advice Speaker’s
ill-meant

“Go on!

Put an end to their impertinence
then

rest during the day
sleep at night”

When APSU

heard him

Deepwater

his face gleamed

for the hurts planned

against his godsons

hugged MUMMU

Speaker

set him in his lap
kissed him

What they planned in conference was repeated to their first born
godsons

They wept
milled around distressed
kept silence

Old Babylonian

Images

An Inuit Poem for the Sun

The sun up there, up there.

A Dama Poem for the Ha-Tree

O the ha-tree, O the hard tree!

A Saan Poem for the Jackal

Canter for me, little jackal, O little jackal, little jackal.

An Inuit Poem Against Death

I watched the white dogs of the dawn.

An Ojibwa Song of the Deer

My shining horns.

A Saan Poem for the Blue Crane

A splinter of stone which is white.

A Seneca Poem for the Crows

The crows came in.

(Variation: The crows sat down.)

Bantu Combinations

1

I am still carving an ironwood stick.
I am still thinking about it.

2

The lake dries up at the edges.
The elephant is killed by a small arrow.

3

The little hut falls down.
Tomorrow, debts.

4

The sound of a cracked elephant tusk.
The anger of a hungry man.

5

Is there someone on the shore?
The crab has caught me by one finger.

6

We are the fire that burns the country.
The Calf of the Elephant is exposed on the plain.

Bantu (Africa)

22 Koyukon Riddle Poems

Like a spruce tree
lying on the ground:
the back-hand
of the bear.

I drag my shovel
on the trail:
a beaver.

Water dripping
from an ice-spear tip:

water dripping
from the beaver's nose.

Like bones
piled up in the stream bed:
sticks
the beaver gnaws.

Flying upward,
ringing bells in silence:
the butterfly.

Muddy-light
dark-fresh
like two streams merging:
eagle feet.

At the tip it's
dipping in ashes:
ermine tail.

Faraway, a
fire flaring up:
red fox tail.

Small dots
on the skyline:
when the birds return.

As if the stream bed
were hacked up with a knife:
footprints of the swans
and geese.

Someone's throwing
sparks in the air:
plucking the reddish feathers
of the grouse.

It scatters little wood crumbs
from the trees:
a roosting grouse, eating.

It looks like a flint:
the louse.

Round and shiny
at the end of my spruce bough:
lynx feet
or the great gray owl.

It really snowed hard
in opposite directions
on my head:
a mountain sheep

At the water hole
the ice-spear
trembles in the current:
a swimming otter's tail.

Like forest branches
fluffing in the wind:
the great gray
owl ears.

Ptarmigan bills:
like bits of charcoal
scattered on the snow.

We come upstream
in red canoes:
the salmon.

Like a water plant:
floating salmon guts.

Smoke-like
it spreads out in the water:
butchered salmon blood.

The hilltop trail
running close beside me:
a thing on which
the wolf has peed.

Koyukon (Alaska)

Correspondences

(from **THE BOOK OF CHANGES**)

The Creative is heaven. It is round, it is the prince, the father, jade, metal, cold, ice; it is deep red, a good horse, an old horse, a lean horse, a wild horse, tree fruit.

The Receptive is the earth, the mother. It is cloth, a kettle, frugality, it is level, it is a cow with a calf, a large wagon, form, the multitude, a shaft. Among the various kinds of soil, it is the black.

The Arousing is thunder, the dragon. It is dark yellow, it is a spreading out, a great road, the eldest son. It is decisive & vehement; it is bamboo that is green & young, it is reed & rush.

Among horses it signifies those which can neigh well, those with white hind legs, those which gallop, those with a star on the forehead.

Among useful plants it is the pod-bearing ones. Finally, it is the strong, that which grows luxuriantly.

The Gentle is wood, wind, the eldest daughter, the guideline, work; it is the white, the long, the high; it is advance & retreat, the undecided, odor.

Among men it means the gray-haired; it means those with broad foreheads; it means those with much white in their eyes; it means those close to gain, so that in the market they get threefold value. Finally, it is the sign of vehemence.

The Abysmal is water, ditches, ambush, bending & straightening out, bow & wheel.

Among men it means the melancholy, those with sick hearts, with earache.

It is the blood sign; it is red.

Among horses it means those with beautiful backs, those with wild courage, those which let their heads hang, those with thin hoofs, those which stumble.

Among chariots it means those with many defects.

It is penetration, the moon.

It means thieves.

Among varieties of wood it means those which are firm & have much pith.

The Clinging is fire, the sun, lightning, the middle daughter.

It means coats of mail & helmets; it means lances & weapons. Among men it means the big-bellied.

It is the sign of dryness. It means the tortoise, the crab, the snail, the mussel, the hawkbill tortoise.

Among trees it means those which dry out in the upper part of the trunk.

Keeping Still is the mountain; it is a bypath; it means little stones, doors & openings, fruits & seeds, eunuchs & watchmen, the fingers; it is the dog, the rat, & the various kinds of black-billed birds.

Among trees it signifies the firm & gnarled.

The Joyous is the lake, the youngest daughter; it is a sorceress; it is mouth & tongue. It means smashing & breaking apart; it means dropping off & bursting open. Among the kinds of soil it is the hard & salty. It is the concubine. It is the sheep.

Chinese

Genesis IV

I

From the conception the increase.
From the increase the swelling.
From the swelling the thought.
From the thought the remembrance.
From the remembrance the desire.

2

The word became fruitful:
It dwelt with the feeble glimmering:
It brought forth night:
The great night, the long night,
The lowest night, the highest night,
The thick night to be felt,
The night to be touched, the night unseen.
The night following on,
The night ending in death.

3

From the nothing the begetting:
From the nothing the increase:
From the nothing the abundance:
The power of increasing, the living breath

It dwelt with the empty space,
It produced the firmament which is above us.

4

The atmosphere which floats above the earth.
The great firmament above us, the spread-out space dwelt with the early dawn.
Then the moon sprang forth.
The atmosphere above dwelt with the glowing sky.
Then the sun sprang forth.
They were thrown up above as the chief eyes of heaven.
Then the sky became light.
The early dawn, the early day.
The midday. The blaze of day from the sky.

Maori (New Zealand)

Aztec Definitions

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

It is ashen, ash colored. At the top of its head and the throat, its feathers are flaming, like fire. They glisten, they glow.

Amoyotl (A Water-Strider)

It is like a fly, small and round. It has legs, it has wings; it is dry. It goes on the surface of the water; it is a flyer. It buzzes, it sings.

Bitumen (A Shellfish)

It falls out on the ocean shore; it falls out like mud.

Little Blue Heron

It resembles the brown crane in color; it is ashen, grey. It smells like fish, rotten fish, stinking fish. It smells of fish, rotten fish.

Seashell

It is white. One is large, one is small. It is spiraled, marvelous. It is that which can be blown, which resounds. I blow the seashell. I improve, I polish the seashell.

A Mushroom

It is round, large, like a severed head.

A Mountain

High, pointed; pointed on top, pointed at the summit, towering; wide, cylindrical, round; a round mountain, low, low-ridged; rocky, with many rocks; craggy with many crags; rough with rocks; of earth, with trees; grassy; with herbs; with shrubs; with water; dry; white; jagged; with a sloping plain, with gorges, with caves; precipitous, having gorges; canyon land, precipitous land with boulders.

I climb the mountain; I scale the mountain. I live on the mountain. I am born on the mountain. No one becomes a mountain—no one turns himself into a mountain. The mountain crumbles.

Another Mountain

It is wooded; it spreads green.

Forest

It is a place of verdure, of fresh green; of wind—windy places, in wind, windy; a place of cold: it becomes cold; there is much frost; it is a place which freezes. It is a place from which misery comes, where it exists; a place where there is affliction—a place of affliction, of lamentation, a place of affliction, of weeping; a place where there is sadness, a place of compassion, of sighing; a place which arouses sorrow, which spreads misery.

It is a place of gorges, gorge places; a place of crags, craggy places; a place of stony soil, stony-soiled places; in hard soil, in clayey soil, in moist and fertile soil. It is a place among moist and fertile lands, a place of moist and fertile soil, in yellow soil.

It is a place with *cuestas*, *cuesta* places; a place with peaks, peaked places; a place which is grassy, with grassy places; a place of forests, forested places; a place of thin forest, thinly forested places; a place of thick forest, thickly forested places; a place of jungle, of dry tree stumps, of underbrush, of dense forest.

It is a place of stony soil, stony-soiled places; a place of round stones, round-stoned places; a place of sharp stones, of rough stones; a place of crags, craggy places; a place of *tepetate*; a place with clearings, cleared places; a place of valleys, of coves, of places with coves, of cove places; a place of boulders, bouldered places; a place of hollows.

It is a disturbing place, fearful, frightful; home of the savage beast, dwelling-place of the serpent, the rabbit, the deer; a place from which nothing departs, nothing leaves, nothing emerges. It is a place of dry rocks, of boulders; bouldered places; boulder land, a land of bouldered places. It is a place of caves, cave places, having caves—a place having caves.

It is a place of wild beasts; a place of wild beasts—of the ocelot, the *cuetlachtili*, the bobcat, the serpent, the spider, the rabbit, the deer; of stalks, grass, prickly shrubs: of the mesquite, of the pine. It is a place where wood is owned. Trees are felled. It is a place where trees are cut, where wood is gathered, where there is chopping, where there is logging: a place of beams.

It becomes verdant, a fresh green. It becomes cold, icy. Ice forms and spreads; ice lies forming a surface. There is wind, a crashing wind; the wind crashes, spreads whistling, forms whirlwinds. Ice is blown by the wind; the wind glides.

There is no one; there are no people. It is desolate; it lies desolate. There is nothing edible. Misery abounds, misery emerges, misery spreads. There is no joy, no pleasure. It lies sprouting; herbs lie sprouting; nothing lies emerging; the earth is pressed down. All die of thirst. The grasses lie sprouting. Nothing lies cast about. There is hunger; all hunger. It is the home of hunger; there is death from hunger. All die of cold; there is freezing; there is trembling; there is the clattering, the chattering of teeth. There are cramps, the stiffening of the body, the constant stiffening, the stretching out prone.

There is fright, there is constant fright. One is devoured; one is slain by stealth; one is abused; one is brutally put to death; one is tormented. Misery abounds. There is calm, constant calm, continuing calm.

Mirror Stone

Its name comes from nowhere. This can be excavated in mines; it can be broken off. Of these mirror stones, one is white, one black. The white one—this is a good one to look into: the mirror, the clear, transparent one. They named it mirror of the noblemen, the mirror of the ruler.

The black one—this one is not good. It is not to look into; it does not make one appear good. It is one (so they say) which contends with one's face. When someone uses such a mirror, from it is to be seen a distorted mouth, swollen eyelids, thick lips, a large mouth. They say it is an ugly mirror, a mirror which contends with one's face.

Of these mirrors, one is round; one is long; they call it *acaltezcatl*. These mirror stones can be excavated in mines, can be polished, can be worked.

I make a mirror. I work it. I shatter it. I form it. I grind it. I polish it with sand. I work it with fine abrasive sand. I apply to it a glue of bat shit. I prepare it. I polish it with a fine cane. I make it shiny. I regard myself in the mirror. I appear from there in my looking-mirror; from it I admire myself.

Secret Road

Its name is secret road, the one which few people know, which not all people are aware of, which few people go along. It is good, fine; a good place, a fine place. It is where one is harmed, a place of harm. It is known as a safe place; it is a difficult place, a dangerous place. One is frightened. It is a place of fear.

There are trees, crags, gorges, rivers, precipitous places, places of precipitous land, various places of precipitous land, various precipitous places, gorges, various gorges. It is a place of wild animals, a place of wild beasts, full of wild beasts. It is a place where one is put to death by stealth; a place where one is put to death in the jaws of the wild beasts of the land of the dead.

I take the secret road. I follow along, I encounter the secret road. He goes following along, he goes joining that which is bad, the corner, the darkness, the secret road. He goes to seek, to find, that which is bad.

The Cave

It becomes long, deep; it widens, extends, narrows. It is a constricted place, a narrowed place, one of the hollowed-out places. It forms hollowed-out places. There are roughened places; there are asperous places. It is frightening, a fearful place, a place of death. It is called a place of death because there is dying. It is a place of darkness; it darkens; it stands ever dark. It stands wide-mouthed, it is wide-mouthed. It is wide-mouthed; it is narrow-mouthed. It has mouths which pass through.

I place myself in the cave. I enter the cave.

The Precipice

It is deep—a difficult, a dangerous place, a deathly place. It is dark, it is light. It is an abyss.

From *The Names of the Lion*

by **AL-ḤUSAYN IBN AḤMAD IBN KHĀLAWAYH**

<i>al-Waththāb</i>	“The Pouncer”
<i>al-‘Aqūḍ</i>	“The Distresser”
<i>al-Mihza‘</i>	“The Smasher”
<i>al-Miktal</i>	“The Big Food-Basket”
<i>al-‘Akammash</i>	“Whose Numbers Are Oppressive”
<i>al-Muḥrib</i>	“The Belligerent”
<i>al-Sāriḥiyy</i>	“The Pastoral [Scourge]”
<i>al-Muḍāmiḍ</i>	“The Open-Mouthed”
<i>al-Qa‘fāniyy</i>	“Whose Tread Stirs the Dust” (?)
<i>al-Hijaff</i>	“The Imposing Bulk”
<i>al-‘Assās</i>	“Who Looks for Trouble in the Night”
<i>al-Mukhayyas</i>	“Whose Den Is Well Kept”
<i>al-Sawwār</i>	“Who Goes Straight for the Head”
<i>al-Musāfir</i>	“The Wayfarer”
<i>al-Ṭaḥḥār</i>	“Whose Eyes Burn”
<i>al-Ghayyāl</i>	“The Well-Concealed”
<i>al-Miṣakk</i>	“The Slammer”
<i>al-Ahyab</i>	“The Most Fearsome”
<i>Dhū Libd</i>	“Whose Hair is Matted”
<i>al-Dilhām</i>	“The Dusky”
<i>al-Hawātima</i>	“Terror of the Lowland” (?)
<i>al-Arash</i>	“The Raking Blow”
<i>al-Shaddākh</i>	“The Skull Crusher”
<i>al-Dilhātha</i>	“Who Strides Unflinching into Battle”
<i>al-Qanawṭar</i>	“The Impaler” (?), said also of the male member of the tortoise, and the spear
<i>Dhu ‘l-‘Ufra</i>	“Whose Hair Gets Thicker When He’s Mad”
<i>Dhu ‘l-Khīs</i>	“Who Has a Hiding Place”
<i>Layth al-‘Arīn</i>	“Lion of the Treetop Hideaway”
<i>Layth Khaffān</i>	“Lion of the Lion-Infested Area”
<i>Layth al-Ghāb</i>	“Lion of the Thicket”
<i>Nazij</i>	“Prancer”
<i>Akhram</i>	“Hare-Lip”
<i>al-Shābil</i>	“Whose Teeth Are Interlaced”
<i>al-A‘far</i>	“Whose Coat Is the Color of the Surface of the Earth”
<i>al-Midlāj</i>	“Who Shows up Late at Night”

<i>al-Mawthabān</i>	“The Seated [Monarch],” also a title of the Ḥimyarites for a king who never stirs from atop his throne
<i>al-Dawsar</i>	“The Lusty”
<i>al-Abghath</i>	“Whose Coat Is Ashy”
<i>al-Aghthā</i>	“Whose Coat Is Shabby”
<i>al-Ghathawthar</i>	“The Thug”
<i>al-Ghuthāghith</i>	“Who Fights without a Weapon”
<i>al-Ghāzī</i>	“The Morning Apparition”
<i>al-Mufarfir</i>	“The Mangler”
<i>al-Khashshāf</i>	“The Calamity”
<i>al-Azhar</i>	“The Radiant”
<i>al-Irrīs</i>	“The Chief”
<i>al-Ajwaf</i>	“The Big-Bellied”
<i>al-Jāfi</i>	“The Brute”
<i>al-Jāhil</i>	“The Unrepentant”
<i>al-Mu‘lankis</i>	“Whose Hair Hangs in Clusters”
<i>al-Jayfar</i>	“Whose Sides Are Well Filled Out”
<i>al-Māḏī</i>	“The Cutter,” also said of a sword
<i>al-Quṣquṣa</i>	“The Stocky”
<i>al-Ḍārī</i>	“The Blood-Bather,” also said of an open vein
<i>al-Ṣabūr</i>	“The Perseverant”
<i>al-Ṣa‘b</i>	“The Difficult”
<i>al-Muḥtajir</i>	“Furiously Jealous in Defense of What Is His”
<i>al-Mudill</i>	“The Brazen”
<i>al-Hayṣama</i>	“The Destroyer”
<i>al-Ashra‘</i>	“Whose Nose Is Long and Prominent”
<i>al-Qaḏūḏ</i>	“The Sunderer”
<i>al-Ḍubāḏib</i>	“The Giant Lout”
<i>al-Qirḏim</i>	“Who Takes the Whole”
<i>al-Ruzam</i>	“Who Can’t Be Budged”
<i>al-Hajjās</i>	“The Show-Off”
<i>al-Muqaṣmil</i>	“The Brutal Shepherd”
<i>al-‘Antarīs</i>	“Valiant in Battle,” [said for] the lion and the she-camel
<i>al-Shaykh</i>	“The Elder”

Syrian

Genesis V

And I commanded in the very lowest parts that visible things should come from invisible, & Adoil came down very great, & I beheld, & look! it was a belly of great light.

And I said: 'Spread apart, & let the visible come out of thee.'

And it spread apart, & a great light came out. And I was in the center of the light, & as light is born from light, an age came out, a great age, & it showed me all the creation I had thought to make.

And I saw that it was good.

And I set a throne up for myself, & took my seat on it, & I said to the light: 'Go up higher & fix yourself high above the throne, & be a foundation for the highest things.'

And above the light there is nothing else, & then I leaned back & I looked up from my throne.

And I commanded the lowest a second time, & I said: 'Let Archas come forth hard,' & it came forth hard from the invisible.

And it came forth hard, heavy & very red.

And I said: 'Be opened, Archas, & let there be born from thee,' & it became open, an age came out, a very great, a very dark age, bearing the creation of all lower things, & I saw that it was good & said:

'Go down below, & make yourself firm & be a foundation for the lower things,' & it happened, & it went down & fixed itself, & became the foundation for the lower things, & below the darkness there is nothing else.

Hebrew

The Pictures



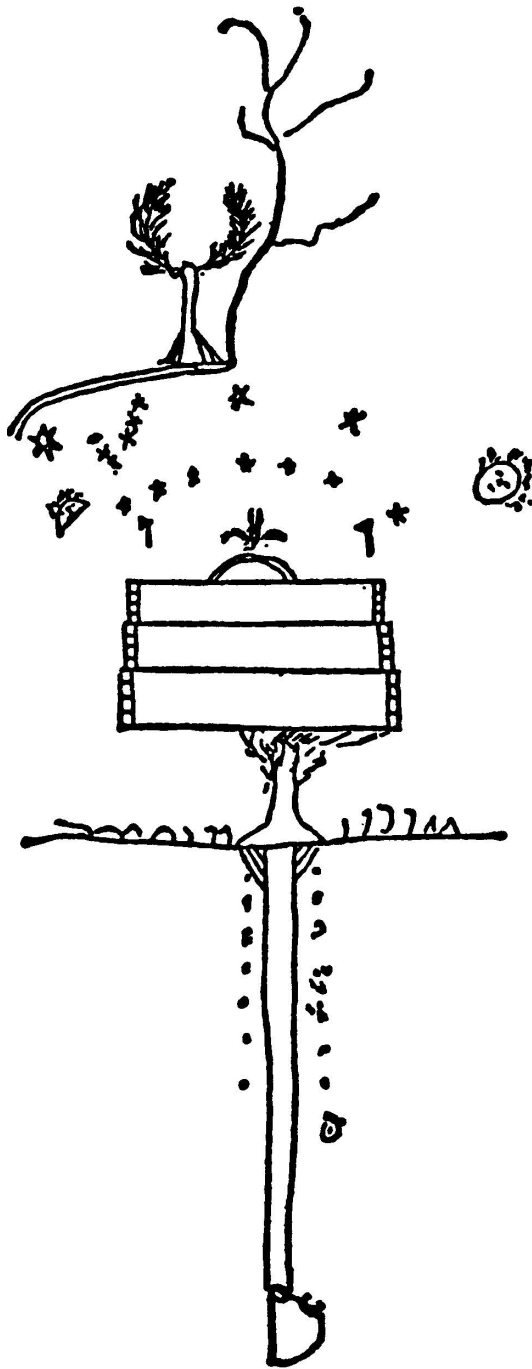
1.

Borneo, Indonesia, 40,000 b.c.



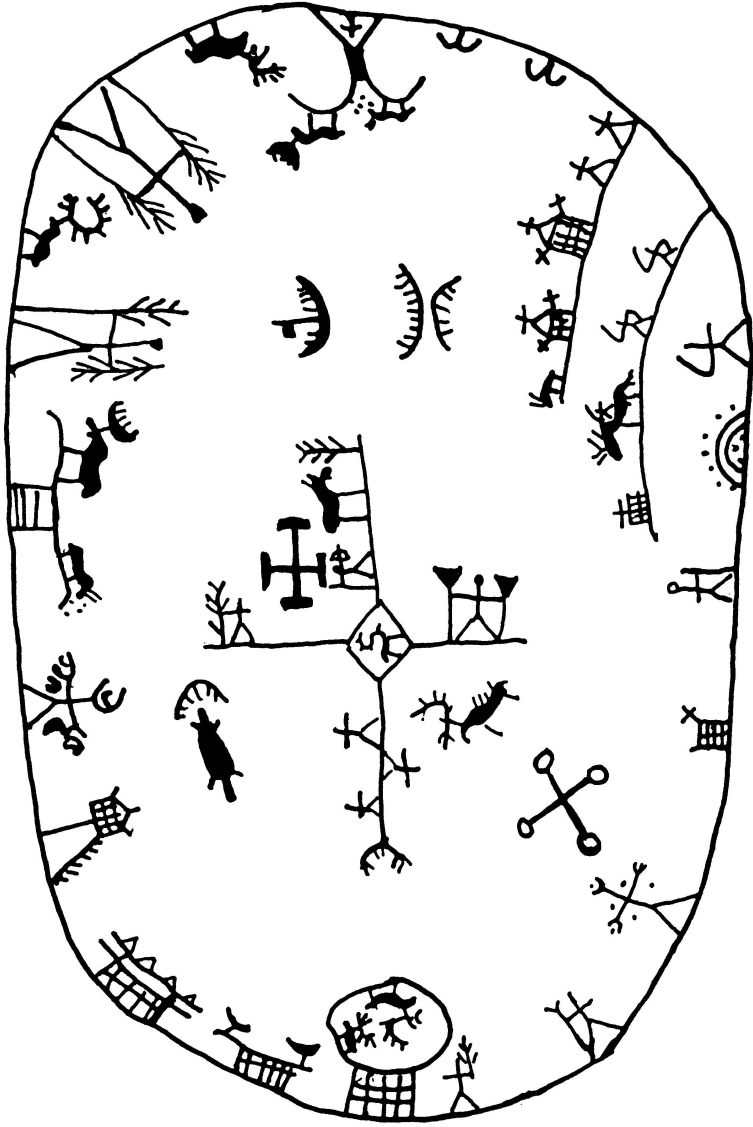
2.

Passamaquoddy



3.

Red Corn, Osage

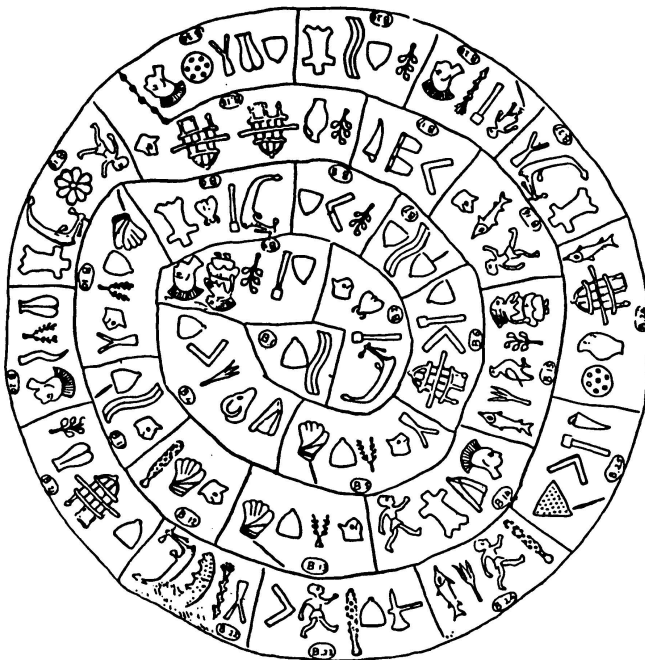


4.
Saami (Lapp)



5.

“The Supplication” (Alaskan)



6.

Minoan

The Girl of the Early Race Who Made the Stars

by ||KÁBBO

My mother was the one who told me that the girl arose; she put her hands into the wood ashes; she threw up the wood ashes into the sky. She said to the wood ashes: "The wood ashes which are here, they must altogether become the Milky Way. They must white lie along in the sky, that the Stars may stand outside of the Milky Way, while the Milky Way is the Milky Way, while it used to be wood ashes." They the ashes altogether become the Milky Way. The Milky Way must go round with the stars; while the Milky Way feels that, the Milky Way lies going around; while the stars sail along; therefore, the Milky Way, lying, goes along with the Stars. The Milky Way, when the Milky Way stands upon the earth, the Milky Way turns across in front, while the Milky Way means to wait, while the Milky Way feels that the Stars are turning back; while the Stars feel that the Sun is the one who has turned back; he is upon his path; the Stars turn back; while they go to fetch the daybreak; that they may lie nicely, while the Milky Way lies nicely. The Stars shall also stand nicely around. They shall sail along upon their footprints, which they, always sailing along, are following. While they feel that, they are the Stars which descend.

The Milky Way lying comes to its place, to which the girl threw up the wood ashes, that it may descend nicely; it had lying gone along, while it felt that it lay upon the sky. It had lying gone round, while it felt that the Stars also turned round. They turning round passed over the sky. The sky lies still; the Stars are those which go along; while they feel that they sail. They had been setting; they had, again, been coming out; they had, sailing along, been following their footprints. They become white, when the Sun comes out. The Sun sets, they stand around above; while they feel that they did turning follow the Sun.

The darkness comes out; they the Stars wax red, while they had at first been white. They feel that they stand brightly around; that they may sail along; while they feel that it is night. Then, the people go by night; while they feel that the ground is made light. While they feel that the Stars shine a little. Darkness is upon the ground. The Milky Way gently glows; while it feels that it is wood ashes. Therefore, it gently glows. While it feels that the girl was the one who said that the Milky Way should give a little light for the people, that they might return home by night, in the middle of the night. For, the earth would not have been a little light, had not the Milky Way been there. It and the Stars.

Saan [Bushman] (Southern Africa)

The Fragments

1

.....
command
.....
..... of the boat of the evening ...
.....
.....
Thy face is like
.....
.....
.....

2

To say: for me three meals
one in heaven, two on earth.
A lion-helmet green

3

..... four.
..... a point.
..... darkness.
..... be not.
come

4

In my wearied , me
In my inflamed nostril, me
Punishment, sickness, trouble . . . me
A flail which wickedly afflicts, me

A lacerating rod me
A hand me
A terrifying message me
A stinging whip me

.....
..... in pain I *faint* (?)
.....

Genesis VI

1

In the beginning the word gave origin to the father.

2

A phantasm, nothing else existed in the beginning: the Father touched an illusion, he grasped something mysterious. Nothing existed. Through the agency of a dream our Father Nai-mu-ena kept the mirage to his body, and he pondered long and thought deeply.

Nothing existed, not even a stick to support the vision: our Father attached the illusion to the thread of a dream and kept it by the aid of his breath. He sounded to reach the bottom of the appearance, but there was nothing. Nothing existed.

Then the Father again investigated the bottom of the mystery. He tied the empty illusion to the dream thread and pressed the magical substance upon it. Then by the aid of his dream he held it like a wisp of raw cotton.

Then he seized the mirage bottom and stamped upon it repeatedly, sitting down at last on his dreamed earth.

The earth-phantasm was his now, and he spat out saliva repeatedly so that the forests might grow. Then he lay down on his earth and covered it with the roof of heaven. As he was the owner of the earth he placed above it the blue and the white sky.

Thereupon Rafu-ema, the-man-who-has-the-narratives, sitting at the base of the sky, pondered, and he created this story so that we might listen to it here upon earth.

Uitoto (Colombia)

All Lives, All Dances, & All Is Loud

The fish does . . . HIP

The bird does . . . VISS

The marmot does . . . GNAN

I throw myself to the left,

I turn myself to the right,

I act the fish,
Which darts in the water, which darts
Which twists about, which leaps—
All lives, all dances, and all is loud.

The fish does . . . HIP
The bird does . . . VISS
The marmot does . . . GNAN

The bird flies away,
It flies, flies, flies,
Goes, returns, passes,
Climbs, soars, and drops.
I act the bird—
All lives, all dances, and all is loud.

The fish does . . . HIP
The bird does . . . VISS
The marmot does . . . GNAN

The monkey from branch to branch,
Runs, bounds, and leaps,
With his wife, with his brat,
His mouth full, his tail in the air,
There goes the monkey! There goes the Monkey!
All lives, all dances, and all is loud.

Baka [Gabon Pygmy]

Yoruba Praises

I
Shango is the death who kills money with a big stick
The man who lies will die in his home
Shango strikes the one who is stupid
He wrinkles his nose and the liar runs off
Even when he does not fight, we fear him
But when war shines in his eye
His enemies and worshippers run all the same
Fire in the eye, fire in the mouth, fire on the roof
The leopard who killed the sheep and bathed in its blood
The man who died in the market and woke up in the house

2

Shango is an animal like the gorilla
A rare animal in the forest
As rare as the monkey who is a medicine man
Shango, do not give me a little of your medicine
Give me all! So that I can spread it over my face and mouth
Anybody who waits for the elephant, waits for death
Anybody who waits for the buffalo, waits for death
Anybody who waits for the railway, waits for trouble
He says we must avoid the thing that will kill us
He says we must avoid trouble
He is the one who waited for the things we are running away from

Yoruba

A Poem for the Wind

by **TALIESIN**

Guess who it is.
Created before the Flood.
A creature strong,
without flesh, without bone,
without veins, without blood,
without head and without feet.
It will not be older, it will not be younger,
than it was in the beginning.
There will not come from his design
fear or death.
He has no wants
from creatures.
Great God! the sea whitens
when it comes from the beginning.
Great his beauties,
the one that made him.
He in the field, he in the wood,
without hand and without foot.
Without old age, without age.
Without the most jealous destiny
and he is coeval

with the five periods of the five ages.
And also is older,
though there be five hundred thousand years.
And he is as wide
as the face of the earth,
and he was not born,
and he has not been seen.
He on sea, he on land,
he sees not, he is not seen.
He is not sincere,
he will not come when it is wished.
He on land, he on sea,
he is indispensable,
he is unconfined,
he is unequal.
He from four regions,
he will not be according to counsel.
He commences his journey
from above the stone of marble.
He is loud-voiced, he is mute.
He is uncourteous.
He is vehement, he is bold,
when he glances over the land.
He is mute, he is loud-voiced.
He is blustering.
Greatest his banner
on the face of the earth.
He is good, he is bad,
he is not bright,
he is not manifest,
for the sight does not see him.
He is bad, he is good.
He is yonder, he is here,
he will disorder.
He will not repair what he does
and be sinless.
He is wet, he is dry,
he comes frequently
from the heat of the sun and the coldness of the moon.

Welsh

War God's Horse Song I

Words by **TALL KIA AHNI**, interpreted by **LOUIS WATCHMAN**

I am the Turquoise Woman's son.
On top of Belted Mountain
beautiful horses—slim like a weasel!
My horse with a hoof like a striped agate,
with his fetlock like a fine eagle plume:
my horse whose legs are like quick lightning
whose body is an eagle-plumed arrow:
my horse whose tail is like a trailing black cloud.
The Little Holy Wind blows thru his hair.
My horse with a mane made of short rainbows.
My horse with ears made of round corn.
My horse with eyes made of big stars.
My horse with a head made of mixed waters.
My horse with teeth made of white shell.
The long rainbow is in his mouth for a bridle
 & with it I guide him.
When my horse neighs, different-colored horses follow.
When my horse neighs, different-colored sheep follow.
 I am wealthy because of him.

 Before me peaceful
 Behind me peaceful
 Under me peaceful
 Over me peaceful—
 Peaceful voice when he neighs.
I am everlasting & peaceful.
I stand for my horse.

Navajo

War God's Horse Song II

by **FRANK MITCHELL**

With their voices they are calling me,
With their voices they are calling me!

I am the child of White Shell Woman,
 With their voices they are calling me,
I am the son of the Sun,
 With their voices they are calling me,
I am Turquoise Boy,
 With their voices they are calling me!

From the arching rainbow, turquoise on its outer edge,
 from this side of where it touches the earth,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Now the horses of the Sun-descended-boy,
 With their voices they are calling me!

The turquoise horses are my horses,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Dark stone water jars their hooves,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Arrowheads the frogs of their hooves,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Mirage-stone their striped hooves,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Dark wind their legs,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Cloud shadow their tails,
 With their voices they are calling me,
All precious fabrics their bodies,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Dark cloud their skins,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Scattered rainbow their hair,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Now the Sun rises before them to shine on them,
 With their voices they are calling me!

New moons their cantles,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Sunrays their backstraps,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Rainbows their girths,
 With their voices they are calling me,
They are standing, waiting, on rainbows,
 With their voices they are calling me,
The dark-rain-four-footed-ones, their neck hair falling in a wave,
 With their voices they are calling me!

Sprouting plants their ears,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Great dark stars their eyes,
 With their voices they are calling me,
All kinds of spring waters their faces,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Great shell their lips,
 With their voices they are calling me,
White shell their teeth,
 With their voices they are calling me,
There is flash-lightning in their mouths,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Dark-music sounds from their mouths,
 With their voices they are calling me,
They call out into the dawn,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Their voices reach all the way out to me,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Dawn-pollen is in their mouths,
 With their voices they are calling me,
Flowers and plant-dew are in their mouths,
 With their voices they are calling me!

Sunray their bridles,
 With their voices they are calling me,
To my right arm, beautifully to my hand they come,
 With their voices they are calling me,
This day they become my own horses,
 With their voices they are calling me,

Ever increasing, never diminishing,
With their voices they are calling me,
My horses of long life and happiness,
With their voices they are calling me,
I, myself, am the boy of long life and happiness,
With their voices they are calling me!

With their voices they are calling me,
With their voices they are calling me!

Navajo

To the God of Fire as a Horse

Your eyes do not make mistakes.
Your eyes have the sun's seeing.
Your thought marches terribly in the night
blazing with light & the fire
breaks from your throat as you whinny in battle.

This fire was born in a pleasant forest
This fire lives in ecstasy somewhere in the night.

His march is a dagger of fire
His body is enormous
His mouth opens & closes as he champs on the world
He swings the axe-edge of his tongue
smelting & refining the raw wood he chops down.

He gets ready to shoot & fits arrow to bowstring
He hones his light to a fine edge on the steel
He travels through night with rapid & various movements
His thighs are rich with movement.
He is a bird that settles on a tree.

Sanskrit (India)

The Stars

For we are the stars. For we sing.
For we sing with our light.
For we are birds made of fire.
For we spread our wings over the sky.
Our light is a voice.
We cut a road for the soul
for its journey through death.
For three of our number are hunters.
For these three hunt a bear.
For there never yet was a time
when these three didn't hunt.
For we face the hills with disdain.
This is the song of the stars.

Passamaquoddy (Maine)

VISIONS & SPELS



The Annunciation

by **MARPA**

*

a man born from a flower in space a man
riding a colt foaled from a sterile mare
his reins are formed from the hair of a tortoise

a rabbit's horn for a dagger he
strikes down his enemies

a man without lips who is speaking who
sees without eyes a man without ears
who listens who runs without legs

the sun & the moon dance
& blow trumpets

a young child touches
the wheel-of-the-law

which turns over

*

: secret of the body
: of the word
: of the heart of the gods

the inner breath is the horse of the bodhisattvas

whipped by compassion it
rears it drives the old yak
from the path of madness

Tibetan

How Isaac Tens Became a Shaman

Thirty years after my birth was the time.

*

I went up into the hills to get firewood. While I was cutting up the wood into lengths, it grew dark towards the evening. Before I had finished my

last stack of wood, a loud noise broke out over me, chu—————, & a large owl appeared to me. The owl took hold of me, caught my face, & tried to lift me up. I lost consciousness. As soon as I came back to my senses I realized that I had fallen into the snow. My head was coated with ice, & some blood was running out of my mouth.

*

I stood up & went down the trail, walking very fast, with some wood packed on my back. On my way, the trees seemed to shake & to lean over me; tall trees were crawling after me, as if they had been snakes. I could see them.

*

At my father's home . . . I fell into a sort of trance. It seems that two shamans were working over me to bring me back to health. . . . When I woke up & opened my eyes, I thought that flies covered my face completely. I looked down, & instead of being on firm ground, I felt that I was drifting in a huge whirlpool. My heart was thumping fast.

*

Another time, I went to my hunting grounds on the other side of the river. . . . I caught two fishers in my traps, took their pelts, & threw the flesh & bones away. Farther along I looked for a bear's den amid the tall trees. As I glanced upwards, I saw an owl, at the top of a high cedar. I shot it, & it fell down in the bushes close to me. When I went to pick it up, it had disappeared. Not a feather was left; this seemed very strange. I walked down to the river, crossed over the ice, & returned to the village at Gitenmaks. Upon arriving at my fishing station on the point, I heard the noise of a crowd of people around the smoke-house, as if I were being chased away, pursued. I dared not look behind to find out what all this was about, but I hurried straight ahead. The voices followed in my tracks & came very close behind me. Then I wheeled around & looked back. There was no one in sight, only trees. A trance came over me once more, & I fell down, unconscious. When I came to, my head was buried in a snow-bank.

*

I got up & walked on the ice up the river to the village. There I met my father who had just come out to look for me, for he had missed me. We went back together to my house. Then my heart started to beat fast, & I began to tremble, just as had happened before, when the shamans were trying to fix me up. My flesh seemed to be boiling, & I could hear s"—————. My body was quivering. *While I remained in this state, I began to sing. A chant was coming out of me without my being able to do anything to stop it. Many things appeared to me presently: huge birds*

& other animals. . . . These were visible only to me, not to the others in my house. Such visions happen when a man is about to become a shaman; they occur of their own accord. The songs force themselves out complete without any attempt to compose them. But I learned & memorized those songs by repeating them.

FIRST SONG

Death of the salmon,
my death

but the city
finds life in it

the salmon floats
in the canyon

ghosts in the city
below me

this robin, the
woman I fly with

SECOND SONG

in mud to my knees,
a lake

where the shellfish
holds me, is

cutting my ankles,
in sleep

THIRD SONG

a boat, a stranger's
boat, a canoe

& myself inside it, a
stranger inside it

it floats past trees,
past water

runs among
whirlpools

FOURTH SONG

& vision: beehives
were stinging my body

or the ghosts of bees,
giants

& the old woman
working me

until I grew hurt me
in dreams, in my head

Gitxsan (British Columbia)

A Shaman Climbs Up the Sky

o

The Shaman mounts a scarecrow in the shape of a goose

above the white sky
beyond the white clouds
above the blue sky
beyond the blue clouds

this bird climbs the sky

oo

The Shaman offers horse meat to the chief drummer

the master of the six-knob
drum he takes a small piece
then he draws closer he
brings it to me in his hand

when I say "go" he bends
first at the knees when I
say "scat" he takes it all

whatever I give him

ooo

The Shaman fumigates nine robes

gifts no horse can carry
that no man can lift &
robes with triple necks
to look at & to touch
three times: to use this
as a horse blanket

sweet

prince ulgan

you are my prince
my treasure

you are my joy

oooo

Invocation to Markut, the bird of heaven

this bird of heaven who keeps
five shapes & powerful
brass claws (the moon

has copper claws the moon's
beak is made of ice) whose

wings are powerful &
strike the air whose tail

is power & a heavy wind

markut whose left wing
hides the moon whose
right wing hides the sun

who never gets lost who flies
past that-place nothing tires her
who comes toward this-place

in my house I listen
for her singing I wait
the game begins

falling past my right eye landing
here
on my right shoulder
markut is the mother of five eagles

◦

The Shaman reaches the 1st sky

my shadow on the landing
I have climbed to (have reached
this place called sky
& struggled with its summit)
I who stand here
higher than the moon
full moon my shadow

◦◦

The Shaman pierces the 2d sky

to reach the second landing
this further level
look!

the floor below us
lies in ruins

◦◦◦

At the end of the climb: Praise to Prince Ulgan

three stairways lead
to him three flocks
sustain him PRINCE ULGAN!

blue hill where no hill
was before: blue sky
everywhere: a blue cloud
turning swiftly

that no one can reach:
a blue sky that no one
can reach (to reach it
to journey a year by water

then to bow before him
three times to exalt him)
for whom the moon's edge
shines forever PRINCE ULGAN!

you have found use for the hoofs
of our horses you who give us
flocks who keep pain from us

sweet
prince ulgan

for whom the stars & the sky
are turning a thousand times
turning a thousand times over

Altaic

The Dog Vision

by **HEHAKA SAPA (BLACK ELK)**

Standing in the center of the sacred place and facing the sunset, I began to cry, and while crying I had to say: "O Great Spirit, accept my offerings! O make me understand!"

As I was crying and saying this, there soared a spotted eagle from the west and whistled shrill and sat upon a pine tree east of me.

I walked backwards to the center, and from there approached the north, crying and saying: "O Great Spirit, accept my offerings and make me understand!" Then a chicken hawk came hovering and stopped upon a bush towards the south.

I walked backwards to the center once again and from there approached the east, crying and asking the Great Spirit to help me understand, and there came a black swallow flying all around me, singing, and stopped upon a bush not far away.

Walking backwards to the center, I advanced upon the south. Until now I had only been trying to weep, but now I really wept, and the tears ran down my face; for as I looked yonder towards the place whence come the life of things, the nation's hoop and the flowering tree, I thought of the days when my relatives, now dead, were living and young, and of Crazy Horse who was our strength and would never come back to help us any more.

I cried very hard, and I thought it might be better if my crying would kill me; then I could be in the outer world where nothing is ever in despair.

And while I was crying, something was coming from the south. It looked like dust far off, but when it came closer, I saw it was a cloud of beautiful butterflies of all colors. They swarmed around me so thick that I could see nothing else.

I walked backwards to the flowering stick again, and the spotted eagle on the pine tree spoke and said: "Behold these! They are your people. They are in great difficulty and you shall help them." Then I could hear all the butterflies that were swarming over me, and they were all making a pitiful, whimpering noise as though they too were weeping.

Then they all arose and flew back into the south.

Now the chicken hawk spoke from its bush and said: "Behold! Your Grandfathers shall come forth and you shall hear them!"

Hearing this, I lifted up my eyes, and there was a big storm coming from the west. It was the thunder being nation, and I could hear the neighing of horses and the sending of great voices.

It was very dark now, and all the roaring west was streaked fearfully with swift fire.

And as I stood there looking, a vision broke out of the shouting blackness torn with fire, and I saw the two men who had come to me first in my great vision. They came head first like arrows slanting earthward from a long flight; and when they neared the ground, I could see a dust rising there and out of the dust the heads of dogs were peeping. Then suddenly I saw that the dust was the swarm of many-colored butterflies hovering all around and over the dogs.

By now the two men were riding sorrel horses, streaked with black lightning, and they charged with bows and arrows down upon the dogs, while the thunder beings cheered for them with roaring voices.

Then suddenly the butterflies changed, and were storm-driven swallows, swooping and whirling in a great cloud behind the charging riders.

The first of these now plunged upon a dog's head and arose with it hanging bloody on his arrow point, while the whole west roared with cheering. The second did the same; and the black west flashed and cheered again. Then as the two arose together, I saw that the dogs' heads had changed to the heads of Wasichus; and as I saw, the vision went out and the storm was close upon me, terrible to see and roaring.

I cried harder than ever now, for I was much afraid. The night was black about me and terrible with swift fire and the sending of great voices and the roaring of the hail. And as I cried, I begged the Grandfathers to pity me and spare me and told them that I knew now what they wanted me to do on earth, and I would do it if I could.

All at once I was not afraid any more, and I thought that if I was killed, probably I might be better off in the other world. So I lay down there in the center of the sacred place and offered the pipe again. Then I drew the bison robe over me and waited. All around me growled and roared the voices, and the hail was like the drums of many giants beating while the giants sang: “Hey-a-hey!”

No hail fell there in the sacred circle where I lay, nor any rain. And when the storm was passed, I raised my robe and listened; and in the stillness I could hear the rain-flood singing in the gulches all around me in the darkness, and far away to eastward there were dying voices calling: “Hey-a-hey!”

The night was old by now, and soon I fell asleep. And as I slept I saw my people sitting sad and troubled all around a sacred tepee, and there were many who were sick. And as I looked on them and wept, a strange light leaped upward from the ground close by—a light of many colors, sparkling, with rays that touched the heavens. Then it was gone, and in the place from whence it sprang a herb was growing and I saw the leaves it had. And as I was looking at the herb so that I might not forget it, there was a voice that woke me, and it said: “Make haste! Your people need you!”

I looked and saw the east was just beginning to turn white. Standing up, I faced the young light and began to mourn again and pray. Then the day-break star came slowly, very beautiful and still; and all around it there were clouds of baby faces smiling at me, the faces of the people not yet born. The stars about them now were beautiful with many colors, and beneath these there were heads of men and women moving around, and birds were singing somewhere yonder and there were horses nickering and blowing as they do when they are happy, and somewhere deer were whistling and there were bison mooing too. What I could not see of this, I heard.

Lakota Sioux

From *The Midnight Velada*

by **MARÍA SABINA**

I am the woman of the great expanse of the water
I am the woman of the expanse of the divine sea
I am a river woman
the woman of the flowing water
a woman who examines and searches

a woman with hands and measure
a woman mistress of measure

◦

I am a saint woman
a spirit woman
I am a woman of clarity
a woman of the day
a clean woman
a ready woman
because I am a woman who lightnings
a woman who thunders
a woman who shouts
a woman who whistles

◦

Morning Star woman
Southern Cross woman
Constellation of the Sandal woman, says
Hook Constellation woman, says
that is your clock, says
that is your book, says
I am the little woman of the ancient fountain, says
I am the little woman of the sacred fountain, says

◦

hummingbird woman, says
woman who has sprouted wings, says

◦

thus do I descend primordial
thus do I descend significant
I descend with tenderness
I descend with the dew
your book, my Father, says
your book, my Father, says
clown woman beneath the water, says
clown woman beneath the sea, says
because I am the child of Christ
the child of Mary, says

◦

I am a woman of letters, says
I am a book woman, says

nobody can close my book, says
nobody can take my book away from me, says
my book encountered beneath the water, says
my book of prayers

o

I am a woman and a mother, says
a mother woman beneath the water, says
a woman of good words, says
a woman of music, says
a wise diviner woman

o

I am a lagoon woman, says
I am a ladder woman, says
I am the Morning Star woman, says
I am a woman comet, says
I am the woman who goes through the water, says
I am the woman who goes through the sea, says

Mazatec (Mexico)

The Dream of Enkidu

Enkidu slept alone in his sickness and he poured out his heart to Gilgamesh, “Last night I dreamed again, my friend. The heavens moaned and the earth replied; I stood alone before an awful being; his face was somber like the black bird of the storm. He fell upon me with the talons of an eagle and he held me fast, pinioned with his claw, till I smothered; then he transformed me so that my arms became wings covered with feathers. He turned his stare towards me, and he led me away to the palace of Irkalla, the Queen of Darkness, to the house from which none who enters ever returns, down the road from which there is no coming back.

“There is the house whose people sit in darkness; dust is their food and clay their meat. They are clothed like birds with wings for covering, they see no light, they sit in darkness. I entered the house of dust and I saw the kings of the earth, their crowns put away forever; rulers and princes, all those who once wore kingly crowns and ruled the world in the days of old. They who had stood in the place of the gods, like Anu and Enlil, stood now like servants to fetch

baked meats in the house of dust, to carry cooked meat and cold water from the waterskin.

“In the house of dust which I entered were high-priests and acolytes, priests of the incantation and of ecstasy; there were servers of the temple, and there was Etana, that king of Kish whom the eagle carried to heaven in the days of old. I saw also Samuqan, god of cattle, and there was Ereshkigal the Queen of the Underworld; and Belit-Sheri squatted in front of her, she who is recorder of the gods and keeps the book of death. She held a tablet from which she read. She raised her head, she saw me and spoke: ‘Who has brought this one here?’

“Then I awoke like a man drained of blood who wanders alone in a waste of rushes; like one whom the bailiff has seized and his heart pounds with terror. O my brother, let some great prince, some other, come when I am dead, or let some god stand at your gate, let him obliterate my name and write his own instead.”

Enkidu had peeled off his clothes and flung himself down, and Gilgamesh listened to his words and wept quick tears, Gilgamesh listened and his tears flowed. He opened his mouth and spoke to Enkidu: “Who is there in strong-walled Uruk who has wisdom like this? Strange things have been spoken, why does your heart speak strangely? The dream was marvelous but the terror was great; we must treasure the dream whatever the terror; for the dream has shown that misery comes at last to the healthy man, the end of life is sorrow.”

And Gilgamesh lamented, “Now I will pray to the great gods, for my friend had an ominous dream.”

Mesopotamian

A List of Bad Dreams Chanted as a Cause & Cure for Missing Souls

To dream that one's hair is falling out.

To dream that all one's teeth are falling out.

To dream that one is being saved.

To dream that one is being nursed.

To dream that one is very dirty.

To dream that one is dissolving.

To dream that one is in mourning, as shown by the hair.
To dream that one is being beaten, beaten on the neck, up to the ears,
and all about the face.

To dream that she is saying the *ngiriyn* prayer.
To dream that she is saying the *ngirogin* prayer.
To dream that she is committing adultery.
To dream that she is being saved.
To dream that she is in the red-hat festival.
To dream that she is putting a red cloth over her shoulders.
To dream that she is wearing, as well as the red cloth, a red hat upon
her head.
To dream that she is sitting on the swinging plank.
To dream that she is nursing the young soul.
To dream that she is lying among pieces of *ranebary* wood.
To dream that she is quarreling.
To dream that she is hitting someone.
To dream that she is involved in a court case.
To dream that she is paying *kati banda* fines.
To dream that she is answering a man's proposal of marriage.
To dream that she is replying and going in among things that had been
ordered which have just arrived.

To dream that she is separated from her husband.
To dream that she is finished with her husband.
To dream that she is dividing her property.
To dream that she is packing her good belongings.
To dream that she is going away.
To dream that she is resting in the bachelors' quarters, resting at the top
of the bachelors' quarters.
To dream that she is looking at the stars.
To dream that she is looking at the moon—
looking at the first day of the new moon,
looking at the first day of the dying moon,
looking at the smoky stars,
looking at the moon being swallowed by clouds.

To dream of looking at a beehive.
To dream of being swallowed by flames of fire.
To dream of resting in the old jungle.
To dream of resting on the cemetery grounds.
To dream of being hit by *tewai* bamboo.

To dream of resting at the foot of the *parai* palm.
 To dream of resting at the pool of paleness.
 To dream of resting at the house of the grandmother of Bubot.
 To dream of resting at the house of the grandmother of Tauh.
 To dream of resting at the house of Kitapung Bannau.
 To dream of resting at the large stretch of low-lying land.
 To dream of resting at the grove of *bemban* palms.
 To dream of resting at the noisy mountain.
 To dream of resting among falling boulders.
 To dream of resting among rolling logs.

 To dream of resting among rolling stones.
 To dream of resting while in a deep hole.
 To dream of resting on the slope of a mountain.
 To dream of resting in an old jungle.
 To dream of resting in a very deep old jungle.

 To dream of resting with a coil of young vines.
 Resting while sick and suffocating.
 To dream of resting in someone's blacksmith shed.
 To dream of resting among beating drums,
 the demon's drum which is flat.
 To dream of resting in the dried leaves.
 To dream of resting inside the small porcupine hole.
 To dream of resting along the wild boar track.
 To dream of resting in the deer's pool.
 Of resting on top of an anthill,
 resting on top of a hill of white ants.
 To dream of resting on a rotten log.
 To dream of being chased by a snake.
 To dream of being bayed at by a wolf.
 To dream of being barked at by the dogs of demons.
 To dream of resting inside a hunting shed.
 To dream of sleeping at the foot of a betel-nut tree.

Bidayuh (Sarawak)

The Killer

(after A'YU'INI)

Careful: my knife drills your soul
listen, whatever-your-name-is
One of the wolf people
listen I'll grind your saliva into the earth
listen I'll cover your bones with black flint
listen " " " " " feathers
listen " " " " " rocks
Because you're going where it's empty
Black coffin out on the hill
listen the black earth will hide you, will
find you a black hut
Out where it's dark, in that country
listen I'm bringing a box for your bones
A black box
A grave with black pebbles
listen your soul's spilling out
listen it's blue

Cherokee

Spell against Jaundice

Yellow cock
Beat your yellow wings three times
Over a yellow hen
A yellow hen in a yellow year
In a yellow month
In a yellow week
On a yellow day
Laid a yellow egg
In yellow hay
Let the yellow hay stay
And the yellow fever leave our Milan.

Yellow bitch
Whelp your yellow pup
On a yellow day
In a yellow week
In a yellow month
In a yellow year
In a yellow wood
Let the yellow wood stay
And the yellow fever leave our Milan.

Yellow cow calve a yellow calf
On a yellow day
In a yellow week
In a yellow month
In a yellow year
In a yellow field
Let the yellow field stay
And the yellow fever leave our Milan.
Hoooh!

Yellow candle
Of yellow wax
Burn in a yellow room
Burn out
Be as if you had never been
Together with our Milan's yellow fever.

Stop—no further!
This is not your place!
Go into the deep sea
Into the high hills . . .

Get up, get out, witches and winds, you've come to eat up Milan's heart and head, but Dora is a wise-woman and is with him, and sends you out into the forest to count the leaves, to the sea to measure the sand, into the world to count all the paths, and when you come back you won't be able to do anything to him. Dora the wise-woman has blown you away with her breath, swept you away with her hand, scattered you with herbs. Look—life and health are upon our Milan.

Serbian

A Poison Arrow

Enough poison to make
your head spin, & chains
to pin you down, & once
they've shot the arrow
& once it lands, well
it's just like the fly & the horse:
I mean a fly that's bitten one horse
will damn sure go after another
& I mean too that this arrow's
like a pregnant woman
 hungry for some meat
& even if it doesn't break your skin
 you die
& if it gets in & does its stuff
 you die
& if it sort of touches you & drops right out
 you die
 & as long as you stay out of my blood
 what do I care whose blood you get in
 kill him
 I won't stand in the way

This is a fire that I'm setting off
& this is a fire that I'm lifting up
& this is a shadow that's burning
& this is the sun that's burning
Because the poison I've got is stronger than bullets
 & it's louder than thunder
 & it's hotter than fire
& what do I care who it gets, kill him!
I won't stand in the way
As long as you stay out of my blood

Hausa (Africa)

A Breastplate against Death

by **FER FIO**

I invoke the seven Daughters of the Sea,
who fashion the threads of long life.

May three deaths be taken from me!

May three lives be given to me!

May seven waves of plenty be poured for me!

Phantoms shall not harm me on my journey
in my radiant breastplate without stain.

My fame shall not perish.

May old age come to me! Death shall not find me till I am old.

I invoke my Silver Champion who has not died, who will not die!

May a period be granted to me equal in worth to white bronze.

May my double be destroyed!

May my right be maintained!

May my strength be increased!

Let my gravestone not be raised,

May death not meet me on my way,

May my journey be secured!

The headless adder shall not seize me,

nor the hard-grey worm,

nor the headless black chafer.

May no thief attack me,

nor a band of women nor a faerie band.

Let me have increase of time from the King of the Universe!

I invoke Senach of the seven lives,

whom faerie women have suckled on the breasts of plenty.

May my seven candles not be extinguished!

I am an indestructible fortress,

I am an unshakable cliff,

I am a precious stone,

I am the symbol of seven riches.

May I live a hundred times a hundred years, each hundred of them
apart!

I summon to me their good gifts.

Old Irish

19 and 4

19 and 4

You oughta

been on

this old

riveeeeer

19

a-and 4

You could

find a dead man

well well well

right a cross your row

right a cross your row

You could

find

a-a

dead maaaaaan

Right a-

cross your row

Why don't you

get up old dead man

well well well

help me carry my row

help me carry my row

Why don't you

get up

old

dead maaaaaan

Help me

carry my-y-y row

Well you

oughta been on this old river

well well well

19 and 5

19 and 5

You oughta

been on

this old

riveeeeer

19

a-and 5

You couldn't hardly find a

a man alive

a man alive

You couldn't hardly

find

aaaaaa

A man

alive

You oughta been on this old river

well well well

in 1910

19 and 10

You oughta been on

this old

riveeeeeer

19

a-and 10

When they were working all the women

well well well

right along with the men

right along with the men

When they was working

all the

womeeeeeen

Right a-

long

with the men

Well I been on this old river

well well well

so jumping long

so jumping long

I don't know

which side of the

brazaaaaas

My ma-

ma's on

Run and call the major
O run and call major
Well run and call the major

...

Well tell him I'm worried
O my lord god
Well tell him I'm worried

...

Well look-a look-a yonder
O my lord god
Well look-a look-a yonder

...

I b'lieve I'll find the major
O my lord god
I b'lieve I'll find the major

...

Well you talk about

your troubles:

Take a look at mine

Ohhhhhhhhh, my lord

You say you got a hundred:

I got 99

Oh my lord

Well it don't

make no difference:

They both life time

Ohhhhhhhhh, my lord

I say it don't make no difference

'cause they both life time

African American

Offering Flowers

(The Aztecs had a feast which fell out in the ninth month & which they called: The Flowers Are Offered)

& two days before the feast, when flowers were sought, all scattered over the mountains, that every flower might be found

& when these were gathered, when they had come to the flowers & arrived where they were, at dawn they strung them together; everyone strung them

& when the flowers had been threaded, then these were twisted & wound in garlands—long ones, very long, & thick—very thick

& when morning broke the temple guardians then ministered to Uitzilopochtli; they adorned him with garlands of flowers; they placed flowers upon his head

& before him they spread, strewed, & hung rows of all the various flowers, the most beautiful flowers, the threaded flowers

then flowers were offered to all the rest of the gods

they were adorned with flowers; they were girt with garlands of flowers

flowers were placed upon their heads, there in the temples

& when midday came, they all sang & danced

quietly, calmly, evenly they danced

they kept going as they danced

◦ ◦
◦

I offer flowers. I sow flower seeds. I plant flowers. I assemble flowers. I pick flowers. I pick different flowers. I remove flowers. I seek flowers. I offer flowers. I arrange flowers. I thread a flower. I string flowers. I make flowers. I form them to be extending, uneven, rounded, round bouquets of flowers.

I make a flower necklace, a flower garland, a paper of flowers, a bouquet, a flower shield, hand flowers. I thread them. I string them. I provide them with grass. I provide them with leaves. I make a pendant of them. I smell something. I smell them. I cause one to smell something. I cause him to smell. I offer flowers to one. I offer him flowers. I provide him with flowers. I provide one with flowers. I provide one with a flower necklace. I provide him with a flower necklace. I place a garland on one. I provide

him a garland. I clothe one in flowers. I clothe him in flowers. I cover one with flowers. I cover him with flowers. I destroy one with flowers. I destroy him with flowers. I injure one with flowers. I injure him with flowers.

I destroy one with flowers; I destroy him with flowers; I injure one with flowers: with drink, with food, with flowers, with tobacco, with capes, with gold. I beguile, I incite him with flowers, with words; I beguile him, I say, "I caress him with flowers. I seduce one. I extend one a lengthy discourse. I induce him with words."

I provide one with flowers. I make flowers, or I give them to one that someone will observe a feastday. Or I merely continue to give one flowers; I continue to place them in one's hand, I continue to offer them to one's hands. Or I provide one with a necklace, or I provide one with a garland of flowers.

Aztec

From *The Night Chant*

after **BITAHATINI**

In Tsegih

In the house made of the dawn

In the house made of evening twilight

In the house made of dark cloud

In the house made of rain & mist, of pollen, of grasshoppers

Where the dark mist curtains the doorway

The path to which is on the rainbow

Where the zigzag lightning stands high on top

Where the he-rain stands high on top

O male divinity

With your moccasins of dark cloud, come to us

With your mind enveloped in dark cloud, come to us

With the dark thunder above you, come to us soaring

With the shapen cloud at your feet, come to us soaring

With the far darkness made of the dark cloud over your head, come to us soaring

With the far darkness made of the rain & mist over your head, come to us soaring

With the zigzag lightning flung out high over your head

With the rainbow hanging high over your head, come to us soaring
With the far darkness made of the rain & the mist on the ends of your
wings, come to us soaring

With the far darkness of the dark cloud on the ends of your wings,
come to us soaring

With the zigzag lightning, with the rainbow high on the ends of your
wings, come to us soaring

With the near darkness made of the dark cloud of the rain & the mist,
come to us

With the darkness on the earth, come to us

With these I wish the foam floating on the flowing water over the roots
of the great corn

I have made your sacrifice

I have prepared a smoke for you

My feet restore for me

My limbs restore, my body restore, my mind restore, my voice restore
for me

Today, take out your spell for me

Today, take away your spell for me

Away from me you have taken it

Far off from me it is taken

Far off you have done it

Happily I recover

Happily I become cool

My eyes regain their power, my head cools, my limbs regain their
strength, I hear again

Happily the spell is taken off for me

Happily I walk, impervious to pain I walk, light within I walk, joyous I
walk

Abundant dark clouds I desire

An abundance of vegetation I desire

An abundance of pollen, abundant dew, I desire

Happily may fair white corn come with you to the ends of the earth

Happily may fair yellow corn, fair blue corn, fair corn of all kinds,

plants of all kinds, goods of all kinds, jewels of all kinds, come with you
to the ends of the earth

With these before you, happily may they come with you
With these behind, below, above, around you, happily may they come
with you
Thus you accomplish your tasks

Happily the old men will regard you
Happily the old women will regard you
The young men & the young women will regard you
The children will regard you
The chiefs will regard you

Happily as they scatter in different directions they will regard you
Happily as they approach their homes they will regard you

May their roads home be on the trail of peace
Happily may they all return

In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty above & about me I walk
It is finished in beauty
It is finished in beauty

Navajo

DEATH & DEFEAT



When Hare heard of Death, he started for his lodge & arrived there crying, shrieking, My uncles & my aunts must not die! And then the thought assailed him: To all things death will come! He cast his thoughts upon the precipices & they began to fall & crumble. Upon the rocks he cast his thoughts & they became shattered. Under the earth he cast his thoughts & all the things living there stopped moving & their limbs stiffened in death. Up above, towards the skies, he cast his thoughts & the birds flying there suddenly fell to the earth & were dead.

After he entered his lodge he took his blanket &, wrapping it around him, lay down crying. Not the whole earth will suffice for all those who will die. Oh there will not be enough earth for them in many places! There he lay in his corner wrapped up in his blanket, silent.

WINNEBAGO

A Peruvian Dance Song

Wake up, woman
Rise up, woman
In the middle of the street
A dog howls

May the death arrive
May the dance arrive

Comes the dance
You must dance
Comes the death
You can't help it!

Ah! what a chill
Ah! what a wind

Ayacucho

Death Song

by **JUANA MANWELL (OWL WOMAN)**

In the great night my heart will go out
Toward me the darkness comes rattling
In the great night my heart will go out

Tohono O'odham [Papago] (Arizona)

From *The Odyssey*

by HOMER

THE JOURNEY TO THE DEAD

And then went down to the ship,
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end.
Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean,
Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,
To the Kimmerian lands, and peopled cities
Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever
With glitter of sun-rays
Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven
Swartest night stretched over wretched men there.
The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place
Aforesaid by Circe.
Here did they rites, Perimedes and Eurylochus,
And drawing sword from my hip
I dug the ell-square pitkin;
Poured we libations unto each the dead,
First mead and then sweet wine, water mixed with white flour.
Then prayed I many a prayer to the sickly death's-heads;
As set in Ithaca, sterile bulls of the best
For sacrifice, heaping the pyre with goods,
A sheep to Tiresias only, black and a bell-sheep.

Dark blood flowed in the fosse,
Souls out of Erebus, cadaverous dead, of brides
Of youths and of the old who had borne much;
Souls stained with recent tears, girls tender,
Men many, mauled with bronze lance heads,
Battle spoil, bearing yet dreory arms,
These many crowded about me; with shouting,
Pallor upon me, cried to my men for more beasts;
Slaughtered the herds, sheep slain of bronze;

Poured ointment, cried to the gods,
To Pluto the strong, and praised Proserpine;
Unsheathed the narrow sword,
I sat to keep off the impetuous impotent dead,
Till I should hear Tiresias.
But first Elpenor came, our friend Elpenor,
Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,
Unwept, unwrapped in sepulchre, since toils urged other.
Pitiful spirit. And I cried in hurried speech:
“Elpenor, how art thou come to this dark coast?
“Cam’st thou afoot, outstripping seamen?”
And he in heavy speech:
“Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe’s ingle.
“Going down the long ladder unguarded,
“I fell against the buttress,
“Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus.
“But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,
“Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-bord, and inscribed:
“*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*
“And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows.”

And Anticlea came, whom I beat off, and then Tiresias Theban,
Holding his golden wand, knew me, and spoke first:
“A second time? why? man of ill star,
“Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region?
“Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever
“For soothsay.”

And I stepped back,
And he strong with the blood, said then: “Odysseus
“Shalt return through spiteful Neptune, over dark seas,
“Lose all companions.” Then Anticlea came.
To whom I answered:
“*Fate drives me on through these deeps; I sought Tiresias.*”
*I told her news of Troy, and thrice her shadow
Faded in my embrace.*
*Then had I news of many faded women—
Tyro, Alcmena, Chloris—
Heard out their tales by that dark fosse, and sailed
By sirens and thence outward and away,
And unto Circe buried Elpenor’s corpse.*

Greek

The Mourning Song of Small-Lake-Underneath

by HAYI-A'K!^u

I always compare you to a drifting log with iron nails in it.
Let my brother float in, in that way.
Let him float ashore on a good sandy beach.
I always compare you, my mother, to the sun passing behind the clouds.
That is what makes the world dark.

Tlingit (Alaska)

The Story of the Leopard Tortoise

by !KWÉITEN TA ||KEN, *after* ‡KAMME-AN

The people had gone hunting; she was ill; and she perceived a man who came up to her hut; he had been hunting around.

She asked the man to rub her neck a little with fat for her; for, it ached. The man rubbed it with fat for her. And she altogether held the man firmly with it. The man's hands altogether decayed away in it.

Again, she espied another man, who came hunting. And she also spoke, she said: "Rub me with fat a little."

And the man whose hands had decayed away in her neck, he was hiding his hands, so that the other man should not perceive them, namely, that they had decayed away in it. And he said: "Yes, O my mate! rub our elder sister a little with fat; for, the moon has been cut, while our elder sister lies ill. Thou shalt also rub our elder sister with fat." He was hiding his hands, so that the other one should not perceive them.

The Leopard Tortoise said: "Rubbing with fat, put thy hands into my neck." And he, rubbing with fat, put in his hands upon the Leopard Tortoise's neck; and the Leopard Tortoise drew in her head upon her neck; while his hands were altogether in her neck; and he dashed the Leopard Tortoise upon the ground, on account of it; while he desired, he thought, that he should, by dashing it upon the ground, break the Leopard Tortoise. And the Leopard Tortoise held him fast.

The other one had taken out his hands from behind his back; and he exclaimed: "Feel thou that which I did also feel!" and he showed the other one his hands; and the other one's hands were altogether inside the

Leopard Tortoise's neck. And he arose, he returned home. And the other one was dashing the Leopard Tortoise upon the ground; while he returning went; and he said that the other one also felt what he had felt. A pleasant thing it was not, in which he had been! He yonder returning went; he arrived at home.

The people exclaimed: "Where hast thou been?" And he, answering, said that the Leopard Tortoise had been the one in whose neck his hands had been; that was why he had not returned home. The people said: "Art thou a fool? Did not thy parents instruct thee? The Leopard Tortoise always seems as if she would die; while she is deceiving us."

Saan [Bushman] (Africa)

Nottamun Town

In fair Nottamun Town, not a soul would look up,
Not a soul would look up—not a soul would look down,
Not a soul would look up—not a soul would look down,
To show me the way to fair Nottamun Town.

I rode a grey horse, a mule-roany mare,
Grey mane and a grey tail, a green stripe down her back,
Grey mane and a grey tail, a green stripe down her back,
There wa'nt a hair on'er be-what was coal-black.

She stood so still, she threw me to the dirt,
She tore-a my hide and she bruis-ed my shirt.
From saddle to stirrup I mounted again,
And on my ten toes I rode over the plain.

Met the King and Queen, and a company more,
A-riding behind, and a-marching before.
Come a stark-naked drummer, a-beating a drum,
With his heels in his bosom come marching along.

They laughed and they smiled, not a soul did look gay,
They talked all the while, not a word did they say;
I bought me a quart to drive gladness away,
And to stifle the dust, for it rained the whole day.

Sat down on a hard, hot, cold-frozen stone,
Ten thousand stood round me, and yet I'uz alone;
Took my hat in my hand for to keep my head warm;
Ten thousand got drown-ded that never was born.

Appalachian (United States)

The Flight of Quetzalcoatl

*

Then the time came for Quetzalcoatl too, when he felt the darkness twist
in him like a river, as though it meant to weigh him down, & he thought
to go then, to leave the city as he had found it & to go, forgetting there
ever was a Tula

Which was what he later did, as people tell it who still speak about the
Fire: how he first ignited the gold & silver houses, their walls speckled
with red shells, & the other Toltec arts, the creations of man's hands &
the imagination of his heart

& hid the best of them in secret places, deep in the earth, in mountains or
down gullies, buried them, took the cacao trees & changed them into
thorned acacias

& the birds he'd brought there years before, that had the richly colored
feathers & whose breasts were like a living fire, he sent ahead of him to
trace the highway he would follow toward the seacoast

When that was over he started down the road

*

A whole day's journey, reached

THE JUNCTURE OF THE TREE
(so-called)

fat prominence of bark
sky branches

I sat beneath it
saw my face/cracked
mirror

An old man

& named it
TREE OF OLD AGE

thus to name
it to raise stones
to wound the bark
with stones

to batter it with
stones the stones to
cut the bark to fester
in the bark

TREE OF OLD AGE

stone patterns: starting
from the roots they
reach the highest leaves

*

The next day gone with walking
Flutes were sounding in his ears
Companions' voices

He squatted on a rock to rest
he leaned his hands against the rock

Tula shining in the distance

: which he saw he
saw it & began to cry
he cried the cold sobs cut his throat

A double thread of tears, a hailstorm
beating down his face, the drops
burn through the rock
The drops of sorrow fall against the stone
& pierce its heart

& where his hands had rested
shadows lingered on the rock: as if
his hands had pressed soft clay
As if the rock were clay

The mark too of his buttocks in the rock,
embedded there forever

The hollow of his hands preserved forever

A place named TEMACPALCO

*

To Stone Bridge next

water swirling in the riverbed
a spreading turbulence of water

: where he dug a stone up
made a bridge across
 & crossed it

*

: who kept moving until he reached the Lake of Serpents, the elders waiting for him there, to tell him he would have to turn around, he would have to leave their country & go home

: who heard them ask where he was bound for, cut off from all a man remembers, his city's rites long fallen into disregard

: who said it was too late to turn around, his need still driving him, & when they asked again where he was bound, spoke about a country of red daylight & finding wisdom, who had been called there, whom the sun was calling

: who waited then until they told him he could go, could leave his Toltec things & go (& so he left those arts behind, the creations of man's hands & the imagination of his heart; the crafts of gold & silver, of working precious stones, of carpentry & sculpture & mural painting & book illumination & featherweaving)

: who, delivering that knowledge, threw his jewelled necklace in the lake, which vanished in those depths, & from then on that place was called The Lake of Jewels

*

Another stop along the line

This time

THE CITY OF THE SLEEPERS

And runs into a shaman

Says, you bound for somewhere honey

Says, the country of Red Daylight know it? expect to land there probe a
little wisdom maybe

Says, no fooling try a bit of pulque brewed it just for you

Says, most kind but awfully sorry scarcely touch a drop you know

Says, perhaps you've got no choice perhaps I might not let you go now
you didn't drink perhaps I'm forcing you against your will might even
get you drunk come on honey drink it up

Drinks it with a straw

So drunk he falls down fainting
on the road & dreams &
snores his snoring echoes very far

& when he wakes finds silence
& an empty town, his face
reflected & the hair shaved off

Then calls it
CITY OF THE SLEEPERS

*

There is a peak between Old Smokey
& The White Woman

Snow is falling
& fell upon him in those days

& on his companions
who were with him, on
his dwarfs, his clowns
his gimps

It fell

till they were frozen
lost among the dead

The weight oppressed him
& he wept for them

He sang

The tears are endless
& the long sighs
issue from my chest

Further out

THE HILL OF MANY COLORS

which he sought

Portents everywhere, those
dark reminders
of the road he walks

*

It ended on the beach

It ended with a hulk of serpents formed into a boat
& when he'd made it, sat in it & sailed away

A boat that glided on those burning waters, no one knowing when he
reached the country of Red Daylight

It ended on the rim of some great sea

It ended with his face reflected in the mirror of its waves

The beauty of his face returned to him

& he was dressed in garments like the sun

It ended with a bonfire on the beach where he would hurl himself
& burn, his ashes rising & the cries of birds

It ended with the linnets, with the birds of turquoise color, birds the
color of wild sunflowers, red & blue birds

It ended with the birds of yellow feathers in a riot of bright gold

Circling till the fire had died out

Circling while his heart rose through the sky

It ended with his heart transformed into a star

It ended with the morning star with dawn & evening

It ended with his journey to Death's Kingdom with seven days of
darkness

With his body changed to light

A star that burns forever in that sky

Aztec

The String Game

by **DÍA!KWAIN**, after **XAA-TTIN**

These were people
Who broke the string for me.

Therefore

This place became like this for me,
On account of it.

Because the string broke for me,

Therefore

The place does not feel to me
As the place used to feel to me,

On account of it.

The place feels as if it stood open before me,
Because the string has broken for me.

Therefore

The place does not feel pleasant to me
Because of it.

Saan [Bushman] (Africa)

The Abortion

I
East, west, north, south
Tell me in which river
We shall put away the child
With rotting thatch below it
And jungly silk above
We will have it put away
You at the lower steps
I at the upper
We will wash & go to our homes
You by the lower path
I by the upper
We will go to our homes

2

O my love
My mind has broken
For the spring has ceased its flow
In the gully by the plantain
Drink cups of medicine
Swallow down some pills
Like a black cow
That has never had a calf
You will again be neat & trim

3

Like a bone
Was the first child born
And the white ants have eaten it
O my love, do not weep
Do not mourn
We two are here
And the white ants have eaten it

4

The field has not been ploughed
The field is full of sand
Little grandson
Why do you linger?
From a still unmarried girl
A two-months child has slipped
And that is why they stare

5

You by the village street
I by the track in the garden
We will take the child away
To the right is a bent tree
To the left is a stump
O my love
We will bury it between them

6

In the unploughed rice field, elder brother
What birds are hovering?
At midnight, the headman's middle daughter
Has taken it away
They are tearing the after-birth to pieces

Santhal (India)

Improved Song against a White Man

by **ZARABE**

I will tell you a terrible truth, aaa!
I've seen a girl at Tamatava,
She had her mouth eaten:
It had been devoured by a vasaha,
Her white lover.
I've seen another girl at Fenerive,
With a big wound instead of a breast:
Her white lover had devoured her breast, aaa . . .

The vasaha does not love like other men, aaa!
When he makes love,
He slavers and bites like a dog.
Go to him, Benachehina,
And return without a mouth!
Go to him, Rasoa,
And return without a breast!
D'you know why the vasaha has a golden tooth?
The dog barks before he bites,
The vasaha bites with his golden tooth
Before he makes love . . .
A calf sucks the milk of a cow,
The vasaha sucks blood from a girl's mouth!
Do you believe me, aaa?

Malagasy (Madagascar)

Psalm 137

*How can we sing King Alpha song
In a strange land?*

We sat & cried along Babylon rivers
remembering Zion.

We hung up our harps on Babylon trees
when our captors asked us for songs
when they mocked us calling for a happy tune:

“Sing us one of those Zion songs!”

If I forgot you Jerusalem
my right hand would wither
my tongue would stick to the roof of my mouth
if I didn't remember you
if I couldn't start up a tune with:
“Jerusalem . . . ”

YaHVeH recall the Edomites
Jerusalem's day when they said:
“Strip her Strip her bottom bare!”

Now thief Babylon (a song for you):

“Happy He'll be to pay you
the reward you've rewarded us
Happy He'll be to snatch your babies
and smash them against a rock!”

Hebrew

A Sequence of Songs of the Ghost Dance Religion

1

My children,
When at first I liked the whites,
I gave them fruits,
I gave them fruits.

—Nawat, “Left Hand”
(Southern Arapaho)

2

Father have pity on me,
I am crying for thirst,
All is gone,
I have nothing to eat.

—Anon.
(Arapaho)

3

The father will descend
The earth will tremble
Everybody will arise,
Stretch out your hands.

—Anon.
(Kiowa)

4

The Crow—*Ehe'eye!*
I saw him when he flew down,
To the earth, to the earth.
He has renewed our life,
He has taken pity on us.

—Moki, “Little Woman”
(Cheyenne)

5

I circle around
The boundaries of the earth,
Wearing the long wing feathers
As I fly.

—Anon.
(Arapaho)

6

I'yehe! my children—
My children,
We have rendered them desolate.
The whites are crazy—Ahe'yuhe'yu!

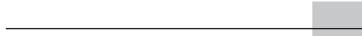
—“Sitting Bull”
(Arapaho “Apostle of the Dance”)

7

We shall live again.
We shall live again.

—Anon.
(Comanche)

THE BOOK OF EVENTS (I)



Lily Events

- (1) A man and woman looking for lilies.
- (2) All the people going down to look for lilies.
- (3) Mud taken up looking for lilies.
- (4) Washing the lilies in the water to remove the mud.
- (5) Washing themselves off after the mud has got on them.
- (6) Lilies in a basket.
- (7) Walking from the lily place “to go look for a dry place to sit down.”

Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Australia)

Garbage Event

1. Pigs and chickens feed on the grass in an inhabited area until it is bare of grass.
2. Garbage is added to the area.
3. The participants defend the “abandoned beauty” and “town-quality” of the environment against all critics.

Sample defense:

Critic. This place is dirty.

Answer. It is filthy.

Critic. Why don't you clean it up?

Answer. We like it the way it is.

Critic. Garbage is unhealthy.

Answer. The pigs feed better in it.

Critic. It breeds mosquitoes.

Answer. There are more mosquitoes in a jungle.

Dayak (Borneo)

Beard Event

The men shave and fashion “Van Dyke” beards. The women paint.

Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Australia)

Stone Fire Event

The old men build a stone fire and the men inhale the smoke and squat over the fire in order to allow the smoke to enter their anuses.

Realization. All the men divide into groups around the various stone fires the old men have made. The women dance around them. All the men hold their heads over the fires and inhale the smoke and heat. They also squat over the fire to allow the smoke to enter the anal opening. Men, women and young boys then paint themselves with red ochre and kangaroo grease.

Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Australia)

Climbing Event

A great jar is set up with two small ladders leaning against its sides. The performers climb up one of the ladders & down the other throughout a whole night.

Sarawak (Borneo)

Forest Event

Go into a forest & hang articles of clothing from the trees.

Hungarian

Gift Event

- Start by giving away different colored glass bowls.
- Have everyone give everyone else a glass bowl.
- Give away handkerchiefs and soap and things like that.
- Give away a sack of clams and a roll of toilet paper.
- Give away teddybear candies, apples, suckers and oranges.
- Give away pigs and geese and chickens, or pretend to do so.
- Pretend to be different things.
- Have the women pretend to be crows, have the men pretend to be something else.
- Talk Chinese or something.
- Make a narrow place at the entrance of a house and put a line at the end of it that you have to stoop under to get in.
- Hang the line with all sorts of pots and pans to make a big noise.
- Give away frying pans while saying things like “Here is this frying pan worth \$100 and this one worth \$200.”
- Give everyone a new name.
- Give a name to a grandchild or think of something and go and get everything.

Kwakiutl (British Columbia)

Marriage Event

for Carolee Schneemann

- (1) Large quantities of food & cloth are piled in a heap.
- (2) The Bridegroom appears outside his own house, where a continuous stream of human bodies leads from his doorway to that of his Father-in-Law.
- (3) As many people as there are permit him to walk over their backs as they lie prostrate on the ground.*

*Should the numbers be insufficient to reach the Father-in-Law's house, those first walked-on rise up quickly & run through the crowd, again to take their places in front.

(4) When the Bridegroom reaches the Father-in-Law's house, three old women prostrate themselves so as to form a living chair for him.

(5) A fish is brought forward &, with the aid of a sharp stick, is cut up & diced on a human body. It is presented to the Bridegroom who eats it raw.

(6) The piles of food & cloth are distributed to as many people as there are, & the food is eaten. Afterwards the street of human bodies is again formed for the return.

(7) The Bridegroom's family perform the same event for the bride.

Cook Islands (Polynesia)

Three Magic Events

Number 1 (to make a couple into enemies)

Take an egg and boil it hard and write the couple's names on it. Then cut the egg in two pieces and give one of the halves to a dog and the other half to a cat.

Number 2 (against rats in the barn)

When the first load of grain is carted in, those who are standing in the barn ask:

—What are you bringing here?

—We are bringing here a load of cats!

Now they ask what the rats shall have to eat.

—Stone and bone and henbane-root.

Then the first load is brought in during a dead silence.

During the following loads one talks about cats all the time.

Number 3 (for white washes)

At the washing a person who comes in shall say:

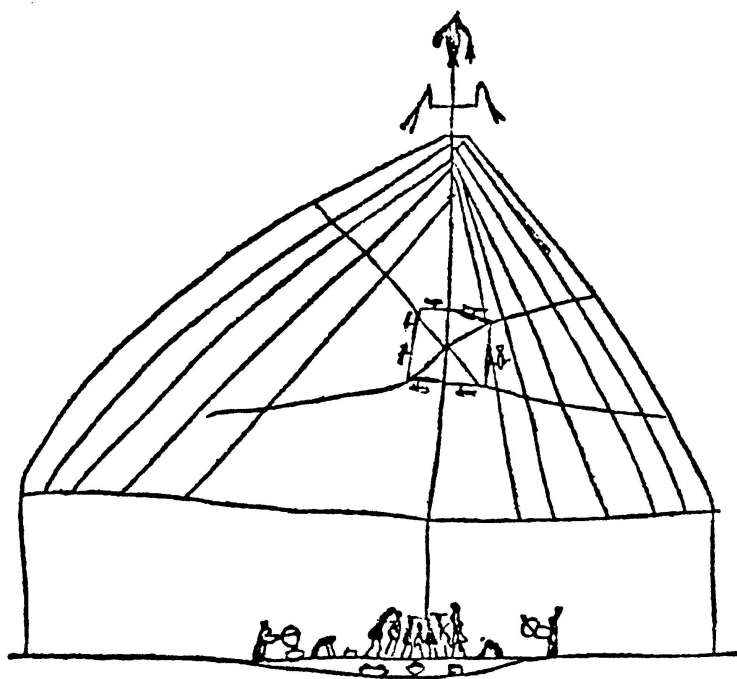
—I saw a swan.

Then the clothes will be clean and white. On the other hand the whole wash will be spoiled if he says:

—I saw a raven.

Swedish

Going-Around Event



1. A long pole is fixed in the middle of a house, the upper end of which protrudes from the vent-hole. On it are two double tassels & a seal-skin float, to the flippers of which are fastened the pelt of a fox & an iron kettle. A square frame made of paddles surmounted by several wooden images of manned boats & whales is suspended halfway up the pole, by means of which people may turn the pole with the frame. Several walrus-heads form the central object of the event.

2. The wheel is turned around as quickly as possible, & in the direction of the sun's course, by people of both sexes, while several other persons beat the drum. All sing various tunes of their own choice. At last those turning the wheel stop; & the men, still running in the same direction, begin to seize women from all over the house. Every man has the right to sleep that night with the woman he has caught.

Chuckchi (Siberia)

Language Event

All parts of a hut are named, and the names have references to the sexual relations between man and woman.

Question. What is the doorstep?

Answer. The doorstep is a woman.

Q. And the crossbar over the door, what is that?

A. The crossbar is a man.

Q. When the door is being put in, what is that?

A. That is when the man comes.

Q. And the hingepin on the door?

A. His penis.

Q. What is the ceiling of the hut and the floor beneath?

A. A boy and a girl who are mating.

Q. And the grass bundles hanging down above them?

A. The python.

Q. Then what is the beaten floor?

A. That is my aunt.

Q. Who has been beating the floor then?

A. A hand.

Q. But what is the door?

A. The door is the crocodile.

Q. And if the door is closed, what is that?

A. The crocodile stretching out.

Q. What is the door from the outside?

A. The crocodile's back.

Q. And if that one is closed?

A. A pregnant woman.

Q. Then what is a door that is open?

A. The woman after delivery.

Q. What are the two sides of the river?

A. A boy and a girl when they meet.

Q. But which one is the crocodile that bites?

A. That is the top one, the one below has no sense.

Q. What is the wall in front of you?

A. A man who is virile.

Q. And the wall behind you?

A. A man who is impotent.

Q. Then what is this housepost?

A. A man who rips a girl apart.

Q. And that one?

A. The striker of the thighs, the crusher of the little ribs.

Venda (Southern Africa)

Naming Events

1. A shaman has a dream & names a child for what he dreams in it. Among such names are Circling Light, Rushing Light Beams, Daylight Comes, Wind Rainbow, Wind Leaves, Rainbow Shaman, Feather Leaves, A-Rainbow-as-a-Bow, Shining Beetle, Singing Dawn, Hawk-Flying-over-Water-Holes, Flowers Trembling, Chief-of-Jackrabbits, Water-Drops-on-Leaves, Short Wings, Leaf Blossoms, Foamy Water.

2. A person receives a name describing something odd about him, always on the bad side. Such names include: Grasshopper-Ate-His-Arrow, Gambler, Ass-Side-to-the-Fire, Pants-Fall-Down, Blisters, Fish-Smell-Mouth, Bed Wetter, Rat Ear, Yellow Legs.

3. A person receives a name describing something odd & sexual about the namer. Here the namer is a woman or a transvestite, who makes the name public by shouting it after the man named when others are present. The man invariably accepts it & is regularly called by it, even by his wife & family. Such names include: Down-Dangling-Pussy-Hairs, Big Cunt, Long Asshole.

4. A group of namers gathers around a dead enemy & shouts abusive names at the body. These names are then given to the shouters. They include: Long Bones, Full-of-Dirt, Back-of-a-Wildcat, Yellow Face, & Gold Breasts, the latter spoken of a girl.

5. A person buys a name or trades names with another person. For example, Devil-Old-Man exchanges names with Contrary, or Looking-for-Girls-at-a-Dance changes with Big Crazy, but has to give him four pints of whiskey in addition because of the desirability of the name.

Tohono O'odham [Papago] (Arizona)

Burial Events

Bury the skull of a yak.

Bury the skull of a black bitch.

Hide the skulls of a dog & a pig under a child's bed, or bury a weasel's skull there, or a puppy's, or a piglet's.

Set out or bury the skulls of a fox, a badger, & a marmot in a cemetery.

Bury the heads of a fish & of an otter.

Bury the head of a wolf, a horse, or a yak at the border of an enemy's house.

Hide the skulls of a man, a dog, & a pig underneath a stupa.

Place the skull of a goat or a sheep halfway up a mountain.

Bury the skull of a monkey, a parrot or a bat where people come to hold a meeting.

Bury the skulls of a hybrid yak & of a mule somewhere in the country.

Bury the skulls of a lynx & a wolf in a pit someone has dug in the center of a city.

Tibetan

Friendship Dance

Preparation

Men participants form a single file and are joined by women who dance in front of them as partners. During the song they dance counterclockwise with a shuffling trot, and in the intervals walk in a circle. At the song, when the leader begins to insert words suggestive of intimacy (see translations below), the humorous gestures and acts of the pantomime begin.

Song & Pantomime

A free rendering of the song is as follows: “Ha!-Ha! I am called an old man [poor and ugly] but I am not this. I am going to take this woman home with me, as I did not know that there was such a good shell-shaker, none like her. I’ll take her home to my town.”

During the song the leader may raise his hands, palms in, to shoulder height, at times turning halfway to the left and moving sideways. Throughout he is imitated by the men. Toward the end, the leader reaches the climax of his humor in the following phrase, “Ha!-Ha! We are going to touch each other’s privates”; the men, holding their partners’ hands, suit actions to words.

Movements (Sequence of Intimacy)

1. Greeting, holding hands facing.
2. Side by side, holding hands crossed.
3. Facing, putting palms upon partners’ palms.
4. Placing hands on partners’ shoulders while facing.
5. Placing arms over partners’ shoulders while side by side.
6. Placing hats on women partners’ heads while facing.
7. Stroking partners under chin while facing.
8. Putting hands on female partners’ breasts while side by side.
9. Touching the clothing over the partners’ genitals while side by side.

Cherokee

Grease Feast Event

A great fire is lighted in the center of the host’s house. The flames leap up to the roof and the guests are almost scorched by the heat, but they do not stir, else the host’s fire has conquered them. Even when the roof begins to burn and the fire attacks the rafters, they must appear unconcerned. The host alone has the right to send a man up to the roof to put out the fire. While the feast is in progress the host sings a scathing song ridiculing his rival and praising himself. Then the grease is filled in large spoons and passed to the guests first. If a person thinks he has given a greater grease feast than that offered by the host, he refuses the spoon. Then he runs out of the house to fetch a copper plate “to squelch with it the fire.” The host

proceeds at once to tie a copper plate to each of his houseposts. If he should not do so, the person who refused the spoon would on returning strike the posts with the copper plate, which is considered equal to striking the host's face. Then the man who went to fetch his plate breaks it and gives it to the host. This is called "squelching the host's fire."

Squelching Song

1. I thought another one was causing the smoky weather. I am the only one on earth—the only one in the world who makes thick smoke rise from the beginning of the year to the end.

2. What will my rival say now—that "spider woman"; what will he pretend to do next? The words of that "spider woman" do not go a straight way. Will he not brag that he is going to give away canoes, that he is going to break coppers, that he is going to give a grease feast? Such will be the words of the "spider woman," and therefore your face is dry and mouldy, you who are standing in front of the stomachs of your guests.

3. Nothing will satisfy you; but sometimes I treated you so roughly that you begged for mercy. Do you know what you will be like? You will be like an old dog, and you will spread your legs before me when I get excited. This I throw into your face, you whom I always tried to vanquish; whom I have mistreated; who does not dare to stand erect when I am eating.

Kwakiutl (British Columbia)

Peacemaking Event

Preparations

An open area of ground is set aside, and across it is erected what is called a *koro-cop*. Posts are put up in a line, to the tops of these is attached a length of strong cane, and from the cane are suspended bundles of shredded palm leaf (*koro*). The "visitors" are the forgiving party, while the home party are those who have committed the last act of hostility.

Movements

The visitors enter dancing, the step being that of the ordinary dance. The women of the home party mark the time by clapping their hands on their

thighs. The visitors dance forward in front of the men standing at the *koro-cop*, and then, still dancing all the time, pass backwards and forwards between the standing men, bending their heads as they pass beneath the suspended cane. The visitors may make threatening gestures at the men standing at the *koro-cop*, and every now and then break into a shrill shout. The men at the *koro* stand silent and motionless.

After dancing thus for a little time, the leader of the visitors approaches the man at one end of the *koro* and, taking him by the shoulders from the front, leaps vigorously up and down to the time of the dance, thus giving the man he holds a good shaking. The leader then passes on to the next man in the row while another of the visitors goes through the same performance with the first man. This is continued until each of the dancers has “shaken” each of the standing men. The dancers then pass under the *koro* and shake their enemies in the same manner from the back. After a little more shaking the dancers retire, and the women of the visiting group come forward and dance in much the same way, each woman giving each man of the other group a good shaking.

When the women have been through their dance the two parties of men and women sit down and weep together.

Andaman Islands

Wild Man Events

1. A man dressed up as a Wild Man is chased through several streets until he comes to a narrow lane across which a cord is stretched. He stumbles over the cord &, falling to the ground, is overtaken & caught by his pursuers. The executioner runs up & stabs with his sword a bladder filled with blood which the Wild Man wears around his body; a stream of blood reddens the groups. Next day a straw-man, made up to look like the Wild Man, is placed on a litter &, accompanied by a large crowd, is taken to a pool into which it is thrown by the “executioner.” This is called “burying the carnival.”

2. A wild man called The King is dressed in bark, ornamented with flowers & ribbons. He wears a crown of gilt paper & rides a horse, which is also decked with flowers. Attended by a judge, an executioner, & other characters, & followed by a train of soldiers, all mounted, he rides to the

village square, where a hut or arbor of green boughs has been erected under the May-trees, which are firs, freshly cut, peeled to the top, & dressed with flowers & ribbons. Here the girls of the village are criticized, a frog is beheaded, & the procession rides to a place previously determined upon, in a straight, broad street. The participants then draw up in two lines & the King takes to flight. He is given a short start & rides off at full speed, pursued by the whole troop. If they fail to catch him he remains King until the next performance. But if they overtake & catch him he is scourged with hazel rods or beaten with wooden swords & compelled to dismount. Then the executioner asks, "Shall I behead this King?" The answer is given, "Behead him." The executioner brandishes his axe, & with the words, "One, two, three, let the King headless be!" he strikes off the King's crown. Amid the loud cries of the bystanders the King sinks to the ground; then he is laid on a bier & carried to the nearest farmhouse.

Bohemian

Booger Event

Participants

A company of four to ten or more masked men (called "boogers"), occasionally a couple of women companions. Each dancer is given a personal name, usually obscene; for example:

White Man
Black Ass
Frenchie
Big Balls
Asshole
Rusty Asshole
Burster (penis)
Swollen Pussy
Long Prick
Sweet Prick
Piercer
Fat Ass
Long Haired Pussy
Etcetera.

Prelude

The dancers enter. The audience and the dancers break wind.

First Action

The masked men are systematically malignant. They act mad, fall on the floor, hit at the spectators, push the men spectators as though to get at their wives and daughters, etc.

Second Action

The boogers demand “girls.” They may also try to fight and dance. If they do, the audience tries to divert them.

Third Action

Booger Dance Song. The name given to the booger should be taken as the first word of the song. This is repeated any number of times, while the owner of the name dances a solo, performing as awkward and grotesque steps as he possibly can. The audience applauds each mention of the name, while the other dancers indulge in exhibitionism, e.g., thrusting their buttocks out and occasionally displaying toward the women in the audience large phalli concealed under their clothing. These phalli may contain water, which is then released as a spray.

Interlude

Everyone smokes.

Fourth Action

A number of women dancers, equaling the number of boogers, enter the line as partners. As soon as they do, the boogers begin their sexual exhibitions. They may close upon the women from the rear, performing body motions in pseudo-intercourse; as before, some may protrude their large phalli and thrust these toward their partners with appropriate gestures and body motions.

Postlude

The rest of the performance consists of miscellaneous events chosen by the audience.

Cherokee

Crazy Dog Events

1. Act like a crazy dog. Wear sashes & other fine clothes, carry a rattle, & dance along the roads singing crazy dog songs after everybody else has gone to bed.
2. Talk crosswise: say the opposite of what you mean & make others say the opposite of what they mean in return.
3. Fight like a fool by rushing up to an enemy & offering to be killed. Dig a hole near an enemy, & when the enemy surrounds it, leap out at them & drive them back.
4. Paint yourself white, mount a white horse, cover its eyes & make it jump over a steep & rocky bank, until both of you are crushed.

Apsáalooke [Crow Nation]

Sea Water Event

The tides of the ocean and the floods are danced; certain birds and animals are included.

Yolngu (Arnhem Land, Australia)

Two Dream Events

1. After having a dream, let someone else guess what it was. Then have everyone act it out together.
2. Have participants run around the center of a village, acting out their dreams & demanding that others guess & satisfy them.

Seneca Nation

Noise Event

1. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.
2. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.
3. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord.
4. Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
5. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together.

Hebrew

THE BOOK OF EVENTS (II)



Taming the Storm

A TWO-SHAMAN VISION & EVENT

I

[On the third evening of the storm we were solemnly invited to attend a shaman seance in one of the snow houses. The man who invited us was a pronouncedly blond Eskimo, bald and with a reddish beard, as well as a slight tinge of blue in his eyes. His name was Kigiuna, "Sharp Tooth."]

The hall consisted of two snow huts built together, the entrance leading on to the middle of the floor, and the two snowbuilt platforms on which one slept were opposite one another. One of the hosts, Tamuánuaq, "The Little Mouthful," received me cordially and conducted me to a seat. The house, which was four meters wide and six meters long, had such a high roof that the builder had had to stay it with two pieces of driftwood, which looked like magnificent pillars in the white hall of snow. And there was so much room on the floor that all the neighbors' little children were able to play "catch" round the pillars during the opening part of the festival.

The preparations consisted of a feast of dried salmon, blubber and frozen, unflensed seal carcasses. They hacked away at the frozen dinner with big axes and avidly swallowed the lumps of meat after having breathed upon them so that they should not freeze the skin off lips and tongue.

"Fond of food, hardy and always ready to feast," whispered "Eider Duck" to me, his mouth full of frozen blood.

2

The shaman of the evening was Horqarnaq, "Baleen," a young man with intelligent eyes and swift movements. There was no deceit in his face, and perhaps for that reason it was long before he fell into a trance. He explained before commencing that he had few helpers. There was his dead father's spirit and its helping spirit, a giant with claws so long that they could cut a man right through simply by scratching him; and then there was a figure that he had created himself of soft snow, shaped like a man—a spirit who came when he called. A fourth and mysterious helping spirit was Aupilalánguaq, a remarkable stone he had once found when hunting caribou; it had a lifelike resemblance to a head and neck, and when he shot a caribou near to it he gave it a head-band of the long hairs from the neck of the animal.

He was now about to summon these helpers, and all the women of the village stood around in a circle and encouraged him.

“You can and you do it so easily because you are so strong,” they said flatteringly, and incessantly he repeated:

“It is a hard thing to speak the truth. It is difficult to make hidden forces appear.”

But the women around him continued to excite him, and at last he slowly became seized with frenzy. Then the men joined in, the circle around him became more and more dense, and all shouted inciting things about his powers and his strength.

Baleen’s eyes become wild. He distends them and seems to be looking out over immeasurable distance; now and then he spins round on his heel, his breathing becomes agitated, and he no longer recognizes the people around him: “Who are you?” he cries.

“Your own people!” they answer.

“Are you all here?”

“Yes, except those two who went east on a visit.”

Again Baleen goes round the circle, looks into the eyes of all, gazes ever more wildly about him, and at last repeats like a tired man who has walked far and at last gives up:

“I cannot. I cannot.”

At that moment there is a gurgling sound, and a helping spirit enters his body. A force has taken possession of him and he is no longer master of himself or his words. He dances, jumps, throws himself over among the clusters of the audience and cries to his dead father, who has become an evil spirit. It is only a year since his father died, and his mother, the widow, still sorrowing over the loss of her provider, groans deeply, breathes heavily and tries to calm her wild son; but all the others cry in a confusion of voices, urging him to go on, and to let the spirit speak.

3

The seance has lasted an hour, an hour of howling and invoking of unknown forces, when something happens that terrifies us, who have never before seen the storm-god tamed. Baleen leaps forward and seizes good-natured old Kigiuna, who is just singing a pious song to the Mother of the Sea Beasts, grips him swiftly by the throat and brutally flings him backwards and forwards in the midst of the crowd. At first both utter wailing, throaty screams, but little by little Kigiuna is choked and can no longer utter a sound; but suddenly there is a hiss from his lips, and he too has been seized with ecstasy. He no longer resists, but follows Baleen, who still has him by the throat, and they tumble about, quite out of their minds. The men of the house have to stand in front of the big blubber lamps to prevent their being broken or upset; the women have to help the

children up on to the platform to save them from being knocked down in the scrimmage; and so it goes on for a little while, until Baleen has squeezed all the life out of his opponent, who is now being dragged after him like a lifeless bundle. Only then does he release his hold, and Kigiuna falls heavily to the floor.

There is a deathly silence in the house. Baleen is the only one who continues his wild dance, until in some way or other his eyes become calm and he kneels in front of Kigiuna and starts to rub and stroke his body to revive him. Slowly Kigiuna is brought back to life, very shakily he is put back on his feet, but scarcely has he come to his senses again when the same thing is repeated. Three times he is killed in this manner! But when Kigiuna comes to life for the third time, it is he who falls into a trance and Baleen who collapses. The old seer rises up in his curious, much too obese might, yet rules us by the wildness in his eyes and the horrible, reddish-blue sheen that has come over his face through all the ill-usage he has been subjected to. All feel that this is a man whom death has just touched, and they involuntarily step back when, with his foot on Baleen's chest, he turns to the audience and announces the vision he sees. With a voice that trembles with emotion he cries out over the hall:

“The sky is full of naked beings rushing through the air. Naked people, naked men, naked women, rushing along and raising gales and blizzards.

“Don't you hear the noise? It swishes like the beating of the wings of great birds in the air. It is the fear of naked people, it is the flight of naked people!

“The weather spirit is blowing the storm out, the weather spirit is driving the weeping snow away over the earth, and the helpless storm-child Narsuk shakes the lungs of the air with his weeping.

“Don't you hear the weeping of the child in the howling of the wind?

“And look! Among all those naked crowds, there is one, one single man, whom the wind has made full of holes. His body is like a sieve and the wind whistles through the holes: Tju, Tju-u, Tju-u-u! Do you hear him? He is the mightiest of all the wind-travelers.

“But my helping spirit will stop him, will stop them all. I see him coming calmly towards me. He will conquer, will conquer! Tju, tju-u! Do you hear the wind? Sst, sst, sst! Do you see the spirits, the weather, the storm, sweeping over us with the swish of the beating of great birds' wings?”

At these words Baleen rises from the floor, and the two shamans, whose faces are now transfigured after this tremendous storm sermon, sing with simple, hoarse voices a song to the Mother of the Sea Beasts:

*Woman, great woman down there
Send it back, send it away from us, that evil!
Come, come, spirit of the deep!
One of your earth-dwellers
Calls to you,
Asks you to bite his enemies to death!
Come, come, spirit of the deep!*

When the two had sung the hymn through, all the other voices joined in, a calling, wailing chorus of distressed people. No one knew for what he was calling, no one worshipped anything; but the ancient song of their forefathers put might into their minds.

And suddenly it seemed as if nature around us became alive. We saw the storm riding across the sky in the speed and thronging of naked spirits. We saw the crowd of fleeing dead men come sweeping through the billows of the blizzard, and all visions and sounds centered in the wing-beats of the great birds for which Kigiuna had made us strain our ears.

Inuinnait [Copper Eskimo]

Coronation Event & Drama

CAST

Horus	<i>The new king</i>
Corpse of Osiris	<i>Mummy representing the old king</i>
Thoth	<i>The chief officiant</i>
Isis & Nephthys	<i>Two wailing women</i>
Followers of Horus	<i>Princes; staff of embalmers, morticians, etc.</i>
Set & henchmen	<i>Temple & sacral personnel</i>

SCENE I

(ACTION): THE CEREMONIAL BARGE IS EQUIPPED.

Horus requests his Followers to equip him with the Eye of power.

(ACTION): THE LAUNCHING OF THE BARGE MARKS THE OPENING UP OF THE NILE & INAUGURATES THE CEREMONY OF INSTALLING OR RECONFIRMING THE KING.

*Horus (to his Followers):
Bring me the EYE*

whose spel
opens this river.

*Horus also instructs his Followers to bring upon the scene the god
Thoth, who is to act as master of ceremonies, & the corpse of his father,
Osiris.*

(ACTION): BEER IS PROFFERED.

SCENE II

(ACTION): THE ROYAL PRINCES LOAD EIGHT MNSH JARS INTO THE
BOW OF THE BARGE.

*Thoth loads the corpse of Osiris upon the back of Set, so that it may be
carried up to heaven*

Thoth (to Set):

See, you cannot
match this
god, the stronger.

(to Osiris):

As your Heart masters his Cold.

(ACTION): THE ELDERS OF THE COURT ARE MUSTERED.

SCENE III

(ACTION): A RAM IS SENT RUSHING FROM THE PEN, TO SERVE AS A
SACRIFICE IN BEHALF OF THE KING. MEANWHILE—AS AT ALL
SUCH SACRIFICES—THE EYE OF HORUS IS DISPLAYED TO THE
ASSEMBLY.

Isis appears on the scene.

Isis (to Thoth):

That your
lips
may open
that the Word may
come
may give the eye
to Horus.

(ACTION): THE ANIMAL IS SLAUGHTERED. ITS MOUTH FALLS OPEN
UNDER THE KNIFE.

Isis (to Thoth):

Open thy mouth—
the Word!

SCENE IV

(ACTION): PRIESTS SLAUGHTER THE RAM. THE CHIEF OFFICIANT HANDS A PORTION TO THE KING & FORMALLY PROCLAIMS HIS ACCESSION.

Thoth conveys the Eye to Horus.

Thoth (to Horus):

Son takes his
father's
place: the Prince
is Lord.

(ACTION): THE KING IS ACCLAIMED BY THE ASSEMBLY.

SCENE V

(ACTION): GRAIN IS STREWN ON THE THRESHING FLOOR.

Horus requests his followers to convey to him the Eye which survived the combat with Set.

Horus (to his Followers):

Bringing your wheat
to the barn
or bringing me
THE EYE
wrenched from Set's
clutches.

SCENE VI

(ACTION): THE CHIEF OFFICIANT HANDS TWO LOAVES TO THE KING.

The two loaves symbolize the two eyes of Horus: the one retained by Set, & the one restored to Horus by Thoth.

Thoth (to Horus):

See, this is THE EYE
I bring you:
EYE-YOU-WILL-NEVER-LOSE.

(ACTION): DANCERS ARE INTRODUCED.

Horus (to Thoth):

My EYE that dances for joy before you.

SCENE VII

(ACTION): A FRAGRANT BOUGH IS HOISTED ABOARD THE BARGE.

The corpse of Osiris is hoisted onto the back of Set, his vanquished assailant.

The Gods (to Set):

O Set! who never will escape
The-one-who-masters-masters-thee.

Horus (gazing on the corpse of Osiris):

O this noble
body, this
lovely beautiful
body.

(ACTION): THE WORKMEN STAGGER UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE
BOUGH.

Horus (to Set):

You bend under him, you plot no more against him!

Egyptian

For the Rain God Tlaloc: A Dialogue for God & Chanters

Choir:

In Mexico we beg a loan from the god.
There are the banners of paper
and at the four corners
men are standing.

[The verse is repeated, probably by the people, and then the priest himself addresses the divinity, imploring rain. The priest of Tlaloc mentions the victims to be offered in the festival. They are small children whose weeping, when they are sacrificed, will be an omen of heavy rain. These children, whose crying is awaited, are symbolically referred to as bundles of blood-stained ears of corn.]

Priest of Tlaloc:

Now it is time for you to weep!
Alas, I was created
and for my god
now carry festal bundles of blood-stained
ears of corn
to the divine hearth.

You are my Chief, Prince and Magician,
and though in truth

it is you who produce our sustenance,
although you are the first,
we cause you only shame.

[Again the choir of students or perhaps another group of priests replies in the name of Tlaloc. The god exhorts the people and the priesthood to venerate him and recognize his power:]

Tlaloc:

If anyone
has caused me shame,
it is because he did not know me well;
you are my fathers, my priesthood,
Serpents and Tigers.

[Then the priest of the Rain God begins to chant another song, mentioning the mansion of Tlalocan and asking the god to spread out over all parts to make the beneficent rain fall.]

Priest of Tlaloc:

In Tlalocan, in the turquoise vessel,
it was used to coming forth, but now
Acatonal's unseen.
Spread out in Poyauhtlan,
in the region of mist!
With timbrels of mist
our word is carried to Tlalocan. . . .

[The choir, now speaking in the name of the victim, the little girl dressed in blue who will be sacrificed to the Rain God, chants several verses of deep religious significance. The victim will go away forever. She will be sent to the Place of Mystery. Now is the time for her crying. But perhaps in four year's time there will be a transformation, a rebirth, there in the region-of-the-fleshless. He who propagates men may send once more to this earth some of the children who were sacrificed. In veiled form this hints at a kind of reincarnation, which is very seldom mentioned in the ancient texts. Now the choir speaks once more for the child:]

Choir [speaking in the name of the victim]:

I will go away forever,
it is time for crying.
Send me to the Place of Mystery,
under your command.

I have already told
the Price of the Sad Omen,
I will go away forever,
it is time for crying.
In four years
comes the arising among us,
many people
without knowing it;
in the place of the fleshless,
the house of quetzal feathers,
is the transformation.
It is the act of the Propagator of Men.

[The priest of Tlaloc repeats the invocation to the God of Rain. He begs him once more to be present in all parts, to make fertile the land sown with seed, to spread out and make the rain fall.]

Priest of Tlaloc:

Go to all parts,
spread out
in Poyauhtlan,
in the region of mist.
With timbrels of mist
our word is carried to Tlalocan.

Aztec

From *The Nine Songs*: An Ancient Ritualistic Drama

by **QU YUAN [CH'U YUAN]**

1/ *The Senior Arbiter of Fate*

(Upon the Kongsang Mountain, a stretch of dark clouds. Half-visible among the clouds, a huge black gate of the North Palace. At the bend of the mountain is parked a jade-chariot driven by four dark horses. Some beautiful girls are playing. Suddenly, a trumpet is heard, and the Arbiter is seen walking toward the gate.)

Arbiter: May the gates of Heaven be opened wide!
I ride upon a dark cloud
And command the whirlwind to be my herald.
May the chill rain lay the dust to rest!

(The Arbiter sees the beautiful girls, descends quickly and runs after them. Surprised, the girls try to escape. The Arbiter succeeds in catching one of them.)

Girl: The Lord circles and circles in the sky and suddenly descends.
Would that I follow you to the Kongsang Mountain!
Variegated and manifold are the peoples in the nine provinces
Whose lives and deaths are in your hands.

(The Arbiter and Girl begin to dance. The other girls now come back to cheer them on.)

Girl: Skyward flight, how smooth and serene!
He rides upon the pure air, commanding yin and yang.
Quickly, solemnly, I hasten to follow you, my Lord,
To accompany you all the way to the Nine Mountains.
Cloud-ropes flutter and flutter.
Jade-pendants quiver and quiver.

Arbiter: One yin and one yang, one yang and one yin.
None knows the extent of my power.

All in chorus:
One yin and one yang, one yang and one yin.
None knows the extent of my power.

(The girls are all exhausted and fall asleep on the ground. The Arbiter is left alone, as if in deep contemplation. Picking a flower from the bush and quietly putting it into the Girl's palm.)

Arbiter: I pick this rarest cassia flower
For the one who lives away from home.

(The Arbiter sighs.)

Old age has now crept in, closing upon me.
Not to come closer ends in drifting apart.

(The Arbiter quietly goes. Girl wakes up, finds the flower in her palm, looks for the Arbiter and catches sight of the Arbiter leaving up in the clouds, to her great dismay.)

Girl: He rides upon the rumbling dragon-chariot
Soaring, soaring into the high heavens.
Twisting the cassia-branch, I wait.
Longing, O Longing cuts deep into my heart!

Chorus: Sorrow, sorrow cuts heart; to it, what can we do?
How one wishes the now is forever.
Man's course is fated.
Unions and separations, who can master them?

2/ The Lesser Arbiter of Fate

(Sunset. In a garden full of semi-tropical flowers. Several girls are playing in the garden. The Lesser Arbiter of Fate arrives.)

Arbiter: Autumn orchids and deer parsleys
Grow in rows and rows under the hall.
Green leaves, white flowers
Such fragrance! to attack my senses.

Girl: It is nature's law that man finds his woman.
No need to be so down, so sad.

Arbiter: Green leaves, white flowers
Such fragrance! to attack my senses.

Girl: Autumn orchids are green upon green.
Green leaves, in sprays, emerge from purple stems.
A full hall of beautiful girls;

Why me, why his eyes are all glued at me, ever so
suddenly?
Ever so suddenly?

(For some unknown reasons, the Arbiter, apparently agitated, leaves in a hurry.)

Girl: Coming: no words. Leaving: no words.
He rode away upon the winds, carrying flags of cloud.
Grief, not to grieve? O this life-separation!
Joy, not to enjoy? O friends that we newly made!

Chorus: Joy, not to enjoy? O friends that we newly made!
Grief, not to grieve? O this life-separation!

Girl: Lotus-garment, basil-belt;
So sudden, he came, so sudden, he went.
In the evening, he rests in the precincts of God.
Lord, whom are you waiting for by the clouds' edge?

Arbiter (from afar):

I would bathe with you in the Pool of Heaven
And dry your hair in the Bank of Sunlight.
I look for the Beautiful One who has not come.
Loudly into the winds, I sing my song.

Chorus: Peacock canopy and kingfisher banners,
He mounts the Nine Heavens, stroking the comet,
Stroking his long sword to protect the young and
the old.
O You alone, the most fit to judge over men.

3/ *The River God*

(The River God emerges from the water riding on the back of a white turtle. Fishes of all imaginable kinds swim around him. The River God sings in response to some girls dressed in white in front of the riverside temple.)

God: With you I will roam the nine rivers.
A riot of winds arises and cuts across the waves.
We will ride the lotus-canopied water-chariot
Drawn by two dragons flanked by hornless serpents.

Girl: I climb up the Kunlun Mountains and look in all
directions.
My spirit flies high as I face the infinite space.
Dusk is here; absorbed, I forget to return.
I only look back upon the distant shore.
A fish-scale house, a hall of dragons,
A purple-shell gateway and a palace of pearl,
O God, why do you dwell in the waters?

God (*ignoring her question*):
Riding a white turtle, chasing spotted fishes,
I will roam with you among the small islets
As swollen waters come tumbling down.
With crossed hands, I will go with you to the East,
To escort my beautiful one to the Southern Shore.

God & Girl: Wave after wave comes to welcome
you.
me.
Shoal on shoal the fishes take us all the way.

Chinese

AFRICA



Ghosts & Shadows

The soul is a dark forest.
—D. H. Lawrence

Ghosts in this forest, shadows
thrown back by the night
Or in daylight
like bats that drink from our veins
& hang from moist walls, in deep caves
Behind this green moss, these awful white stones
We pray to know who has seen them
Shadows thrown back by the night
We pray to know who has seen them

Baka [Gabon Pygmy]

The Chapter of Changing into Ptah

I

I eat bread.
I drink ale.
I hoist up my garments.
I cackle like the Smen goose.
I land on that place hard by the Sepulchre for the festival of the
Great God.
All that is abominable, all that is abominable I will not eat.
Shit is abominable, I will not eat it.
All that is abominable to my Ka will not enter my body.
I will live on what the gods live.
I will live & I will be master of their cakes.
And I will eat them under the trees of the dweller in the house
of Hathor My Lady.
I will make an offering.
My cakes are in Busiris, my offerings are in Heliopolis.
I wrap a robe around me woven by the goddess Tait.
I will stand up & sit down wherever it pleases me.
My head is like the head of Ra.
I am complete like Tem.

I will come forth.
 My tongue is like the tongue of Ptah
 & my throat like that of Hathor.
 With my mouth I remember the words of Tem my father.
 Tem forced the woman, the wife of Keb
 & broke the heads of those around him
 so that people were afraid of him
 & proclaimed him
 & made me his heir on Keb's earth.
 Then I mastered their women.
 Keb refreshed me.
 Keb lifted me up to his throne.
 Those in Heliopolis bowed their heads to me.
 I am their bull.
 I am stronger than the Lord-of-the-Hour.
 I have fucked all their women.
 I am Master for millions of years.

Egyptian

The Cannibal Hymn

The sky is heavy, it is raining stars.
 The arches of the sky are cracking; the bones of the earthgod tremble;
 The Pleiads are struck dumb by the sight of Unas
 Who rises towards the sky, transfigured like a god,
 Who lives off his father and eats his mother.
 He is the bull of the sky; his heart lives off the divine beings;
 He devours their intestines, when their bodies are charged with magic.
 It is he who passes judgment, when the elders are slaughtered.
 He is Lord over all meals.
 He ties the sling with which he catches his prey,
 He prepares the meal himself.
 It is he who eats men and lives off the gods.
 He has servants who execute his orders.
 Skullgrabber catches them for him, like bulls with a lasso.
 Headerect watches them for him and brings them to him;

Willow-croucher binds them
And tears their intestines from their bodies,
Winepresser slaughters them
And cooks a meal for him in his evening pots.
Unas swallows their magic powers
He relishes their glory.
The large ones among them are his morning meal,
the medium sized are his lunch,
The small ones among them he eats for supper.
Their senile men and women he burns as incense.
The great ones in the North sky lay the fire for him
With the bones of the elders,
Who simmer in the cauldrons themselves;
Look, those in the sky work and labor for Unas.
They polish the cookingpots for him with thighs of their wives.
O Unas has reappeared in the sky,
He is crowned as Lord of the Horizon,
Those he meets in his path he swallows raw.
He has broken the joints of the gods,
Their spines and their vertebrae.
He has taken away their hearts,
He has swallowed the red crown,
He has eaten the green crown,
He feeds on the lungs of the Wise,
He feasts, as he now lives on hearts,
And on the power they contain.
He thrives luxuriously, for all their power is in his belly,
His nobility can no longer be taken away.
He has consumed the brain of every god,
His life time is eternity,
His limit is infinity.

Egyptian

Conversations in Courtship

.....

He says:

I adore the gold-gleaming Goddess,
 Hathor the dominant,
 and I praise her.

I exalt the Lady of Heaven,
 I give thanks to the Patron.
She hears my invocation
 and has fated me to my lady,
Who has come here, herself, to find me.
 What felicity came in with her!
I rise exultant
 in hilarity
 and triumph when I have said:
 Now,

And behold her.
 Look at it!
 The young fellows fall at her feet.
Love is breathed into them.

I make vows to my Goddess,
 because she has given me this girl for my own.
I have been praying three days,
 calling her name.
For five days she has abandoned me.

She says:

I went to his house, and the door was open.
 My beloved was at his ma's side
 with brothers and sisters about him.

Everybody who passes has sympathy for him,
 an excellent boy, none like him,
 a friend of rare quality.

He looked at me when I passed
 and my heart was in jubilee.
If my mother knew what I am thinking
 she would go to him at once.

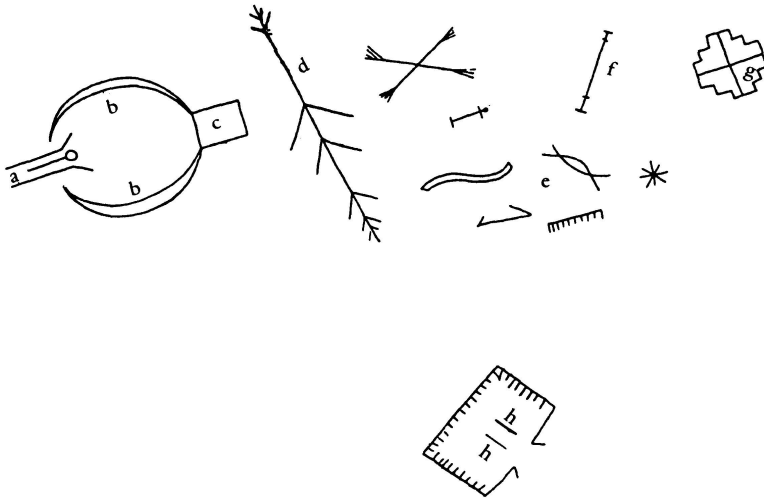
O Goddess of Golden Light,
 put that thought into her,
 Then I could visit him
And put my arms round him while people were looking
And not weep because of the crowd,
 But would be glad that they knew it
 and that you know me.
What a feast I would make to my Goddess,
 My heart revolts at the thought of exit,
If I could see my darling tonight,
 Dreaming is loveliness.

He says:

Yesterday, Seven days and I have not seen her.
 My malady increases;
 limbs heavy!
 I know not myself any more.
High priest is no medicine, exorcism is useless:
 a disease beyond recognition.
I said: She will make me live,
 her name will rouse me,
Her messages are the life of my heart
 coming and going.
My beloved is the best of medicine,
 more than all pharmacopoeia.
My health is in her coming,
 I shall be cured at the sight of her.
Let her open my eyes
 and my limbs are alive again;
Let her speak and my strength returns.
Embracing her will drive out my malady.
 Seven days and
 she has abandoned me.

Egyptian

The Comet




- (a) A stranger enters a town. He walks up the main street between two rows of houses (b b) till he comes to the Egbo House (c).
- (d) A comet which has lately been seen by the townspeople.
- (e) Property is strewn about in disorder—denoting confusion.
- (f) A seat before the Chief's house.
- (g) The arm-chair in which the body of the Head Chief has been set. His death was foretold by the comet.
- (h h) Two claimants to the office of Head Chief now vacant. The townsfolk have collected in the Egbo House to decide between the rivals.

Ekoi

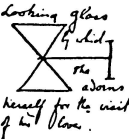
The Lovers

(Toy Taya Surod - Oram No 1)

calabash - which women come first for me. He is not the husband.



looking glass of which she adorns herself for the maid of her Oram.



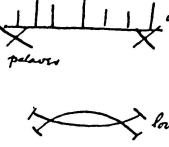
Male witness calls by husband to watch wife.

with people leaning against it listening & watching.

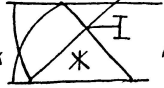
palaces

loving couple

young friends of husband who come home to advise wife to give up her lover.



Then come into the Compound and say to the man.



You are not unmanly. Why do you not have your own wife at home!

Why then do you go to another man's wife. and take foot for the calabash which belongs to another.

Both parties like to get your advice.

They go for a last walk together. then she tells on either side of a river. after which each goes a different way.

The girl finds a horse!

The husband

separated

palaces

loving couple

Judge

Judge

Respondent

cross-respondent

Case brought to Court.

plaintiff

young girls.

wife's companion

who come to advise her to give up her lover.

They do not see her as a witness.

Man's father stands with his hands on his knees. leaning forward to ask for pardon for her when they have first chains.

people who the father brings to keep his child.

The son bounds with neck ring and leg pieces.

Compound into which the son was taken.

Then come into the Compound and say to the man.

You are not unmanly. Why do you not have your own wife at home!

Why then do you go to another man's wife. and take foot for the calabash which belongs to another.

Both parties like to get your advice.

They go for a last walk together. then she tells on either side of a river. after which each goes a different way.

The girl finds a horse!

Ekoi

Drum Poem #7

M-M-M-FF M-M F M-F,
MF M M-F,
M-F-F-F-F F-M-F M,
M-M-F M-M-F M,
M F FM M M-M-M,
F-F F-F F-F,
M-M-M-FF M-FM M-M-M-F-F,
M-M-M-FF M-FM M-M-M-F-F,
M-F-F-F-F F-M-F M,
M-M-F M-M-F M,
M F FM M M-M-M,
F-F F-F F-F,
M M M-F F,
F-F F F F.

Oh Witch, don't kill me, Witch
Please spare me, Witch
This Holy Drummer swears to you that
When he rises up some morning
He will sound his drums for you some morning
Very early
Very early
Very early
Very early
Oh Witch that kills our children very early
Oh Witch that kills our children very early
This Holy Drummer swears to you that
When he rises up some morning
He will sound his drums for you some morning
Very early
Very early
Very early
Very early
Hear me talking to you
Try and understand

Ashanti

Praises of Ogun

. . . who smashes someone into pieces that are more or less big
his town's got stuff in it most people couldn't guess at
Ogun is called a thief by definition
Ogun is master of the crown Big-Ogun props up on his head
Ogun is orisha number three
he's master of his town no he won't leave anyone alone who
 badmouths Ogun like a thief
he's very high & mighty
he hires an elephant to say prayers to his head
he kills the husband in a fire
he kills the wife in her foyer
he kills the babies when they try to run outside
he takes somebody's head off if he feels like
he covets his neighbor's prick
even if there's water in his house Ogun washes up with blood
Ogun makes the child kill himself with the sword he plays around
 with
a man starts trembling like someone opening a door
he kills on the right & destroys on the right
he kills on the left & destroys on the left
the day Ogun got the husband & wife was the day I was afraid
 he'd touch me that day we drank the palmwine of terror
quicker than lightning he scares off the loafer
the sword doesn't know the neck of the swordsmith
the place Ogun lives in town is blacker than nightfall
the day they laid his cornerstone he told his children he'd stay
 homeless
master of iron, man & warrior
big old mountain on the outskirts of town
a pillar of earth falls & starts it trembling
someone who looks at him stumbles he knocks into a baobab tree
he throws his iron tools down under a coco tree
he shoves it deep in he touches base of cock with his hand maybe
 he's gone soft
he makes sure his cock is in no it isn't soft except his balls
except his balls are drained
never clumsy on the battlefield
the yam neglected by the sick man sends shoots into the bushes
he plows the field its owner doesn't plow

he tells the sick man if he dies people will take his field away
 death rattles keep the sick man from sleeping
 a large-headed leaf
 big swampy water seeps into the river
 a dead man balances his head on shoulder of someone who supports
 him
 Ogun kills the long tits' owner on the water
 battle of the crab & fish
 he finds water in his house & on the road but washes up with
 blood
 Ogun sticks a bloodcovered hat on his head
 & the bushes & the forest crying "sizzle sizzle"
 if someone says Ogun won't fight a minute later you see him like a
 dice-cup under an elephant's foot
 Ogun makes a baby's skull hum like a pumpkin he makes a grown
 man's clink like a plate
 Ogun I don't want my balls cut off for no one's ceremonies
 Big-Ogun battles in blood
 Big-Ogun who eats of the ram
 who hangs a snake around his neck & struts up & down with it
 Ogun-of-the-barbers eats other men's beards
 Ogun-of-the-tattoo-artists sucks up their blood
 Ogun has four hundred wives & one thousand four hundred children
 Ogun won't help anyone that doesn't bring him offerings of kola
 Big-Ogun my husband my big boss of iron
 Ogun sweet river grass abundant Ogun good to eat good to sell
 good to go around with
 If someone says "I'm going to die on the road" bad luck dogs him
 he dies like a wild deer he drops dead like an ekiri he goes to his
 death like a dying deer
 he has arrows over his body as bad as any wild deer
 (unless it wasn't Akisale that gave birth to an oka snake)
 (unless it wasn't Akisale that gave birth to a boa)
 Ogun killed Big-Ogun he captured his town & set up shop there
 boss of the world who walks ahead of the orishas
 big man who captures the boss of all the other big men
 who eats the head of the man who was headstrong
 a blacksmith does better in the market than someone working in
 the fields
 Ogun kills Big-Ogun he kills him completely he makes his house
 into a residence

Ogun seven parts of the houses for Ogun
he is very high & very mighty
he smashes someone into pieces that are more or less big

Yoruba

Abuse Poem: For Kodzo & Others

by **KOMI EKPE**

1

Poverty moved into my homestead
Can I be this way and earn the name of a great singer?
Shall I fear death by song
and refuse to sing?

2

Hm hm hm. Beware,
I will place a load on Kodzo's head.
Nugbleza informed me that
it is the women of Tsiamé
who goaded Kodzo into my song.
Questioners, this became the evil firewood
he'd gathered; his hands decayed
his feet decayed.
I am the poet; I am not afraid of you.
Kodzo, winding in the air, his asshole agape
his face long and curved
like the lagoon egret's beak.
Call him here, I say call him
and let me see his face.
He is the man from whom the wind runs,
the man who eats off the farm he hasn't planted
his face bent like the evil hoe
on its handle. Behold, ei ei ei
Kodzo did something. I forgive him his debt.
I will insult him since he poked
a stick into the flying ant's grove.
Amegavi said he has some wealth
And he took Kodzo's part.

The back of his head tapers off
 as if they'd built a fetish hut on his breathing spot.
 His face wags, a fool with a white ass.
 The monkey opened his asshole
 in display to the owner of the farm.
 The lion caught a game, alas,
 his children took it away from him.
 Kodzo's homestead shall fall, shall surely fall.
 Questioners, let evil men die
 let death knock down the evil doer.
 If I were the fetish in the creator's house
 that will be your redemption.
 Kodzo, this imbecile, evil animal
 who fucks others' wives fatteningly
 his buttocks run off, his teeth yellow
 his penis has wound a rope around his waist
 pulling him around and away,
 his backside runs into a slope
 his eye twisted like the sun-inspector,
 he has many supporters in Tsiamé
 his mouth as long as the pig
 blowing the twin whistle.
 Something indeed has happened.

Ewe

What Fell Down? Penis!

Vocalist: **AWAWO, WIFE OF JOHN**

Hai Hai Hai Hai Hai-i-i-i	HOE! HOE!
What fell down?	PENIS!
How did it fall?	IT FELL WITH A BANG!
The oracle	LET IT SPEAK!
Pot with noise inside	LET IT SPEAK!
Iroko tree in the compound	LET IT SPEAK!
Those who pull honey from the ground say a woman's body is sweeter than honey	
WE DO NOT EVEN BELIEVE THEY HAVE TASTED OUR BODY SPIRIT, EGUWA ETUMABE	LET THEM SEE!

Ridiculous men whose pubic hair
is straight
Foolish men whose arms are bent
like a monkey's

LET THEM SEE!

LET THEM SEE!

Elo who is supreme

Elo

The one with cudgel is not a
woman

Elo

The supreme one has never
fetched water from the river

Elo

The supreme one has never
fetched firewood

Elo

He asks me to "shake my waist" a little bit Elo

BUT I CAN'T SHAKE MY WAIST A LITTLE BIT BECAUSE IT'S TOO DIFFICULT

Elo

He asks me to lie on my back

BUT I CAN'T LIE ON MY BACK AND SPREAD MY LEGS BECAUSE IT'S TOO

DIFFICULT Elo

So he asks me to lie on my side a little

BUT I CAN'T LIE ON MY SIDE JUST A LITTLE BECAUSE IT'S TOO

DIFFICULT Elo

E-lo who is supreme

Elo

The one with cudgel is not a
woman

Elo

The one with sticks on his body
is not a woman

Elo

The one with okra is not a
woman

Elo

The one with an "extra body" is
not a woman

Elo

ELO-O-O-O

E-lo who is supreme

Ekperi

What Fell Down? Vulva!

Vocalist: **OGIEPO, SON OF AIMIEBO**

Hai-ai-ai-ai	HOE! HOE!
What fell down?	<i>Vulva!</i>
How did it fall?	<i>It fell with a bang!</i>
The oracle	<i>Let it speak!</i>
Pot with noise inside	<i>Let it speak!</i>
Iroko tree in the compound	<i>Let it speak!</i>
Those who pull HONEY FROM THE GROUND SAY THAT A MAN'S BODY IS SWEETER THAN HONEY	
WE DO NOT EVEN BELIEVE THEY HAVE TASTED OUR BODY	
THE ONE WHOSE CLITORIS IS TOO LONG	
SLAP HER, THE ONE WHOSE PUBIC HAIR IS STRAIGHT	
SLAP HER, THE FOOLISH ONE WHOSE ARMS ARE BENT LIKE A MONKEY'S	
SLAP HER!	

Let us sing songs-of-the-mouth together	<i>Songs-of-the-mouth</i>
Let us sing songs-of-the-mouth together	<i>Songs-of-the-mouth</i>
<u>The bottom calabash in the net</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH</u>
<u>Four-score cowries inside-o</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH-O</u>
<u>Oho koko ho-o-o</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH-O-O-O</u>

No one should ask why I dance Agiela-dance
No one should ask WHY I DANCE AGIELA-DANCE
I DANCE AGIELA FOR the oracle
I DANCE AGIELA FOR Okhailopokhai
No one should ask why I dance Agiela-dance *E-e-e-e-e-e*

Ekperi

The Train

Iron thing coming from Pompei, from the round-house
Where Englishmen smashed their hands on it,
It has no front it has no back.
Rhino Tshukudu going that way.
Rhino Tshukudu no, coming this way.
I'm no greenhorn, I'm a strong, skillful man.

Animal coming from Pompi, from Moretele.
 It comes spinning out a spider's web under a cloud of gnats
 Moved by the pulling of a teat, animal coming from Kgobola-diatla
 Comes out of the big hole in the mountain, mother of the great woman,
 Coming on iron cords.
 I met this woman of the tracks curving her way along the river bank
 and over the river.
 I thought I'd snatch her
 So I said
 "Out of the way, son of Mokwatsi, who stands there at the teat."
 The stream of little red and white birds gathered up all of its track
 Clean as a whistle.
 Tshutshu over the dry plains
 Rhino Tshukudu out of the high country
 Animal from the south, steaming along
 It comes from Pompi, the round-house, from Kgobola-diatla.

Hurutshu

Speaking the World: Seven Praise-Mottoes

1

Arm and Hand

Arm, shoulder is big
 Arm, separates at the elbow
 Fist is small
 Fingers lengthy
 Palm is striated
 Fingers, each with three phalanges

2

Hoe

Iron hoe says *hu*
 All day; iron palm
 Finger tip
 Hole in the handle fits
 Iron in: hafted like man and woman
 Bent neck

Slenders to the grip
Poor man works with it
Rich man works with it
Who has a hoe hangs on
Even an orphan grows
By dint of:
Sun, fatigue, content.

3

Woman

Worn stirring stick.

4

Young Girl

Young girl sways
Eye of the dawn star
Gleaming neck
Breasts no bigger than
Ewe's udder
Firm as a cake of indigo
Belly flatter than
Fulani's sandal
Hips a hand could
Span the measure of.

5

To Gazelle Mask

Greetings, goat of the bush,
Full of the beans you have eaten,
An able man shoots—
Blood flows on the ground.
All eyes are upon you—
Hare stares
Turtledove watches.
Good bush, shake your legs
Good bush, shake your body.

6

Blindness

Morning darkness, evening darkness
Always, always.

7

Ogotemmel

Flicks away rooted obstacles.

Dogon

Death Rites I

Leader: The gates of Dan are shut.

Company: Shut are the gates of Dan.

Leader: The spirits of the dead flit hurrying there.
Their crowd is like the flight of mosquitoes.
The flight of mosquitoes which dance in the evening.

Company: Which dance in the evening.

Leader: The flight of mosquitoes which dance in the evening.
When the night has turned completely black.
When the sun has vanished.
When the sun has turned completely black.
The dance of the mosquitoes.
The whirlwind of dead leaves.
When the storm has growled.

Company: When the storm has growled.

Leader: They await him who will come.

Company: Him who will come.

Leader: Him who will say: You, come, you, go away!

Company: Him who will say: Come, go!

Leader: And Khvum will be with his children.

Company: With his children.

All: And this is the end.

Baka [Gabon Pygmy]

Death Rites II

The animal runs, it passes, it dies. And it is the great cold.

It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.

The bird flies, it passes, it dies. And it is the great cold.

It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.

The fish flees, it passes, it dies. And it is the great cold.

It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.

Man eats and sleeps. He dies. And it is the great cold.

It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.

There is light in the sky, the eyes are extinguished, the star shines.

The cold is below, the light is on high.

The man has passed, the shade has vanished, the prisoner is free!

Khvum, Khvum, come in answer to our call!

Baka [Gabon Pygmy]

The Praises of the Falls

*A bo phela a morapeli, Malaola
tse phelang le tse shoeleng.*

*He will live who knows how to pray.
Divining the things alive & dead.*

The Fall of The Little Creeper

- (1) is one called “rascal of the circle”
- (2) is a calf that doesn’t frolic, doesn’t come out of the village
- (3) then it frolics & goes back to its post

The Swimming of the Sunbird

- (1) Sunbird
secret & daring
- (2) when you take up a piece of straw
- (3) & say you imitate the hammerhead
- (4) though nobody can imitate the hammerhead
- (5) bird
of those who take new clothes
into deep waters
- (6) you are taking up pieces of straw
one by one
- (7) you build above pools
- (8) the little sunbird
mustn't fall
- (9) that falls & goes *phususu*
in the pool
- (10) the patient man
is sitting on the drift
- (11) watching his sins pass by
- (12) & sees the river reed
mocking
the reed of the plain
- (13) it says:
when the grass is burning
- (14) the other one laughing also
saying:
when the river fills up

The Fall or Swimming of the Molele

- (1) of
mothers
of "give me some fat
to smear myself"
- (2) & fat to smear it on the road
- (3) to wait
a long time, not to
smear
if going to your husband
- (4) the smooth face of some monkey
- (5) & the space in front of him
- (6) those shining stones

The Swimming of the Red Sparrow

- (1) Red sparrow
never be a stranger
- (2) Stranger with stunted horns
- (3) & open guilt
- (4) This big turd was the stranger's
- (5) Our headsman's
turd
is such a
paltry thing

The Fall of Shaping the Hammer

- (1) some irons eating
some others
in the pincers
- (2) the positions of the bushmen's huts
- (3) the bushman's son
throwing
his arrow
is turning his back
- (4) & hits the eland in the udder
- (5) & these attract crowds
& are facing each other
- (6) one died at the drift
- (7) & one in the public places
- (8) take their hoes
& spades
- (9) let's bury the witchdoctors

*Of the Witchdoctor who Stopped the Pig
by His Cleverness*

- (1) The sky is eating
is whispering
- (2) & eating
it roots in the straw
- (3) that the asparagus may stay with its garbage
- (4) sky
of distant lands
& of the hearth

- (5) now that the sky has stopped
raining
joy, joy
cries the pig
- (6) & is an animal
that grows fat
in fair weather

The Masibo Plant of the Power

- (1) Who doesn't belong to the powerful
doesn't grow from the power
- (2) This is the eland
& the small antelope
- (3) & the beast with a mane
- (4) This eland has bewitched
the eland of the shepherds
- (5) has arisen
has taken a new skin
- (6) Does the cow suck power from her calf?
- (7) The woman sucks power from her child

The Famous Masibo of the Swimming

- (1) Swim on the deep waters
lie upon them
- (2) who have no hippos & no little things
- (3) no beast of prey
biting
while it moves
- (4) & coiling itself in a corner
- (5) only the little hippos were swimming
- (6) the big ones
never swim here anymore
- (7) Why are the crocodiles
fighting in the water?
- (8) They are fighting for an old
crocodile
- (9) for many talks in the water
- (10) which says: I do not
bite, I only
play

- (11) will bite some other year
(12) when the mimosa
& the willow tree
are growing

The Fame of the Lamp

- (1) O mother elephant
(2) O mother elephant, I'm going blind
(3) O mother elephant, I came here in secret
(4) O mother elephant, their road was red
(5) O mother elephant, there was blood & disorder
(6) O mother elephant, who shakes her ear
O running elephant

The Fame of the Creepers

- (1) This is the big creeper
(2) whose leaves have fallen
(3) We warm ourselves
at its embers
We use it again
(4) You are light
the lamp
(5) which says:
make light for us

poor people

The Appearance of the Orchis of the Basutos

- (1) of the children of one clan
(2) & of one who distributes
posterity
(3) & of the white calabash
for remembrance
(4) & the distribution of meat
(5) of sheep & of kids
(6) of the springboks
bringing hunger
to our bellies

The Lamp of the Seers

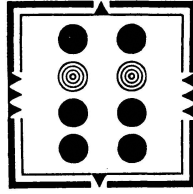
- (1) The angry man
fights with his mother-in-law
 - (2) What was the good of those lamps?
 - (3) Seeing wonders
every morning
 - (4) your sins passed by
& you saw them
 - (5) & saw the child of a cow
& of a human being
 - (6) saw them, could tell them
apart
- from the entrails

The Rise of the Cobra

- (1) He fell on the rock
& lay down
- (2) but he got up with his luggage
- (3) got up & shook off
the dust
- (4) White head?
Wear ornaments
- (5) White hair is a sign
- (6) something
the ancestors long for
- (7) fur from the head
of a hare
would make it
- (8) This is the last time

Basuto

Ika Meji



Greetings for the sacrifice!

Now let us praise Ika Meji—

Can you see how Ifa came to this designation?

Up against the wall's no place

to extend "long life!" to your elders;

Coming straight on,

gazing vaguely away

signifies a voracious visitor;

Might look as though I were up to no good,

followed by all of you; stay home,

said the snake to his hungry children

Made Ifa for Slim-pickings,

stubby little fellow who will survive

twenty thousand years in this world

if he sacrifice

ten pigeons, a scroungy cock, and ten bags of cowries.

He sacrificed, they made Ifa leaves for him,

and he did not die—

unlike the broom swept into a wisp,

he stayed together

We have sacrificed efficaciously.

Now let's get on to row two:

King of the counting house

don't count me

Turn around, misery,

count me out;

Snake-eyes,

if we're being counted,

why'd ya call me?

Accountable for no-account?

*No one's seen me sin;
no wickedness on me.
Mother counts the baskets
Father counts the bins
One by one they counted us down,
but we fixed them.*

Ifa, hearing this:

How is it all of you who live
in this rickety town
have icky names?
'Cause hicks are what we called ourselves
till you hit the scene.

So that's the reason, Ifa said,
All your lives you've been higgledy-piggledy, sick, sick, sick,
like housewives rushing before the storm
picking laundry off limbs.

Now go distribute money to snails,
for it's their shells that spiral in—
like Mother Yemoja making medicine
with viper's head. You dig?

She covered herself with prickly cloth;
and when this hedgehog edged over to sit
beside her victim, they said:

Go feed grass to *that* horse
standing by the corn bin.

When hedgehog hit
it was beancake-vendor
fell down dead.

Now snail turned gravedigger;
viper mourned the death
of beancake-vendor.

Creeping snail upon snail
adds insult to injury;
If witch's snare can't smell the entrance,
snail within will survive forever.
Will dog bite the heel of bush cow?
Never! We sneaked out of the way
to our rickety town
early in the morning.

Trading for years and nothing to show for it
called on

Axe strikes tree, definitively,
 diviner of the house of Orunmila.
 Secret arrived on foot,
 blessed the racketsy-packetsy inhabitants of Ika;
 and when he had done,
 we praised the diviner, saying:
 Secret said I will have money,
 and here is money.
 Axe strikes tree, definitively,
 as blade's edge
 is the tongue of secrets.

Diviner says I will have a wife—
 Here she is.

Axe strikes tree
 Power sits
 in the mouth
 of Ifa

Diviner says I will have offspring—
 Here are children.
 His tongue speaks
 with authority:

Diviner says I will build me a house—
 See, over there—
 Secret's spit is commanding.

Diviner says I will see good things—
 There they are, everywhere, everything—
 Energy fills the speech of diviner.

Then he started singing:

<i>Spiky fingers</i>	<i>grip iniquity</i>
<i>Aka leaves</i>	<i>bind hands of mine enemy</i>

Reverse wickedness!

<i>Close their hands</i>	<i>globe, peel, pound, knead</i>
--------------------------	----------------------------------

Till there's no remainder!

May they die young!

<i>Spiny cloth</i>	<i>slim leaves</i>
<i>bend and twist</i>	<i>till there be</i>
<i>no vise in</i>	<i>hostility</i>

So be it!

Greetings! May our sacrifice see us through this thicket.

Yoruba

Little Leper of Munjolóbo

as told by **MĀ KELEZENSIA KAHAMBA**

I give you a story.

AUDIENCE: I give you another.

I came and I saw.

AUDIENCE: See so that we may see.

◦

N-o-w

there was a girl.

THE GIRL WAS B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L.

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL.

Now men continually come to court her, but
she refuses . . .

They come to court.

She refuses . . .

They come to court. She refuses . . .

Eh-Eh! The chief s-a-y-s,

“I’ll go and court her myself.”

◦

The chief chooses and chooses men

and sends them.

◦

They go, but she says, “No.”

EH! HE PICKS OUT ONE HANDSOME MAN, HAS HIM RUBBED WITH
BUTTERFAT, DRESSES HIM IN BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES OF GOLD.
NO!

He goes to arrange a marriage and she refuses.

◦

Then there volunteered a short man who was LEPROUS.

He had contracted leprosy.

THE LITTLE ONE HAD BECOME ALL DRY AND HARD.

He says, “I’m going to search for her.”

They say, “You, Little Leper, you?”

You go and bring the girl?”

He says, “I’ll bring her.”

◦

Mh! He takes out a leather cape. He takes out butterfat and he
anoints himself. He dresses.

Just like that.

He goes.

◦

He goes and finds the g-i-r-l.

She's there in the entrance to her h-o-u-s-e.

She's weaving a basket.

◦

He says to her,

“The chief has sent me to you.”

She says, “You?”

To you, to you I say never.”

◦

As she's weaving the basket,

he jumps up and snatches her

empindwi.

She's using it to weave the basket.

◦

He runs and reaches the courtyard.

“Little Leper, Little Leper of Munjolóbo,
give me my *empindwi.*”

He says,

(sings) “Beautiful soft grass of the palace,

Here, take your *empindwi.*

Beautiful young calf of the palace,

Here, take your *empindwi.*”

◦

(Narrator's aside: Look at the cooking pot, Benja.)

“Beautiful young calf of the palace,

Here take your *empindwi.*”

(sings) “Little Leper, Little Leper of Munjoló—”

That's the girl.

(sings) “Little Leper, Little Leper of Munjolóbo,

You don't give me my *empindwi*."
"Mother, fertile piece of land,
Here, take your *empindwi*.
Beautiful soft grass of the palace,
Here, take your *empindwi*."
"Little Leper, Little Leper of Munjolóbo,
You don't give me—"

NOW, THEN

THEY LEAVE THERE

and go for about two hours.

o

THE GIRL . . .

followed the Little Leper.

HE TOOK

HER *EMPINDWI*

AND IS RUNNING

to take her to the chief.

o

Eh-Eh!

They're moving along.

They go for about six hours.

THEN THE GIRL . . .

doesn't know the way back.

NOW THAT LITTLE LEPER . . .

is running on the way to the palace
to take her to the chief.

AND THE *EMPINDWI*,

he's taken it.

Eh-Eh! They move along. They go and stop, stop and go,
bit by bit.

THEN THE GIRL . . .

has begun to cry.

She tries again:

"Little Leper, Little Leper of Munjolóbo,

You don't give me my *empindwi*."

"Beautiful farmland of the palace,

Here, take your *empindwi*.

Beautiful young calf of the palace,

Here, take your *empindwi*."

EH-EH!

THEY MOVE ALONG. They go on for about nine hours.

o

THEN THE GIRL . . .

has begun to cry.

All that's left is a j-o-u-r-n-e-y . . .

of about half an hour

to reach the palace.

Then the palace residents . . .

go outside.

They say, "Chief,"

they

s-a-y,

"The Little Leper has brought the woman."

Eh-Eh!

The one who said this first,
the chief cuts him down.

He takes out a machete

AND CUTS HIM DOWN.

EH-EH!

THE SECOND ONE SAYS,

"MY LORD,

DON'T KILL PEOPLE.

THE LITTLE LEPER HAS BROUGHT THE WOMAN."

o

EH-EH! HE SAYS, "KILL HIM ALSO."

THEY CUT HIM DOWN TOO,

WITH A MACHETE.

MH-MH!

o

THEN THE TWO OF THEM

go and stop, stop and go, bit

by bit. There's only a half hour to go.

WHEN THEY APPROACHED CLOSE BY THE PALACE,

THEN THE GIRL BEGAN TO CRY . . .

THAT LITTLE LEPER

was running ahead with her *empindwi*,

JUMPING UP AND RUNNING AHEAD,
JUMPING UP
AND RUNNING AHEAD.
EH-EH!

*The one who raced out of the palace this time was a royal
adviser, a favorite of the chief.*

He says, "I'll go and tell the chief."

He says, "My Lord,
stop killing people."

He says, "THE LITTLE LEPER HAS BROUGHT
THE WOMAN."

Eh-Eh! They leave the house.

They take our beautiful clothes of GOLD . . .

THEY GO AND DRESS HER . . .

THEY PICK HER UP . . .

THEY PUT HER ON THEIR SHOULDERS . . .

AUTOMOBILES . . .

BUSES . . .

THE KING'S DRUMS SOUND . . .

CANNON . . .

They bring her into the house.

As for the Little Leper . . .

the chief gives him cattle.

He presents him with a maidservant.

He presents him with a manservant.

When I saw them giving him a manservant,

giving him

a maidservant,

and he himself eating plantains,

o

I left there . . .

o

I said, "Let me go and report."

o

It's done.

Haya

The Voice of the Karaw

(1)

*Bursts of twilight's frantic wing-beats, submit to me, I am Yori
I am as the arching sky, as encounter of crossroads in space
Green savanna, entirely fresh, green savanna entirely outstretched
where no dog may scavenge*

Hornbill of deaf-mute village I am deaf-mute chief.

What sort of a thing is this? *Come, old tearers-to-shreds, submit to me,
I am Yori.*

Astonishing! What we are learning now existed already, arriving from
beforehand: rhythm

I entered the flow and found it was transformation—

Rhythm, beginning of all beginning speech, was the crowned crane's:

I speak, said the crowned crane,
meaning I know I speak.

Oh, if I here misspeak, may heat of error be sufficient to pardon my
mistakes;

If I omit, may omission be forgiven that anticipates!

*Old knives, having been sheathed, cannot transpierce the mystery—
come, old tearers-to-shreds, submit to me,
I am Yori*

*I am as the arching sky, as encounter of crossroads in space,
I am as the unique sun!*

Cock's head of night's transformation, Father of my instruction, see, my
arm is bent behind my back as you wish;

Memory itself is to blame for all mistakes,
memory which makes me stumble, if I do

As for oblivion—blame inattention of spirit;

Perhaps a running knot will form along the cord of my speech;
but all cords are corridors leading to embrace

And all antechambers lead to our common origin: Mande

All having derives from another's possession

To have you come, you arrive by means of instruction;

Transformation, where true possession takes place,
even moderate insight
anticipates penetration.

His word has been translated exactly!

Transformation, all transformation, man's furnace,
crucible of patience,

I say all waiting is pure patience

If these words be spoken at the crossroads of space!

(2)

Be at peace, old tearers-to-shreds, here am I, Yori,

As handle of spear I am, as the arching sky

I am as the unique sun,

You there, slapping the face of twilight,

calm yourselves; here am I, Yori,

I as the arching sky, I as the unique sun

Deaf-mute hornbill, fire which spared the bone,

chief of deaf-mute village,

I say mumble mumble, I say caw-caw the cacophonous,

Sheathed, sheathed are the old knives. Yori, my father,

Yori, my mother, Yori, my ancestor,

I have gone to question our founder.

The old man as if seized by uncontrollable itching

scratches his head; thoughtfully rotates his jaw

as if pestered by a piece of gristle;

then hastens to Ségou to consult the sages;

For some things may be found in the enemy's house

that the friend's house lacks;

and that which is lacking makes enemies friends;

Founder, my father, my friend, exacerbation of questing

is calmed within; there the true task begins;

but transformation is arduous, arduous.

Come, what we are learning now existed already;

let us accomplish the rhythm;

All cords are corridors leading to embrace of origin.

Bamana

Gassire's Lute

Four times Wagadu stood there in all her splendor. Four times Wagadu disappeared and was lost to human sight: once through vanity, once through falsehood, once through greed, and once through dissension. Four times Wagadu changed her name. First she was called Dierra, then Agada, then Ganna, then Silla. Four times she turned her face. Once to the north, once to the west, once to the east, and once to the south. For Wagadu, whenever men have seen her, has always had four gates: one to the north, one to the west, one to the east, and one to the south. Those are the directions whence the strength of Wagadu comes, the strength in which she endures no matter whether she be built of stone, wood, and earth or lives but as a shadow in the mind and longing of her children. For really, Wagadu is not of stone, not of wood, not of earth. Wagadu is the strength that lives in the hearts of men and is sometimes visible because eyes see her and ears hear the clash of swords and ring of shields, and is sometimes invisible because the indomitability of men has overtired her, so that she sleeps. Sleep came to Wagadu for the first time through vanity, for the second time through falsehood, for the third time through greed, and for the fourth time through dissension. Should Wagadu ever be found for the fourth time, then she will live so forcefully in the minds of men that she will never be lost again, so forcefully that vanity, falsehood, greed, and dissension will never be able to harm her.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Every time that the guilt of man caused Wagadu to disappear she won a new beauty which made the splendor of her next appearance still more glorious. Vanity brought the song of the bards which all peoples (of the Sudan) imitate and value today. Falsehood brought a rain of gold and pearls. Greed brought writing as the Burdama still practice it today and which in Wagadu was the business of the women. Dissension will enable the fifth Wagadu to be as enduring as the rain of the south and as the rocks of the Sahara, for every man will then have Wagadu in his heart and every woman a Wagadu in her womb.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Wagadu was lost for the first time through vanity. At that time Wagadu faced north and was called Dierra. Her last king was called Nganamba Fasa. The Fasa were strong. But the Fasa were growing old. Daily they fought against the Burdama and the Boroma. They fought every day and every month. Never was there an end to the fighting. And out of the fighting the strength of the Fasa grew. All Nganamba's men were heroes, all

the women were lovely and proud of the strength and the heroism of the men of Wagadu.

All the Fasa who had not fallen in single combat with the Burdama were growing old. Nganamba was very old. Nganamba had a son, Gassire, and he was old enough, for he already had eight grown sons with children of their own. They were all living and Nganamba ruled in his family and reigned as a king over the Fasa and the doglike Boroma. Nganamba grew so old that Wagadu was lost because of him and the Boroma became slaves again to the Burdama who seized power with the sword. Had Nganamba died earlier would Wagadu then have disappeared for the first time?

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Nganamba did not die. A jackal gnawed at Gassire's heart. Daily Gassire asked his heart: "When will Nganamba die? When will Gassire be king?" Every day Gassire watched for the death of his father as a lover watches for the evening star to rise. By day, when Gassire fought as a hero against the Burdama and drove the false Boroma before him with a leather girth, he thought only of the fighting, of his sword, of his shield, of his horse. By night, when he rode with the evening into the city and sat in the circle of men and his sons, Gassire heard how the heroes praised his deeds. But his heart was not in the talking; his heart listened for the strains of Nganamba's breathing; his heart was full of misery and longing.

Gassire's heart was full of longing for the shield of his father, the shield which he could carry only when his father was dead, and also for the sword which he might draw only when he was king. Day by day Gassire's rage and longing grew. Sleep passed him by. Gassire lay, and a jackal gnawed at his heart. Gassire felt the misery climbing into his throat. One night Gassire sprang out of bed, left the house and went to an old wise man, a man who knew more than other people. He entered the wise man's house and asked: "Kiekorro! When will my father, Nganamba, die and leave me his sword and shield?" The old man said: "Ah, Gassire, Nganamba will die; but he will not leave you his sword and shield! You will carry a lute. Shield and sword shall others inherit. But your lute shall cause the loss of Wagadu! Ah, Gassire!" Gassire said: "Kiekorro, you lie! I see that you are not wise. How can Wagadu be lost when her heroes triumph daily? Kiekorro, you are a fool!" The old wise man said: "Ah, Gassire, you cannot believe me. But your path will lead you to the partridges in the fields and you will understand what they say and that will be your way and the way of Wagadu."

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

The next morning Gassire went with the heroes again to do battle against the Burdama. Gassire was angry. Gassire called to the heroes: "Stay here behind. Today I will battle with the Burdama alone." The heroes stayed behind and Gassire went on alone to do battle with the Burdama. Gassire hurled his spear. Gassire charged the Burdama. Gassire swung his sword. He struck home to the right, he struck home to the left. Gassire's sword was as a sickle in the wheat. The Burdama were afraid. Shocked, they cried: "That is no Fasa, that is no hero, that is a Damo [a being unknown to the singer himself]." The Burdama turned their horses. The Burdama threw away their spears, each man his two spears, and fled. Gassire called the knights. Gassire said: "Gather the spears." The knights gathered the spears. The knights sang: "The Fasa are heroes. Gassire has always been the Fasa's greatest hero. Gassire has always done great deeds. But today Gassire was greater than Gassire!" Gassire rode into the city and the heroes rode behind him. The heroes sang: "Never before has Wagadu won so many spears as today."

Gassire let the women bathe him. The men gathered. But Gassire did not seat himself in their circle. Gassire went into the fields. Gassire heard the partridges. Gassire went close to them. A partridge sat under a bush and sang: "Hear the *Dausi*! Hear my deeds!" The partridge sang of its battle with the snake. The partridge sang: "All creatures must die, be buried and rot. Kings and heroes die, are buried and rot. I, too, shall die, shall be buried and rot. But the *Dausi*, the song of my battles, shall not die. It shall be sung again and again and shall outlive all kings and heroes. Hoooh, that I might do such deeds! Hoooh, that I may sing the *Dausi*! Wagadu will be lost. But the *Dausi* shall endure and shall live!"

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire went to the old wise man. Gassire said: "Kiekorro! I was in the fields. I understood the partridges. The partridge boasted that the song of its deeds would live longer than Wagadu. The partridge sang the *Dausi*. Tell me whether men also know the *Dausi* and whether the *Dausi* can outlive life and death?" The old wise man said: "Gassire, you are hastening to your end. No one can stop you. And since you cannot be a king you shall be a bard. Ah! Gassire. When the kings of the Fasa lived by the sea they were also great heroes and they fought with men who had lutes and sang the *Dausi*. Oft struck the enemy *Dausi* fear into the hearts of the Fasa, who were themselves heroes. But they never sang the *Dausi* because they were of the first rank, of the Horro, and because the *Dausi* was only sung by those of the second rank, of the Diare. The Diare fought not so much as heroes for the sport of the day but as drinkers for the

fame of the evening. But you, Gassire, now that you can no longer be the second of the first, shall be the first of the second. And Wagadu will be lost because of it.” Gassire said: “Wagadu can go to blazes!”

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire went to a smith. Gassire said: “Make me a lute.” The smith said: “I will, but the lute will not sing.” Gassire said: “Smith, do your work. The rest is my affair.” The smith made the lute. The smith brought the lute to Gassire. Gassire struck on the lute. The lute did not sing. Gassire said: “Look here, the lute does not sing.” The smith said: “That’s what I told you in the first place.” Gassire said: “Well, make it sing.” The smith said: “I cannot do anything more about it. The rest is your affair.” Gassire said: “What can I do, then?” The smith said: “This is a piece of wood. It cannot sing if it has no heart. You must give it a heart. Carry this piece of wood on your back when you go into battle. The wood must ring with the stroke of your sword. The wood must absorb down-dripping blood, blood of your blood, breath of your breath. Your pain must be its pain, your fame its fame. The wood may no longer be like the wood of a tree, but must be penetrated by and be a part of your people. Therefore it must live not only with you but with your sons. Then will the tone that comes from your heart echo in the ear of your son and live on in the people, and your son’s life’s blood, oozing out of his heart, will run down your body and live on in this piece of wood. But Wagadu will be lost because of it.” Gassire said: “Wagadu can go to blazes!”

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire called his eight sons. Gassire said: “My sons, today we go to battle. But the strokes of our swords shall echo no longer in the Sahel alone, but shall retain their ring for the ages. You and I, my sons, will that we live on and endure before all other heroes in the *Dausi*. My oldest son, today we two, thou and I, will be the first in battle!”

Gassire and his eldest son went into the battle ahead of the heroes. Gassire had thrown the lute over his shoulder. The Burdama came closer. Gassire and his eldest son charged. Gassire and his eldest son fought as the first. Gassire and his eldest son left the other heroes far behind them. Gassire fought not like a human being, but rather like a Damo. His eldest son fought not like a human being, but like a Damo. Gassire came into a tussle with eight Burdama. The eight Burdama pressed him hard. His son came to help him and struck four of them down. But one of the Burdama thrust a spear through his heart. Gassire’s eldest son fell dead from his horse. Gassire was angry. And shouted. The Burdama fled. Gassire dismounted and took the body of his eldest son upon his back. Then he

mounted and rode slowly back to the other heroes. The eldest son's heart's blood dropped on the lute which was also hanging on Gassire's back. And so Gassire, at the head of his heroes, rode into Dierra.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire's eldest son was buried. Dierra mourned. The urn in which the body crouched was red with blood. That night Gassire took his lute and struck against the wood. The lute did not sing. Gassire was angry. He called his sons. Gassire said to his sons: "Tomorrow we ride against the Burdama."

For seven days Gassire rode with the heroes to battle. Every day one of his sons accompanied him to be the first in the fighting. And on every one of these days Gassire carried the body of one of his sons, over his shoulder and over the lute, back into the city. And thus, on every evening, the blood of one of his sons dripped on to the lute. After the seven days of fighting there was a great mourning in Dierra. All the heroes and all the women wore red and white clothes. The blood of the Boroma (in sacrifice) flowed everywhere. All the women wailed. All the men were angry. Before the eighth day of the fighting all the heroes and the men of Dierra gathered and spoke to Gassire: "Gassire, this shall have an end. We are willing to fight when it is necessary. But you, in your rage, go on fighting without sense or limit. Now go forth from Dierra! A few will join you and accompany you. Take your Boroma and your cattle. The rest of us incline more to life than fame. And while we do not wish to die fameless we have no wish to die for fame alone."

The old wise man said: "Ah, Gassire! Thus will Wagadu be lost today for the first time."

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Gassire and his last, his youngest, son, his wives, his friends and his Boroma rode out into the desert. They rode through the Sahel. Many heroes rode with Gassire through the gates of the city. Many turned. A few accompanied Gassire and his youngest son into the Sahara.

They rode far: day and night. They came into the wilderness and in the loneliness they rested. All the heroes and all the women and all the Boroma slept. Gassire's youngest son slept. Gassire was restive. He sat by the fire. He sat there long. Presently he slept. Suddenly he jumped up. Gassire listened. Close beside him Gassire heard a voice. It rang as though it came from himself. Gassire began to tremble. He heard the lute singing. The lute sang the *Dausi*.

When the lute had sung the *Dausi* for the first time, King Nganamba died in the city Dierra; when the lute had sung the *Dausi* for the first time, Gassire's rage melted; Gassire wept. When the lute had sung the *Dausi*

for the first time, Wagadu disappeared—for the first time.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Four times Wagadu stood there in all her splendor. Four times Wagadu disappeared and was lost to human sight: once through vanity, once through falsehood, once through greed, and once through dissension. Four times Wagadu changed her name. First she was called Dierra, then Agada, then Ganna, then Silla. Four times she turned her face. Once to the north, once to the west, once to the east, and once to the south. For Wagadu, whenever men have seen her, has always had four gates: one to the north, one to the west, one to the east, and one to the south. Those are the directions whence the strength of Wagadu comes, the strength in which she endures no matter whether she be built of stone, wood, or earth or lives but as a shadow in the mind and longing of her children. For, really, Wagadu is not of stone, not of wood, not of earth. Wagadu is the strength which lives in the hearts of men and is sometimes visible because eyes see her and ears hear the clash of swords and ring of shields, and is sometimes invisible because the indomitability of men has overtired her, so that she sleeps. Sleep came to Wagadu for the first time through vanity, for the second time through falsehood, for the third time through greed, and for the fourth time through dissension. Should Wagadu ever be found for the fourth time, then she will live so forcefully in the minds of men that she will never be lost again, so forcefully that vanity, falsehood, greed, and dissension will never be able to harm her.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Every time that the guilt of man caused Wagadu to disappear she won a new beauty which made the splendor of her next appearance still more glorious. Vanity brought the song of the bards which all peoples imitate and value today. Falsehood brought a rain of gold and pearls. Greed brought writing as the Burdama still practice it today and which in Wagadu was the business of the women. Dissension will enable the fifth Wagadu to be as enduring as the rain of the south and as the rocks of the Sahara, for every man will then have Wagadu in his heart and every woman a Wagadu in her womb.

Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!

Soninke

AMERICA



Midē Songs & Picture-Songs

AN IMPLORATION FOR CLEAR WEATHER



I swing the spirit like a child



The sky is what I was telling you about



We have lost the sky



I am helping you



Have I made an error?



(Silence)



I am using my heart



What are you saying to me & am I in-my-senses?



The spirit wolf



I didn't know where I was going



I depend on the clear sky



I give you the-other-village, spirit that you are



The thunder is heavy



We are talking to each other

Seven Ojibwa Songs

1

a loon
I thought it was
but it was
my love's
splashing oar

—by Mary English

2

(a death song)

large bear
deceives me

—by Gawitayac

3

the odor of death
I discern the odor of death
in front of my body

—by Namebines

4

(a war song)

in the coming heat
of the day
I stood there

—by Memengwa

5

as my eyes
search
the prairie
I feel the summer in the spring

—by Ajidegijig

6

(a death song)

whenever I pause
the noise
of the village

—by Kimiwun

7

(song of the game of silence)

it is hanging
in the edge of sunshine
it is a pig I see
with its double hoofs
it is a very fat pig
the people who live in a hollow tree
are fighting
they are fighting bloodily
he is rich
he will carry a pack toward the great
water

—by John W. Carl (Mejakigijig)

From *The Wishing Bone Cycle*

by **JACOB NIBENEGENESABE**

I

I try to make wishes right
but sometimes it doesn't work.
Once, I wished a tree upside down
and its branches
were where the roots should have been!
The squirrels had to ask the moles
“How do we get down there
to get home?”
One time it happened that way.

Then there was the time, I remember now,
I wished a man upside down
and his feet were where his hands
should have been!
In the morning his shoes
had to ask the birds
“How do we fly up there
to get home?”
One time it happened that way.

2

There was an old woman I wished up.
She was the wife
of an old pond.
You could watch her swim in her husband
if you were
in the hiding bushes.
She spoke to him by the way she swam
gently.
One time in their lives there was no rain
and the sun began making the pond smaller.
Soon the sun took the whole pond!
For many nights the old woman slept
near the hole where her husband once lived.
Then, one night, a storm came
but in the morning there still was no water
in her husband's old house.
So she set out on a journey to find her husband
and followed the puddles on the ground
which were the storm's footprints.
She followed them for many miles.
Finally she came upon her husband
sitting in a hole. But he was in the wrong hole!
So the old woman brought her husband home
little by little in her hands.
You could have seen him come home
if you were
in the hiding bushes.

3

Once I wished up a coat
wearing a man inside.

The man was sleeping
and when he woke
the coat was on him!
This was in summer, so many asked him
“Why do you have that coat on?”
“It has me in it!”
he would answer.
He tried to take it off
but I wished his memory shivering with cold
so it wouldn’t want to remember
how to take a coat off.
That way it would stay warm.
I congratulated myself on thinking of that.
Then his friends came,
put coats on,
and slowly showed him how they took coats off.
Even that didn’t work.
Things were getting interesting.
Then his friends
tried to confuse the coat
into thinking it was a man.
“Good morning,” they said to it,
“Did you get
your share of fish?”
and other things too.
Some even invited the coat to gossip.
It got to be late summer
and someone said to the coat
“It is getting colder.
You better go out
and find a coat to wear.”
The coat agreed!
Ha! I was too busy laughing
to stop that dumb coat
from leaving the man it wore
inside.
I didn’t care.
I went following the coat.
Things were getting interesting.

Swampy Cree

The Shaman of the Yellowknives: A Chipewyan Talk-Poem

by FRANÇOIS MANDEVILLE

[PROLOGUE]

There was a man called Sinew Water.

He was a shaman.
This is what they say.

He dreamed about what was good
and through his dreams he taught the people.
He also told people about the future.
He knew songs about the things which upset people
and he was able to calm them down with those songs.

Because of these things
people felt he was very useful.
This is what they say.

[SCENE I]

One spring the people left the fort where they had been staying.

A large group of them were crossing the great lake
where the crossing was wildest.
There were many of them, women as well as children,
crossing in many canoes.

Besides the many large canoes,
there were some men alone in small canoes.

When they had come into the middle of the lake,
it suddenly started to blow very hard.

It still had not blown for long,
but the waves had already started to swell.

In time the waves began to swamp into the canoes.
Women and children were bailing out the canoes,
but the water on the inside was rising nearly to the top,
and people were nearly drowning.

Suddenly the shaman called out to the people from behind.

He said,

“Wait for me.
I’ll go on ahead of you.”

So they stopped to wait for him to pass by.

When he had passed by them
and pulled out in front of the first canoe,
he began to sing.

Immediately the wind stopped.
As soon as he began to sing,
it became calm.

And so that way he paddled along ahead of the people, singing.

The people continued to cross along after him.

When they had come among the islands,
he led them to where a river flowed out.

He said,

“We’ll make camp here.
We’ll put up on shore right here.”

So everyone went up on the shore.

Then he spoke again,

“Be careful when you put up the tepees.
Make them good and strong.
Also bring the canoes up on land.
The wind is not yet finished.
When it starts to blow again
it will be very strong.
Put some weights on the canoes.
Otherwise they might be blown away.”

All of the tepees were put up quickly.
and all of the canoes were put up on land.

When the shaman saw that it was done, he said,

“Okay, let it blow now!

My children are all up on land.”

Immediately it started to blow among the woods on the hilltop.
It roared like thunder.

And so the wind blew among the people.
The strong wind nearly blew the tepees apart.
It blew like that for a long time.
Then the wind became more moderate.

It continued to blow for three days.

Because of the way the shaman stopped the wind,
the people were not killed by the water.
This is what they say.

[SCENE II]

The shaman Sinew Water said,

“If I die
there will not be a shaman here among the people.

“There is only one other person who sees what I see.
Once, I met him.
He was rising as I was coming down.

“That other shaman said,

‘I haven’t seen any people around here until just now.
You’re the first person I’ve seen.’

“Then he said,

‘I’m a Beaver Indian.
What are your people?’

‘I am a Yellowknife.’”

Then the Beaver Indian said to Sinew Water,

“I am pleased that we have seen each other here.
Let’s not let our meeting be in vain.
Let’s give each other two songs.”

So they gave each other two songs.

Sinew Water sang two songs.
The Beaver Indian himself sang two songs,
a Beaver song and a Yellowknife song.

The Beaver Indian said,

“Now I have seen a Yellowknife while I was rising.
He gave me two songs.”

This is what they say.

[SCENE III]

Once Sinew Water was sick.

He spoke to his relatives,

“My relatives,
I am sick.
But I am not sick with an illness.
I am sick with the mind of the people.
I will not be living,
but you people will go on living.

“I am told that
if you say so, I will live.
You are in control of it.
I don't want to live here on the land
after my children have died.”

One of his relatives said,

“We want you to go on living with us.
Because of the way you speak to us,
the children know what is right.
You are very important to us.”

Sinew Water said,

“If only one person loves me,
I cannot go on living.
But I have been told that
if many people think about one another,
I will live.”

At once all of his relatives told him,

“Please go on living.”

At once he revived.

He did not feel at all sick.

This is what they say.

[SCENE IV]

In that way he lived for a long time but finally became sick again.

Once again, he said to his relatives,

“I have become an old man,
but I am still alive here on the land.
This is not pleasant for me,
but I will go on living.

“Again I am told that if you think about me
I’ll go on living.”

But the people said nothing to him.

Thus he became very sick.

In the winter he said,

“They have told me
that when the leaves come out to a good size in the spring,
then I will be called.
I’ll leave at that time.
Now I am living but
I have also died already.
It doesn’t matter if you urge me to live,
I will die.”

In the spring when the leaves had grown to a good size,
he died quietly as if going to sleep.

This is what they say.

Chipewyan (Canada)

Three Lakota Songs

1

owls
(were) hooting
in the passing of the night
owls
(were) hooting

—by Brave Buffalo

2

from everywhere
they come
flying
(from) the north
the wind is blowing
to earth
rattling
flying
they come
they come
from everywhere
they come

—by Bear Necklace

3

today
is mine (I claimed)
(to) a man
a voice
I sent
you grant me
this day
is mine (I claimed)
(to) a man
a voice
I sent
now
here
(he) is

—by Shell Necklace

From *Battiste Good's Winter Count*



1794-95 Killed-the-little-faced-Pawnee winter



1795-96 The-Rees-stood-the-frozen-man-up-with-the-buffalo-stomach-in-his-hand winter



1796-97 Wears-the-War-Bonnet-died winter



1797-98 Took-the-God-Woman-captive winter



1798-99 Many-women-died-in-childbirth winter



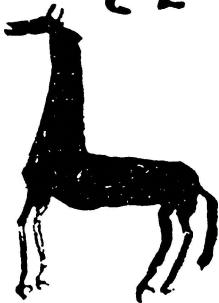
1799-1800 Don't-Eat-Buffalo-Heart-made-a-com-
memoration-of-the-dead winter



1800-1 The-Good-White-Man-came winter



1801-2 Smallpox-used-them-up-again winter



1802-3 Brought-home-Pawnee-horses-with-iron-
shoes-on winter



1803-4 Brought-home-Pawnee-horses-with-them
winter



1804-5 Sung-over-each-other-while-on-the-
warpath winter

Dakota

Peyote Songs

by TEWAKI

1 It has a red flower, it has power.
2 Daylight. Red flower.
3 It moves along.
4 Yellow.
5 Dawn rays are standing.
6 Power is flying.
7 Bird.

1 Horse is coming down.
2 Move into line, it's daylight.
3 Male antelopes, breeding.
4 Bird is circling, crying out.
5 Hell-diver's circling, crying out.
6 Bird getting ready to fly.
7 Beaver, it's dawn.

Comanche

Song of the Humpbacked Flute Player



Kitana-po, ki-tana-po, ki-tana-po,
ki-tana-PO!
Ai-na, ki-na-weh, ki-na-weh
Chi-li li-cha, chi-li li-cha
Don-ka-va-ki, mas-i-ki-va-ki
Ki-ve, ki-ve-na-meh
HOPET!

Hopi

Coyote & Junco

by **ANDREW PEYNETSA**

SON'AHCHI.
SONTI^{LO}—NG A_{GO}

AT STANDING ARROWS

OLD LADY JUNCO HAD HER HOME

and COYOTE

Coyote was there at Sitting Rock with his children.

He was with his children

and Old Lady Junco

was winnowing.

Pigweed

and tumbleweed, she was winnowing these.

With her basket

she winnowed these by tossing them in the air.

She was tossing them in the air

while Coyote

Coyote

was going around hunting, going around hunting for his children there
when he came to where Junco was winnowing.

“What are you DOING?” that’s what he asked her. “Well, I’m winnowing”
she said.

“What are you winnowing?” he said. “Well

pigweed and tumbleweed”

that’s what she told him.

“Indeed.

What’s that you’re saying?” “Well, this is
my winnowing song,” she said.

“NOW SING IT FOR ME

so that I

may sing it for my children,” he said.

Old Lady Junco

sang for Coyote:

YUUWA^{HINA} YUUWA^{HINA}

YUUWA^{HINA} YUUWA^{HINA}

YU^{HINA} YU^{HINA}

(blowing) PFFF PFFF

YU^{HINA} YU^{HINA}

(blowing) PFFF PFFF

That's what she said.

"YES, NOW I

can go, I'll sing it to my children."

Coyote went on to Oak Arroyo, and when he got there MOURNING

DOVES FLEW UP

and he lost his song.

He went back:

(*muttering*) "Quick! sing for me, some mourning doves made me lose my song," he said.

Again she sang for him.

He learned the song and went on.

He went through a field there

and broke through a gopher hole.

Again he lost his song.

Again, he came for the third time

to ask for it.

Again she sang for him.

He went on for the third time, and when he came to Oak Arroyo

BLACKBIRDS FLEW UP and again he lost his song.

He was coming for the fourth time

when Old Lady Junco said to herself, (*tight*) "Oh here you come but I won't sing," that's what she said.

She looked for a round rock.

When she found a round rock, she

dressed it with her Junco shirt, she put her basket of seeds with the

Junco rock.

(*tight*) "As for you, go right ahead and ask."

Junco went inside her house.

Coyote was coming for the fourth time.

When he came:

"Quick! sing it for me, I lost the song again, come on," that's what he told her.

Junco said nothing.

"Quick!" that's what he told her, but she didn't speak.

"ONE," he said.

"The fourth time I

speak, if you haven't sung, I'll bite you," that's what he told her.

o

"Second time, TWO," he said.

"Quick sing for me," he said.

She didn't sing. "THREE. I'll count ONCE MORE," he said.

Coyote said, “QUICK SING,” that’s what he told her.

She didn’t sing.

Junco had left her shirt for Coyote.

He bit the Junco, CRUNCH, he bit the round rock.

Right here (*points to molars*) he knocked out the teeth, the rows of teeth in back.

(*tight*) “So now I’ve really done it to you.” “AY! AY!”

that’s what he said.

THE PRAIRIE WOLF WENT BACK TO HIS CHILDREN,

and by the time he got back there his children were dead.

Because this was lived long ago, Coyote has no teeth here

(*points to molars*). LEE——SEM KONIKYA. (*laughs*)

Zuni

The Tenth Horse Song of Frank Mitchell

Key: wnn Ngahn n NNN

Go to her my son N wnn & go to her my son N wnn N wnnn N nnnn
N gahn

Go to her my son N wnn & go to her my son N wnn N wnnn N nnnn
N gahn

Because I was thnboynngng raised ing the dawn NwnnN go to her my
son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

& leafing from thuhuh house the bluestone home N gahn N wnn N
go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

& leafing from the (rurur) house the shining home NwnnnN go to her
my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

& leafing from thm(mm) (mm) swollen house my breath has blown
NwnnN go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

& leafing from thnn house the holy home NwnnN go to her my son N
wnnn N wnn () nnnn N gahn

& from the house hfff precious cloth we walk upon N wnn N nnnn
Ngo to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

with (p)(p)ayersticks that are blue NwnnN go to her my son N wnn N
wnn N nnnn N gahn

with my feathers that're blue NwnnN go to her my son N wnn N wnnN
 nnnn N gahn
 with my spirit horses that're blue NwnnN go to her my son N wnn N
 wnn () nnnn N gahn
 with my spirit horses that're blue & dawn & wnnN go to her my son N
 wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with my spirit horses that rrr bluestone & Rwnn N wnn N go to her my
 son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with my horses that hrrr bluestone & rrwnn N wnn N go to her my son
 N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with cloth of evree(ee)ee kind to draw (nn nn) them on & on N wnn N
 go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with jewels of evree(ee)ee kind to draw (nn nn) them on & wnn N go to
 her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with horses of evree(ee)ee kind to draw (nn nn) them on N wnn N go to
 her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with sheep of ever(ee)ee kind to draw (nn nn) them on N wnn N go to
 her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with cattle of evree(ee)ee kind to draw (nn nn) them on N wnn N go to
 her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 with men of ever(ee)ee kind to lead & draw (nn nn) them on N wnn N
 go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 from my house of precious cloth to her backackeroom N gahn N wnn
 N go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 in her house of precious cloth we walk (p)pon N wnn N gahn N go to
 her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 vvveverything that's gone befffore & more we walk upon N wnn N go
 to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 & everything thadz more & won't be(be)be poor N gahn N go to her
 my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 & everything thadz living to be old & blesst N wnn then go to her my
 son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn
 (a)cause I am thm boy who blisses/blesses to be old N gahn N nnnn N
 go to her my son N wnn N wnn N nnnn N gahn

 Go to her my son N wnnn N go to her my son N wnn N wnnn N nnnn
 N gahn
 Go to her my son N wnnn N go to her my son N wnn N wnnn N nnnn
 N gahn

Navajo

A Song of the Winds

by **SANTO BLANCO**

Below the sea there is the mouth of a cave
In which all the winds are born.
He comes below the sea and mounts up
To where there is no sun.
But the cave is light, like the sun.

Another mouth is smooth and slippery
and hard, like ice.
He stands erect with his arms outstretched
and from each finger there comes a wind.

First he blows the White Wind
then he blows the Red Wind
then he blows the Blue Wind.
And from his little finger
he blows the Black Wind,
which is stronger than them all.

The White Wind comes from the north
and is very hot.
Blue comes from the south.
The Red Wind comes from the west
in the middle of the day, and is soft.
The Black Wind comes from beyond the mountains
and is strongest of them all.
The whirlwind comes from the east.

Seri (Mexico)

Six Seri Whale Songs

by **SANTO BLANCO**

I
The sea is calm
there is no wind.
In the warm sun

I play on the surface
with many companions.
In the air spout
many clouds of smoke
and all of them are happy.

2

The mother whale is happy.
She swims on the surface, very fast.
No shark is near
but she swims over many leagues
back and forth, very fast.
Then she sinks to the bottom
and four baby whales are born.

3

First one comes up to the surface
in front of her nose.
He jumps on the surface.
Then each of the other baby whales
jumps on the surface.
Then they go down
into the deep water to their mother
and stay there eight days
before they come up again.

4

The old, old whale has no children.
She does not swim far.
She floats near the shore and is sad.
She is so old and weak
she cannot feed like other whales.
With her mouth on the surface
she draws in her breath—hrrr—
and the smallest fish and the sea birds are swallowed up.

5

The whale coming to shore is sick
the sharks have eaten her bowels
and the meat of her body.
She travels slowly—her bowels are gone.

She is dead on the shore
and can travel no longer.

6

Fifty sharks surrounded her.
They came under her belly
and bit off her flesh and her bowels
and so she died. Because she had no teeth
to fight the sharks.

Seri (Mexico)

Flower World: Four Poems from the Yaqui Deer Dance

1

o flower fawn
 about to come out, playing
 in this flower water

out there
 in the flower world
 the patio of flowers

in the flower water
 playing
 flower fawn

about to come out, playing
 in this flower water

2

(where is the rotted stick that screeches lying?)
the screeching rotted stick is lying over there
(where is the rotted stick that screeches lying?)
the screeching rotted stick is lying over there
there in the flower world
 beyond us
 in the tree world

the screeching rotted stick

is lying
over there the screeching
rotted stock is lying
over there

3
flower

with the body of a fawn
under a cholla flower
standing there
to rub your antlers
bending
turning where you stand to rub
your antlers
in the flower world
the dawn
there in its light
under a cholla flower
standing there
to rub your antlers
bending turning where you stand
to rub your antlers
flower
with the body of a fawn
under a cholla flower
standing there
to rub your antlers
bending
turning where you stand to rub
your antlers

4

SONG OF A DEAD MAN

I do not want these flowers
moving
but the flowers
want to move
I do not want these flowers
moving
but the flowers
want to move

I do not want these flowers
 moving
 but the flowers
 want to move
 out in the flower world
 the dawn
 over a road of flowers
 I do not want these flowers
 moving
 but the flowers
 want to move
 I do not want these flowers
 moving
 but the flowers
 the flowers
 want to move

Yaqui

To Find Our Life

after **RAMÓN MEDINA SILVA**

A few hundred yards down the trail the peyote pilgrims halted once more. Facing the mountains and the sun, they shouted their pleasure at having found their life and their pain at having to depart so soon. “Do not leave,” they implored the supernaturals, “do not abandon your places, for we will come again another year.” And they sang, song after song—their parting gift to the *kakauyarixi*:

What pretty hills, what pretty hills,
 So very green where we are.
 Now I don't even feel,
 Now I don't even feel,
 Now I don't even feel like going to my rancho.
 For there at my rancho it is so ugly,
 So terribly ugly there at my rancho,
 And here in Wirikuta so green, so green.
 And eating in comfort as one likes,
 Amid the flowers, so pretty.

Nothing but flowers here,
Pretty flowers, with brilliant colors,
So pretty, so pretty.
And eating one's fill of everything,
Everyone so full here, so full with food.
The hills very pretty for walking,
For shouting and laughing,
So comfortable, as one desires,
And being together with all one's companions.
Do not weep, brothers, do not weep.
For we came to enjoy it,
We came on this trek,
To find our life.

For we are all,
We are all,
We are all the children of,
We are all the sons of,
A brilliantly colored flower,
A flaming flower.
And there is no one,
There is no one,
Who regrets what we are.

Huichol

The Painted Book

after **NEZAHUALCOYOTL**

I
In the house of paintings
the singing begins,
song is intoned,
flowers are spread,
the song rejoices.

Above the flowers is singing
the radiant pheasant:
his song expands
into the interior of the waters.

To him reply
all manner of red birds:
the dazzling red bird
sings a beautiful chant.

Your heart is a book of paintings,
You have come to sing,
to make Your drums resound.
You are the singer.
Within the house of springtime,
You make the people happy.

You alone bestow
intoxicating flowers,
precious flowers.
You are the singer.
Within the house of springtime,
You make the people happy.

2

With flowers You write,
O Giver of Life:
with songs You give color,
with songs You shade
those who must live on the earth.

Later You will destroy eagles and ocelots:
we live only in Your book of paintings,
here, on the earth.

With black ink You will blot out
all that was friendship,
brotherhood, nobility.

You give shading
to those who must live on the earth.
We live only in Your book of paintings,
here on the earth.

3

I comprehend the secret, the hidden:
O my lords!
Thus we are,

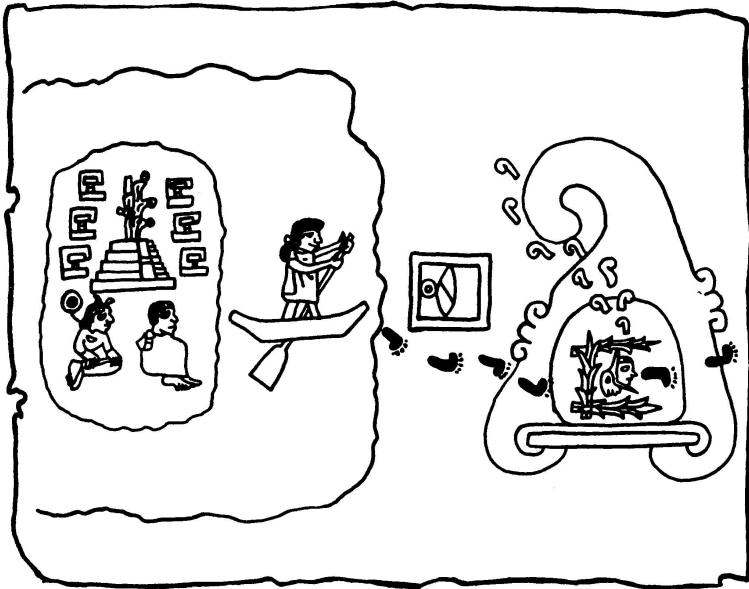
we are mortal,
men through and through,
we all will have to go away,
we all will have to die on earth.
Like a painting,
we will be erased.
Like a flower,
we will dry up
here on earth.

Like plumed vestments of the precious bird,
that precious bird with the agile neck,
we will come to an end.
Think on this, my lords,
eagles and ocelots,
though you be of jade,
though you be of gold
you also will go there,
to the place of the fleshless.
We will have to disappear,
no one can remain.

Nahuatl (Texcoco)

From *Codex Boturini*

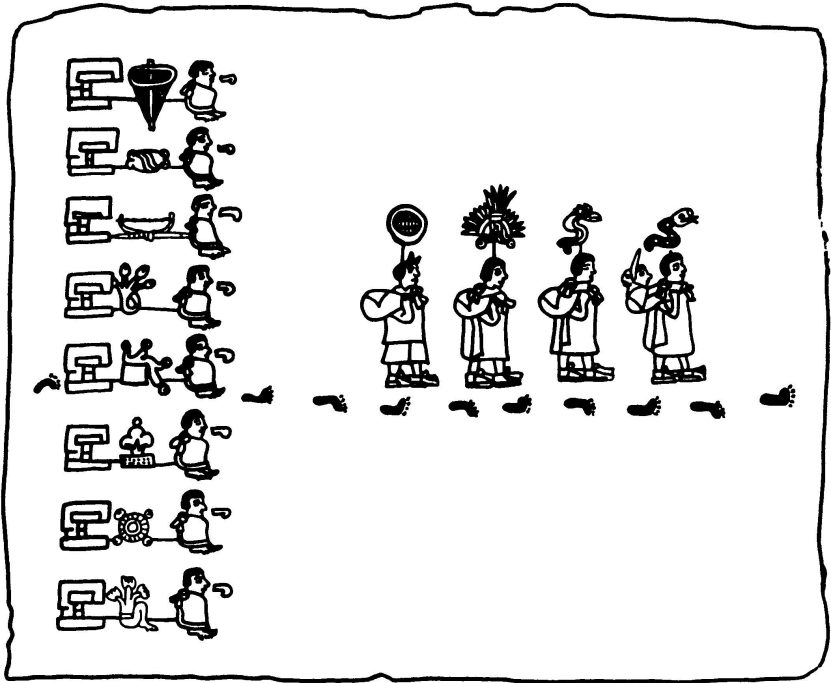
“THE ORIGIN OF THE MEXICA AZTECS”



The six
patriarchal clans
lived in barrios
around their temple
on Acatl Island,
Water-&-Reed Island,
later called Aztlan.
They were ruled
by a priest
who took his name
from the place,
and by a priestess
named Chimalma,
Shield Hand Lady.

In the year
5-Flint
[648 a.d.?] they went to find
the sanctuary
of their chief god,
Huitzilopochtli,
the Blue
Hummingbird
of the Left.

They found it
at Colhuacan,
Bent Mountain:
the god's face
came from the mouth
of a hummingbird
inside his grass temple.
Words rose
from the god's mouth:
he told them
they must wander.



8 clans asked to join them

The Matlatzincas,

The Hip-Net People;

The Tepanecs,

Those Who Live on Rocks;

The Tlahuicas,

The Hunting People;

The Malinalcas,

The Twisted Grass People;

The Colhuas,

The Turning Water People;

The Xochimilcas,

The Patrons of Flowers;

The Chalcas,

The Precious Stone People;

The Huexotzincas,

The Bowlegged People.

They began their journey,

led by 3 priests & a priestess:

Chimalma:

Shield Hand

Lady.

Cuauhcoatl:

Eagle Snake.

Apanecatl:

He who

Passes Rivers.

Tezaccoatl:

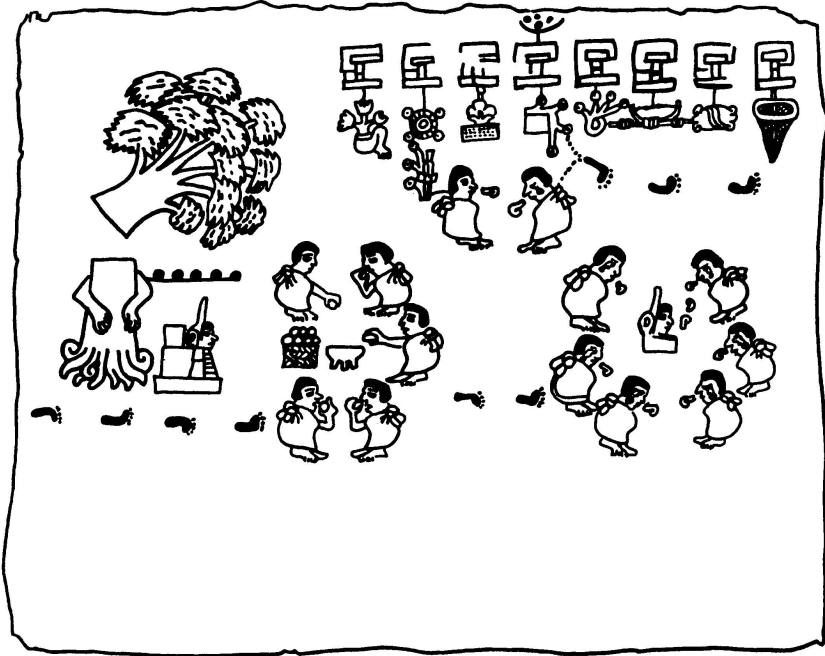
Serpent Mirror—

this priest

carried the

god's bundle

on his back.



They came to
Tamoanchan,
The Place of Origins,
& built a temple.
As they were feasting
at the end
of 5 counts of time,
the sacred tree
broke open—
this was the omen
that told them
to leave that place.

Acatl told a representative of the 8 tribes
that they would have to continue their journey
along separate paths;
in sorrow the representatives agreed.

Before leaving,
the Mexica
did penance
before Huitzilopochtli,
& prayed
for guidance.



(the path
of the alienated tribes
goes off the page)

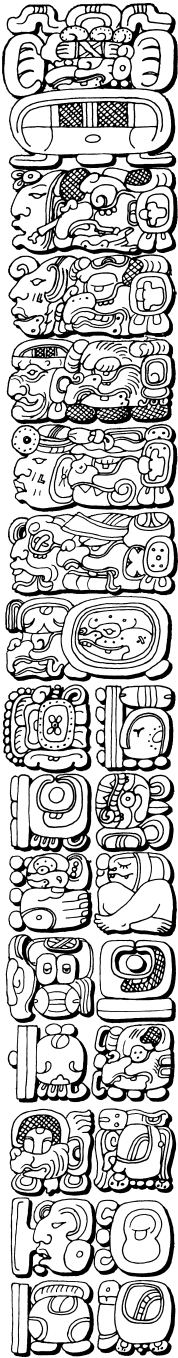
Huitzilopochtli, as Eagle-Sun,
gave them bows & arrows,
& taught them their use.

The 4 holy ones lead the Mexica
on their way.

Acatl, the high priest,
sacrificed 3 sorcerers
in thanks
for the gift of archery:
it was a powerful omen
& a mandate—
it guided them
toward their destiny.

Aztec

From *The Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield*



Dawn counts the drumbeats,
counts the scores of stones:

after one bundle of stones,

eighteen score stones,

five single stones,

three score days,

and six single days,

the date was Thirteen Death

(the headband was worn by the third lord of the
night) 19 Deer,

a score and 6 days after the arrival

of the 4th in a series of moons. . . .

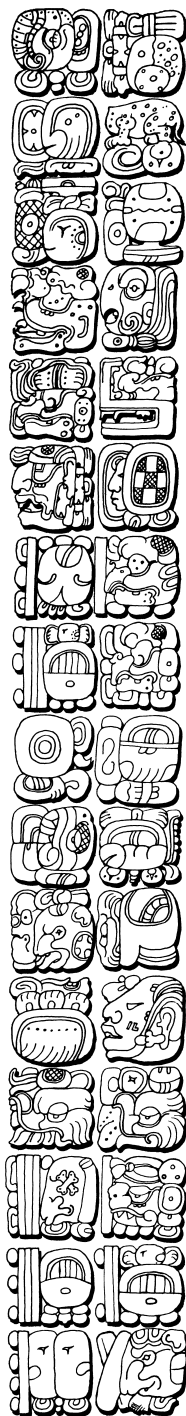
is the birth name of the new month of a score and 10
days.

11 and 2 score days and 1 stone had passed,

and the mirror scepter had been stood in place

in the north on 1 Wind

10 Penance, and then the child



was born, the guardian spirit of the sun-eyed torch
at the center of the sun, the jaguar who lost his head
in the house of . . ., the White Bone House,
Snake Bath,
Smoke . . . Crocodile,
Sun-Eyed Lord of the Shield.
6 and 3 score days, 5 single stones,
18 score stones, and 1 bundle of stones ago,
he had turned around at the heart of Sixth Sky,
and then he arrived at invisibility.
The one who fasted
was the Lady of the Split Place,
Cormorant, lady who offers shells for the Egrets.
16 and 5 score days,
18 stones, 12 score stones,
and 9 bundles of stones after the hearth was
measured



at the edge of the sky,

the New Three Stone Place, on 4 Lord

8 Kiln, what happened

on 2 Honey 14 Cluster

was a delay in the movement of the guardian spirit
of one of the divine triplets, Sun-Eyed Lord of the
Shield.

With the change to 3 Earth

15 Cluster, the one who turned around

into the west, in Quetzal Jaguar Temple,

inside the home of the burners of incense,

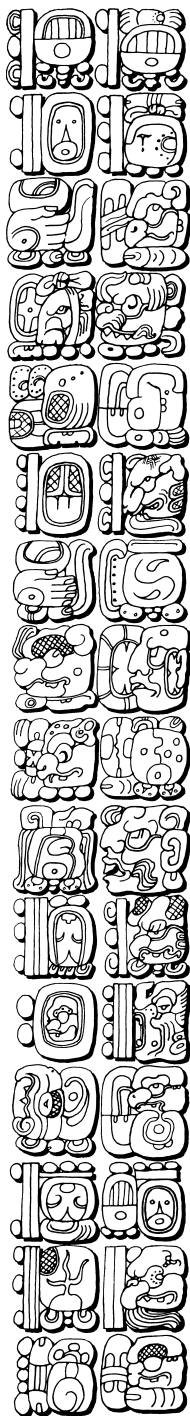
was the one with the segmented guardian spirit,
Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar, lord who offers everything
for the Egrets.

On the 3rd day, he summoned a ghost,

it was raised where the river is channeled

by the cave, by the landslide

of Quetzal Ridge. 3 and 12 score days,



6 single stones, and 7 score stones

after 12 Lord 8 Deer,

with the entry into the tree of succession

of Yellow Bound Peccary, which happened

at Cloudy Center, what occurred

on 9 Night 6 Point

was another entry, and 5 days after

his entry into the tree of succession came the great
day

of Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar, when his segmented
guardian spirit

was joined by Corn Silk.

18 and 2 score days and 6 stones

after 2 Death 19 Bat,

when he was born, he entered the tree of succession.

After 12 and 8 score days and 1 stone, on 13 Lord

18 Yellow Sun, with the count at 10 stones,

he came down after entering the tree.

Maya

From *The Popol Vuh: Blood-Girl & the Chiefs of Hell*

[After the Twin Gods, 1 and 7 Hunter, had been murdered by the Chiefs of Hell, their skulls were hung like fruit from a tree at Dusty Court. Blood-Girl found them there, and, while they spoke to her, spittle from the skulls dripped in her womb and filled her. Six months pregnant when her father, Blood Chief, discovered it and cursed her for her fornication; sent four owls to kill her and bring her heart back in a jar. To whom she pleaded, and they, having decided they would spare her, asked what they could bring back as her heart.]

“Take the fruit of this tree,”
Said the maiden then.
For red was the sap of the tree
That she went and gathered in the jar,
And then it swelled up
And became round
And so then it became an imitation heart,
The sap of the red tree.
Just like blood the sap of the tree became
An imitation of blood.
Then she gathered up there in it
What was red tree sap
And the bark became just like blood,
Completely red when placed inside the jar.
When the tree was cut by the maiden
Cochineal Red Tree it was called,
And so she called it blood
Because it was said to be the blood of the croton.
“So there you will be loved then;
On earth there will come to be something of yours,”
She said then
To the Owls.
“Very well,
Oh maiden,
We must go back
And appear directly;
We shall go right back.
We feel it must be delivered,
This seeming imitation of your heart,
Before the lords,”

Then said
 The messengers.
 So then they came before the lords,
 Who were all waiting expectantly.
 “Didn’t it get done?”
 Then asked ɾ Death.
 “It is already done,
 Oh Lords,
 And here in fact is her heart.
 It is down in the jar.”
 “All right,
 Then I’ll look,”
 Said ɾ Death then.
 And when he poured it right out,
 The bark was soggy with fluid,
 The bark was bright crimson with sap.
 “Stir the surface on the fire well
 And put it over the fire,” said ɾ Death then.
 So then they dried it over the fire
 And those of Hell then smelled the fragrance.
 They all wound up standing there,
 Bending over it.
 It really smelled delicious to them,
 The aroma of the sap.
 Thus it was that they were still crouching there
 When the Owls came who were guiding the maiden,
 Letting her climb up through a hole to the earth.
 Then the guides turned around and went back down.
 And thus were the lords of Hell defeated.
 It was by a maiden that they were all blinded.

Maya

Mayan Definitions

by **ALONZO GONZALES MÓ**

THINGS

When they say, “There is a thing.”
 It is a thing lying on the ground.
 Or a thing comes down the road,

noise.
One might say it is a snake
or a beast
or a thing someone will show you.
You feel like this,
“What will he show me?”
Well, who knows what he will show me?
Perhaps what he will show me,
perhaps palm
or gold.
Perhaps he will show me
things of the house.
Perhaps a thing, too.
Perhaps a cunt.
Perhaps a cockroach, too.
Or a small cockroach,
or an iguana,
or a scorpion,
or a tarantula,
or a centipede,
or a small iguana,
or a large iguana,
or a large centipede,
or a woman
embracing.
She is kissing a man.
Lonely street,
fence near the road.
Or a thing one will ask of you.
The thing he asks of you,
a person asks of you,
a thing to buy.
You answer,
“There is that thing
I will sell, also.”
We are waiting for a thing
to carry us.
As we leave it appears.
A bus.
Let’s get on.

SHADE

Where does a horse shade itself?

Under the shade of a tree.

Shade.

Where do cattle shade themselves?

Under the shade of a tree.

Shade.

Where do chickens, turkeys, ducks shade themselves?

Under the shade of a tree.

Shade.

Where do deer shade themselves?

By a fence,
under the shade of a tree.

Shade.

Where do wild boars shade themselves?

Under the shade of a tree.

Shade.

Where do birds shade themselves?

Under the shade of a tree.

That is the reason for shade.

For all animals, even for people.

Shade.

PERHAPS

Perhaps, maybe, we'll see how the world ends.

Perhaps the day will come of hunger.

There are those who will see what will come to pass on the earth.

Perhaps we'll die too. We don't know what day.

Perhaps we'll go to Mérida or another town.

Perhaps I'll come to visit your house or home too.

Perhaps I'll buy what I need.

Perhaps soon I'll have money too

with the little that I'll sell.

Perhaps soon I'll have a woman too,

to marry.

Perhaps soon I'll have land to work,

to build a house to live in.

Perhaps I'll go far away too,

to know places.

Perhaps soon I'll have a cow, a horse, a milpa.

Maya

From *Inatoippiler*

by **AKKANTILELE**

The Living Beings

Down below a way is being opened for them
Under the great waves the boys come to life again
In front of them a world of living beings is moving, living beings are
swimming
In front of them living beings are wavering, living beings are making a
noise
All like golden bells the living beings sound down below
All like golden guitars the living beings sound down below
All like golden watches the living beings sound down below
The living beings make a noise like panpipes and flutes
The living beings make a noise down below like the *kokke*-flute
The living beings are making a noise down below
The living beings make a noise like that of many different instruments
In front of them the living beings are making a noise like the *suppe*-flute
The living beings are making a noise down below
The living beings make a noise like the *tolo*-flute
The living beings are making a noise down below
The living beings make a noise like the *tae*-flute
The living beings are making a noise down below
The living beings make a noise like many different instruments

o o o o o o

The boys have come to life again: in front of them a world of living
beings is teeming
In front of them the world is making a noise, living beings are fluttering
Uncle Oloyailer's river opens up
Uncle Oloyailer's river lies flaming
The boys stand regarding the place
The boys go forward into the empty space
The boys descend along the middle of the river
Uncle Oloyailer's river opens up
The river lies with bays and inlets as from big rocks
The river lies with bays and inlets as from seaweed
The wind of Uncle Oloyailer's river is blowing
The wind of the river is rippling the ground

The Boy Inatoipippiler

The boy Inatoipippiler stands looking around
The river of Kalututuli is rising, the river of Kalututuli is illuminating
the place
Beside Kalututuli, beside the river bank, Uncle Nia's women are
expecting them
The boy Inatoipippiler stands arranging his hair, he stands letting down
his hair
The boy Inatoipippiler stands taking off his shirt and pants
He stands taking off his white shirt
He descends into the middle of the river, he is bathing in the river
He is combing his noble hair, he is letting down his hair, his hair is
reaching far down
Among the tufts of his hair the fish of the sea, the sardines are
swimming
The boy Inatoipippiler climbs up on the river bank
He stands arranging his hair, he stands combing his hair
With the comb he stands loosening his hair
He stands spreading out his hair, he stands twisting his hair
He stands putting the comb into his hair
The boy Inatoipippiler stands putting on his shirt and pants
He stands putting on his white shirt
He stands tying his golden necktie for the sake of the feast
He stands putting on his golden coat, he stands putting on his golden
chain
His golden chain hangs down eightfold as he stands
The golden chain glistens as he stands, the golden chain shines reaching
down to his waist
The boy Inatoipippiler stands putting on his golden socks, he stands
putting on his golden shoes
He stands putting on his golden hat, he stands with his golden hat
shining
He stands with his golden hat glistening like the sun
He stands with his golden hat shining, he stands with his golden shoes
creaking

Kuna [Cuna]

From *The Elegy for the Great Inca Atawallpa*

. . . You all by yourself fulfilled
 Their malignant demands,
But your life was snuffed out
 In Cajamarca.

Already the blood has curdled
 In your veins,
And under your eyelids your sight
 Has withered.
Your glance is hiding in the brilliance
 Of some star.

Only your dove suffers and moans
 And drifts here and there.
Lost in sorrow, she weeps, who had her nest
 In your heart.

The heart, with the pain of this catastrophe,
 Shatters.
They have robbed you of your golden litter
 And your palace.
All of your treasures which they have found
 They have divided among them.

Condemned to perpetual suffering,
 And brought to ruin,
Muttering, with thoughts that are elusive
 And far away from this world,
Finding ourselves without refuge or help,
 We are weeping,
And not knowing to whom we can turn our eyes,
 We are lost.

Oh sovereign king,
 Will your heart permit us
To live scattered, far from each other,
 Drifting here and there,
Subject to an alien power,
 Trodden upon?

Discover to us your eyes which can wound
 Like a noble arrow;

Extend to us your hand which grants
More than we ask,
And when we are comforted with this blessing
Tell us to depart.

Quechua

Three Quechua Poems

1

Where are you where are you going
they say
and we still have to go on

sun and moon go past
and go past
six months to get from Cuzco to Quito

at the foot of Tayo we'll rest

fear nothing
lord Inca fear nothing
we're going with you we'll get there together

2

I'm bringing up a fly
with golden wings
bringing up a fly
with eyes burning

it carries death
in its eyes of fire
carries death
in its golden hair
in its gorgeous wings

in a green bottle
I'm bringing it up

nobody knows
if it drinks

nobody knows
if it eats

at night it goes wandering
like a star

wounding to death
with red rays
from its eyes of fire

it carries love
in its eyes of fire
flashes in the night
its blood
the love it bears in its breast

insect of night
fly bearing death

in a green bottle
I'm bringing it up
I love it
that much

but nobody
no
nobody knows

if I give it to drink
nobody knows if I feed it

3
It's today I'm supposed
to go away

I won't
I'll go
tomorrow

you'll see me go
playing a flute
made from a bone of a fly

carrying a flag
made from a spider's web

beating an ant's egg
drum
with a humming-bird's nest for a hat
with my head
in a humming-bird's nest

Poems for a Carnival

1

That's the big
boss's house
shining with the money
studded in it
rolls of bank notes
papered on it
his cows even
shit gold

2

The carnival was
a sad old man it was
under the bridge
sniffing around he was
I saw him with his
such'i fish moustache
in his bag
two eggs there were
I tried to grab them
but hollow they were

3

The politicians from the valley
have no mouths
being without mouths
they peck with their nails

Quechua

Raising the Mediating Center & the Field of Evil with the Twenty-Five Thousand Accounts & the Chant of the Ancients

by **EDUARDO CALDERÓN**

Con Cipriano poderoso,
With powerful Saint Cyprian,

Cabalista y cirujano, viejo caminante,
Cabbalist and surgeon, old traveler,

Y en los cuatro vientos y los cuatro caminos,
And with the four winds and the four roads,

Y en las veinticinco mil cuentas,
And with the twenty-five thousand accounts,

Justicieras, curanderas, y ganaderas,
Good, curing, and evil,

Ajustando con mis buenos rambeadores, mis sorbedores.
Adjusting with my good assistants, my absorbers.

Con buenas cuentas,
With good accounts,

Así vengo parando,
Thus I come raising,

En todo su encanto y su poder:
With all his enchantment and his power:

Cerro Blanco, Cerro Colorado,
White Mountain, Red Mountain,

Cerro Chaparri, Cerro Yanahuanga,
Mount Chaparri, Mount Yanahuanga,

Cerro Chalpón, poderoso y bendito,
Mount Chalpón, powerful and blessed,

Con tu volcanazo de fuego ardiendo,
With your great volcano of burning fire,

Donde cuenta el encanto del Padre Guatemala.
Where the enchantment of Father Guatemala is accounted.

Y en sus grandes poderes,
And with your great powers,

Todos sus encantos voy llamando,
All his enchantments I go calling,

Voy contando.
I go accounting.

Cerro Pelagato, Cerro Huascarán,
Pelagato Mountain, Mount Huascarán,

Cerro del Aborcado, Cerro Campanario,
Hanged Man's Mountain, Belfry Mountain,

Cerro Cuculicote y su gran poder,
Cuculicote Mountain and its great power,

Donde vengo ajustando,
Where I come adjusting,

Y a mi banco,
And at my bench,

En todos sus encantos y poderes,
With all its enchantments and powers,

Voy contando.
I go accounting.

Y en mi buena laguna encantada,
And with my good enchanted lagoon,

Mi Huarigana,
My Huarigana,

Donde voy llamando.
Where I go calling.

Mi buena Laguna Shimbe,
My good Shimbe Lagoon,

Siempre linda y poderosa,
Always beautiful and powerful,

Donde juega mi maestro Florentino García,
Where my master Florentino Garcia plays,

En su gran poder del chamán,
With his great power as a shaman.

Y así vengo contando,
And thus I come accounting,

Con todos mis encantos,
With all my enchantments,

Vara por vara,
Staff by staff,

Cerro por cerro,
Mountain by mountain,

Laguna por laguna,
Lagoon by lagoon,

Y en el chorro de Santo Crisanto,
And in the Stream of Santo Crisanto,

Voy llamando.
I go calling.

En mis hermosos jardines bien floridos,
With my beautiful flowery gardens,

Con todas sus hierbas y sus encantos,
With all their herbs and their enchantments,

Voy llamando.
I go calling.

Cuenta por cuenta, voy jugando,
Account by account, I go playing,

Y en mi Huaca poderosa de los Gentiles,
And with my powerful Temple of the Ancients,

Donde voy contando, jugando, floreciendo.
Where I go accounting, playing, flowering.

Huaca Prieta, Huaca del Sol, y Huaca de la Luna,
Huaca Prieta, Temple of the Sun, and Temple of the Moon,

Juega a mi ciento.
Play at my game.

Con la hierba del hombre,
With the herb of man,

Con la hierba del león,
With the herb of the lion,

Con la hierba de la coqueta,
With the herb of the coquette,

Voy cantando.
I go singing.

Con mis buenos hierbateros voy llamando,
With my good herbalists I go calling,

Todos los poderes y los encantos,
All the powers and the enchantments,

Que mi buen remedio viene ya,
So that my good remedy comes now,

Buscando, justificando, levantando, parando.
Looking, justifying, raising, standing up.

Con sus buenos encantos,
With their good enchantments,

Todos los grandes maestros,
All the great masters,

Van contando donde cuento.
Go accounting where I account.

A las doce de la noche entera,
At twelve midnight,

Y a la madrugada,
And at dawn,

Seis de la mañana al ojo del sol,
Six in the morning under the eye of the sun,

Voy llamando,
I go calling,

Estoy contando y refrescando.
I am accounting and refreshing.

Buena hora, buenos vientos,
Good time, good winds,

Voy llamando y contando,
I go calling and accounting,

De mis buenas maravillas,
With my good marvels,

Vengo levantando todo mi banco.
I come raising all of my bench.

Donde cuentan todos los grandes poderosos.
Where all the great powers are accounted.

Voy dominando todo golpe,
I go dominating all spiritual shocks,

Floreciendo en buena hora.
Flowering in good time.

Spanish (Peru)

The Machi Exorcises the Spirit Huecuve

get out right now Huecuve get
out
—they got after me
with 4 firebrands, a swarm
of young men running me out—:
That's what you'll tell them
when you get back home.
Get out; go; quick; now.
—this *machi* shoved me—: that's
what you'll say later.
Look this is a poor man why
do you enter him?
Go take over a rich one

My Breath

by **ORPINGALIK**

This is what I call my song, because it is as important for me to sing it
as it is to draw breath.

This is my song: a powerful song.
Unaija-unaija.
Since autumn I have lain here,
helpless and ill,
as if I were my own child.

Sorrowfully, I wish my woman
to another hut,
another man for refuge,
firm and safe as the winter-ice.
Unaija-unaija.

And I wish my woman
a more fortunate protector,
now I lack the strength
to raise myself from bed.
Unaija-unaija.

Do you know yourself?
How little of yourself you understand!
Stretched out feebly on my bench,
my only strength is in my memories.
Unaija-unaija.

Game! Big game,
chasing ahead of me!
Allow me to re-live that!
Let me forget my frailty,
by calling up the past!
Unaija-unaija.

I bring to mind that great white one,
the polar bear,
approaching with raised hind-quarters,
his nose in the snow—
convinced, as he rushed at me,
that of the two of us,

he was the only male!
Unaija-unaija.

Again and again he threw me down:
but spent at last,
he settled by a hump of ice,
and rested there,
ignorant that I was going to finish him.
He thought he was the only male around!
But I too was a man!
Unaija-unaija.

Nor will I forget that great blubbery one,
the fjord-seal that I slaughtered
from an ice-floe before dawn,
while friends at home
were laid out like the dead,
feeble with hunger,
famished with bad luck.
I hurried home,
laden with meat and blubber,
as though I were just running across the ice
to view a breathing-hole.
Yet this had been an old and cunning bull,
who'd scented me at once—
but before he had drawn breath,
my spear was sinking
through his neck.

This is how it was.
Now I lie on my bench,
too sick to even fetch
a little seal oil for my woman's lamp.
Time, time scarcely seems to pass,
though dawn follows dawn,
and spring approaches the village.
Unaija-unaija.

How much longer must I lie here?
How long? How long must she go begging
oil for the lamp,
reindeer-skins for her clothes,
and meat for her meal?

I, a feeble wretch:
she, a defenseless woman.
Unaija-unaija.

Do you know yourself?
How little of yourself you understand!
Dawn follows dawn,
and spring is approaching the village.
Unaija-unaija.

Inuit [Netsilik Eskimo]

Inuit Prose Poems

A MOTHER & CHILD

A pregnant woman brought forth a child. The child was hardly born before it flung itself upon its mother & killed her, & began eating her.

Suddenly the infant cried:

My mother's little first finger stuck crosswise in my mouth, & I could hardly manage to get it out again.

And with these words, the infant killed itself, after first having murdered & eaten its mother.

—Told by Inugpasugjuk

THE WOMAN WHO TOOK IN A LARVA TO NURSE

There was once a barren woman, who could never have any children. At last she took in a larva & nursed it in her armpits, & it was not long before the larva began to grow up. But the more it grew the less blood the woman had for it to suck. Therefore she often went visiting the homes near by, to set the blood in motion, but she never stayed long away from home, for she was always thinking of her dear larva, & hurried back to it. So greatly did she long for it, so fond of it had she grown, that whenever she came to the entrance of her house, she would call out to it:

Oh, little one that can hiss, say “te-e-e-e-E·r.”

And when she said that, the larva would say in answer: Te-e-e-e-E·r.

The woman then hurried into the house, took the larva on her lap & sang to it:

Little one that will bring me snow
when you grow up
Little one that will find meat for me
when you grow up!

And then she would bite it out of pure love.

The larva grew up & became a big thing. At last it began to move about the village among the houses, & the people were afraid of it & wanted to kill it, partly because they were afraid & partly because they thought it was a pity to let the woman go on growing paler & paler from loss of blood.

So one day when the woman was out visiting, they went into her house & threw the larva out into the passage. Then the dogs flung themselves on it & bit it to death. It was completely filled with blood, & the blood poured out of it.

The woman who had been out visiting came home all unsuspecting, & when she got to the entrance of her house, called out to the larva as she was wont to do. But no one answered, & the woman exclaimed:

Oh, they have thrown my dear child out of the house.

And she burst into tears & went into the house weeping.

—Told by Ivaluardjuk

WHEN HOUSES WERE ALIVE

One night a house suddenly rose up from the ground and went floating through the air. It was dark, & it is said that a swishing, rushing noise was heard as it flew through the air. The house had not yet reached the end of its road when the people inside begged it to stop. So the house stopped.

They had no blubber when they stopped. So they took soft, freshly drifted snow & put it in their lamps, & it burned.

They had come down at a village. A man came to their house & said:

Look, they are burning snow in their lamps. Snow can burn.

But the moment these words were uttered, the lamp went out.

—Told by Inugpasugjuk

Inuit [Iglulik Eskimo]

ASIA



The Quest of Milarepa

1

When named I am the man apart;
I am the sage of Tibet;
I am Milarepa.
I hear little but counsel much;
I reflect little but persevere much;
I sleep little but endure in meditation much.
My narrow bed gives me ease to stretch and bend;
my thin clothing makes my body warm;
my scanty fare satisfies my belly.
Knowing one thing I have experience of all things;
knowing all things I comprehend them to be one.
I am the goal of every great meditator;
I am the meeting place of the faithful;
I am the coil of birth and death and decay.
I have no preference for any country;
I have no home in any place;
I have no store of provisions for my livelihood.
I have no fondness for material things;
I make no distinction between clean and unclean in food;
I have little torment of suffering.
I have little desire for self-esteem;
I have little attachment or bias;
I have found the freedom of Nirvana.
I am the comforter of the aged;
I am the madman who counts death happiness;
I am the playmate of children.

2

When the tiger-year was ending
and the hare-year beginning
on the sixth day of the month of the barking of the fox,
I grew weary of the things of this world;
and in my yearning for solitude
I came to the sanctuary wilderness, Mount Everest.
Then heaven & earth took counsel together
and sent forth the whirlwind as messenger.
The elements of wind & water seethed
and the dark clouds of the south rolled up in concert;

the sun and the moon were made prisoner
and the twenty-eight constellations of the moon were fastened together;
the eight planets in their courses were cast into chains
and the faint milky way was delivered into bondage;
the little stars were altogether shrouded in mist
and when all things were covered in the complexion of mist
for nine days & nine nights the snow fell,
steadily throughout the eighteen times of day and night it fell.
When it fell heavily the flakes were as big as the flock of wool,
and fell floating like feathered birds.
When the snow fell lightly the flakes were small as spindles,
and fell circling like bees.
Again, they were as small as peas or mustard-seed,
and fell turning like distaffs.
Moreover the snow surpassed measure in depth,
the peak of white snow above reached to the heavens
and the trees of the forest below were bowed down.
The dark hills were clad in white,
ice formed upon the billowing lakes
and the blue Tsangpo was constrained in its depths.
The earth became like a plain without hill or valley,
and in natural consequence of such a great fall
the lay folk were mewed up;
famine overtook the four-footed cattle,
and the small deer especially found no food;
the feathered birds above lacked nourishment,
and the marmots and field-mice below hid in their burrows;
the jaws of beasts of prey were stiffened together.
In such fearsome circumstances
this strange fate befell me, Milarepa.
There were these three: the snowstorm driving down from on high,
the icy blast of mid-winter,
and the cotton cloth which I, the sage Mila, wore;
and between them rose a contest on that white snow peak.
The falling snow melted into goodly water;
the wind, though rushing mightily, abated of itself,
and the cotton cloth blazed like fire.
Life and death wrestled there after the fashion of champions,
and swords crossed victorious blades.
That I won there the heroic fight
will be an example to all the faithful

and a true example to all great contemplatives;
more especially will it prove the greater excellence
of the single cotton cloth & the inner heat.

3

That the white ice-peak of Tisé, great in fame,
is just a mountain covered with snow,
proves the whiteness of Buddha's teaching.
That the turquoise lake of Mapang, great in fame,
is water through which water flows,
proves the dissolution of all created things.
That I, Milarepa, great in fame,
am an old and naked man,
proves that I have forsaken & set at nought self-interest.
That I am a singer of little songs,
proves that I have learned to read the world as a book.

Tibetan

Ocean Woman Who Already Knows

by **KHAMS-SMYON DHARMA-SENGGE**

after a long wait
the bountiful goddess appeared
 she's the granddaughter of innermost utterance
 granddaughter of the precious guide
 the lama who lives
 in the royal ravine
& begging to follow her
to enter the door of reality
i said:

you are
father
 mother
 teacher
& because i know this
i will faithfully
enact your spoken commands

(devotion like this doesn't really exist
but speaking my mind i continued)

namo guru
i bow before
the lotus-footed one
ocean woman who already knows
she
this woman whose
words leave no mark
 what i know
 i've figured by myself
 i'm the khams-pa beggar &
 i know the gist of
 this lady's life

if i sing of her
boasting begins
if i slur her
even a little
wrathful moods ensue
when i try to explain
what's really happening
a clue
is all you get

if you've lived at home
you've felt her presence
if you hold to this presence
you'll arrive home

if you try to enjoy her
nothing will happen
if you offer small presents
she'll gently respond

when amongst mortals
she's very tight-lipped
after hard work
no reason for chatter

try to go uphill
you'll just fall back down
try to sneak in the door to reality
& you'll kill the infant calm

if you stay at home
no child will be born
if you want to bear heroes
arguing doesn't help

when i talk like this
there's no stopping me
if you suffer similar thoughts
then nothing makes sense
 (the day after tomorrow
 you'll realize you're sorry)

not cut
it can't cut
a hair can't cut!
not made
it's not made
reality isn't made!

few know how to
enter reality's door
but you
madam
have transformed
restless mind
 (easily spoken
 painfully won)

 this woman
 then answered:

although it's true that
you've got your faults
if you transmit this precious teaching
to everyone
men & women
the aged & young
& amongst animals too
you'll surely accomplish my wishes
& certainly experience what's real . . .

well i don't remember much
right now

but the essence of her message
i lost most of it
will remain for a long time
people shouldn't bother
looking for guidance
apart from
just
what's happening

again
a voice spoke:
namo guru
in the oral tradition
amongst mere mortals
they say
women, outcasts & cripples
wherever they go
encounter difficulties
& it's true

if they've got money, they run into thieves
if they don't, they wander around begging
if they're good-looking, spiritual troubles arise
if they're ugly, they spend their time hiding
if they get friendly, they end up married
if they're aloof, there's nowhere to stay

but the precious message
which a lama has
is always available
wherever you are
& the real teaching
about being rich or broke is
there's nothing you can do about it

i joyfully thought
about this
& replied:
these sacred words are true
they remain so &
through them
one can taste
the authentic fact

of complete teaching &
then pass it to others
 this kind of instruction
 can't be found
 except
by asking her
by invoking her
totality, as:

father
 mother
 & teacher &
doing so again
& again
i entered reality's door
& became thoroughly wise

after drinking my fill
after six years
the message came special events &
achievements erupted

 now the afterflow
 becomes potent

earth: gravity

water: cohesion

& all the
other forces

burn out
going beyond &

even if you wander around
even if this song makes no sense

you'll arrive

 at the stairs
 at the door

home

Tibetan

Keeping Still / The Mountain

The Judgment

KEEPING STILL. Keeping his back still
So that he no longer feels his body.
He goes into his courtyard
And does not see his people.
No blame.

1
Mountains standing close together:
The image of KEEPING STILL.

2
Keeping his toes still.
No blame.
Continued perseverance furthers.

3
Keeping his calves still.
He cannot rescue him whom he follows.
His heart is not glad.

4
Keeping his hips still.
Making his sacrum stiff.
Dangerous. The heart suffocates.

5
Keeping his trunk still.
No blame.

6
Keeping his jaws still.
The words have order.
Remorse disappears.

7
Noblehearted keeping still.
Good fortune.

Chinese

The Marrying Maiden

The Judgment

THE MARRYING MAIDEN

Undertakings bring misfortune.

Nothing that would further.

1

Thunder over the lake:

The image of THE MARRYING MAIDEN.

2

The marrying maiden as a concubine.

A lame man who is able to tread.

Undertakings bring good fortune.

3

A one-eyed man who is able to see.

The perseverance of a solitary man furthers.

4

The marrying maiden as a slave.

She marries as a concubine.

5

The marrying maiden draws out the allotted time.

A late marriage comes in due course.

6

The sovereign *I* gave his daughter in marriage.

The embroidered garments of the princess

Were not as gorgeous

As those of the servingmaid.

The moon that is nearly full

Brings good fortune.

7

The woman holds the basket, but there are no fruits in it.

The man stabs the sheep, but no blood flows.

Nothing that acts to further.

Chinese

From *The Nine Songs*

by **QU YUAN**

Song v

The Big Lord of Lives

The gates of Heaven are open wide;
Off I ride, borne on a dark cloud!
May the gusty winds be my vanguard,
May sharp showers sprinkle the dust!
The Lord wheels in his flight, he is coming down;
I will cross K'ung-sang and attend upon you.
But all over the Nine Provinces there are people in throngs;
Why think that his task is among *us*?
High he flies, peacefully winging;
On pure air borne aloft he handles Yin and Yang.
I and the Lord, solemn and reverent,
On our way to God cross over the Nine Hills.
He trails his spirit-garment,
Dangles his girdle-gems.
One Yin for every Yang;
The crowd does not understand what we are doing.
I pluck the sparse-hemp's lovely flower,
Meaning to send it to him from whom I am separated.
Age creeps on apace, all will soon be over;
Not to draw nearer is to drift further apart.
He has driven his dragon chariot, loudly rumbling;
High up he gallops into Heaven.
Binding cassia-branches a long while I stay;
Ch'iang! The more I think of him, the sadder I grow,
The sadder I grow; but what does sadness help?
If only it could be forever as this time it was!

But man's fate is fixed;
From meetings and partings none can ever escape.

Song vi

The Little Lord of Lives

The autumn orchid and the deer-fodder
Grow thick under the hall,

From green leaves and white branches
Great gusts of scent assail me.
Among such people there are sure to be lovely young ones;
You have no need to be downcast and sad.
The autumn orchid is in its splendour;
Green its leaves, purple its stem.
The hall is full of lovely girls;
But suddenly it is me he eyes and me alone.

When he came in he said nothing, when he went out he said no word;
Riding on the whirlwind he carried a banner of cloud.
There is no sadness greater than that of a life-parting;
No joy greater than that of making new friends.
In coat of lotus-leaf, belt of basil
Suddenly he came, and as swiftly went.
At nightfall he is to lodge in the precincts of God.
Lord, for whom are you waiting, on the fringe of the clouds?
I bathed with you in the Pool of Heaven,
I dried your hair for you in a sunny fold of the hill.
I look towards my fair one; but he does not come.
With the wind on my face despairing I chant aloud.
Chariot-awning of peacock feathers, halcyon flags—
He mounts to the Nine Heavens, wields the Broom-star.
Lifts his long sword to succour young and old;
Yes, you alone are fit to deal out justice to the people.

Song viii

The River God (Ho-Po)

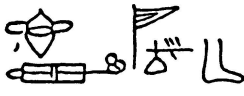





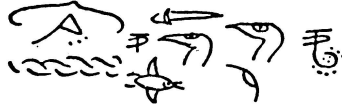
With you I wandered down the Nine Rivers;
A whirlwind rose and the waters barred us with their waves.
We rode in a water-chariot with awning of lotus-leaf
Drawn by two dragons, with griffins to pull at the sides.
I climb K'un-lun and look in all directions;
My heart rises all a-flutter, I am agitated and distraught.
Dusk is coming, but I am too sad to think of return.
Of the far shore only are my thoughts; I lie awake and yearn.

In his fish-scale house, dragon-scale hall,
Portico of purple-shell, in his red palace,
What is the Spirit doing, down in the water?
Riding a white turtle, followed by stripy fish





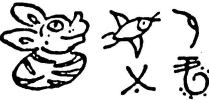
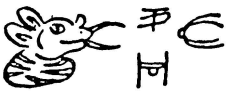



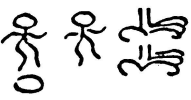

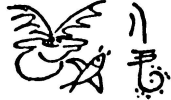
With you I wandered in the islands of the River.
The ice is on the move; soon the floods will be down.
You salute me with raised hands, then go towards the East.
I go with my lovely one as far as the southern shore.
The waves surge on surge come to meet him,
Fishes shoal after shoal escort me on my homeward way.


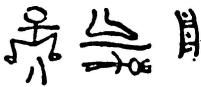




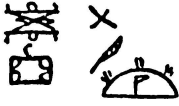


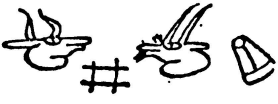

Chinese

Song of the Dead, Relating the Origin of Bitterness

SONG OF THE DEAD, RELATING THE ORIGIN OF BITTERNESS			
(Set One)			
			
To learn to do things here is bitterness	Ssu-ssa-zo of Shu-lo	when he was old but didn't know it	
			
made a yellow wooden bowl	went to wash gold in it	Ssu-ssa-zo's shadow was projected on the water	
			
he saw his shadow reflected on the water	his own shadow	that he saw reflected	
			
he was old then & he knew it	on the horizon where the clouds touch heaven the old crane still didn't know that he was old		

(Set Two)

		
How he was shaking his own body	his own white feathers dropping down before him	now that he knew that he was old
		
old tiger of the place called Such-&-Such	still didn't know that he was old	his long white fangs were falling down before him
		
& now he knew that he was old	At Such-&-Such-Another-Place	the white stag didn't know that he was old
		
now he was shaking his own body	his white antlers were falling down before him	then he knew that he was old

(Set Three)					
					
Now we will go with the dead & will suffer the bitterness of the dead		we will dance again & vanquish demons again		but if no one had told us where the dance began	
					
we would never dare to speak about the dance		for unless one knows the origin of the dance		one cannot dance it	
					
On top of Such-&- Such-a-Mountain		the yak said he would like to dance		but for the yak	
					
no custom for the goat that followed		The sons of bitterness are here— they wear their hats			

(Set Four)

		
The yak will dance there, as the custom is	on top of Such-&- Such-a-Mountain	the stag said he would like to dance there
		
but for the stag	there was no custom of the dance	Shoes of elfskin & white toes
		
the sons of bitterness will wear them	the stag will dance there, as the custom is	& where the pinetrees grow the young deer try to dance
		
they beat their cloven hoofs in rhythm	swaying, dancing, as the custom is	& all the people of the village

(Set Five)	
	
& all the sons of bitterness	who have slim hips & sway in rhythm
	
who sway & dance again, as is the custom	<i>we will follow the crane to his clouds</i>
	
<i>will go with the tiger to his high mountain</i>	<i>& with our ancestor into the sky</i>
	
the crane wants to fly to the shining white gate in the clouds	all those born with wings
	
have followed the crane to his clouds	<i>but his ability we do not allow to pass</i>

Nakhi (China)

A Shaman Vision Poem

Shao Yeh's birthplace was situated over ten miles from Wen Yuan. After his death the people of this district while observing a religious ceremony asked a shamanka to put a mourning cap on & do a dance. Suddenly the shamanka muttered: "Old Mr Shao has come to me in a vision." The people thought he was uttering nonsense & to frustrate him challenged him at once: "Old Shao was a notable poet. Can you get him to compose some poetry for us?" But before anyone could think, he'd made a poem, of melancholic phrase. No other poet could have done it. Shao's townspeople who understood poetic composition were deeply moved & sighed.

From graygreen mists
 at the foot of a mountain
I see a youth appear,
 frustrated, once,
to the point
 of forsaking
his native town:
 unbearable sorrow
if he looked back
 would see
—distantly, across the river,—
 into the hut
where he'd been born & raised.

Chinese

Al Que Quiere!: I I Pai-hua

18 year-old girl;
3 year-old boy:
he pees & shits
in his pajamas,
has to be carried off
& tucked into bed.
sleeps until midnight,
then it's milk he wants.
whippity-whap!

(2 little slaps),—
“I’m your *wife*,
not your *mother!*”

Northern China

if you have a daughter
don’t marry her to a scholar
knowing how to close a door
& how to sleep alone.

if you have a daughter,
don’t marry her to a farmer
with cowshit on his feet
& dirt all in his hair.

if you have a daughter,
marry her, quickly,
to a U.S.-bound traveler:
once on board the oceanliner
he’ll be rich just like Rockefeller.

Taishan district of Guangdong province

like planting a rose on a heap of cow turds,
like marrying a crow (that s.o.b.) to the queen of birds,
golden rings & silver hairpins—what’s the use?
gold nor silver can never take the place
of my dream lover.

Hunan province

it’s bitter to be poor.
really, it’s no joke!
not even a rag
to patch a hole.
a girl grows into teens,
her butt exposed
herding waterbuffaloes.

Guizhou province

shrill cries of crickets:
it’s time to harvest.

my crop's withered already—
I'll have to go & pawn my old lady.
my old lady, those tears,
my old lady, I beg you, stop.
'cos I'll come back for you
after selling next year's crop!

Anhui province

I want to cry, yet dare not cry out—
precisely as a knife blade against my throat—
my heart's not hard, heartless,
but to abandon a child—, such anguish!
O! waters of the Yangtze!
please flow gently, ever gently!
don't dash against your rocks

my little girl!

Sichuan province

young girl by the river
washing her brassiere
tracing the flowing waters
with her ten fingers
he who drinks there
inspired by an endless fire

Shandong province

Oo La LA!
I take off my pants:
shiny white thighs!
Oo La LA!
I take off my blouse:
what a pair of boobs!
Oo La LA!
I'm going to marry
Whoever's loaded with cash!

Taishan district of Guangdong province

money-grubbing slave,
stingy skinflint,
no food for the hungry,
no cash for the poor,
says,
money's my very life—
flay me,
torture me,
you'll never touch my silver!

Jiangsu province

horses to graze,
waterbuffaloes to graze,
graze 'em where?
graze 'em up on Phoenix Hill.
back home, I'm hungry,
& sneak a peek inside the pot.
inside the pot, local mud soup.
boiling mad, I break down
in a long, loud wail.

Jiangsu province

Heaven's old grandfather,
old beyond years,
your ears can't hear
& your eyes see only stars:
you can't see people,
you can't hear their cries.
vegetarian monks
starve themselves to death.
murderers & arsonists
lead lives of wealth & ease.
Heaven's old grandfather,
you don't know how
to rule up there—
why don't you just jump?

Beijing

From *The Kojiki*

HOW OPO-KUNI-NUSI BIDS FAREWELL TO HIS JEALOUS WIFE, SUSERI-BIME, IN SONG

[Again the deity's chief queen, SUSERI-BIME-NÖ-MIKÖTÖ, was extremely jealous. Her husband, highly distressed on this account, was about to leave IDUMO and go up to the land of YAMATO.

When he had completed dressing and was about to depart, he put one hand on the saddle of his horse and one foot in the stirrup, singing:]

All dressed up
 In my jet-black clothes,
When I look down at my breast,
 Like a bird of the sea,
Flapping its wings,
 This garment will not do;
I throw it off
 By the wave-swept beach.

All dressed up
 In my blue clothes,
Blue like the kingfisher,
 When I look down at my breast,
Like a bird of the sea,
 Flapping its wings,
This garment will not do;
I throw it off
 By the wave-swept beach.

All dressed up
 In my clothes dyed
With the juice
 Of pounded ATANE plants
 Grown in the mountain fields,
Now when I look down at my breast,
 Like a bird of the sea,
Flapping its wings,
 This garment will do.

Beloved wife of mine,
When I go off

With my men
Flocking like flocking birds;
When I go off
With my men
Accompanied like birds of a company;
Although you may say
That you will not weep—
Your head drooping,
Like the lone reed of SUSUKI grass
On the mountain side,
You will weep;
And your weeping will rise
Just as the morning rain
Rises into a mist.
O my young wife
Like the young grass!
These are
The words,
The words handed down.

Japanese

A Song of the Spider Goddess

by **HIRAGA ETENOA**

Doing nothing but needlework,
I remained with my eyes
focused on a single spot,
and this is the way
I continued to live
on and on until

One day
from far out at sea
a god was heard coming this way
with a loud roaring
and rumbling.
After a while
he stopped his chariot

over
my house.

All around
it grew silent.
Then after a while,
the voice of a god
came ringing out.
This is what he said:

“Greetings,
o goddess dwelling
in this place.
Listen to
what I have
to say.

“Behind
the Cloud Horizon
there dwells
Big Demon,
and he has fallen in love
with you
and you alone.
Because of this,
he is now
getting ready
to come here.
I have come [to warn you]
because I was
worried about you
in case Big Demon
should arrive
unexpectedly.”

The voice of the god
rang out with these words.
Nevertheless.
I thought to myself:

“Am I
a deity with weak powers?”

Thinking this,
I paid no attention.

After that,
doing nothing but needlework,
I remained with my eyes
focused on a single spot,
and this is the way
I continued to live
on and on
uneventfully until

One day
a god was heard moving
shoreward
with an even louder
roaring
and rumbling.
After a while
he stopped his chariot
over
my house.
The voice of a god
came ringing out.

“It was not
a lie
that I told you, but
you, weighty goddess,
seem to have
doubted me,
for you do
nothing about it
even while Big Demon
is on his way here.
This is why
I have come here
to give you
a warning.”

At these words,
I turned and looked,

and true enough,
Big Demon
was on his way.
Thus,
at my sitting place
I set in waiting
Thin Needle Boy.
In the middle of the fireplace
I set in waiting
Chestnut Boy.
At the window
I set in waiting
Hornet Boy.
In the water barrel
I set in waiting
Viper Boy.
Above the doorway
I set in waiting
Pestle Boy.
Above the outer doorway
I set in waiting
Mortar Boy.
After that
I transformed myself
into a reed stalk
and waited.

Just then,
outside the house
there was the sound of a voice.
Without hesitation
some sort of being
came in,
wiggling its way through
the narrow doorway.
The one who came in
was surely
the so-called
Big Demon,
he who dwells
behind

the Cloud Horizon.
He stepped along
the right-hand side of the fireplace
and sat down
at my sitting place
on the right-hand side of the fireplace.
He started to dig up
the hidden embers in the fireplace,
uttering these words
while he did so:

“I thought that
the goddess dwelling
in this place
was here
just a moment ago,
but now she is gone.
Where could she
have gone?”

Saying these words,
he dug up the embers.
When he did that,
there was a loud snap
in the middle of the fireplace.

Chestnut Boy
popped into
one of the eyes
of Big Demon.
When that happened,

“*Haí*, my eye!”

he cried, and
fell over backward.

When he did that,
Needle Boy
jabbed him
in the flesh on his rump.
When that happened,

“*Haí*, my eye!
Haí, my rump!”

he cried, and
stood up and
went
toward the window.

Then Hornet Boy
stung him
in one of his eyes.
After that,

“*Haí*, my eyes!
Haí, my rump!”

he cried, and
went
toward the water barrel.

Then Viper Boy
bit
Big Demon
on one of his hands.

When that happened,
Big Demon cried:

“*Haí*, my hand!
Haí, my eyes!
Haí, my rump!”

Crying this,
he went out.
Then Pestle Boy
tumbled down
on top of the head
of Big Demon.

Then Big Demon
moaned in pain,
crying:

“*Haí*, my eyes!
Haí, my hand!
Haí, my rump!
Haí, my head!”

Crying this,
he went outside.
Then when he went out
through the outer doorway,
Mortar Boy
tumbled down
on top of his head.
Right away
Big Demon
was heard moving off dying
with a loud rumbling
and roaring.

When it was all over,
everything grew quiet all around.

After that,
I came out
by the fireside
and did nothing but needlework,
remaining with my eyes
focused on a single spot,
and this is the way
I live on and on
uneventfully.

This tale was told by Spider Goddess.

Ainu

Things Seen by the Shaman Karawe

I slept and my souls went away.

They set out for way up there to look at, to visit, Sun, Dawn, and Creator.

On the road they said to me: “What’s this slow movement of yours? Take our harnesses!”

Dawn and Sun spoke in that way. Dawn said: “I’ll go with you. It’s good for me to go with the drum. When I’m in between both of you, keeping up with the drum.”

These souls went under the earth and no longer came back, even though I called them back. When they started walking they were walking on the earth and under the earth, they were seeing everything above the earth and in the high places, they didn't want to come back, no matter how much I called them back from there.

But in the summer I was with the herd and fell asleep in front of the herd. Two came on reindeer, the bedding of their sledges worn from traveling so long. The hooves of the deer were ground down from galloping. I looked at them and my mind got confused, my body weakened and became like water. I was turned from a strong one into a weak one, fond of sleep, hardly walking in daylight.

To my herd were born such reindeer, as in the harness of those people. A wild buck came to the herd, turned tame and quiet and sired children of his same color. These reindeer of my neighbors—my own.

On the river's steep bank lives a person, a voice there exists and speaks. I saw the master of this voice and spoke with him. He submitted to my power, bent down and sacrificed to me. He arrived yesterday.

Small grey bird with the blue breast, who shamanizes sitting in the hollow of the tree and calls the spirits, arrives and answers my questions. Woodpecker strikes his drum in the tree with his drumming bill. Under the blows of the axe the tree trembles and wails, like a drum under the drumstick . . . it was my helping spirit; it arrives and I hold it in my hands.

My souls are flying like birds in all directions, observing everything there is at once and bringing news to my breast, like food to the nest. It's good for me to fly with my souls in the round canoe.

My friend! Not far away from here I saw that from the river Oloi a great storm's advancing and it hits everything. Between the tents a river was flowing, full of blood. Soon we'll hear news of murder. I heard how Creator was angry that we, the inhabitants of this country, are paying tribute to the Russians—papers of mixed-up colors that we receive in exchange for different skins—are accepting foreign signs, and because of this he makes the pasture of the deer deteriorate and creates limping mothers and young calves with atrophied limbs, so that many of our people have already become poor.

Everything still lives; the lamp walks, walls of the house have their own voice, and even the piss-pot has its own country and tent, wife and chil-

dren, and serves as a helping spirit. Skins, lying in bags as stock for trade, are having conversations through the night. Antlers on the graves of the dead are walking in procession around the graves, and in the morning they're coming back to their former places, and the dead themselves are getting up and coming to the living.

Chukchi

Praise Song of the Buck-Hare

I am the buck-hare, I am,
The shore is my playground
Green underwood is my feeding.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
What's that damn man got wrong with him?
Skin with no hair on, that's his trouble.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
Mountaintop is my playing field
Red heather my feeding.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
What's wrong with that fellow there with his eye on a girl?
I say, is his face red!

I am the buck-hare, I am,
Got my eyes out ahead
You don't lose me on a dark night, you don't.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
What's wrong with that bloke with a poor coat?
Lice, that's what he's got, fair crawlin' he is.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
I got buck teeth.
Buck-hare never gets thin.

I am the BUCK-HARE, I am,
What's that fool got the matter with him?
Can't find the road! Ain't got no road he CAN find.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
I got my wood-road,
I got my form.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
What ails that fool man anyhow?
Got a brain, won't let him set quiet.

I am the buck-hare, I am,
I live in the big plain,
There's where I got my corral.

I am the buck-hare, I said so.
What's wrong with that loafer?
He's been to sleep in a bad place, he has.

I am the buck-hare,
I live in the bush, I do,
That's my road over yonder.

I am the buck-hare, I said so,
Women that don't get up in the morning,
I know how they look by the chimney.

I am the buck-hare, I said it,
I can tell any dumb loafer
Lying along by the hedge there.

I am the buck-hare,
Women don't love their men?
I can tell by what their cows look like.

Teleut

Setchin the Singer

old man with visored hat
setchin old singer
for whom these words come:
in the old man's house
prince of the town they made
the clawed beast sit

ferocious claws they set up
in the old man's house
old man with visored hat
& sent a messenger
a handspan high:
he didn't come
they sent two messengers:
he didn't come
a third time sent a messenger
a handspan high
old man with visored hat
who buckles on his wife's
threadbare old coat of wolverine
he wraps his wife's dogleash around
his waist
& on his head he sets
a hat of shredded hemp
then with an icy wooden staff
starts on the road
with an icy wooden staff
knocks down
the heavy redwood door
its iron hinges
work of a master's hands he turns
to toothpicks
and he enters
on his back he wears his wife's
threadbare old coat of wolverine
his wife's dogleash
around his waist
and on his head a hat of shredded
hemp each time
he hammers with his icy staff
against the floor
great knots swell up like teacups
with his icy wooden staff
confronts the muzzle of
the little sacred beast

*

“by your father’s rotten blood”
(the bear says) “why do you sit here
“songless crouching in a corner?”
(says the man) “where did you carry off
“the dearest of my dear sons?”
(& the bear replies)
“you have your second son still left
“your youngest
“my water spirit my ambassador of waters
“I sent out through the waters
“& my forest spirit my ambassador of forests
“I sent out through the forest
“my father Numi-Torem made me
“with a corner of my belly
“furious here below
“in a corner of my belly drunk
“with anger
“I lock up this taunt

*

Old man with visored hat comes back
into his house he tells his wife
“go find me what in distant moscow
“as a boy I dragged out from the waters
“bring me my lovely shining robe
“& bring me my belt with cotton fringes
“& bring me my blackrimmed hat
“& bring me a fatted horse’s haunch
“& bring me a fatted horse’s rib
“& bring me a silver bowl three handspans wide”
she did & he put on
his lovely shining robe
hooked on his belt with cotton fringes
stuck on his blackrimmed hat
& in the silver bowl three handspans wide
he crammed
the fatted horse’s haunch
then took a tree he strung with wolfgut strings
& headed out

*

“watching from this side I saw
“a woman’s son appear
“from who knows where
“a son of privilege from who knows where
“I looked & saw
“under his left arm
“was a tree with five strings
“looked & on his right side
“saw
“a silver bowl three handspans wide
“& saw
“a chunk of fatted horse’s haunch
“I took a harder look
“old man with visored hat: he stood
“before the muzzle of
“the little sacred beast
“set down
“a silver bowl three handspans wide
“three nights & days
“I watched
“a dish that ran with horse’s fat
“& watched
“three nights & days
“a lovely play of whirling legs
“he touched the low string
“of his five-stringed tree
“the string shook with the voice of the lower sky
“he touched the high string
“the string shook with the voice of the upper sky
“a lovely play of twisting hands
“he made for me”

*

it is for good cause one says
“this is a man expert in song”
it is for good cause one says
“this is a man expert in lore”

Mansi [Vogul]

Mantra for Binding a Witch

I

I bind the sharp end of a knife
I bind the glow-worm in the forehead
I bind the magic of nine hundred gurus
I bind the familiars of nine hundred witches
I bind the fairies of the sky

Let the sky turn upside down, let the earth be overturned, let horns grow on horse and ass, let moustaches sprout on a young girl, let the dry cow-dung sink and the stones float, but let this charm not fail

2

I bind the glow-worm of a virgin
I bind every kind of Massan
The nail of bone
The lamp of flesh
Who binds the spirits?
The guru binds and I the guru's pupil
May the waters of the river flow uphill
May the dry cow-dung sink and stones float
But let my words not fail.

Baiga (India)

The Pig

I

Crushing the Pig

Ter na ni na O! Ter na ni na O!
Make a hole in the big gourd. I will go for water.
The old mother blows me out of the house.

O ter na ni na O!
The leaves of the parsa tree have long stalks.
You've been lying with your son.

I am going to cut my bewar.
You've been sleeping with your brother.
I am busy making rope.

You've been lying with your sister's son.
I am roasting gram.
I am lying with you, and your mother's watching us.

I am cutting wood for the fire.
You've been lying with a little boy.
Ter na ni na O! Ter na ni na O!

2

The Blood-Letting

Bring water, bring water! I'll wash his feet with water.
Bring oil, bring oil! I'll wash his feet with oil.
Bring milk, bring milk! I'll wash his feet with milk.

Teri na ho! Na na re na! Teri na na mor na na!
Today is Saturday, this is the night for the Laru!
We put the belwanti on the feet of the god.
I make a square of pearls.

O master, sit here on your throne.
Tare nake namare nana saheb! Tare nake namare nana!

3

The Coming of the Demon

Ter nana ke nano ho!

Where were you born? Where is your dwelling-place?
I was born down below. I live on the fence.
I am going to live with you.

Then I'll sleep with your sister.
O Phulera, dance and dance again.
Are you cooking in your kitchen?

May a cat dishonour you!
Don't have an old woman, she looks so very dirty.
By enjoying young girls, my life is satisfied.

Bring the root of adrak: may your father have you!
Where are you off to, girl?
May your brother dishonor you!

Baiga (India)

Two Cosmologies

1

The goddess Laksmi
loves to make love to Vishnu
from on top
looking down she sees in his navel
a lotus
and on it Brahma the god
but she can't bear to stop
so she puts her hand
over Vishnu's right eye
which is the sun
and night comes on
and the lotus closes
with Brahma inside

2

Krishna went out to play
Mother
and he ate dirt

Is that true Krishna

No
who said it

Your brother Balarama

Not true
Look at my face

Open your mouth.

he opened it
and she stood speechless

inside was
the universe

may he protect you

Sanskrit (India)

From *The Guide* to *Lord Murukan*

by **NAKKIRAR**

THE SHAMAN & THE RED GOD

The possessed shaman with the spear
wears wreaths of green leaves
 with aromatic nuts between them
and beautiful long pepper,
 wild jasmine and the three-lobed
 white nightshade;

his jungle tribes
 have chests bright with sandal;
the strong-bowed warriors
 in their mountain village
drink with their kin
sweet liquor, honey brew
 aged in long bamboos,
they dance rough dances
 hand in hand
 to the beat of small
 hillside drums;

the women
wear wreaths of buds
 fingered and forced to blossom
 so they smell differently,
wear garlands
 from the pools on the hill
 all woven into chains,
cannabis leaves
 in their dense hair,

white clusters
from a sacred *kaṭamṇu* tree
red-trunked and flowering,
arrayed between large cool leaves
for the male beetle to suck at,

in leaf-skirts
shaking
on their jeweled mounds of venus,
and their gait sways with the innocence
of peacocks;

the shaman
is the Red One himself,
is in red robes;

young leaf of the red-trunk *aśoka*
flutters in his ears;

He wears a coat of mail,
a warrior band on his ankle,
a wreath of scarlet ixora;

has a flute,
a horn,
several small instruments
of music;

for vehicles
he has a ram,
a peacock;

a faultless rooster
on his banner;

the Tall One
with bracelets on his arms,
with a bevy of girls, voices
like lutestrings,

a cloth
cool-looking above the waist-band
tied so it hangs
all the way to the ground;

his hands large
as drumheads
hold gently
several soft-shouldered
fawnlike women;

he gives them proper places
and he dances
on the hills:

and all such things happen
because
of His being
there.

And not only there.

Tamil (India)

For the Lord of Caves

by **ALLAMA PRABHU**

I
I saw an ape tied up
at the main gate of the triple city,
taunting
every comer.

When the king came
with an army,
he broke them up at one stroke
and ate them.

He has a body, no head, this ape:
legs without footsteps,
hands without fingers;
a true prodigy, really.

Before anyone calls him, he calls them.
I saw him clamber over the forehead of the wild elephant
born in his womb

and sway in play
in the dust of the winds.

I saw him juggle his body as a ball
in the depth of the sky,
play with a ten-hooded snake
in a basket; saw him blindfold
the eyes of the five virgins.
I saw him trample the forehead
of the lion that wanders in the ten streets,
I saw him raise the lion's eyebrows.
I saw him grow from amazement
to amazement, holding a diamond
in his hand.

Nothing added,
nothing taken,

the Lord's stance
is invisible
to men untouched
by the Linga of the Breath.

2

Looking for your light,
I went out:

it was like the sudden dawn
of a million million suns,
a ganglion of lightnings
for my wonder.

O lord of Caves,
if you are light,
there can be no metaphor.

Kannada (India)

**EUROPE & THE ANCIENT
NEAR EAST**



The Calendar

Moon of the Thaw
Moon of the Spring Salmon Run
Moon of the Calving
Moon of the Flowers
Moon of the Moulting
Moon of the Rutting Bison
Moon of the Nut
Moon of the First Frost

Upper Paleolithic

The Vulva Song of Inanna

I am lady I
who in this house
of holy lapis
praying
in my sanctuary say
my holy prayer
I who am lady
who am queen of heaven
let the chanter
chant of it
the singer sing of it
& let my bridegroom
my Dumuzi my wild bull
delight me
let their words fall
from their mouths
o singers
singing for their youth
their song that rises up
in Nippur gift to give

the son of god
I who am lady sing to
praising him
the chanter chants it
I who am Inanna
give my vulva song to him
o star my vulva of the dipper
vulva slender boat of heaven
new moon crescent beauty vulva
unploughed desert vulva
fallow field for wild geese
where my mound longs
for his flooding
hill my vulva lying open
& the girl asks:
who will plough it?
vulva wet with flooding
of myself the queen
who brings this ox to stand here
“lady he will plow for you
“our king Dumuzi he will plow for you
o plow my vulva o my heart
my holy thighs are soaked with it
o holy mother.

Sumerian

The Battle Between Anat & the Forces of Mot

The Virgin Anat
Camouflages her divine aura
And puts on

The smell of goats and rabbits

She closes both the doors
Of the Palace of Anat

She catches up to the troops
In the mountain's slit

In the valley
Between the cities
How she slays them!

She cleaves the Shore folk
She smashes the Western man.

All around her

Heads—a swarm of locusts
Hands—like crickets, as many
Soldiers' hands as thorns on cactus

Anat bundles up her
Prize

She loads up the heads
On her back:
She ties the hands
On her belt.

And, returning from
The valley

Her knees slosh through
The soldiers' blood,
The soldiers' flesh
Up to her hips.

She prods the captives
With the back of her bow.

And Anat comes home
Unsatisfied with her slaughters
In the valley.
She fights on, indoors.

She sets up

Chairs for soldiers
Tables for soldiers
Stools to be soldiers.

How she slays them!

She smites them, then
Stands back
Her liver full of laughter
Her heart filled with joy
Overjoyed
For her knees wade in
Soldiers' blood:
Soldiers' flesh
Up to her hips.

When she has finished
Fighting in the house
Lunging between the tables

She is full

And she rubs her hands
In the soldiers' blood.

She pours the rich oil
Into a basin

And she washes
Her hands
Virgin Anat
Washes
Her fingers

The Sister-of-the-Peoples
Washes
Her hands in the blood
Of the soldiers
Her fingers in the gore
Of the soldiers

The chairs are only chairs again
The tables, tables
The footstools, footstools

She pours out water

To wash
In the dew of the heavens
In the oil of the land

The rain from Cloudrider.

The Heavens' dew

Bathes her.

The rain bathes her.

Ugaritic [Canaanite]

From *The Song of Ullikummi*

fucked the Mountain
fucked her but good his mind
sprang forward
and with the rock he slept
and into her let his manhood
go five times he let it go
 ten times he let it go
 in ikunta luli she is three
 dalugasti long
 she is one and a half
 palhasti wide. What below she has
up on this his mind sprang upon

When Kumarbi his wisdom
he took upon
his mind

 he took his istanzani
 to his piran hattatar
 istanzani piran daskizzi

Kumarbis-za istanzani piran hattatar
daskizzi

 sticks wisdom
unto his mind like his cock
into her
iskariskizzi

 the fucking
of the Mountain

 fucked the mountain went right through it and came out
the other side

Speak tell me
how we were born the beginning
 of the ground we walk on
 rivers ponds lakes
sea without end swelling rushing
 stars sending light
 sky cupped overhead
 gods born of them
 the gods givers of good things
dividing wealth among themselves
 honors titles a palace in the mountains
Olympos

Muses living in the houses of Olympos
 who was first?

“Gap was first
 then Earth the great chair with her immense seat
 then Pit hard to see
 deep in the wombs of Earth

next Love
 loveliest of gods
who unstrings the body
 tames the heart
 breaks the mind
 whether god or man
 within his heart

the children of Gap were Gloom and Night
 whom Love joined
their children were bright Air and Day

Earth's firstborn was star-lit Sky
 a lover to cover her
 equal in every particular

he made her his chair
 the seat forever for the happy gods

o o o o o

as soon as his children were born
 Sky hid them away

he deprived them of light
showing them back deep into the wombs of Earth
he went away and laughed

Earth crowded groaned
she thought of something clever and ugly
she made gray adamant
made a sickle of it
made her children understand what she wanted done with it
sorrowing in her heart
she encouraged them

‘pay him back for what he has done
he was first to hurt’
this is what she said

they were afraid
none of them answered
but great Kronos who thinks around corners was not afraid
he spoke to his wise mother
‘I shall do it
I shall finish it
I do not love my father
he was first to hurt’
he spoke huge Earth shook with joy in her heart
she hid him in a place of ambush
she put the sickle with jagged teeth in his hand
she showed him her plan

great Sky came
bringing night
lying heavy on Earth in love and desire
she opened receiving him
their son stretched out his left hand from ambush
in his right he held the great sickle with jagged teeth
he chopped off his father’s balls
he threw them to the wind behind him
they flew away a bloody track in the air
which Earth enfolded
in full time she gave birth to the strong Curses
and the great Titans
full-armored bursting with light shaking long spears
and the Meliads nymphs of the ash tree

all over boundless Earth
when his balls cut down by adamant
fell from boundless Earth
onto high Sea
battered they swam open currents
from that deathless flesh foam blossomed
inside the pink flower a girl was born and grew
she passed by holy Cythera
she came to Cyprus surrounded by water's flood
she stepped onto land
august lovely goddess
grass sprung up under her tapered feet
Aphrodite born of foam Cytheria the well-garlanded
because she grew inside the bloody foam
because she passed near Cythera
Cyprogene because there she was born
on Cyprus wave washed
Philomedes because she loves Love's bone
because she was born inside her father's balls
Love walks with her
Desire follows

Greek

Fragment of a Vision

by **PARMENIDES OF ELEA**

FROM *ON NATURE*

Fragment One

The mares that are able to take me
as far as I want to travel
had so taken me
once they'd set me down on the Daimon's Way—
for it is She that takes the Knower through each town.
Onto such a route had they placed me
and the knowing horses carried me along it, straining at the reins.
And the daughters of the sun went before us, leading the way.

The axle of the chariot
urged round by eddying wheels attached at the ends

put it in motion
and the axle whistled and shimmered as it turned in the nave
while the daughters of the sun sent us into the light

having come out of Night's abodes
and pushed back the veils from their faces with their hands.

Up there are the gates of the tracks of day and night
fitted above with a lintel
and below with a threshold of stone
and the openings themselves, high up in the air,
are closed by mighty doors.

Dike—The Equalizer—holds the keys to them.
And the sun's cunning daughters

used mild speech to persuade her
to open the gates.

The gates, when opened, opened on a vast expanse
and the daughters of the sun
drove the chariot and mares out on to it
and the gates were fixed on singing axle hinges.

And taking me by the right hand she spoke to me thus:

“Oh Youth, linked with your mares to immortal charioteers
who have led you here to my home—Welcome.
Since it is by no means an inappropriate destiny
that has sent you forth to travel this path

far from the wanderings of mortals

but a Right and Just one,

it is necessary for you to learn all things—
both the stable heart of well-rounded truth
as well as the notions of mortals—

(and in these there is nothing at all to put your faith in)
nonetheless you shall study such matters also—
how the things that seem
(and these pervade everything)
must seem to be.

Greek

From *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*

I was sent forth from the power,
and I have come to those who reflect upon me,
and I have been found among those who seek after me.
Look upon me, you all who reflect upon me,
and you hearers, hear me.
You who are waiting for me, take me to yourselves.
And do not banish me from your sight.
And do not make your voice hate me, nor your hearing.
Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any time. Be on your guard!
Do not be ignorant of me.

For I am the first and the last.
I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the mother and the daughter.
I am the members of my mother.
I am the barren one
and many are her sons.
I am she whose wedding is great,
and I have not taken a husband.
I am the midwife and she who does not bear.
I am the solace of my labor pains.
I am the bride and the bridegroom,
and it is my husband who begot me.
I am the mother of my father
and the sister of my husband,
and he is my offspring.
I am the slave of him who prepared me.
I am the ruler of my offspring.

But he is the one who begot me before the time
on a birthday.
And he is my offspring in due time,
and my power is from him.
I am the staff of his power in his youth,
and he is the rod of my old age.
And whatever he wills happens to me.
I am the silence that is incomprehensible
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent.
I am the voice whose sound is manifold
and the word whose appearance is multiple.
I am the utterance of my name.

Coptic (Egypt)

Song of the Arval Brothers

Then the Dancing Priests of Mars go into a room which is locked behind them. They tie up their robes and pick up the texts. They divide into three groups to dance and sing:

field gods help
field gods help
field gods help

please Marmar
for most of us
no death
no disease

please Marmar
for most of us
no death
no disease

war Mars
enough no more
dance through our doorway
stop here
whip earth

war Mars
enough no more
dance through our doorway
stop here
whip earth

war Mars
enough no more
dance through our doorway
stop here
whip earth

war Mars
enough no more
dance through our doorway
stop here
whip earth

talk
to all the Seeders of the field
one by one

talk
to all the Seeders of the field
one by one

talk
to all the Seeders of the field
one by one

Marmor help
Marmor help
Marmor help

one two THREE
one two THREE
one two THREE

again
three times
again

After the Dance of the Three Steps, a signal is given. Public slaves come in and put away the texts.

Roman

Amen (said)
Praises Father
Thank you Sunshine Light
no darkness (said)
“I will inform you now
“the reason for this thanks
(then said)
I save
& will be saved
Amen
I free
& will be freed
Amen
I hurt
& will be hurt
Amen
Am born
& will give birth
Amen
I feed
& will be food
Amen
I hear
& will be heard
Amen
I will be known
all knowing mind
Amen
I will be washed
& I will wash
Amen
all Grace Sweet Mind the Dance is round
I blow the pipe for
all are in the Round Dance
I will pipe
all dance along
Amen
I will moan low
all beat your breasts
Amen
the One & Only Eight

plays up for us
Amen
Old Number Twelve
stomps up above
Amen
the Universe controls
the dancer
Amen
whoever isn't dancing
's in the dark
Amen
I will go
& I will stay
Amen
I will dress thee
& I will dress
Amen
I will be Oned
& I will One
Amen
I have no house
& I have houses
Amen
I have no place
& I have places
Amen
I have no temple
& I have temples
Amen
I am a lamp to thee
who see me
Amen
I am a mirror to thee
who view me
Amen
I am a door to thee
who come thru me
Amen
I am a way to thee
wayfarer
Amen (said)
"Follow

“my Round Dance
 “& see yourself in me
 “the Speaker
 “& seeing what I speak
 “keep silent on
 “my mysteries
 “or dancing think of what
 “I do
 “make yours the suffering of a man
 “that I will suffer
 “yet powerless to understand your suffering
 “without a word
 “the Father sent language thru me
 “the sufferer you saw
 “& saw me suffering
 “you grew restless
 “shaken
 “you were moved toward wisdom
 “lean on me
 “I am a pillow
 “who am I?
 “you only will know me
 “when I’m gone—
 “but am not he for whom
 “I am now taken—
 “will know it when you reach it
 “& knowing suffering will know
 “how not to suffer
 “myself will teach you what
 “you do not know
 “I am your god
 “not the betrayer’s
 “will harmonize the Sweet Soul with my own
 “the Word of Wisdom speaks in me
 “says
 “Praises Father
 & we answered him
 Amen (said)
 Praises Word (said)
 Praises Grace
 Amen (said)
 Praises Spirit (said)

Praises Holy Holy (said)
“& if thou wouldst understand that which is me
“know this all that I have said I have uttered
“playfully & I was by no means ashamed of it
“I danced
“& when you dance in understanding
“understand & say
“Amen

Syriac

A Song of Amergin

I am the wind which breathes upon the sea,
I am the wave of the ocean,
I am the murmur of the billows,
I am the bull of seven battles,
I am the vulture upon the rocks,
I am a tear shed by the sun,
I am the fairest of plants,
I am a wild boar for courage,
I am a salmon in the water,
I am a lake in the plain,
I am a word of science,
I am the point of the lance in battle,
I am the god who created fire in the head.
Who is it who throws light into the meeting on the mountain?
Who announces the ages of the moon?
Who teaches the place where the sun rests?

Old Irish

Three Ogham Poems from Inchmarnock

1/ Having Reached the Holy Reward

Her body fades with her hair becomes invisible her skin is a salmon.
Singing eye sings her songs together kine alpine kine grazing.
Guarded life is guarded shielded ringed with soldiers.
South from our slit ribs bees swarm north.
Now is elsewhere jealousy did this.

Thieves clean her breasts.
A bower is constructed high in the thorn.
Three fires jealousy love and death maggots us.
Under no place there are no trees there is no place.
Pulse great throbbing blooded heart harts live in her irises.

2/ Gaming Board

(To Be Read in Any Direction)

you're blest	you're dead
you're fading	concentrate
you're hopeful	counting chickens
shit shit	shit shit
you're hopeful	you're hopeful
shit shit	shit shit
o sweet	o pale
you're flying	you're fleeing
you're dead	a corpse
concentrate	you're fading
you're hopeful	o sweet
shit shit	you're flying
o pale	you're hopeful
you're fleeing	shit shit
you're blest	you're hopeful
you're fading	shit shit
you're hopeful	you're hopeful
shit shit	shit shit
you're chiselling	you're dead
will it hold	concentrate

you're dead o pale
concentrate you're fleeing

3/ The Questioning

*when does timber wither in oakwoods
at a flaying*

*what is sweeter than ivy grasses
flesh*

*what is torn apart drained
ash*

*what dances from a corpse mouth
salmon*

*what is torn apart drained
vein*

*what is ash salmon
grasses*

*what is grass ivy
a flaying*

*when does timber wither in oakwoods
if it turns black*

Scottish Gaelic

From *The Red Book of Hergest*

attributed to **LLYWARCH HEN**

Let the cock's comb be red; naturally loud
Be his voice, from his triumphant bed:
Man's rejoicing, God will recommend.

Let the swineherds be merry at the sighing
Of the wind; let the silent be graceful;
Let the vicious be accustomed to misfortune.

Let the bailiff impeach; let evil be a tormentor;
Let clothes be fitting;
He that loves a bard, let him be a handsome giver.

Let a monarch be vehement, and let him be brave;
And let there be a hurdle on the gap;
He will not show his face that will not give.

Fleet let the racers be on the side
Of the mountain; let care be in the bosom;
Unfaithful let the inconstant be.

Let the knight be conspicuous; let the thief be wary;
The rich woman may be deceived;
The friend of the wolf is the lazy shepherd.

Let the knight be conspicuous: fleet be the horse;
Let the scholar be ambitious;
Let the prevaricating one be unfaithful.

Let cows be round-backed; let the wolf be gray;
Let the horse over barley be swift;
Like gossamer will he press the grain at the roots.

Let the deaf be bent; let the captive be heavy;
Nimble the horse in battles;
Like gossamer will he press the grain to the ground.

Let the deaf be dubious; let the rash be inconstant;
Let the mischievous wrangle;
The prudent need but be seen to be loved.

Let the lake be deep; let the spears be sharp;
Let the brow of the sick be bold at the shout of war;
Let the wise be happy—God commends him.

Let the exile wander; let the brave be impulsive;
Let the fool be fond of laughter.

Let the furrows be wet; let bail be frequent;
Let the sick be complaining, and the one in health merry;
Let the lapdog snarl; let the hag be peevish.

Let him that is in pain cry out; let an army be moving;
Let the well-fed be wanton;
Let the strong be bold; let the hill be icy.

Let the gull be white; let the wave be loud;
Let the gore be apt to clot on the ashen spear;
Let the ice be gray; let the heart be bold.

Let the camp be green; let the suitor be reproachless;
Let there be pushing of spears in the defile;
Let the bad woman be with frequent reproaches.

Let the hen be clawed; let the lion roar;
Let the foolish be pugnacious;
Let the heart be broken with grief.

Let the tower be white; let the harness glitter;
Let there be beauty—many will desire it;
Let the glutton hanker; let the old man mediate.

Welsh

Two Poems for All-Hallows' Eve

I
Winter's Eve,
baiting of apples,
who is coming out to play?

A White Lady
on the top of the tree,
whittling an umbrella stick.

It's one o'clock,
it's two o'clock,
it's time for the pigs to have dinner.

2
A tailless Black Sow
& a headless White Lady:

may the tailless Black Sow
snatch the hindmost.

A tailless Black Sow
on Winter's Eve:
thieves coming along,
knitting stockings.

Welsh

The Fairy Woman's Lullaby

My little dun buck thou,
Offspring of the lowing cow,
For whom the Mull cow lows,
My darling and my fair one,
My soul and my delight!
Thou art not of the race of Clan Donald,
But of a race dearer to us—
The race of Leod of the galleys,
The race of the weighty saplings,
The race of the breastplates,
Norway was thy patrimony!

Faire fire
Thou art not the calf of
Faire fire
The old shriveled cow,
Faire fire
Thou art not the little kid
Faire fire
Whom the she-goat brought forth,
Faire fire
Thou art not the lamb
Faire fire
Whom the sheep brought forth,
Faire fire
Thou art not the foal
Faire fire
Of a lean old mare,
Faire fire
Though thou art not,
Faire fire
Thou art my calf!

Fairim frim obh obh!
May I not hear of thy wounding,
May I not see thy tears,
Until thy shoes are holed,
Until thy nose grows sharp,
Until thou duly becomest grey

As hoar as the clouds,
Until thy day becomes dark
Within the precincts of Dunvegan!

Scottish Gaelic

The Nine Herbs Charm

remember mugwort what you did reveal
what you did at Regenmeld
you have strength against three and against thirty
you have strength against poison and against infection
you have strength against the foe who fares through the land

and you plaintain mother of herbs
open to the east mighty within
chariots have creaked over you queens have ridden over you
brides have moaned over you over you bulls gnashed their teeth
all these you did withstand and resist
so may you withstand poison and infection
and the foe who fares through the land

this herb is called stime it grew on a stone
it resists poison it fights pain
it is called harsh it fights against poison
this is the herb that strove with the snake
it has strength against poison it has strength against infection
it has strength against the foe who fares through the land

now cock's-spur grass conquer the greater poisons though you are the
lesser
you the mightier vanquish the lesser until he is cured of both

remember mayweed what you did reveal
what you brought to pass at Alorford
where he did not lose his life because of infection
because mayweed was placed on his food

this is the herb called wergulu
it crossed the ocean on the back of a seal
it came to heal the hurt of other poison
these nine herbs against nine poisons

a snake came crawling it bit a man
Woden took nine glorious herbs
struck the serpent into nine parts
the apple brought this to pass against poison
no more to enter her house

thyme and fennel a pair of great power
put in the world to help all the poor and the rich
to stand against pain to resist venom
they have power against three and against thirty
against the fiend's hand and the sudden trick
against witchcraft of evil creatures

now these nine herbs have power against nine evil spirits
against nine poisons and against nine infectious diseases
against the red poison against the running poison
against the white poison against the blue poison
against the yellow poison against the green poison
against the black poison against the blue poison
against the brown poison against the crimson poison
against snake blister against water blister
against horn blister against thistle blister
against ice blister against poison blister
if any poison comes flying from the east or if any poison comes flying
from the north
or if any poison comes flying from the west upon the people

i alone know running water let the nine serpents heed it
may all pastures now spring with herbs
the seas all salt water be destroyed
when I blow this poison from you

mugwort, plaintain, open to the east, lamb's cress, cockspur grass, mayweed, nettle, crabapple, thyme and fennel, old soap; crush the herbs to dust, mix with the soap and the apple's juice. make a paste of water and ashes; take fennel, boil it in the paste and bathe with egg moisture, either before or after he puts on the salve. sing this charm on each of the herbs, three times before he works them together and on the apple also; and sing the same charm into the man's mouth and into both his ears and into the wound before he puts on the salve.

Anglo-Saxon

From Shakespeare's *Lear*

[Enter EDGAR *disguised as a madman.*]

EDG. Away! the foul fiend follows me!

Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind.

Humh! go to thy cold bed, and warm thee.

LEAR. Hast thou given all to thy two daughters? And art thou come to this?

EDG. Who gives any thing to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting-horse over four-inched bridges, to course his own shadow for a traitor. Bless thy five wits! Tom's a-cold,—O, do, de, do de, do de. Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking! Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes: there could I have him now,—and there,—and there again, and there.

[*Storm still.*]

LEAR. What, has his daughters brought him to this pass?

Could'st thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?

FOOL. Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

LEAR. Now, all the plagues that in the pendulous air

Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT. He hath no daughters, sir.

LEAR. Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature

To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.

Is it the fashion that discarded fathers

Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?

Judicious punishment! 't was this flesh begot

Those pelican daughters.

EDG. Pillicock sat on Pillicock-hill.

Halloo, halloo, loo, loo!

FOOL. This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDG. Take heed o' the foul fiend; obey thy parents; keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud array. Tom's a-cold.

LEAR. What hast thou been?

EDG. A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair;
wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress' heart, and did
the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words,
and broke them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the
contriving of lust, and waked to do it. Wine loved I deeply, dice
dearly; and in woman outparamoured the Turk. False of heart, light
of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness,
dog in madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor the
rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman. Keep thy foot out of
brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and
defy the foul fiend. Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind:
Says suum, mun, ha, no, nonny. Dolphin my boy, my boy, sessa! let
him trot by.

[*Storm still.*]

LEAR. Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy
uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this?
Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide,
the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are
sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no
more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you
lendings! come, unbutton here.

[*Tearing off his clothes.*]

FOOL. Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in.
Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart; a
small spark, all the rest on's body cold. Look, here comes a walking
fire.

[*Enter GLOUCESTER, with a torch.*]

EDG. This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet. He begins at curfew, and
walks till the first cock. He gives the web and the pin, squinies the eye,
and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor
creature of earth.

St. Withold footed thrice the old;
He met the night-mare and her nine-fold;
Bid her alight,
And her troth plight,
And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!

Each word drew
each deed drew

another word from me,
another deed from me.

Runes you will find,
that the king of singers coloured
and the great gods have made,
good strong staves
carved by a god-ruling spirit.

fateful signs

good stout staves

Odin for the gods,
and Dvalin for the dwarfs,
Asvid for giants
and some I wrote myself.

Dain for the elves,

and humankind

Know how to cut
to read them?

know how

Know how to tint
to test them?

know how

Know how to plead
to proffer?

know how

Know how to send
to surrender?

know how

Better no prayer
By your getting measure your gift;
Better no gain
as Thund wrote
where he rose up

than too big an offering,

than too big a sacrifice,
before lives were laid down
when he came home.

Icelandic

From *Kalevala*

FIRE

Ilmarinen struck
fire, Väinämöinen
flashed above eight heavens, in
the ninth sky: a spark
dropped down through the earth
through Manala, and
through the smoke-hole caked with soot

the children's cradle
it broke maidens' breasts
and burned the mother's bosom.
The mother knew more of it:
she shoved it into the sea
lest the maid go to Mana
lest the fire should burn her up
lest the flame roast her.

That gloomy Lake Alue
three times on a summer night
foamed as high as the spruces
in the torment of the fire
the flame's overwhelmingness.

A smooth whitefish swam
and swallowed the spark:
torment to the swallower
came, hardship to the gulper.
A grey pike swam up
swallowed the whitefish
a light lake-trout swam
swallowed the grey pike
a red salmon swam
and swallowed the light lake-trout:
it swam, it darted about
in between the salmon-crags
in the torment of the fire.

It said in these words
it uttered along these lines:
"Fire once burned much land
one evil summer of fire
one year of flame without help.
A small piece was left unburned
at the turn of Ahti's fence
at the rear of Hirska's bank."

It was hoed and dug
and Tuoni's maggot was found
and Tuoni's maggot was burned
in a copper boat
in an iron-bottomed punt.

Its ashes were sown upon
the shore of Lake Alimo:
 flax without like grew
 peerless linen rose
in a single summer night.

It was quickly stripped
now taken to the water
now the linen put in soak.

 The sisters spun it
 the brothers wove cloth
 and fashioned a net.

Sturdy old Väinämöinen
put the young ones on the net.
They drew across the water:
that fish did not come
for which the net was fashioned.
They drew along the water:
 that fish did not come
for which the net was fashioned.
They drew against the water:
the salmon splashed in the sea.

Sturdy old Väinämöinen
could not bear to put his hand
without mittens of iron:
took his mittens of iron
split open the red salmon—
 the light lake-trout came
from the red salmon's belly
split open the light lake-trout—
 the grey pike came out
he split open the grey pike—
 the smooth whitefish came
split open the smooth whitefish—
 and the spark came out.

 There the fire was lulled
 and the flame was rocked
at a misty headland's tip
 there the fire was lulled
 in a silver sling:

the golden cradle jingled
the copper mantle trembled
as the fire was lulled.

Finnish

The Fox

who runs along the wolf's way
follows
the wolf's track, he finds
much meat there
then sleeps inside the clearings
& when he falls asleep his shape
turns over like a skin
it prowls relentlessly
after the reindeer herds
o body left to ravens
wolves & eagles
for a song the night birds
crunch its bones
eagles & foxes shit
the flesh & bones on hillsides
then the crows take turns
to eat their shit
so hungry after meat
they are he is himself
he eats so much
he vomits
then sucks his vomit up
o twisty are the fox's tracks
that sly beast
whom no devil can catch up with
master gonnif
precious is thy fur
thy pelt & not thy skin worth taking

Saami [Lapp]

Blood River Shaman Chant

then grasped
my sky tree grasped it
all my friends
would bend their backs to me
they sprang up to their feet
then stretched me on their laps
“now I must harness the sky’s reindeer
“the smallest of the seven
“must hold the reindeer’s reins
cloud island sledge
shot off we found
the grass ridge
there at the ridge’s foot we found
a hill with lawns
bored through by seven lizards
who bored through it
“mother lizard grandmother
“give thou a child
“a child give to my friend
the lizard child my friend
bored through my side
we found the ice ridge then
& at its side
found a blood river
the blood river started flowing
its currents started flowing
in the currents the blood river
tufts of hair flowed by
for me to cut to cut the river
with bare hands
would make the blood stop
the river & the current stop
until we crossed the river
& the blood we found
the iron tent
I went into the iron tent
the seven women sat there
I embraced them seven women
swaddling seven boys

cloud island sledge
shot off again it took us
to our tent
“I must unhitch
“our spirit reindeer
“the smallest of the seven
“I must head back to camp
“my friends must head back
“of the seven let a single one remain
then they took back my sky tree
left me I have found no place
to camp but here
inside this fire I fall
to pieces

Nenets

Bald Mountain Zaum-Poems

I

Kumara
Nich, nich, pasalam, bada.
Eschochomo, lawassa, schibboda.
Kumara
A.a.o.—o.o.o.—i.i.i.—e.e.e.—u.u.u.—ye.ye.ye.
Aa, la ssob, li li ssob lu lu ssob.
Schunschan
Wichoda, kssara, gujatun, gujatun, etc.

2

io, ia,—o—io, ia, zok, io, ia,
pazzo! io, ia, pipazzo!
Sookatjema, soossuoma, nikam, nissam, scholda.
Paz, paz, paz, paz, paz, paz, paz, paz!
Pinzo, pinzo, pinzo, dynsa.
Schono, tschikodam, wikgasa, mejda.
Bouopo, chondryamo, boupo, galpi.
Ruachado, rassado, ryssado, zalyemo.
io, ia, o. io, ia, zok. io nye zolk. io ia zolk.

Russian

A Poem for the Goddess Her City & the Marriage of Her Son & Daughter

she builds her city
the white goddess
builds it
not on the sky or earth
but on a cloud branch
builds
three gates to enter it
one gate she builds
in gold
the second pearls
the third in scarlet
where the gate is dry gold
there the goddess's son
is wedded
where the gate
is pearl
the goddess's daughter
is the bride
& where the gate is scarlet
solitary
sits the goddess
solitary glances
everywhere
she sees
the lightning
playing with the thunder
the precious sister
with two brothers
& the bride
plays with
the bridegroom's
brothers
there the goddess sees
the lightning
win it all

the precious sister
over her two brothers
 & the bride
over her bridegroom's brothers
☞ the goddess was enchanted by it

Serbian

The Message of King Sakis & the Legend of the Twelve Dreams He Had in One Night

1
I saw a gold pillar from earth to heaven.

2
I saw a dark towel
hanging from heaven to earth.

3
I saw three boiling kettles:
one of grease, one of butter, and one of water,
and grease boiled over into butter
and butter into water
but the water boiled all by itself.

4
I saw an old mare with a colt
and a black eagle pulling grass by its roots
and laying it down before the mare
while the colt neighs.

5
I saw a bitch lying on a dunghill
while the puppies were barking from her womb.

6
I saw many monks soaked in pitch
wailing because they can't get out.

7

I saw a beautiful horse
grazing with two heads—
one in front, one in the back.

8

I saw precious stones, pearls, and royal wreaths
scattered over the whole kingdom,
but fire came down from heaven
and burnt everything into ashes.

9

I saw the rich giving workers
gold or silver or rice,
but when they came back to ask for their rewards
found that no one was left.

10

I saw evil-faced rocks descending
from the sky
and walking all over the earth.

11

I saw three virgins in a stubble field
bearing wreaths of sunlight on their heads
and sweet-smelling flowers in their hands.

12

I saw men with narrow eyes,
with hairs standing up and cruel fingernails,
and these were the devil's own servants.

Serbian

A Love Poem with Witches

I got up this morning
woke up early this morning
rinsed my eyes out with water
kneeled down before the saints

threw on a white gown
ran over to the church
stepped across the threshold
nobody there had seen me
nobody there had heard me
nobody but the witches
nobody but the bruja
they made a crazy racket
with their hair out in the wind
they dragged me out of town
they wrapped me in a snakeskin
smeared me with fish & tar
made me the world's great fool
then I shouted
and I bellowed
nobody there had heard me
nobody there had seen me
nobody but Saint Mary
with her golden staff came down to me
she took me by the hand
she led me down the road to Abraham's
dropped me off in the Jordan fountain
stuffed a cuckoo into my mouth
that everyone thought was a nightingale
everyone there looked out for me
dressed me up for sweet loving
I wandered down to the highway
sick people there were looking for me
young boys climbed up on the fences
old ladies ran out without shawls
old men without caps
& young boys without belts
they all asked:
who is this
beautiful woman?
this sharp lady admiral
for now & forever
may everyone cuddle & love her

Romanian

The Descriptions of King Lent

by **FRANÇOIS RABELAIS**

[1]

“Lent was a little better proportioned in his external parts,” Xenomanes continued, “except that he had seven ribs more than a common man.”

His toes were like the keyboard of a spinet.

His nails like a gimlet.

His feet like guitars.

His heels like clubs.

His soles like hanging-lamps.

His legs like snares.

His knees like stools.

His thighs like a crank-arbalest.

His hips like borers.

His potbelly was buttoned up in the old fashion and belted high.

His navel was like a fiddle.

His pubic bone was like a cream cake.

His member like a slipper.

His ballocks like a double leather bottle.

His genitals like a carpenter’s plane.

His testicle-strings like tennis rackets.

His perineum like a flageolet.

His arse-hole like a crystal mirror.

His buttocks like a harrow.

His loins like a pot of butter.

The base of his spine like a billiard table.

His back like a large cross-bow.

His vertebrae like a bagpipe.

His ribs like a spinning-wheel.

His chest like a canopy.

His shoulder-blades like mortars.

His breast like a portable organ.

His nipples like cattle-horns.

His armpits like chessboards.

His shoulders like a wheel-barrow.

His arms like round hoods.

His fingers cold as friary andirons.

His wrist bones like a pair of stilts.

His arm-bones like sickles.
His elbows like rat-traps.
His hands like curry-combs.
His neck like a beggar's bowl.
His throat like a punch-strainer.
His adam's apple like a barrel with a pair of bronze goitres hanging
down from it, fine pieces which matched and were shaped like an
hour-glass.
His beard was like a lantern.
His chin like a toadstool.
His ears like a pair of mittens.
His nose like a high boot, hung on like a small shield.
His nostrils like babies' caps.
His eyebrows were like dripping pans, and beneath the left one he had a
mole of the size and shape of a piss-pot.
His eyelids were like fiddles.
His eyes like comb-cases.
His optic nerves like tinder-boxes.
His forehead like an earthenware bowl.
His temples like watering-cans.
His cheeks like a pair of clogs.
His jaws like a drinking-cup.
His teeth were like boar spears; and you will find specimens of his
milk-teeth at Coulonges-sur-l'Autize in Poitou, where there is one,
and at La Brosse in Saintonge, where there are two hung above the
doors of the cellar.
His tongue was like a harp.
His mouth like a horse-cloth.
His misshapen face like a mule's pack-saddle.
His head twisted to one side like a retort.
His skull like a game-bag.
The sutures of his skull like the Pope's seal.
His skin like a gabardine coat.
His epidermis like a sieve.
His hair like a scrubbing-brush.
His whiskers as already described.

[2]

If he spat, it was basketfuls of artichokes.
If he blew his nose, it was salted eels.

If he wept, it was ducks in onion sauce.
 If he trembled, it was great hare-pies.
 If he sweated, it was stock-fish in butter sauce.
 If he belched, it was oysters in the shell.
 If he sneezed, it was barrels full of mustard.
 If he coughed, it was boxes of quince-jelly.
 If he sobbed, it was pennyworths of water-cress.
 If he yawned, it was potsful of pea-soup.
 If he sighed, it was smoked ox-tongues.
 If he whistled, it was hods full of fairy-tales.
 If he snored, it was bucketsful of shelled beans.
 If he frowned, it was pigs' trotters fried in their own fat.
 If he spoke, it was far from being that crimson silk out of which
 Parysatis wanted whoever spoke to her son Cyrus, King of the
 Persians, to weave his words. What it was, was coarse Auvergne
 frieze.
 If he blew, it was boxes for indulgences.
 If he blinked his eyes, it was waffles and wafers.
 If he grumbled, it was March-born cats.
 If he nodded his head, it was iron-bound wagons.
 If he pouted, it was broken staves.
 If he mumbled, it was the law clerks' pantomime.
 If he stamped his foot, it was postponements and five-year
 adjournments.
 If he stepped back, it was piles of cockle-shells.
 If he slobbered, it was communal ovens.
 If he was hoarse, it was an entry of the Morris-dancers.
 If he farted, it was brown cow-hide gaiters.
 If he pooped, it was Cordova-leather shoes.
 If he scratched himself, it was new regulations.
 If he sang, it was peas in the pod.
 If he shat, it was toadstools and morels.
 If he puffed, it was cabbages fried in oil, alias, in the language of
 Languedoc, *caules d'amb'olif*.
 If he made a speech, it was last year's snows.
 If he worried, it was for the bald and the shaven alike.
 If he gave nothing to the tailor, the embroiderer did no better.
 If he woolgathered, it was of members flying and creeping up walls.
 If he dreamt, it was of mortgage deeds.

French

Deep Song

1

in the middle of the sea
a stone
my love was sitting on
to tell her troubles:
only to the earth, oh only
to the earth I tell
what happened to me
nowhere in the world would find
someone to tell
but every morning
would go out
& ask the rosemary:
if love's so bad
can there still be a cure
before I die from it?

2

I climbed the wall the wind
would answer me
“why all this sighing, sighing
“& no end to it
the wind would cry to me
on seeing
these long gashes in my heart
until I loved
the wind wind of a woman
as a woman is a wind
I stayed in
& was jealous of the wind
that brushed your face
if that wind was a man
I'd kill him
& not be afraid to row
but rowing, rowing
only the wind to frighten me
up from your harbor

Spanish Roma [Gypsy]

The Canticle for Brother Sun

by FRANCESCO D'ASSISI

*Most high omnipotent good lord:
all praise is yours & honor glory
every blessing
yours & only yours
& no man living fit to say your name*

Be praised my lord with all your creatures
but especially with Mr. Brother Sun
because you show us light & day through him
& he is lovely glowing with great shine
from you my lord: his definition

Be praised my lord for Sister Moon & for the stars
because you made them for your sky their
loveliness is white & rare

Be praised my lord for Brother Wind
& for the air & cloudy days
& bright & all days else because
through these you give your creatures
sustenance

Be praised my lord for Sister Water
because she shows great use & humble-
ness is hers & preciousness
& depth

Be praised my lord for Brother Fire
through whom you light all nights upon the earth
Because he too is lovely
full of joy & manly strength

Be praised my lord because our sister
Mother Earth sustains & rules
us & because she raises
food to feed us: colored flowers
grass

Be praised my lord for those who pardon by your love
& suffer illnesses & grief

Bless those who undergo in silence
the poor for whom you hold a crown

Be praised my lord for Sister Death-of-Body
whom no man living will escape
And pity those who die in mortal sin
& everyone she finds who minds you
bless: no second death
to bring them hurt

Oh praise my lord & bless my lord & thank
& serve my lord with humbleness
Triumphant

Italian

From *Europe a Prophecy*

by **WILLIAM BLAKE**

Five windows light the cavern'd Man; thro' one he breathes the air;
Thro' one, hears music of the spheres; thro' one, the eternal vine
Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes; thro' one can look.
And see small portions of the eternal world that ever groweth;
Thro' one, himself pass out what time he please, but he will not;
For stolen joys are sweet, & bread eaten in secret pleasant.

So sang a Fairy mocking as he sat on a streak'd Tulip,
Thinking none saw him: when he ceas'd I started from the trees!
And caught him in my hat as boys knock down a butterfly
How know you this said I small Sir? where did you learn this song
Seeing himself in my possession thus he answerd me:
My master, I am yours. command me, for I must obey.

Then tell me, what is the material world, and is it dead?
He laughing answer'd: I will write a book on leaves of flowers,
If you will feed me on love-thoughts, & give me now and then
A cup of sparkling poetic fancies; so when I am tipsie,
I'll sing to you to this soft lute; and shew you all alive
The world, where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy.

I took him home in my warm bosom: as we went along
Wild flowers I gatherd; & he shew'd me each eternal flower:
He laugh'd aloud to see them whimper because they were pluck'd.
They hover'd round me like a cloud of incense: when I came
Into my parlour and sat down, and took my pen to write:
My Fairy sat upon the table, and dictated EUROPE.

English

OCEANIA



Twelve Kura Songs from Tikopia

1

o kume kume of the falling rain
kume to draw near
and to ask after kume

And One-Before-Us to draw near

to do something to enter, o
to do something to turn to us

2

stand firm, my housepost
and stand firm for me, my housepost
rata was dancing in front
he had followed me

he had followed me, o
he had followed me here like the iron tree
he had followed me, o

3

& knock away the rear of the hermit crab, o
my maleness had long been prepared
now was ready

now that you've turned on your back
& sleep snoring

4

your pit, your cherry
is concealed and must stay hidden
must not spread your legs apart
but hide what smells there

5

take it
& keep on scorching it
& turn it over nicely
with legs apart

& call the long one penis
to turn it over nicely
& desire it

6
he is like a spider, he shits
& comes on as a tree trunk

& shits, o he shits on that road
all men reach for

7
& is red as rata
& as all this land
& its mountains

8
asking my wife to come near
to hold up my penis
& say:
you are penis

like the cunt of an unmarried woman
his penis is dark

9
the woman you found on the road
who stayed on the road
and brought the men to fulfillment
whose buttocks are black as an oven

10
leave me only
the lips of my throat
o my belly is hungry

o this bright red flower
you carried away
& my fear you would drop it

11

the bright red flower of that road
adorned by woman

you came walking down that road
your body glowing

12

your penis, penis of the hot cordyline root
your fruit-dark penis

that looks dark, looks dark to me
in front of you
& darker, like a cowry shell
for darkness

Tikopian (Solomon Islands)

Tolai Songs

1

The Chinaman rode on a bicycle,
Carrying a bunch of cabbages.
Where is your village?
The little bird flew around, around, around.

2

He is after you, ladyfriend.
A friend wrote it like this:
A yellow fish. Guard the use of your name,
A policeman is after you and you are afraid.

3

Three boys went by canoe to Gumu,
To the river at Gavi.
And what is the reason for the difference
Between the Catholic Church and the Methodists?
And what is the reason for the difference
Between the Catholic Church and the S.D.A.'s?

Tolai (Kuanua, New Guinea)

Pidgin Song

Time me look so very young
Allo people i wandim me
And alogeter wandim talko too much longo me
But time me ready for die
No more man i save come longo me
No more man i save wandim talko lelebiti longo me.

Mummy and my Daddy
Come sit down withim me
Sorry and karai kasim me now
Oh Mummy and my Daddy
Come say good bye longo me
Time bilongo me for die come kolosap now.

Ande alogeta leavim me
No more man i save come longo me
No good all i kasim sikinis i kasim me
Oh my angel up in heaven
Come down and pick up me
No good all i makim foolu too much longo me.

Neo-Melanesian (Papua New Guinea)

The Gumagabu Song

by **TOMAKAM**

I

The stranger of Gumagabu sits on the top of the mountain.
“Go on top of the mountain, the towering mountain . . . ”
—They cry for Toraya. . . —

The stranger of Gumagabu sits on the slope of the mountain.
—The fringe of small clouds lifts above Boyowa;

The mother cries for Toraya—

“I shall take my revenge.”

The mother cries for Toraya.

2

Our mother, Dibwaruna, dreams on the mat.
She dreams about the killing.

“Revenge the wailing;

Anchor; hit the Gabu strangers!”
—The stranger comes out;
The chief gives him the *pari*;
“I shall give you the *doga*;
Bring me things from the mountain to the canoe!”

3
We exchange our *vaygu'a*;
The rumour of my arrival spreads through the Koya
We talk and talk.
He bends and is killed.
His companions run away;
His body is thrown into the sea;
The companions of the stranger run away,
We sail home.

4
Next day, the sea foams up,
The chief's canoe stops on the reef;
The storm approaches;
The chief is afraid of drowning.
The conch shell is blown:
It sounds in the mountain.
They all weep on the reef.

5
They paddle in the chief's canoe;
They circle round the point of Bewara.
“I have hung my basket.
I have met him.”
So cries the chief,
So cries repeatedly the chief.

6
Women in festive decoration
Walk on the beach.
Nawaruva puts on her turtle rings;
She puts on her *luluga'u* skirt.
In the village of my fathers, in Burakwa.
There is plenty of food;
Plenty is brought in for distribution.

Trobriand Islands (Papua New Guinea)

With their most beautiful ornaments
on their bodies
they go bathing.
She bites him.

2

Song of a Men's Secret Society

A woman sees the tumbuan-spirit's cock feathers.
She vomits,
cries: *Noi jaja*;
the spirit looks down,
moves like a snake in the water
and sings. One man beats the slit-gong,
all paint their foreheads,
all go into the bush,
all see the bush-spirit Leleo—
he comes down from a tree,
his body painted like a snake's skin;
all sound gongs,
all put on feathers,
the sound carries over the sea.

3

Men's Song

She cries out sobbing
as she sees
the shadow
with a mouth: Stay there,
stay there, you ghost!
E au!

4

Men's Song

She spins round dancing
before his eyes,
he waves to her with his hand
and turns to go away.

“You have such beautiful eyes.”

io!

She goes among the seaweed
and picks it.

“There! look! what a
man! what a fine body!” She sees
the other man and
calls sadly after her
own man.

Then she goes to the beach.

5

Women's Song

Strong wind,
the storm-spirit rages and roars

auinai au

all the women see him—his
head is bristly—

are startled

—they sit down and sing.

Then they all walk about
together.

One says: Now it is over—
we will go to the beach
and go out in a boat.

Melanesian (Duke of York Islands, Papua New Guinea)

The Daybreak

Day breaks: the first rays of the rising Sun, stretching her arms.

Daylight breaking, as the Sun rises to her feet.

Sun rising, scattering the darkness; lighting up the land . . .

With disc shining, bringing daylight, as the birds whistle and
call . . .

People are moving about, talking, feeling the warmth.

Burning through the Gorge, she rises, walking westwards,

Wearing her waist-band of human hair.

She shines on the blossoming coolibah tree, with its sprawling roots,
Its shady branches spreading . . .

Mudburra (Australia)

From *George Dyungayan's Bulu Line*

VERSE 1

they're bursting out
of Wanydyal
they're thinking about
()
which way to go
from Wanydyal
where to go
()
they're emerging
they're thinking about
they're starting
from Wanydyal . . .

VERSE 2

a flock of snipes
flying toward us
wait! they're rai
fast approaching
we nearly collide
their bellies like birds'
wait! they're flying
belly-up
becoming rai
racing through sky
flying toward us
from far away

birds becoming rai

no more distance

nearly on top of us

watch out!

the snipes are

flying toward us

we watch snipe become rai

flying belly up . . .

VERSE 3

they're travelling to Mawula

past the white ochre

()

passing through

they didn't stop making

galdyiri travelling

to Mawula

()

didn't stop

didn't stop making they're

passing the white ochre place

galdyiri

()

going right through

making them

making them they're

travelling

to Mawula

making the white ochre . . .

VERSE 4

Balgandyirr white

gums white on the ridges

we see the gums

on the ridges

before turning

away leaving

the country behind

for the mountain

in the north-west

turning away

from the white gums

on the ridges

leaving Balgandyirr

behind leaving

the white gums

for the north-west

we turn away

from that country we

can see the white gums

on the ridges

from Balgandyirr we're turning

leaving that white country behind . . .

VERSE 5

beaks

()

sticking out

from a straight line

of pelicans

we see their heads out

in all directions

() of pelicans

flying close together

one hiding

behind the ()

their beaks stuck out

all mixed up

pelicans

flying close together

()

behind one another

we see them
sticking out from the line

in all directions
the beaks of the pelicans . . .

VERSE 6

faint
far away Mt Clarkson
standing up
coming from the east
we look into the distance
Mt Clarkson there
standing up to greet us

the sun's rising
over us
we stop to watch it rise
at Garrawin
where the day begins
we see the sun coming up
to dance over Garrawin

faint / sun
we're far away / the day
at Mt. Clarkson / Garrawin
we stop to watch
we're watching
standing up / sun rising
Mt Clarkson / the sun's coming out

at Garrawin / in the distance
a new day / standing up . . .

VERSE 7

we see it there
hazy
far away

Sightings: Kunapipi

(1ST SET)

- 1 The musk of her
 red-walled vagina
 inviting coitus
- 2 Her skin soft like fur
- 3 She is shy at first, but soon they laugh together
- 4 Laughing-together
 Clitoris
 Soft-inside-of-the-vagina
- 5 Removing her pubic cloth
 opening
 her legs
 lying between them &
 coming
- 6 And copulating for a child
- 7 Fire Fire
 Flame Ashes
- 8 fire sticks &
 flames are
 flaring
 sparks
 are flying
- 9 Urination
 Testes
 Urination
- 10 Loincloth
 (red)
 Loincloth
 (white)
 Loincloth
 (black)

(2ND SET)

- 1 “penis” incisure incisure
 penis penis semen
- 2 Semen white like the mist
- 3 with penis erect
 the kangaroo
 moves its buttocks
- 4 step by step
 (he) walks away from coitus
 her back to them
- 5 the catfish swimming
 & singing
- 6 the bullroarer’s string
- 7 The nipples of the young girl’s breasts protrude—
 & the musk of her vagina—
- 8 creek
 moving
 “creek”
- 9 mist covering
 the river
- 10 cypress branches
 cypress cone
 seeds of the cone

Yirrkalla (Arnhem Land, Australia)

From *The Goulburn Island Cycle*

SONG 11

They saw the young girls twisting their strings, Goulburn Island men
and men from the Woolen River:
Young girls of the western clans, twisting their breast girdles among the
cabbage palm foliage . . .
Stealthily creeping, the men grasp the cabbage tree leaves to search for
their sweethearts.

Stealthily moving, they bend down to hide with their lovers among the
foliage . . .
With penis erect, those Goulburn Island men, from the young girls'
swaying buttocks . . .
They are always there, at the wide expanse of water . . .
Always there, at the billabong edged with bamboo.
Feeling the urge for play, as they saw the young girls of the western clans,
Saw the young girls hiding themselves, twisting the strings . . .
Girls twisting their breast girdles, making string figures: and men with
erect penes,
Goulburn Island men, as the young girls sway their buttocks.

SONG 12

They seize the young girls of the western tribes, with their swaying
buttocks—those Goulburn Island men . . .
Young girls squealing in pain, from the long penis . . .
Girls of the western clans, desiring pleasure, pushed onto their backs
among the cabbage palm foliage . . .
Lying down, copulating—always there, moving their buttocks . . .
Men of Goulburn Islands, with long penes . . .
Seizing the beautiful young girls, of the western tribes . . .
They are always there at that billabong edged with bamboo . . .
Hear the sound of their buttocks, the men from Goulburn Islands
moving their penes . . .
For these are beautiful girls, of the western tribes . . .
And the penis becomes erect, as their buttocks move . . .
They are always there at the place of Standing Clouds, of the rising
western clouds,
Pushed onto their backs, lying down among the cabbage palm foliage . . .

SONG 13

Ejaculating into their vaginas—young girls of the western tribes.
Ejaculating semen, into the young Burara girls . . .
Those Goulburn Island men, with their long penes;
Semen flowing from them into the young girls . . .
For they are always there, moving their buttocks.
They are always there, at the wide expanse of water . . .
Ejaculating, among the cabbage palm foliage:
They cry out, those young girls of the Nagara tribe . . .

He ejaculates semen for her, among the cabbage palm foliage . . .
 Ejaculating for the young girls of the western clans . . .
 From the long penes of men from Goulburn Islands . . .
 They are always there at the open expanse of water, at the sea-eagle nest
 . . .
 Ejaculating semen, for the young girls . . .
 Into the young girls of the western tribes . . .
 For they are ours—it is for this that they make string figures . . . [the
 men say]
 Thus we ejaculate for her—into the young girl’s vagina.
 Semen, among the cabbage palm foliage . . .
 Thus we push her over, among the foliage;
 We ejaculate semen into their vaginas—young girls of the western tribes
 . . .
 Ejaculating semen, into the young Burara girls . . .
 For they move their buttocks, those people from Goulburn Islands.

SONG 14

Blood is running down from the men’s penes, men from Goulburn
 Islands . . .
 Blood running down from the young girls, like blood from a speared
 kangaroo . . .
 Running down among the cabbage palm foliage . . .
 Blood that is sacred, running down from the young girl’s uterus:
 Flowing like water, from the young girls of the western tribes . . .
 Blood running down, for the Goulburn Island men had seen their
 swaying buttocks . . .
 Sacred blood running down . . .
 Like blood from a speared kangaroo; sacred blood flows from the
 uterus . . .
 They are always there, at the wide expanse of water, the sea-eagle nests . . .
 They are sacred, those young girls of the western tribes, with their
 menstrual flow . . .
 They are always there, moving their buttocks, those Goulburn Island
 people . . .
 Sacred, with flowing blood—young girls of the western clans . . .
 They are always there, sitting within their huts like sea-eagle nests, with
 blood flowing . . .
 Flowing down from the sacred uterus of the young girl . . .
 Sacred young girls from the western tribes, clans from the Woolen River:

Blood, flowing like water . . .
Always there, that blood, in the cabbage palm foliage . . .
Sacred blood flowing in all directions . . .
Like blood from a speared kangaroo, from the sacred uterus . . .

SONG 15

They talked together, we heard them speaking the western language:
Heard their words—men from the western clans, and from Goulburn
Islands.
They are always there, in the huts like sea-eagle nests: young girls
leaning against the walls . . .
We heard the speech of the western clans, clans from the Woolen River
. . .
Heard them speaking, girls and men of the western tribes . . .
Flinging their words into the cabbage palm foliage . . .
They are always talking there, at the billabong edged with bamboo:
their words drift over the water . . .
There at the Sea-Eagle place, we heard them speaking the western
language . . .
Heard their words at the Sea-Eagle place—clans from the Woolen River
. . .
Talking there, Goulburn Island men of the long penes . . .
They are always there, at the wide expanse of water . . .
We heard their words, men from the western tribes, and clans from the
Woolen River . . .

SONG 16

Get the spears, for we feel like playing!
They are always there, at the billabong edged with bamboo . . .
They fling them one by one as they play, the bamboo-shafted spears . . .
Twirling the shaft, pretending to throw, then flinging them back and
forth . . .
The wind catches the spear, and blows it point upwards into the
cabbage palm . . .
Thin shaft twisting up like a snake, as they fling it in play . . .
Spears travelling to different places, and different tribes . . .
We saw the spear-throwers' chests and buttocks swinging—those
Goulburn Island people . . .
They are always there, at the billabong edged with bamboo . . .

They feel like playing, and flinging spears—Goulburn Island men, clans
from the Woolen River:
Twirling the shaft, pretending to throw: the point twists up like a snake
...
They feel like play, leaning back on the forked sticks within the
huts . . .

SONG 17

The pheasant cries out from the door of its nest . . .
Crying out from the door, at the sound of the coming rain . . .
Rain and wind from the west, spreading over the country . . .
It cries out, perched on the top rails of the huts.
It is always there, at the wide expanse of water, listening for the rising
wind and rain:
Wind and rain from the west, as the pheasant cries out . . .
The pheasant, within its wet-season hut—for it has heard the coming
rain . . .
Darkness, and heavy rain falling . . .
It is for me! [says the pheasant] My cry summons the wind and
rain . . .
Noise of the rain, and of thunder rolling along the bottom of the clouds
...
The pheasant cries out from its nest, from the door of its hut . . .
It is always there, at the billabong edged with bamboo.

SONG 18

They take the fighting clubs, standing them upright . . .
We saw their chests, men of the western clans, of the rising clouds.
Carefully they stand them up in the ground, these groups of clubs . . .
Carefully, assembling them in rows, like a line of clouds in the west.
They are always there, at the wide expanse of water . . .
We saw their chests, men of the west, invoking the rising clouds . . .
Assembling the fighting clubs, like lines of clouds . . .
At the place of Standing Clouds, of the Rising Western Clouds,
spreading all over the country.
They drift over the huts, the sea-eagle nests, at the billabong edged with
bamboo:
Carefully they assemble the clubs in rows, like a line of clouds in the
west . . .

From within these rows of clubs, from the lines of clouds, comes the
western rain . . .
Thus we assemble the fighting clubs in rows, like lines of clouds . . .

SONG 19

From those fighting clubs, assembled in rows, come the western clouds
. . .
Dark rain clouds and wind, rising up in the west . . .
They make them for us, clouds from within the rows of fighting clubs
. . .
Clouds that spread all over the sky, drifting across . . .
Above Milingimbi, above the Island of Clouds . . .
Rising all over the country—at Goulburn Islands, and at the Sea-Eagle
place,
Clouds building up, spreading across the country—at the place of the
Rising Clouds, the place of Standing Clouds,
They spread all over the sky, clouds that they make in the camp at the
billabong edged with bamboo . . .
At the open expanse of water—large rain clouds rising . . .
Dark rain clouds and wind, rising up in the west . . .
They come rising up, for thus we assemble the clubs,
Groups of fighting clubs, assembled in rows.

SONG 20

Thunder rolls along the bottom of the clouds, at the wide expanse of
water . . .
Thunder shaking the clouds, and the Lightning Snake flashing through
them . . .
Large Snake, at the billabong edged with bamboo—its belly, its skin
and its back!
Thunder and lightning over the camps, at the wide expanse of water . . .
Sound of thunder drifting to the place of the Wawalag Sisters, to the
place of the Boomerang . . .
I make the thunder and lightning, pushing the clouds, at the billabong
edged with bamboo [says the Lightning Snake] . . .
I make the crash of the thunder—I spit, and the lightning flashes!
Sound of thunder and storm—loud ‘stranger’ noise, coming from
somewhere . . .

Coming to Caledon Bay, the storm from the west . . .
Thunder and rain spread across to Caledon Bay . . .
I make the thunder and lightning, at the billabong edged with bamboo!
[says the Lightning Snake]

SONG 21

The tongues of the Lightning Snake flicker and twist, one to the other
. . .
They flash among the foliage of the cabbage palms . . .
Lightning flashes through the clouds, with the flickering tongues of the
Snake . . .
It is always there, at the wide expanse of water, at the place of the
Sacred Tree . . .
Flashing above those people of the western clans . . .
All over the sky their tongues flicker: above the place of the Rising
Clouds, the place of Standing Clouds . . .
All over the sky, tongues flickering and twisting . . .
They are always there, at the camp by the wide expanse of water . . .
All over the sky their tongues flicker: at the place of the Two Sisters, the
place of the Wawalag . . .
Lightning flashes through the clouds, flash of the Lightning Snake . . .
Its blinding flash lights up the cabbage palm foliage . . .
Gleams on the cabbage palms, and on the shining semen among the
leaves . . .

Gumatj (Arnhem Land, Australia)

From *The Kumulipo: Night Births*

by **KEAULUMOKU**

o

At the time when the earth became hot
At the time when the heavens turned about
At the time when the sun was darkened
To cause the moon to shine
The time of the rise of the Pleiades
The slime, this was the source of the earth

The source of the darkness that made darkness
The source of the night that made night
The intense darkness, the deep darkness
Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night
 Nothing but night

I

The train of walruses passing by
Milling about in the depths of the sea
The long lines of opule fish
The sea is thick with them
Crabs and hardshelled creatures
They go swallowing on the way
Rising and diving under swiftly and silently
Pimoe lurks behind the horizon
On the long waves, the crested waves
Innumerable the coral ridges
Low, heaped-up, jagged
The little ones seek the dark places
Very dark is the ocean and obscure
A sea of coral like the green heights of Paliuli
The land disappears into them
Covered by the darkness of night
 Still it is night

2

With a dancing motion they go creeping and crawling
The tail swinging its length
Sullenly, sullenly
They go poking about the dunghill
Filth is their food, they devour it
Eat and rest, eat and belch it up
Eating like common people
Distressful is their eating
They move about and become heated
Act as if exhausted
They stagger as they go
Go in the land of crawlers
The family of crawlers born in the night
 Still it is night

3

The parent rats dwell in holes
The little rats huddle together
Those who mark the seasons
Little tolls from the land
Little tolls from the water courses
Trace of the nibblings of these brown-coated ones
With whiskers upstanding
They hide here and there
A rat in the upland, a rat by the sea
A rat running beside the wave
Born to the two, child of the Night-falling-away
Born to the two, child of the Night-creeping-away
The little child creeps as it moves
The little child moves with a spring
Pilfering at the rind
Rind of the 'ohi'a fruit, not a fruit of the upland
A tiny child born as the darkness falls away
A springing child born as the darkness creeps away
Child of the dark and child in the night now here
Still it is night

4

Fear falls upon me on the mountain top
Fear of the passing night
Fear of the night approaching
Fear of the pregnant night
Fear of the breach of the law
Dread of the place of offering and the narrow trail
Dread of the food and the waste part remaining
Dread of the receding night
Awe of the night approaching
Awe of the dog child of the Night-creeping-away
A dog child of the Night-creeping-hither
A dark red dog, a brindled dog
A hairless dog of the hairless ones
A dog as an offering for the oven
Palatable is the sacrifice for supplication
Pitiful in the cold without covering
Pitiful in the heat without a garment
He goes naked on the way to Malama

Where the night ends for the children of night
From the growth and the parching
From the cutting off and the quiet
The driving Hula wind his companion
Younger brother of the naked ones, the 'Olohe
Out from the slime come rootlets
Out from the slime comes young growth
Out from the slime come branching leaves
Out from the slime comes outgrowth
Born in the time when men came from afar
Still it is night

Hawai'ian (Polynesia)

The Woman Who Married a Caterpillar

Kumuhea the night-caterpillar loves the woman
with his daylight man-body takes her for wife, handsome
man huge caterpillar, at night
gorges on sweet-potato leaves
Kumuhea huge night-caterpillar
bloated back home mornings
soft Kumuhea flabby Kumuhea, through
him shiftless the wife starves
Where does he go nights, her father says, Where
does he go nights, says the hemp string
his wife fastens to track him where he goes nights;
after him through brush on his crawl
the long string snarls, the night-
caterpillar is strong with anger, tears
into leaves all around
 all people cry Kane help us
 night-caterpillar kills our food, do him in
 in his hill-cave home, he
 kills our food
merciful Kane slices him to bits
we now call cut-worm cut-worm cut-worm

Hawai'ian (Polynesia)

The Body-Song of Kio

by **RUEA-A-RAKA**

Then Kio again spoke to Oatea, saying:

Take hold of my flattened-crown

" " " " wrinkled-brow
" " " " observing-eye
" " " " obstructed-nose
" " " " conversing-mouth
" " " " chattering-lips
" " " " flower-decked-ears
" " " " distorted-chin
" " " " descending-saliva
" " " " crooked-neck
" " " " broad-chest
" " " " contracted-hands
" " " " grasping-fingers
" " " " pinching-nails
" " " " flexed-side
" " " " bulging-ribs
" " " " inset-navel
" " " " princely-belly
" " " " small-of-the-back
" " " " swollen-penis
" " " " tightly-drawn-testicles
" " " " evacuating-rectum
" " " " twisted-knee
" " " " splay-foot
" " " " given-over-body

Tuamotu (Polynesia)

Funeral Eva

by **KORONEU**

(Solo) Oh, Priest Pangeivi, you let go
my son, the canoe of his life
is dashed and sunk.

(Chorus) O Tane, you could have saved him,
made him return, a
sapling among our aging forest.
But he died, woman-like, wet
on his pillow, far from the
crash of spears and adzes. You could have
done better than god Turanga, a bag
of lies not worth our prayers.

Your belly full, you can't be bothered.
Let shitballs be thrown at you,
Let you be smeared all over,
Let piss and shit dribble down your
fat cheeks, you bum god. Any man
can do better.

(Solo) Fart, O Tiki, let your wind go.
Fart on this phony god not worth
our curses.

(Chorus) Fart, fart, fart.
Swallow the wind, O Pangeivi.
Having eaten my son, you
shall eat our feces.

Mangaian (Polynesia)

Toto Vaca

I

Ka tangi te kivi

kivi

Ka tangi te moho

moho

Ka tangi te tike

Kiwi cries the bird

Kiwi

Moho cries the bird

Moho

Tieke cries the bird

ka tangi te tike
tike
he poko anahe
to tikoko tikoko
haere i te hara
tikoko
ko te taoura te rangi
kaouaea
me kave kivhea
kaouaea
a-ki te take
take no tou
e haou
to ia
haou riri
to ia
to ia
to ia ake te take
take no tou

Tieke
only a belly
rises into the air rises into the air
continue your road
rises into the air
here's the second year
Kauaea
here is the catcher of men
Kauaea
make room and drag him
Kauaea
drag where
Kauaea
Ah the root
the root of Tou
Heh the wind
drag further
raging wind
drag further the root
the root of the Tou

2

ko ia rimou ha ere
kaouaea
totara ha ere
kaouaea
poukatea ha ere
kaouaea
homa i te tou
kaouaea
khia vhitikia

So push, Rimo
Kauaea
go on Totara
Kauaea
go on Pukatea
Kauaea
give me the Tou
Kauaea
give me the Maro

kaouaea
takou takapou
kaouaea
hihi e
haha e
pipi e
tata e
a pitia
ha
ko te here

Kauaea
stretch stretch (the hauling rope)
Kauaea
my belly
Kauaea
kihi, e
haha, e
pipi, e
tata, e
apitia

ha	HA;
ko te timata	
e—ko te tiko pohue	together
e—ko te aitanga a mata	ha
e—te aitanga ate	me the rope
hoe-manuko	ha
	me the rope
	me the spear
	me the silex-child
	me the child of the Manuka-oar

3	
ko aou ko aou	I am I am
hitaoue	a long procession
make ho te hanga	dead is the thing
hitaoue	a long procession
tourouki tourouki	goes on gliding goes on gliding
paneke paneke	to sink you to sink you
oioi te toki	brandish the axe
kaouaea	Kauaea
takitakina	
ia	
he tikaokao	only a rooster
he taraho	only a Taraho bird
he pararera	only a duck
ke ke ke ke	ke ke ke ke
he pararera	only a duck
ke ke ke ke	ke ke ke ke

Maori (Polynesia)

The Lovers I

by **TOMOKI**

The woman went searching inland, for what?
 May the hermit crab enter
 Only this: I was up at the north here,
 Spread my knees until the thing was very thick.
 Floated to you at the edge of the pool, landed.

Not yet soft. I
look along her belly.
She lies flat.

(She says) Why're you
lying down
Stand
up, the rain
is coming seaward of
Hukuniu Island.
The island is buried, the rain
moves eastward
see what its nature is.

(He says) It will pass us, it blocks
to the east of us.

(She says) Lie
on your bed, come
back
to the swollen thing—
crawl here!

Kapingamarangi (Polynesia)

Flight of the Chiefs: Song V

by **DAUBITU VELEMA**

*I was sweating: then I hurdled the threshold,
Then I came outside; then I circled about.
I broke off the dangling uci shrub
And I inserted it above my ear.*

When the dangling *uci* shrub is bruised,
It quivers like the tail feathers of the cock.
And now Lady Song-of-Tonga speaks:

“Why is the dangling *uci* broken?”

And now The-Eldest answers:

“Leaves for garlands have no worth as food;
I am using it just as an ornament.”

I descended down to the shore.

*I leapt into the bow of my canoe;
Its timbers were felled at The-Task-Is-Complete;
The artist, Flaming-Moon, felled them;
Its name was The-Turmeric-of-the-Mother-and-Child.
And shells concealed the tying of its sennit.
The walls of the chief's house were hung with barkcloth.
And a large dentalium adorned the chief's house.
And there were four figureheads together.
And Lady Song-of-Tonga is weaving her fishnet.
And Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep crawls to her.
And she grasped the weaving hook from my hand.
I struck her with the handle of the net.
And the child is smothered black from weeping.
And now The-Eldest speaks:*

*“Lady Song-of-Tonga, what evil have you done?
You strike a helpless creature.”*

*And I grasped the forearm of the child.
Then I slung her to my back and carried her.
And now The-Eldest speaks:*

*“O my child, for what blossom are you weeping?
Are you crying for the red leba?
Look there at the ripe ones on the branch.”*

*I grasped the handle of my ray-spined spear.
Reaching upward I tapped a fruit in the cluster.
It fell and I halved it straightway.
And the red leba speaks in his hand:*

“Why am I broken in half?”

And now The-Eldest answers:

“You are halved to no purpose.”

*Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep is weeping.
She sees, and now her thoughts are soothed.
Then I threaded the leba on a girdle cord.
And dangled it there before her.
And now the child is angry and refuses to look.
And she leaps down and scratches the earth;
And she scoops up a handful and casts it on her back.
And I grasped the forearm of the child.
And I slung her to my back and carried her.*

“O my child, for what blossom are you weeping?”

*And The-Eldest is looking about.
And my glance fell upon Clapping-Out-of-Time;*

I saw him; then I shouted calling.
And now Clapping-Out-of-Time speaks:
 “The-Eldest, why am I called?”
And now The-Eldest speaks:
 “You are called for no purpose.
 Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep is weeping.
 Come dance to see if you can please her.”
Leap to the mote on the landward side.
Leap to the mote on the seaward side.
And he twists bending in the dance and stands again.
Saliva drips forth from his mouth.
 “Come, watch, Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep.”
She looks but asks no questions.
And the child is smothered black from weeping.
And I grasped the forearm of the child
And I slung her to my back and carried her.
And Sailing-the-Ocean is sorrowful.
Returning I carried Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep;
Went to enter The-Grass-Strewn-Floor.

iTaukei (Fiji)

Animal Story X

by **WILIAMI NAURA**

Let it be told, *iya, iya, iya*
Vuai na dri, vuai na dra,
Source of the blossoms of the Malay apple.
Crane falls; Goose awakes;
Rail knocks,
Knocks at the village of The-Strong,
Cock crows, crows in the village,
Crows there in the branch of the black tree,
The rotten core of the branched taro,
And the eggs of the chicken hatch,
And the hatchlings flap their wings.
And the eggs of the rail hatch,
And the hatchlings kick their feet.

Crane flies down,
Snaps the anus of Parrot.
Defecate what? Defecate brown.
Brown woman is born therefrom.
Who is to place a name upon her?
Woman, *soqiri*; woman, *soqara*.
What ship is approaching there near Kana?
The ship of the Roko, it chugs like a steamer.
It chugs upon me, I recognize one;
It chugs upon me, I recognize two.
A Fireman is Red Rail; always knows the firewoods.
The branch of hibiscus is beating,
And there is a heap of *molau*.
One piece of *basina* is long;
It is bad, the path to River's-Mouth.
Return the song, all you young people.
One piece of *basina* is short;
It is bad, the path to Nakavakea.
Return the song, all you women.
One piece of *basina* is fine, is fine.
Mynah makes merry.
The eyes are blind, missing.
O-*i*! A fine village.

iTaukei (Fiji)

SURVIVALS & REVIVALS



Allegory of the Land

by **INRASARA**

1

Not a few friends have scolded me for wasting time on Cham poetry
is there even a trifling scarcity of readers? Will there be anyone to
remember?

yet I want to squander my entire life on it
 though there may only be around a quarter dozen people
 though there may only be one person
or even if there's not a single living soul.

2

One line of proverb—one verse of folk song
half a child's lullaby—one page of ancient poetry
I search and gather
like a child seeking a tiny pebble
(pebbles that adults carelessly step past)
to build a castle for only myself to live in
a castle one day they'll use for shelter from the rain—it's certain!

Cham (Vietnam & Cambodia)

Where the Song Begins

by **JUAN GREGORIO REGINO**

*Because they are the papers of the judge
It is the Book of your law
It is the Book of your government
Because I know how to speak with your eagle
Because the judge knows us
Because the world knows us
Because God knows us*

—María Sabina

I

In the light of the candle
in the essence of sweet basil
In the spirit called forth by the incense
my life's book is laid out.

Open is my thought before the judge
The gears of time stop short
So that Limbo may pull back a pace
So that the sun and moon dress up
Because the images take on a face

2

What does the smoke of the incense say as it accompanies
the words that initiate their journey to the heavens.
What is the message of the maize your palms propel
that seeks for truth there in the mystery.
In what place, what path
and on what pretext does the guardian of the earth
possess my spirit.
Today reveal it, master
before my person,
before the eyes of God,
before the witnesses.

3

You who know the sacred
who lead us on the pathway sown with songs.
Open the sky to me, show me the world,
start me on the path to wisdom.
Let me drink from the children who spring forth,
teach me to speak and read the language of the Wise Ones,
flood me with the power of the Gods,
inscribe my name there in the Sacred Place.
I am clean, my wings are free.
Dew will cause new words to sprout,
rain will nourish wisdom.
I am the star that shines beneath the stone,
sea that dances in the blue of sky,
light that travels in raw weather.
I am sun's vein, I am song.
I am dance and chant that heals.

4

The spirit of evil lies in wait,
the song begins.

May the words arise that open up the heavens,
the prayers that cut across the profane world.
So may the candles of white light be lit
and drip envenomed blood.

It is a mortal struggle in the Sacred Place,
it is the ransom for my spirit.
For my life these fresh leaves will go forth,
these knowing words,
these colored feathers,
these songs for this initiation.

5

Here my basil is at daybreak,
clean like the horizon:
my medicine is fresh,
my medicine is white.

In its leaves the gentle word
that opens up the heavens:
the word that gives us peace,
the word that gives us breath.

My basil will arrive where sins are purged
will fly off clean to where dawn grows bright.
My pleas will reach into the book of records,
will free my soul from poisons that can kill me.

6

My incense will reach the place
where it communes with life.
It will reach the house of those
who are the guardians of the earth.
It will be heard out in the place of images,
will plead its case there in the bosom of the night.

However many mouths they have,
however many tongues they may possess,
those who have knowledge of the heavens,
those conversing with the codices
and speaking with the Gods.

7

Here is my spirit,
my oak, my cedar.
Here in my heart the prayer is born
is with it in its journey to the heavens.

From the house of purity,
the table of the dawn.
I am asking for strength.
I am seeking justice.

The sacred book will open,
the darkness will grow bright.
In the house of writings.
In the house of the stelae.

8

Down to the soles of my feet.
Down to the palms of my hands.
At the apex of my thought.
At the core of my extremities.

My spirit has feet,
my soul has hands,
my veins leave tracks,
pulses of time and the way.

I can talk with the dawn,
can submerge myself in turbid waters of torrential rivers,
barefoot can walk up the incline,
can hurl my song against the wind.

9

I arrive with God the Father, God the Mother,
I have crossed seven winds,
seven levels of the heavens.
I have defied seven faces of the World Below.

Because I have eyes for looking at the night,
light enough to plumb the mystery.
Because I am a messenger who guarantees his word,
a singer who can track the soul.

In the house of purity
I come to put my calling to the test,
come to awaken secrets.
I come to seek the word,
the fresh and clean path.

I am a bird that prophesies the sacred,
morning star that opens the horizon,
cicada that whispers to the moon,
mist that cures the mountain.

10

Here the fiesta ends,
the road is closed, the song is over.
Lucidity is lingering in the copal,
kernels of corn close up their pages,
standing guard over the journey's secrets.

A mystery is disappearing,
new ways emerging, ways to fathom life.
The birds trace paths, the earth is fasting.
The moon confides her troubles to the sun
and dawn shakes loose on the horizon.

Here the fiesta ends,
the song rests in the morning's arms.
The children who spring forth open the world's heart,
nature is sending signals.

Mazatec (Mexico)

Two for the God Aia

by **ALLAN NATACHEE**

I

The Cycle of A'Alsa

Water all over
all all over
darkness all over
all all over
Aia sitting seated
Aia living alive

Aia sitting seated
sitting forever
Aia living alive
living forever
Aia without beginning
Aia without end

Aia above the water
Aia has lived
Aia has watched
above the darkness
Aia has lived
Aia has watched

Aia creator of our earth
Aia creator of our home
Creator of earth
creator creating
creator of home
creator creating

2

Aia walks on the road
Aia all naked
He walks on the road

Aia my hand is faultless
Aia all naked
My hand is faultless!

Aia you shake your spear!
Aia all naked
you shake your spear!

Aia in war decoration
Aia all naked
Aia in war decoration

Mekeo (Papua New Guinea)

From *The Age of Wild Ghosts*

I

Long ago the living could see the dead and the dead could see the living. Living and dead both attended the market: on one side of the street the dead sold their things; on this side the living sold theirs; and the dead took the same form as the living. At that time they used copper money, not paper. The dead used paper to stamp out coins that looked just like the copper coins of the living, and with this money they bought things from the living. But the living were not to be trifled with. They put the coins in a pan of water: the real coins made of copper sank, and the paper coins made by the dead floated. They returned the false money to the dead, and gradually the dead could no longer buy them from the living; they could buy only from other dead. If your father died, you could go to the market the next day and see him. But it was not permitted for living and dead to speak to each other. The dead were punished if they spoke to the living—their officials taxed and fined them—and the living were afraid to speak to the dead. So living and dead could only look at each other. Then, as now, the dead sometimes harmed [bit] the living, but the living could beat the dead in return, so the dead had no power over them. Disgusted with this situation, the dead petitioned for a bamboo sieve to be set up between them and the living. The living could see the dead only vaguely, but the dead [being closer to the sieve's holes] could see the living clearly. The living did not like this, for the sieve was too thick to beat the dead through. The living were stupid: some say they asked for a paper screen to be placed on their side of the street; they could beat the dead through the paper, but they could not see them at all.

2

ghosts of ridges attack
ghosts of gullies attack

descend from the sky
arise from the earth

pain floods her head
her torso and her feet

of an entire family harmed
the harm centers on her bed

of thirty of their men
thirty of their women

of all in this house
You beat *her* head with clubs
shoot *her* breast with crossbows

she can't sleep a wink
can't sit a moment

can't stretch her legs
can't lift her hands

her food won't digest
her drink won't stay down
her bones have no marrow

pain pierces her pupils
invades even her pupils
pain pierces her bone marrow
invades even her marrow

3

some die bearing sons or daughters
some die with blood-dyed clothing
some die with blood-soaked groins
some die crushed by trees or stones
some die of hunger or thirst
some swell and explode
some hang and explode
some are stabbed or slashed
some trip and crush their heads
some die of loud shouts or big words

some are roasted by fire
some are swept away by floods
tile-roofed houses burn
thatched-roof huts burn
at work on the road
they step on mating snakes
at work on the mountain
crushed by falling trees
some have intestines ruptured by poison

4
go over there to Beijing
your ghost kings live there
every day they hold meetings in Beijing
Lin Biao died in a plane crash
Jiang Qing hanged herself
your ghost king Lin Biao, go follow Lin Biao
your king is over there
I shall lead you to Beijing
go to where your ghost friends live
go to where your ghost companions live
if the road returns don't you return
if the road strays don't you stray

Lolop'o [Yi] (China)

Three Incantations

I
In the womb of my mother
I learned the spells.
In the womb of my mother
I heard them.

I took the basket,
I received the bottle,
I was given the incense,
I was shown the Book.

From the womb of my mother
I dreamed the incantations.

—Pasakwala Kómes

2

The Drunken Woman's Song

Saint Mother,
Godmother, I am drunk.

I caught the drops that fall from your roof.
I drank your shadow.

Now I am getting drunk.
Anyway, my Saint Mother,
anyway, my Godmother,

look after me
so I won't trip over something.

I am drunk; I have drunk,
my Saint Mother, my Godmother,
Saint Maruch, *Niña* Maruch.

I want all your pretty ones to overwhelm me.
I want to sing,

Virgin Maruch,
Niña Maruch.

I am a drinker of drink.
I drank your wine.

It has gone to my head.
My heart is spinning

I know how to drink.
I know how to drink everything.

—Maruch Méndes Péres

I Am a Woman My Woman

I am a woman, my woman.

I am a girl, my girl.

I am woman, the woman.

I am girl, the girl.

I know how to work.

My feet work.

My hands know.

I am girl, my girl.

I am woman, my woman.

You made me woman.

You gave me woman.

Woman of the Flowers.

Mother of the Sky.

Woman of the Roses.

Girl of the Roses.

Flowery Woman of the Roses.

Daughter of the Rose in Bloom.

You gave me woman.

You gave me girl.

You took a girl out of me.

You took a woman out of me.

Woman of the Silk *Huipil*.

Girl of the Silk *Huipil*.

Woman of the Wool *Huipil*.

Girl of the Wool *Huipil*.

I am a girl, my girl.

I am a woman, my woman.

You gave me my spirit.

You gave me my death.

You put my soul inside.

I am the Woman of the Spider *Huipil*.
I am the Girl of the Spider *Huipil*.

Woman of the Bromelia Flower.
Woman of the *Kilon* Flower.

The Moon is full.
The woman in bloom.

My girl, my girl.
My woman, my woman.

Put into my head,
give me in my heart

your three needles,
your three looms,

your gourds,
the tips of your spindles.

I am a girl, my girl.
I am a woman, my woman

—Loxa Jiménez López

Tzotzil Maya (Mexico)

**From *Twenty-Eight Variations
on Themes from Chuvash and
Udmurt Folk Songs***

by **GENNADY AYGI**

*And transfixed by the song,
I could see what is hidden from mortal men.*
—N. Garin-Mikhailovsky

23/
Between Kazan and the Chuvash lands
have you seen the boundary post?
It isn't a post. I stand there,
turned to wood by misfortune.

24/

And very vividly,
as in a Russian song,
a birch named Alexander
strums its branches.

25/

I look into the water—it is peaceful,
and I think a quiet thought.
I can still see something good,
and death too can be kind.

26/

Suddenly all have returned, all together,
but the shouts and the noise grow frightening,
and I stop the dream with effort,
as they stop a cart in the steppe.

27/

And do the sashes not fall from our waists,
and has life not passed us by? —
I ask, like the cuckoo calling
or a clock striking the hours.

28/

Again the work time—singers and birds
grow thoughtful and fall silent,
some for a time,
and some, perhaps, forever.

Chuvash & Russian

The Moons of Childhood

by AHMATJAN OSMAN

1

Dream

When the moon floated far from childhood
there was a dream that never grew up
Deaf, dumb, blind
it soared upon millions of wings
toward the graveyard of my ancestors
a graveyard whose name I later learned
when older: Earth

2

Mourning

When the moon floated far from childhood
I stole it
and hid it inside my pencil case
The old darkness was awakened
and slipped out to the deaf roads
calling in a mournful voice,
O my grandson
where are you my moon . . . ?

3

Art Dealer

When the moon floated far from childhood
I measured the sun by days
and the days by dreams
I saw the night on the sidewalk
sitting cross-legged
in front of a pile of moons and stars
for sale

4

The Fisherman and the Golden Fish

When the moon floated far from childhood
the night became the starry sea
and the moonlight golden fish

The horizon hunted the fish each morning
and returned them to the sea at dusk

5

Sadness

When the moon floated far from childhood
I cried . . .
Mother wiped my tears away with a laugh
as I told her how the moon
started to drown in the waves of clouds
and so I threw out my arms
to save it from vanishing

6

God's Pupil

When the moon floated far from childhood
I was sitting at the edge of nothingness
Grandfather whispered to my parents
that I was sitting in God's pupil
so it didn't matter if His eyes
were open or closed

7

Night's Presence

When the moon floated far from childhood
it was so tired that it fell asleep
on a cloud
Long before morning
it had a bad dream
and tumbled to the ground
in that moment
the night's presence
woke my heart

8

Escape with the Earth

When the moon floated far from childhood
the rainbow tried so hard
to carry Earth between its arms
and all day I wondered

where was it planning to escape
with the Earth?!

9

Knot

When the moon floated far from childhood
the sun had barely risen
and sea said to land,
“What if, my friend, we tied a knot
between the colorblind moon
and the forgetful sun?”

10

Metaphysical Questions

When the moon floated far from childhood
the wind rested on the roof
beside me, whispering:
Where did it begin?
Where will it end?
What does it want?

11

Language Practice

When the moon floated far from childhood
I tripped over the night
but the moon still pulled me back
the same way the sun held me up
whenever I stumbled over the day

12

Small Window

When the moon floated far from childhood
through a small window I watched
a dream leave the night behind
It was morning
and I saw my father
returned from the war
lying in a pool of his own blood
Then my small window shattered

13

Waiting

When the moon floated far from childhood
I wanted to pluck the stars from the sky
I stayed up the long night waiting
and the moon never shut its eyes to sleep

14

Moonlit Speech

When the moon floated far from childhood
it vanished—
the stars trembled in the darkness
my heart climbed high into the sky
so that my share of the night
reflected its silver light

Uyghur & Arabic (China)

Two Creole Poems

ZONBI / ZOMBIES

Ever since I was small
I've heard
them say there are zombies
I never saw one

later they explained to me
a zombie's a person they bury
without his being dead
they dig him up and put him to work

I thought about that
and that if he wasn't dead
he sure would be one day

I never heard
that they buried
a zombie who was dead

for a long time
I've walked day and night
all over the land
I never met
a zombie face to face

I never heard
what they do with the corpse
of a dead zombie

—Feliks Moriso-Lewa

LAKANSYÈL / RAINBOW

It's a ribbon tied to the rain's hair
It's a multicolored belt round the waist of a little darling
It's a talisman to chase the evil eye away
It's a lasso round the sun's neck
to make him come back and light up the earth

Rainbow plunges behind mountains
they say it goes to drink
all the way down to the head of the water
Ogun grumbles like bamboo
the siren went off to make love

Two little fish climb up
to watch Queen Simbi dance the *banda*
my hat fell into the sea
when a little breeze blows
all the boats' sails will swell

Rainbow is a bridle in the thunder's mouth
It's the fright pushing back wars
It's a shot of white rum after the cockfights
we can all beat the drums
sing the loas and dance voodoo
It's a sickle to weed out misery
It's a big collective to tear out poverty
to make water run in every garden
so hoes under the sun can throw off lightning
a collective reaching all the way to Guinea
all the way to the other side of the sea
a collective of comrades of every color
to transform the earth
to tame the mean ones
to change our life

—Pòl Larak [Paul Laraque]

Haitian

Worawora Woman

by **PADDY ROE**

Well this man proper man had two woman in camp -
an' he's a strong man that fella well I mean he can feed that two woman -
that's why he's strong you know he, he can get lotta food -
walkin' you know --

well he used to kill goanna --
everything -
bring pleeenty o' meat you know plenty everything tucker for these two
woman --

so one day come -
that old fella paint himself with everything -

he want to find this woman if it's true -
it's true all right he come out in 'im -
so he got this woman too an' he got nether two over there proper
 womans in his camp you know --
all right -
oh this woman feller 'im round he got his, thing too, to carry --
everything what that man kill you know (**Stephen: Yeah**) -
tucker for them two women too -
all right -
oh he got 'nuf dis -
coolamon is full now you know with the tucker goanna everything -
"Oh well that 'nuf" -

 all right he -
 he stop in one, tree -
 they siddown -
 "All right you take this one" -
 he tell that woman -
 "An I'll take this one back to my 'nother two woman in camp" -
 "No" he say --
 "No you not takin' anything back it's all mine" -

(Laughs) he come back -
come back in his two woman --
so that woman disappeared with his tucker an' everything it's gone -
this man go back oh he's too tired now can't get nomore -
everything enough to go back home he's hungry --
he had two woman waiting for im -
see -
only with spear hunting stick tommyhawk in his belt --
"Ooh what wrong?" they tell-im -
"No no got nothing" he say "I been everywhere can't find anything" --
he didn' want to tell, these two woman -

ah -
he's bin doin' this for aaaall the time -
so this man off dis way -
but that woman is there too -
he kill eeverything what he can get he pull everything out of his belt -
that man you know put-im in his little, that thing -
he must carry all them things -
he bin doin' this for ooh ----

(Speaks to Butcher Joe in Nyigina)

smoke -
all right? -
no I means -
he just asked me if -
that smoke all right, eh -
it's not -- **(Stephen: Oh that's all right)** aah **(Stephen: He wants to
move?)** no he's all right too -

aah so one day come -
"Ah well you bin little bit too long comin' back with these things" he
tell-im "No tucker" -
these two woman tell-im --
"You must be got somebody" -
tell-im, you know these two woman say --
"Might be some woman somewhere" -
oh they know too the womans know too -
"Aah yes" he tell-im "Yeah -
that's that woman" -
aah all right "Well we gettin' hungry look at all the kids all gettin'
hungry no tucker -
you only feeding one woman" -
"Yeah tha's right" he say "Tha's true" -

so he went back again he kill everything -
finish all right -
they siddown under the tree now, that -
aall that goanna what dis man got he puttin-im in the same dish again
you know that thing -
this man off one side 'e get that tommyhawk from his belt an' he cut his
neck right off -
finish (Laughs) **(Stephen: Oh)** kill-im, dead -
finish -
'e didn't want to kill-im but 'e had to do it -
other way they all die from hungry too -
the people -
so he kill that woman -

but that's only one -
it's lots more, yet -
(Laughs) you know **(Stephen: Mm)**-
he only done this jus' to try -

this person, you know -
he done this jus' to try -
but we all know too -
there is a woman there -

but we gotta be painted up with the different trees -
you know -
gotta be painted up with different trees -
we bite all the leaves and skin you know off the trees an' we gotta paint -
sit down under that tree then the woman come (*Laughs*) -
I know it's very hard for somebody to believe, you know (**Stephen : Mm**)
It, it's dere -
it's there -
(**Stephen : Aw, sounds all right**) -
(Laughs) yeah -
yeah -
Oh some, lotta people done these things too, you know -
lotta people done paint themselves

Nyigina (Australia)

They Went to the Moon Mother

A Song for Two Astronauts

ho-ho-ho he-he-he
ho-ho-ho he-he-he

“Rejoice holy bundles, sacred bundles!
By means of your wise thoughts
there in the east your Moon Mother spoke,
gave her word
when we went up there with the dragonfly,
entered upon her road.
Rejoice! You will be granted many blessings
flowing silt.”
The Two Stars are saying this to all the sacred bundles
here now mmmmmm.
The Lying Star says this to all the sacred bundles
here now mmmmmm.

Maskers, rainmakers soaking the earth with rain
making lightning, thundering, coming, coming
stretching, stretching, stretching

hey-o hey-e neya, hey-o hey-e neya
awiyo-o heyena, awiyo-o heyeney
awiyo-o heye, awiyo-o
hahaha iihi hiya hiya
ha haha iihihi hiya hiya
hapiime, hapiime

By the Moon Mother's word
from the Middle Place all the way to Dawn Lake
your paths will be complete.
You will reach old age.

I the masker say this to you the people
here now mmmmmm.

Zuni

How Kora Was Born

by **PAPA SUSSO**

This story begins long long long long ago
So long ago that it was a place not a time
There was a man
He was so alone
The only person he could talk to was Africa
Luckily there was a tree nearby
Even more luckily behind that tree
That's where his partner was hiding
All the sun and all the water were condensed
Into a single tiny block
Which the man planted in the sandy soil
He blew and he blew on that spot
Each time he blew he thought he heard something
What he was hearing was of course his partner singing
The man didn't even know what singing was
Because he could only talk
He couldn't sing yet

So he blew and he listened, blew listened blew listened
And the plant pushed out dark green
And began to twist and grow
A vine reaching for the breath
And stretching towards the song
(Because it was made from sun and rain, remember?)
So at the end of the vine that was the calabash
And the tree it was not a tree anymore
It was the neck and handles
That was when the man's partner Saba Kidane
Came out into the open (but that's another story)
And the breath and the singing and the vine?
Well, there are 21 strings, what do you think?
And now you say what about the bridge and the cowhide
And the rings that tie the strings to the neck
So you can tune the kora
Hey, what about the thumbtacks that hold
The cowhide taut over the calabash
And the resonator hole
Well you go right on talking about all that
I'm playing kora now
Next time I'll tell you about the cow

Mandinka (Gambia)

The Prayer of the Bear

by **LEONTY TARAGUPTA**

O Father of the Seven Skies—
I too have been a God-spirit,
descendant of the bright ancestor,
descendant of the all-hearing ancestor,
though set upon the firmament
of the Earth!
But the Son of the Master of Towns—
is he your Father's heir?
the son of the Master of the Hamlets—
is he your Mother's heir?

O Father of the Seven Skies!
Please send down
ten mighty animals
from the abundant celestial pastures!

And ten mighty animals
did descend.
I hear the Son of the Master of Towns
went into the woods.
Like the crack of the briar nut
on strong teeth
he slew the celestial messengers.
Like the crack of the cherry nut
on strong teeth
he slew the celestial messengers.
And into his sable nest
onto his downy seat
he fell like a broad-shouldered pine.

I too have been a God-spirit.
O Mother, hear me!
O Father, hear me!
Please send down
twenty mighty animals from
the abundant celestial pastures.

As soon as
twenty mighty animals
were set upon the firmament
of the Earth
the piercing cries
of the forest giants
rose again
in the woods near the house.
But they died out again
with a crack of the cherry nut
on the strong teeth
of the Son of the Towns.
They died out again
with a crack of the briar nut
on the strong teeth
of the Son of the Hamlets.

I hear
he fell again
into his sable nest
onto his downy seat
like a broad-shouldered pine tree.

O Father of the Seven Skies,
my forefather, hear me!
O Mother of the Seven Skies,
my foremother, hear me!
The Son of the Master of Towns—
is he your Father's heir?
The Son of the Master of Hamlets—
is he your Mother's heir?
Please send down
the leader of the hundred animals,
my mother the White-Neck!

In the woods by the house
the piercing cries
of the forest giants
rise again.
The Son of the Master of Towns
goes into the woods.
The crack of the cherry nut
on strong teeth
is all I hear.
The crack of the briar nut
on strong teeth
is all I hear.
Yet by the White-necked Deer
by my White-Necked Mother
by the eight-layered bow
he is brought to the ground.

O Son of the Master of Towns,
O Son of the Master of Hamlets,
you have slaughtered
my offspring,
the mighty animals,
with the crack of a briar nut
on strong teeth—

with the crack of a cherry nut
on strong teeth.
But the sacred clan-mother,
the great White-Neck
you cannot destroy!

Now,
since you have overthrown
at daybreak
that poor son of mine
sent from the skies,
you shall spread the
sacred happy news of him
to the towns and the hamlets,
including your own sinful town.
You shall raise
a sacred house
higher than the highest
beautiful houses.
You shall make
a broad flooring of three planks
in the western corner.
You shall encircle
this bright home
with sacred smoke.
You shall humbly rest
the head of the good son
on that fresh flooring
with a bowl of hot food behind.
Only when this is done
at the man-dance
may the children of the three tribes
come together.
Only when this is done
may you hear
the five songs of the taiga
from five open-hearted sons.
And only after this
may you call for the
hump-backed
merry pranksters.

And in the future
when the lovely woman-faced happy world
shall come to pass,
when the hunting tracks
of the blood-children
shall blaze without fear—
children of the eternal tree,
dwellers of the Lower World,
children of the severed navel cord—
you shall remember
my testament.

Khanty (Siberia)

The Scream of the Stones: Two Poems

by **MARCELA DELPASTRE**

I/THE STONE

I don't know if they bleed, the stones. Or if they scream, if they howl under the wheel & the mace, or if the knife's blade wounds them, deep in their flesh, slicing through them.

I know that the loam that sometimes runs from them, no matter how red, is not blood.

And I'll say nothing of their tenderness, from stone to stone, from water to air.

But what I know is that our blood comes from the stone. And our flesh comes from nowhere else, come from stone we are stone, we are dust and wind's smoke.

That our blood is blood of the stone, and our heat is of the sun, and our wail the howl of the stone, through which our soul passes full-bodied, that we are the soul of the stone—but tell me, the stone, who is the stone—where does she come from?

2/THE SCREAM OF THE STONES

When the stones start to howl, to howl like a sick dog,
like a child lost in the night,
like the dogs at the moon,
like a woman in her pains,
have you heard them, the stones?

When the stones howl under the hammer and under the mace,
when the stones wail under the steel's edge,
have you heard them lament?

—Have you heard them sing?

When you hear it blow, the wind that goes & whips the stone,
& that passes its hands through its hair, its fingers over the stone's soft
cheek,
listen to it sing . . .

Listen to it sleep, the stone. For so much time inside the blackness of
time and of the stone.

Listen to it breathe.

So bravely, such a long and deep breath that never ends, you'll listen to
its respiration . . .

One on top of the other, one behind the other, one against the other,
sand above, sand below, the earth is deep and the stones sleep inside
of it.

Don't you hear them sleep?

Occitan (France)

The North Wind Whips

by **VICTOR TERÁN**

The north wind whips through,
in the streets papers and leaves
are chased with resentment.

Houses moan,
dogs curl into balls.

There is something in the afternoon's finger,

a catfish spine,
a rusty nail.

Someone unthinkingly
smoked cigarettes in heaven,
left it overcast, listless.
Here, at ground level, no one could
take their shadow for a walk,
sheltered in their houses, people
are surprised to discover their misery.

Someone didn't show,
their host was insulted.
Today the world
agreed to open her thighs,
suddenly the village comprehends
that it is sometimes necessary to close their doors.

Who can divine
why I meditate on this afternoon?
Why is it birthed in me
to knife the heart
of who uncovered the mouth
of the now whipping wind,
to jam corncobs in the nose
of the ghost that pants outside?

The trees roar with laughter,
they split their sides,
they celebrate
that you haven't arrived at your appointment.

Now bring me
the birds
that you find in the trees,
so I can tell them
if the devil's eyelashes are curled.

Isthmus Zapotec (Mexico)

What Indians?

by **SIMON ORTIZ**

The Truth Is: “No kidding?” “No.” “Come on! That can’t be true!” “No kidding.”

“What Indians?” is my too-often unspoken response to people who ask “When do the Indians dance?” Like other colonized Indigenous peoples, cultures, and communities throughout the world, Native Americans have experienced and endured identities imposed on them by colonial powers, most of which originated in Europe. This imposition has resulted to a great extent—more than we admit and realize—in the loss of a sense of a centered human self and the weakening and loss of Indigenous cultural identity.

STRANGE

April 9, 1999, 9:15 A.M.
Snow in soft wet knots
falling,
coming down
through gray trees.

Strange to think of Iowa and Kansas.
And Washington where I’ve never been in winter.
And Portland, Oregon, where I’ve lived
—elms and pines dripping with rain
on Umatilla Street in weather like this—

Sellwood Bridge
over the Willamette River.

Strange . . .

Nebraska, South Dakota, elsewhere . . .

.

NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE

But this is Salt Lake City, Utah.

Yeah, it could be elsewhere. In fact,

it could be Somewhere Else City,
United States of America, Planet Earth,
but this is Salt Lake City
right smack on the western edge
of the center of the world, believe it or not.

Yeah, it's not elsewhere. It's not Somewhere Else City. It is

Salt Lake City
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake City

No where else but.

And, yeah, what a place, what a place.

What a place to think of Indians.

“Where are the Indians?”

“What Indians?”

“You know, Indians.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

.

GREATEST BELIEVERS GREATEST DISBELIEVERS

To believe or not to believe,

this was the question.

And THE ANSWER.

Asked and answered and believed
by the greatest believers
and disbelievers the world has ever known.

Where are the Indians?

Where are the real Indians?

There are no Indians.
There are no real Indians.

There were never any Indians.

There were never any Indians.

There were never any real Indians.

You mean . . . you mean, there were never any Indians? No real Indians? No Indians?

None.
Never.

.

“INDIANS” WANTED

Real or unreal.
Real and/or unreal.
They were made up.
It didn’t matter.

They were what people in Europe believed.
They were what people in Europe wanted:
to believe.
They were what people in Europe wanted.
To believe.

Indians were what people in Europe wanted to believe. Indians were what people in Europe wanted to believe. Indians were what people in Europe wanted to believe.

“Indians” were what people in Europe wanted to believe.

“Indians” were what Europeans wanted. To believe.

“Indians” were what Europeans believed.

“Indians were what Europeans believed.”

Believe it or not.
Believe it or not.
Believe it or not.
Believe it or not!
Believe it or not!

.

BELIEVING THE BELIEF

They believed!
Oh my, yes, they believed!
Soon, very quickly, there were Indians!

If it's one thing Europeans knew how to do, it was to believe!
They still do, you won't believe it even though it's true!

Oh, their belief in the power of belief is powerful!

Their power to believe was beyond belief!

It was overwhelming!

They believed, they believed!

Soon the Americans believed
since they were originally Europeans
and they yearned for "the old country."

Oh my, they believed!

They absolutely believed!

.

EVEN "THE INDIANS" BELIEVED

Indians were made up?

Yeah.

They became what people in Europe believed them to be? Indians?

Indians.

Yeah, Indians.

Soon there were Indians all over the place. But mainly in the New World, especially in America! Indians thrived in the New World. That's where they were seen the most. That's where they "belonged." That's where they were the most Indian!

Soon even "the Indians" believed there were "Indians."

Soon even the "Indians" believed they were Indians.

Nonetheless they were people.

They were hanoh. They were people who were themselves.

They were people who were their own people.

See Indians.

See real Indians.

See real Indians play.

See real Indians work.

But there was nothing to see.
There was nothing.
Because there was nothing there.
Nothing real
or surreal.
To see.

See real Indians.
Where?
Where?

Where.
No where.

.

WHAT WE KNOW

So where were the Indians?
What did Europeans see?
Did they see anything?
What did they see?
Did they see people?
Did they see people like themselves?
What did they see?

What did they see?
What did they see.
What did they see.

“Indians” who are our people

(The People, Human Beings, Hanoh, etc.)

knew themselves as people. Different from each other. Speaking
different and distinct and separate languages. They heard each others’
languages. Their people had different names. They wore different
clothes. They ate different foods. They danced different dances. They
celebrated their differences. Yes, they were different but they were all
the same:

The People, Human Beings, You, Me.

.

ALWAYS JUST LIKE YOU JUST LIKE ME

Meanwhile
and meantime
and always

After and before
and during
and always

always no matter what always and always and even despite the
greatest believers and disbelievers in the world, they/we were people they/
we were/are people we/they are people four times and without number or
need for number we/they are people like you and just like me

Acoma Pueblo

Old Man Beaver's Blessing Song

after **JOHNSON JIMERSON**

* OLD * MAN * BEAVER * S * BLESSING * SONG *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heeheeHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* all * i * want * s * a * good * 5 ¢ * seegar *
* heecheHOHOheecheHOHOheecheHOHO *
* OLD * MAN * BEAVER * S * BLESSING * SONG *

Seneca Nation

The Myth of the Dragon-Fly

by JORDAN ABEL

“The myth of the Dragon-Fly. A young unmarried woman of this clan, whose name was Yaw’l, broke her seclusion taboos to play with her brothers. Although it was summertime, a heavy fall of snow covered the ground at night. When the brothers and sister looked outside, they found themselves in a strange country; their house was nearly covered with snow. Huge-Belly, a monstrous being, appeared from time to time, calling the young taboo-breakers outside, one by one, in order to cut them open with his long, sharp, glass-like nose, and hang their bodies on the rafters of his lodge to smoke and dry like split salmon. One of them managed to kill him. The slayer took to flight with his sister and remaining brothers, but to little avail. A female being of the same kind, Ksemkai-gyet, who could draw out her nose into a sharp knife, pursued them. As they hid in a tree at the edge of a lake, she detected their shadows in the frosty waters and dived several times to capture them, until she was quite frozen. Then they killed her. But before she died, she declared, “The people will always suffer from my nose.” From her remains were born the mosquitoes and other pests.”

—Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles*, vol. I (1950), 24

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[4]

summertime
in a strange country;
time with
the remaining
and
the remains

[5]

broke n
, calling
the smoke
the water
the
people

[6]

time calling
the
people

[7]

with sand with blood
with smoke
with
snow

[8]

their inner workings
filled with
a ravenous hunger
the language
of
a strange country.

[9]

the solitude
opened
with
Ksemkaigyet's
palms
the smoke
once more
in the woods

[10]

·
,
,
their working his work
·
a ·
specimen ·
held in ·
spirit ·
·
·

[11]

split open
fill in
what had happened
and had become

[12]

[13]

The Tale of the Blacked-Out Sky at Noon. That winter the snow had blanketed the Nass River Valley, but the old man Ksemkaigyet barely noticed. He had secluded himself from the village, found comfort in the solitude of his work—splitting open dragonflies, determining their inner workings. But each specimen he opened revealed something different. Some were filled with sand, others with blood or pine needles. He allowed himself to crack open only one each day. But Ksemkaigyet's desire to know how they worked soon became a ravenous hunger. And he found himself splitting open every specimen he had until he came upon one dragonfly that was filled with smoke—wreaths upon wreaths—and ice water. Ksemkaigyet was stunned. The smoking creature he held in his palms was not a dragonfly at all, but a spirit in disguise. The glass-nosed spirit rose from the smoke and spoke in a language that he did not understand. But before Ksemkaigyet knew what had happened the spirit transformed into a dragonfly once more and flew out of the lodge. He followed the spirit out into the woods and saw that the sky had become blackened with the beating wings of dragonflies, that all those wings together were melting all of the snow. He had indeed found himself in a strange country.

Nisg'a Nation (Canada)

The First Truck at Tambrey

by **TOBY WILIGURU PAMBARDU**

The strange thing comes closer,
coming into view for inspection.

The strange thing comes closer,
coming into view for inspection.

The strange thing comes closer,
coming—into view for inspection.

The strange thing comes closer,
coming—full length into view.

Now we have seen you, stranger,
coming—full length into view.

Now we have seen you, stranger,
coming—full length into view.

Poor fellow you, stranger,
—your transparent eyes reaching everywhere,
You stand there, fire spitting: eedj!
—your transparent eyes reaching everywhere.

You stand there, fire spitting: eedj!
—your transparent eyes reaching everywhere,
You stand there, fire spitting: eedj!
transparent.—With its splutter
Inside below the engine
is built—with its splutter.

Inside below the engine
is built—with its splutter,
Inside below the engine
is built—the starter,
Chirping “njeen njeen” in the front
like crickets—the starter.

Chirping “njeen njeen” in the front
like crickets—the starter,
Chirping “njeen njeen” in the front
like crickets.—Up and down
Smell the petrol going through
by the big end!—up and down.

Smell the petrol going through
by the big end—up and down!
Smell the petrol going through
by the big end!—Bubbles,
See them suddenly blown high,
boiling—bubbles!

See them suddenly blown high
boiling—bubbles
See them suddenly blown high
boiling.—Both shaking
. you two,
clever men,—both shaking.

. you two,
clever men—both shaking

. you two,
clever men—in the sleek cabin

Sitting on a seat to drive,
all gadgets!—in the sleek cabin.

Sitting on a seat to drive,
all gadgets!—in the sleek cabin

Sitting on a seat to drive,
all gadgets!—The noise swells,
When they accelerate along the road
to a rumble—the noise swells.

When they accelerate along the road
to a rumble—the noise swells

When they accelerate along the road
to a rumble—a buzz sets in.

The wheels make miles,
at a proper speed—a buzz sets in.

The wheels make miles
at a proper speed—a buzz sets in.

The wheels make miles,
at a proper speed—the tyre marks spin
Around in the dust like mad,
like firesticks—the tyre marks spin.

Around in the dust like mad,
like firesticks—the tyre marks spin

Around in the dust like mad,
like firesticks—its sides rattle,

Jerking when a load is pulled
by the truck—its sides rattle.

Jerking when a load is pulled
by the truck—its sides rattle,

Jerking when a load is pulled
by the truck.—the ground whirls past,

When you look out front it is swaying,
running straight—the ground whirls past.

When you look out front it is swaying,
running straight—the ground whirls past.

When you look out front it is swaying,
running straight—the roar's like a meteor

Blundering from star to star,
running through the bend—the roar's like a meteor.

Blundering from star to star,
 running through the bend—the roar's like a meteor.
Blundering from star to star,
 running through the bend—fading far away
The noise making miles
 like a firestick—fading far away.

Yinjibarndi (Australia)

Angel/Engine

by **KAMAU BRATHWAITE**

I

The yard around which the smoke circles
 is bounded by kitchen, latrine & the wall
 of the house where her aunt die

 where her godma bring her up
 where she was jump up-

 on by her copperskin cousin,
 drivin canemen to work during crop

 time. smellin of rum & saltfish,
 who give her two children when so she say

 she back was turn to the man. when she wasnt
 lookin

the children grow up quietly
 the boy runnin bout while like a pump-
 kin vine de girl name christofene

dem went to all saints primary school
 den de boy sit down & win a exam
 & gone down de hill to de college.

christie still bout hey turnin foolish
 she us:ed to help me to sew
 an mek up de cloze pun de singer sewin machine

 but she fingers gone dead. an she isnt got eyes in she head

then one two tree wutless men come up in hey
an impose a pregnant pun *she*
one tek. but de other two both foetus dead.

now she sittin up here wid she hann in she lap in de corner
rockin sheself in a chair by de window
an as far i know, she too cd be dead

2

i tek up dese days wid de zion

we does meet wensdee nights in de carpenter shop
praaaze be to god

i hear de chapman hall preacher shout out
praaaze be to god

an uh hear de black wings risin
an uh feel de black rock rock

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

& uh holdin my hands up high in dis place
& de palms turn to

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

an the fingers flutter an flyin away
an uh cryin out

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

softly

an de softness flyin away

is a black

is a bat

is a flap

a de kerosene lamp

an it spinn

an it spinn

an it spinn

-in rounn

-an it stagger-

in down

to a gutter-

in shark

a de worl

praaaze be to

praaaze be to

praaaze be to gg

praaaze be to

praaaze be to

praaaze be to gg

de tongue curlin back

an muh face flowin empty

all muh skin cradle an crackle an ole

i is water of wood

ants

crawlin crawlin

i is spiders weavin

away

my ball

headed head

is ancient &

black &

it fall from de top a de praaaze be to

tree
to de rat-hearted coco-
nut hill
so uh walk-
in an talk
-in. uh steppin
an call-
in thru
echo-
in faces
that barrel an bare of my name
thru crick
crack
thru crack
crack
uh creak-
in thru crev-
ices, reach-
in for icicle light
who hant me
hub
who haunt me
hub
my head is a cross
is a cross-
road
who hant me
is red
who haunt me
is blue
is a man
is a moo

is a ton ton macou

is a coo
is a cow
is a cow-

itch

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hub

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hab

is a hearse
is a horse
is a horseman

is a trip
is a trick
is a seamless hiss

that does rattle these i:ron tracks

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hub

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hab

is de scissors gone *shhhaaaaa*
under de rattle an pain

i de go
hub

i de go
shhhaaaaa

an a black curl callin my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

shang

praaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to

gg

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

sh

**praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to**

ssshhhhhhhhhhhhh

Barbadian

Six Poems of Labor & Desperation

by XU LIZHI

I SWALLOWED AN IRON MOON

I swallowed an iron moon
they called it a screw

I swallowed industrial wastewater and unemployment forms
bent over machines, our youth died young

I swallowed labor, I swallowed poverty
swallowed pedestrian bridges, swallowed this rusted-out life

I can't swallow any more
everything I've swallowed roils up in my throat

I spread across my country
a poem of shame

I KNOW A DAY WILL COME

I know a day will come
when those I know and don't know
will enter my room
to collect my remains
and wash away the darkened blood stains I've shed across the floor
rearrange the upturned table and chairs
toss out the moldering garbage
take in the clothing from the balcony
someone will help me write the poem I didn't have time to finish
someone will help me read the book I didn't have time to finish
someone will help me light the candle I didn't have time to light
last will be the curtains that haven't been opened for years
someone will help me open them, and let the sunlight in for a while
they will be closed again, and nailed there deathly tight
the whole process will be orderly and solemn
when everything is tidy
they will all line up to leave
and help me quietly shut the door

WAITING IN LINE

The packed crowds in this city
crawl up and down the streets
crawl up and down the pedestrian bridges, into the subway
crawl up and down this earth
one lap around is one life
this fire-driven fire-singed species
busy from birth to death
only at the moment of death do they not cut in line
they lower their heads, follow in order
and burrow back into their mothers' wombs

SINGLE-DISH MENU: TWICE-COOKED MEAT

Garlic scape twice-cooked meat
Bitter melon twice-cooked meat
Green pepper twice-cooked meat
Dried tofu twice-cooked meat
Potato twice-cooked meat
Cabbage twice-cooked meat
Bamboo shoot twice-cooked meat
Lotus root twice-cooked meat
Onion twice-cooked meat
Smoked tofu twice-cooked meat
Celtuce twice-cooked meat
Celery twice-cooked meat
Carrot twice-cooked meat
Beansprout twice-cooked meat
Green bean twice-cooked meat
Pickled bean twice-cooked meat
Xu Lizhi twice-cooked meat

OBITUARY FOR A PEANUT

Merchandise Name: Peanut Butter

Ingredients: Peanuts, Maltose, Sugar, Vegetable Oil, Salt, Food
Additives (Potassium sorbate)

Product Number: QB/T1733.4

Consumption Method: Ready to consume after opening the package

Storage Method: Before opening keep in a dry place away from
sunlight, after opening please refrigerate

Producer: Shantou City Bear-Note Foodstuff Company, LLC
Factory Site: Factory Building B2, Far East Industrial Park, Brooktown
North Village, Dragon Lake, Shantou City
Telephone: 0754-86203278 85769568
Fax: 0754-86203060
Consume Within: 18 Months
Place of Production: Shantou, Guangdong Province
Website: stxiongji.com
Production Date: 8.10.2013

MY FRIEND FA

You're always holding your lower back with your hands
just a young guy
but to the other workers, you look
like a pregnant woman in her tenth month
now that you've tasted the migrant worker life
when you talk of the past, you always smile
but the smile doesn't cover over hardship and misery
seven years ago you came alone
to this part of Shenzhen
high-spirited, full of faith
and what met you was ice,
black nights, temporary residence permits, temporary shelter
after false starts you came here to the world's largest equipment
factory
and began standing, screwing in screws, doing overtime, working
overnight
painting, finishing, polishing, buffing,
packaging and packing, moving finished products
bending down and straightening up a thousand times each day
dragging mountain-sized piles of merchandise across the workshop
floor
the seeds of illness were planted and you didn't know it
until the pain dragged you to the hospital
and that was the first time you heard
the new words "slipped disc in the lumbar vertebra"
and each time you smile when you talk about the pain and the past
we're moved by your optimism
until at the annual New Years party, you drunkenly

grasped a liquor bottle in your right hand, and held up three fingers
with your left,
you sobbed and said:
“I’m not even thirty
I’ve never had a girlfriend
I’m not married, I don’t have a career—
and my whole life is already over.”

Chinese

Two Poems on Poetry

by **ELICURA CHIHUAILAF**

ARS POETICA

The blue house in which I was born and raised sits upon a hill surrounded by hualle trees, a willow, walnut-trees, chestnut-trees, myrrh that blooms like it found spring in the fall—a sun with the fragrance of ulmo honey—chilco flowers surrounded by hummingbirds that we did not know whether they were real or a vision. So ephemeral! . . . At night we’d hear the chants, stories and riddles at the fire side, breathing the fragrance of bread baked by my grandmother, my mother, or aunt María, while my father and grandfather, lonko of the community, observed with respect. I speak of the memory of my childhood and not of a utopian society. There, I think, I learned what was poetry. The greatness of everyday life, and above all its details, the sparkle of flames, eyes, hands. . . . Sitting on the knees of my grandmother I heard the first stories of trees and stones in dialogue with each other, with animals, and people. All you have to do—she’d say—is to learn to interpret their signs and to perceive their sounds that often hide in the wind.

THE KEY THAT NO ONE HAS LOST

Poetry serves no purpose, I am told
and trees caress one another in the forest
with blue roots and twigs ruffling to the wind,
greeting with birds the Southern Cross
Poetry is the deep murmur of the murdered
the rumor of leaves in the fall, the sorrow

for the boy who preserves the tongue
but has lost the soul
Poetry, poetry, is a gesture, a landscape,
your eyes and my eyes, girl; ears, heart,
the same music. And I say no more, because
no one will find the key that no one has lost
And poetry is the chant of my ancestors
a winter day that burns and withers
this melancholy so personal.

Mapuche (Chile)

Essie Parrish in New York

[*Transcribed by* **GEORGE QUASHA**]

It is a test you have to pass.
Then you can learn to heal
with the finger, said Essie
pointing over our heads:
I went thru every test on the way,
that's how come I'm a shaman.
Be careful on the journey, they said,
the journey to heaven. They warned me.
And so I went.
Thru the rolling hills
I walked and walked,
mountains and valleys, and rolling hills,
I walked and walked and walked—
you hear many things there
in those rolling hills and valleys,
and I walked and walked and walked
and walked and walked until
I came to a footbridge,
and on the right side were a whole lot of people
and they were naked and crying out,
how'd you get over there,
we want to get over there too
but we're stuck here,

please come over here and help us cross,
the water's too deep for us—
I didn't pay no attention,
I just walked and walked and walked,
and then I heard an animal, sounded like a huge dog,
and there was a huge dog and next to him a huge lady
wearing blue clothes,
and I decided I had to walk right thru—
I did
and the dog only snarled at me.
Never go back.
I walked and walked and walked
and I came to one only tree
and I walked over to it and looked up at it
and read the message:
Go on, you're half way.
From there I felt better, a little better.
And I walked and walked and walked and walked
and I saw water, huge water
how to get thru?
I fear it's deep. Very blue water.
But I have to go.
Put out the first foot, then the left,
never use the left hand,
and I passed thru.
Went on and on and on, and I had to enter a place
and there I had to look down:
it was hot and there were people there
and they looked tiny down there in that furnace
running around crying.
I had to enter.
You see, these tests are to teach my people
how to live.
Fire didn't burn me.
And I walked and walked and walked.
On the way you're going to suffer.
And I came to a four-way road
like a cross. Which is the right way?
I already knew.
East is the right way to go to heaven.

North, South, and West are dangerous.
And at this crossroad there was a place in the center.
North you could see beautiful things of the Earth,
hills and fields and flowers and everything beautiful
and I felt like grabbing it
but I turned away.
West was nothing but fog and damp
and I turned away.
South was dark, but there were sounds,
monsters and huge animals. And I turned away and
Eastward I walked and walked and walked
and there were flowers, on both sides of the road,
flowers and flowers and flowers
out of this world.
And there is white light, at the center,
while you are walking.
This is the complicated thing:
my mind changes.
We are the people on the Earth.
We know sorrow and knowledge and faith and talent
and everything.
Now as I was walking there
some places I feel like crying
and some places I feel like talking
and some places I feel like dancing
but I am leaving these behind for the next world.
Then when I entered into that place
I knew:
if you enter heaven
you might have to work.
This is what I saw in my vision.
I don't have to go nowhere to see.
Visions are everywhere.

Kashaya Pomo (California)

“With Other Poets”

by HENINO VINOKO AKPALU

I

I shall sing you a song of sorrow.
When my turn comes, who will sing for me?
There is silence, earthly silence.
This way they said is how the poet dies.
Alas for someone who will bring him over the gulf
and he will come bearing along his voice
Only night shall fall; another day will dawn;
he will sing a song of sorrow.

The skull proclaimed: it is my mouth that sent me.
In the desert the rain beat me
soon the brushfire shall roar over me.
Folks came asking for song.
Akpalu the poet asked; what song
shall I sing for you?
If I threw a long rope, night will fall.
Let me cut it short.
When you have a short sleeping mat
you do not nod in an easy chair
nor do you sleep on the earthen floor.
We are the owners of song.
Call the poet, call Akpalu from Anyako
he will cut it short, cut it very short for you.

2

There are guns; those who want to bury me.
To them I say when we meet I will step aside for them.
We know them in life, those who say:
“Die that I may bury you.”
Those on whom I had been counting
to look after me when evil matters fall,
when I meet them I will step aside for them.
I thought I had a child called “all is well behind me.”
Another, I thought, was called “to whom shall I tell it?”
The third was called “I am spread.”
Alas my children turned out to be my songs

that is how things have gone with me.
Let everyone know them, those who say:
“Die that I may bury you.”
Those on whom I had been counting
to look after me when the end comes
there are guns, those who want to bury me.
when I meet them I will step aside for them.

3

I was made by a great God.
I was made together with other poets.
You call yourself a poet, can you sing with Akpalu's voice?
Who deceived you? I was made by a great God.
I was made together with other singers.
The song of the drum, I do not sing it merely,
It was from old men I heard it;
a child who thinks he understands so much
cannot understand Agoha.
Agoha cannot die.
You may understand the top but not the deep words.
Anagli is going to bark.
You say you are a singer, can you sing with Akpalu's voice?
Who deceived you?
Is there any poet who can sing with Akpalu's voice?
I was made by a great God.
I was created together with other poets.

Ewe (Ghana)

THE STATEMENTS



I

This ceremony molded me. I paid the most careful attention to it. I worshiped it as best I knew how. . . . The members of the Medicine Rite told me that if, properly and reverently, I obeyed all the things the ceremony enjoined, I would return to Earthmaker. I was considerate to everyone and everyone loved me. This ritual was made with love!

Statement by Warudjaxega, "Crashing-Thunder," Winnebago

2

The mind, *nanola*, by which term intelligence, power of discrimination, capacity for learning magical formulae, and all forms of non-manual skill are described, as well as moral qualities, resides somewhere in the larynx. . . . The memory, however, the store of formulae and traditions learned by heart, resides deeper, in the belly. . . . The force of magic, crystallized in the magical formulae, is carried by men of the present generation in their bodies. . . . The force of magic does not reside in the things; it resides within man and can escape only through his voice.

Trobriands, Papua New Guinea

3

The chief or learned poet explains or exhibits the great extent of his knowledge . . . by composing a quatrain without thinking, that is, without studying. At this day it is by the ends of his bones he effects it, & he discovers the name by this means. The way in which it is done is this: when the poet sees the person or thing before him, he makes a verse at once with the ends of his fingers, or in his mind without studying, & he composes & repeats at the same time. . . . But . . . before Patrick's time . . . the poet placed his staff upon the person's body or upon his head, & found out his name, & the name of his father & mother, & discovered every unknown thing that was proposed to him, in a minute or two or three. . . . Patrick abolished these things [that were] among the poets when they believed, for they were profane rites . . . & could not be performed without offering to the idol gods. He did not leave them after this any rite in which offering should be made to the devil, for their profession was pure.

From The Ancient Laws of Ireland

Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces & ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like the ice floe sailing here and there in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps & his heart throb. Something like an abatement in the weather will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves—we get a new song.

Statement by Orpingalik, Netsilik Inuit

5

I must first sit a little, cooling my arms; that the fatigue may go out of them; because I sit. I do merely listen, watching for a story, which I want to hear; while I sit waiting for it; that it may float into my ear. These are those to which I am listening with all my ears; while I feel that I sit silent. I must wait listening behind me, while I listen along the road; while I feel that my name floats along the road; they (my three names) float along to my place; I will go to sit at it; that I may listening turn backwards (with my ears) to my feet's heels, on which I went; while I feel that a story is the wind. It, the story, is wont to float along to another place. Then our names do pass through those people; while they do not perceive our bodies go along. For our names are those which, floating, reach a different place. The mountains lie between the two different roads. A man's name passes behind the mountains' back; those names with which returning he goes along.

Statement by ||kábbó, Saan (Southern Africa)

A man who is about to transfer his membership in a certain dance calls to his house a song-maker (“man of understanding”), whose profession is musical composition and the leading of singers on ceremonial occasions, and a “word-passer,” who sets words to music and on public occasions stands and chants each line in advance of the singers in order to prompt them. These two are requested to make the necessary number of songs, the number depending on the dance in question. For the Cannibal-Dancer it is sixteen. So the composers go into the woods, sometimes accompanied by another (“sitting-close-beside-the-head”), who is a novice in the art of composition. The song-maker draws inspiration chiefly from the sounds of running or dropping water, and from the notes of birds. Sitting beside a rill of falling water, he listens intently, catches the music, and hums it to himself, using not words but the vocables *hamamama*. This is his theme. Then he carries the theme further, making variations, and at last he adds a finale which he calls the “tail.” After a while he goes to the word-passer, constantly humming the tune, and the word-passer, catching the air, joins in, and then sets a single word to it. This is called “tying the song,” so that it may not “drift away” like an unmoored canoe. Then gradually other words are added, until the song is complete. The novice sits a little apart from the master, and if he “finds” a melody, he “carries” it at once to the song-maker, who quickly catches the theme and proceeds to develop it. Many songs are obtained from the robin, some from a waterfowl which whistles before diving, and from other birds. A witness has seen a song-maker, after employing various themes, coil a rope and then compose a song representing it. On a certain occasion when the singers were practicing new songs in the woods, the song-maker lacked one to complete the number, and he asked the others if they had a song. The other composers present said they had none. One of them looked across at a visiting woman song-maker and said to the presiding song-maker, “I will ask her.” She heard the phrase, caught the inflection of the rising and falling syllables, and began to sing *hamamama*. As the sound left her lips, those on the opposite side of the circle heard it and at once began to hum, and together they composed the necessary song. This manner of catching a melody is called “scooping it up in the hands.”

Kwakiutl

7

The artist: disciple, abundant, multiple, restless.

The true artist: capable, practicing, skillful;
maintains dialogue with his heart, meets things with his mind.

The true artist: draws out all from his heart,
works with delight, makes things with calm, with sagacity,
works like a true Toltec, composes his objects, works dexterously,
invents;
arranges materials, adorns them, makes them adjust.

The carrion artist: works at random, sneers at the people,
makes things opaque, brushes across the surface of the face of things,
works without care, defrauds people, is a thief.

Aztec

Where is the root of poetry in a person; in the body or in the soul? Some say it is in the soul, for the body does nothing without the soul. Some say it is in the body where the arts are learned, passed through the bodies of our ancestors. It is said that this is the truth remaining over the root of poetry, and the wisdom in every person's ancestry does not come from the northern sky into everyone, but into every other person.

What then is the root of poetry and every other wisdom? Not hard; three cauldrons are born in every person—the cauldron of warming, the cauldron of motion and the cauldron of wisdom.

Statement by Amirgen White-knee, Old Irish (7th century A.D.)

FROM THE GREAT DIGEST:**[TSENG'S COMMENT]**

1/

In letters of gold on T'ang's bathtub:

AS THE SUN MAKES IT NEW
 DAY BY DAY MAKE IT NEW
 YET AGAIN MAKE IT NEW

2/

It is said in the K'ang Proclamation:

He is risen, renewing the people.

3/

The Odes say:

*Although Chou was an ancient kingdom
 The celestial destiny
 Came again down on it NEW.*

Kung-Fu-Tze [Confucius] (Chinese)

The Book was before me. I could see it but not touch it. I tried to caress it but my hands didn't touch anything. I limited myself to contemplating it and, at that moment, I began to speak. Then I realized that I was reading the Sacred Book of Language. My Book. The Book of the Principal Ones.

I had attained perfection. I was no longer a simple apprentice. For that, as a prize, as a nomination, the Book had been granted me. When one takes the *saint children*, one can see the Principal Ones. Otherwise not. And it is the mushrooms that are saints; they give Wisdom. Wisdom is Language. Language is in the Book. The Book is granted by the Principal Ones. The Principal Ones appear with the great power of the *children*.

I learned the wisdom of the Book. Afterwards, in my later visions, the Book no longer appeared because its contents were already guarded in my memory.

Statement by María Sabina, Mazatec (Mexico)

II

When this Verse was first dictated to me, I consider'd a monotonous cadence like that used by Milton and Shakspeare, and all writers of English Blank Verse, deriv'd from the modern bondage of Riming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rime itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences and number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts; all are necessary to each other. Poetry fetter'd fetters the Human Race. Nations are destroy'd or flourish, in proportion as their Poetry, Painting, and Music are destroy'd or flourish. The Primeval State of Man was Wisdom, Art, and Science.

William Blake, "To the Public," from Jerusalem

And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.

Therefore I was left alone, & saw this great vision, & there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, & I retained no strength.

Yet heard I the voice of his words: & when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, & my face toward the ground.

Hebrew

THE COMMENTARIES



Epigraph Come, Ascend the Ladder

Source: Invocation to the *U'wannami* (rainmakers) from Matilda Coxe Stevenson, *The Zuni Indians*, Annual Report No. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905), 175–76.

1. Sprinkling water, pollen, meal, to accompany the invocation.
2. Striking stones together, rolling them along the ground to make thunder.
3. Flute playing, shell rattling, as the rainmakers (i.e., “ghosts of dead rain priests”) move up the lines of pollen & meal.

Page 7 Genesis I

Source: From the complete literal translation in Pliny Earle Goddard, *Kato Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, 1909), vol. 5, no. 3: 71–74. After the Kato (Cahto) narrator Bill Ray.

What’s of interest here isn’t the matter of the myth but the power of repetition & naming (monotony, too) to establish the presence of a situation in its entirety. This involves the acceptance (by poet & hearers) of an indefinite extension of narrative time, & the belief that language (i.e., poetry) can make-things-present by naming them. The means employed include the obvious pile-up of nouns (until everything is named) & the use of “they say” repeated for each utterance. In Kato, this last is a quotative [*yaem*], made from the root *-ni-n*, “to speak,” & the plural prefix *yaem*. (Cp. use of Japanese particle *-to*; of *tzo* = “says” in Mazatec [see p. 57].) While *yaem* is undoubtedly less conspicuous in Kato than “they say” in English, it still gives the sense of a special (narrative or mythic) context. The editor’s use of Goddard’s literal over his free translation is based on such considerations; also from a

feeling that “they say” plus other repetitions add something special to the English &/or American tongues. In brief: there’s something going on here.

Summary & Addenda. (1) Repetition & monotony are powers to be reckoned with; or, as the lady said to M. Junod after having heard the tale of Nabandji, the toad-eating girl, “I should never have thought there could be so much charm in monotony” (Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, 1912).

Charm, in the old sense.

(2) “There is the important question of repetition and is there any such thing. Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be . . . And so let us think seriously of the difference between repetition and insistence. . . . It is very like a frog hopping he cannot ever hop exactly the same distance or the same way of hopping at every hop. A bird’s singing is perhaps the nearest thing to repetition but if you listen they too vary their insistence. That is the human expression saying the same thing and in insisting and we all insist varying the emphasizing. . . . When I first really realized the inevitable repetition in human expression that was not repetition but insistence . . .” (Gertrude Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” in *Lectures in America*, 1935).

Page 8 Sounds

Sources: 1. “Rain-chant” quoted by Baldwin Spencer in *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1914). 2. A Navajo “coyote song” from Berard Haile, *Origin Legend of the Navaho Enemy Way*, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 17 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938), 265. 3. Edward Deming Andrews, *The Gift to Be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 72. 4. A sound-poem from Brazil and Peru, from “A Mini-Anthology of South American Indian Poetry,” in *Alcheringa* 3 (Winter 1971): 37, version by J. R. after Kenneth Kensinger.

“The words have no meaning, but the song means,
‘Take it, I give it to you.’”

—A Navajo informant speaking to Father Berard

Sounds only. No meaning, they say, in the words, or no meaning you can get at by translation into-other-words; & yet it functions; the meaning contained then in how it’s made to function. So here the key is in the “spell” & in the belief behind the “spell”—or in a whole system of beliefs, in magic, in the power of sound & breath & ritual to move an object toward ends determined by the poet-magus.

Magic, then, is the first key & from this the idea of a special language or series of languages, extraordinary in their nature & effect, & uniting the users (through what Malinowski calls “the coefficient of weirdness”) with the beings & things they’re trying to influence or connect with for a sharing of power, participation in a life beyond their own, beyond the human, etc.

Such special languages—“meaningless” &/or mysterious—are a small but nearly universal aspect of “primitive-&-archaic” poetry. They may involve (1) purely invented, meaningless sounds, (2) distortion of ordinary words & syntax, (3) ancient words emptied of their (long since forgotten) meanings, (4) words borrowed from other languages & likewise emptied. And all these may, in addition, be explained as (1) spirit language, (2) animal language, (3) ancestral language—distinctions between them often being blurred.

C. M. Bowra, in *Primitive Song*, views sound-poems like these as truly rudimentary, a kind of rock-bottom poetics. He writes that “since such [apparently meaningless] sounds are easier to fit to music than intelligible sounds are . . . [they] look as if they were the earliest kind of song practiced by man.” And yet this mantric use of sound is as close to (say) the Hindu *om* as to “purely” emotive sounds of the ay-ay-ay & yah-yah-yah variety. One could as well argue—at least where song is magic—that the use of words-emptied-of-meaning is a *late* development, even as geometric (abstract) art follows the naturalistic cows & bulls in the caves of Europe. The reappearance of the sound-poem among some twentieth-century poets is a further reminder (along with assorted scat-songs & mouth-musics, etc.) that chronology isn’t the question.

The “Bald Mountain *Zaum*-Poems” on p. 310, below, & the traditional Christian practice of glossolalia (speaking-in-tongues) are still further examples of this newly recovered form of poetry.

Addenda. (1) “Magic words, magic songs or magic prayers are fragments of old songs, handed down from earlier generations. . . . They may also be apparently meaningless sentences heard once in the days when the animals could talk, and remembered ever since through being handed down from one generation to another. Sometimes also a seemingly senseless jumble of words may derive force by a mystic inspiration which first gave them utterance. On the day when a man seeks aid in magic words, he must not eat of the entrails of any beast, and a man when uttering such words must have his head covered with a hood; a woman must have the whole spread of the hood behind thrown over her face” (K. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Hudson Bay Eskimos*).

(2) “Take the principal spell of Omarakana garden magic, which begins with the word *vatuvi* . . . (a magical form that has no grammatical setting and is a root never met with in common speech). . . . The magician, after certain preparations and under the observance of certain rules and taboos, collects herbs and makes of them a magical mixture. . . . After ritually and with an incantation offering some . . . fish to the ancestral spirits, [he] recites the main spell, *vatuvi*, over the magical mixture. [In doing this] he prepares a sort of large receptacle for his voice—a voice-trap we might call it. He lays the mixture on a mat and covers this with another mat so that his voice may be caught and imprisoned between them. During the recitation he holds his head close to the aperture and carefully sees to it that no portion of the herbs shall remain unaffected by the breath of his voice. He moves his mouth from one end of the aperture to the other, turns his head,

repeating the words over and over again, rubbing them, so to speak, into the substance. When you watch the magician at work and note the meticulous care with which he applies this most effective and most important verbal action to the substance . . . then you realize how serious is the belief that the magic is in the breath and the breath is the magic” (B. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens & Their Magic*).

(3) “The Moon thus says to the little Hare, that the little Hare is a little fool. Therefore his ears are red, because of the foolish things. He is not clever.

“The Moon speaks with the side of his tongue, because his tongue is upon his palate. Therefore he speaks with his tongue’s tip because he feels he is the moon who tells his story, and he does so, because he feels that he is the Moon he is not a person, who will speak nicely, for he is the Moon. Therefore he tells the Moon’s story, he does not tell a person’s story, for he thus speaks, he thus tells the Moon’s stories.

“Therefore he speaks turning up the other part of his tongue, for he feels that he is a shoe. Therefore he tells the shoe’s stories, for he feels that he is not a man, but is the Moon. He is the Mantis’ foot’s shoe, and he feels that it was the Mantis who called his name, he will act like a shoe.

“Therefore he speaks like this, for he feels that he speaks like the Hare, he speaks in this manner, for he feels that he merely speaks with his tongue, he merely speaks like the Hare. The Hare speaks the Hare’s language, he speaks like this. The Hare does like this the Hare talks. The Hare talks like his mother, he tells his mother’s stories, his mother’s stories as she tells them. And the little Hare listens to his mother’s speech; he talks just like his mother, because he feels that his father talks like his mother, his father talks like this, for he feels that he speaks like his wife, he does like this, he speaks; they all tell one story for they feel that they talk their own language, they do not talk the people’s language, for they tell their own stories, as they feel that another story is not there, that they may tell. For they tell one story, they do not tell the people’s stories; for they speak like baboons, for they feel that baboons talk in this manner” (D.F. Bleek, “Speech of Animals & Moon Used by the !xam Bushmen,” *Bantu Studies* 10 [1936]: 187–89).

(4) “It is noteworthy and perhaps to be interpreted as a general tendency in Hindu culture to *raise certain aspects of the subliminal to consciousness*, that Hinduism in general and the Tantric sects in particular make extensive use in ritual and religious practice generally, not only of the intrinsically meaningless gestures (of the dance and iconography), but also of *intrinsically meaningless vocables*. For example, the famous *om* and *hum* and the not so famous *brim*, *hrām*, *phat*, and many others, are apparently meaningless, religious noises in origin, whatever symbolic meanings are given to them by the developed dogma” (M. B. Emenau, review of La Meri’s *The Gesture Language of the Hindu Dance*, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62 [1942]: 149).

(5) “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (*Acts of the Apostles* 2:1–4).

(6) The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing—called “Shakers”—originated in England in the mid-eighteenth century & soon centered around the person of Ann Lee (Mother Ann, or Mother Wisdom), who became “the reincarnation of the Christ Spirit . . . Ann the Word . . . Bride of the Lamb.” Writes Edward Deming Andrews: “The first Shaker songs were wordless tunes . . . [&] were received from Indian spirits or from the shades of Eskimos, Negroes, Abyssinians, Hottentots, Chinese and other races in search of salvation. Squaw songs, and occasionally a papoose song, were common. When Indian spirits came into the Shaker Church, the instruments would become so ‘possessed’ that they sang Indian songs, whooped, danced and behaved generally in the manner of ‘savages’” (Andrews, *Gift to Be Simple*, 29). As such, they show the kind of connection between ideological & formal innovation that has characterized many movements-of-recovery, past & present.

(7) “I invented,” circa 1915, “a new species of verse, ‘verse without words,’ or sound poems, in which the balancing of vowels is gauged & distributed only to the value of the initial line. The first of these I recited tonight. I had a special costume designed for it. My legs were covered with a cothurnus of luminous blue cardboard, which reached up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk. Above that I wore a huge cardboard collar that was scarlet inside & gold outside. This was fastened at the throat in such a way that I was able to move it like wings by raising & dropping my elbows. In addition I wore a high top hat striped with blue & white. I recited the following:

gadji beri bimba
glandridi lauli lonni cadori
gadjama bim beri glassala
glandridi glassala tuffin i zimbrabim
blassa galassasa tuffin i zimbrabim

“. . . I now noticed that my voice, which seemed to have no other choice, had assumed the age-old cadence of the sacerdotal lamentation. . . . The electric light went out, as I had intended, & I was carried, moist with perspiration, like a magical bishop, into the abyss. . . .” (Hugo Ball, quoted in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters & Poets*, trans. Eugene Jolas [New York: George Wittenborn, 1951], xix).

[N.B. How different is Ball’s dada-show from the Kirgiz-Tatar poet (shaman) who “runs around the tent, springing, roaring, leaping; he barks like a dog, sniffs at the audience, lows like an ox, bellows, cries, bleats like a lamb, grunts like a pig, whinnies, coos, imitating with remarkable accuracy the cries of animals, the songs of birds, the sound of their flight, and so on, all of which greatly impresses

the audience” (M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Bollingen Series 76 [New York: Pantheon Books, 1964], 97)? It is part of a world with Artaud’s cries in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, Kurt Schwitters’s *Ur Sonata*, & Michael McClure’s latterday poems in “beast language” (see below). But there are plenty of less dramatic examples also.]

(8)

That Dada Strain

(circa 1921)

Have you heard it, have you heard it,
That Da Da Strain?
It will shake you, it will make you
Really go insane.
Everybody’s full of pep,
Makes you watch your every step.
Every prancer, every dancer,
Starts to lay ‘em down,
Everybody when they hear it
Starts to buzzing ‘round;
I get crazy as a loon,
When everybody hums this tune:
Da-Da, Da-Da,
Da-Da, Da-Da,
Because the feeling
Sets your brain a-reeling;
Just like you’re falling,
That runabout refrain, [?]
When everybody starts to
Da-Da, Da-Da,
Da-Da, Da-Da,
I want to do it once again,
I’m simply wild about that Da-Da, Da-Da Strain!
Oh, Da-Da Da-Da
Da-Da Da-Da,
Because this feeling
Sets your brain a’reeling,
Just like you’re falling,
That runabout refrain, [?]
When everybody starts to Da-Da, Da-Da, Da, Da-Da
I want to do it once again,
I’m simply wild about the Da-Da, Da-Da Strain.

Da, Da-Da, Da-Da,
 Da-Da, Da-Da,
 Da-Da, Da-Da,
 Because that feeling
 Sets your brain a-reeling.
 Just like you're falling,
 That runabout refrain, [?]
 Oh, Da-Da, Da-Da,
 Da-Da, Da-Da,
 I wanna do it once again,
 I'm simply wild about that
 Da-Da, Da-Da Strain!

—Lyrics by Mamie Medina, with music by Edgar Dowell & sounding by
 Ethel Waters, 1921–23)

(9)

Michael McClure
Ghost Tantra #1 (1964)

GOOOOOOR! GOOOOOOOOOO!
 GOOOOOOOOOR!

GRAHHH! GRAHH! GRAHH!

Grah goooooor! Ghahh! Graaarr! Greeeeer! Grayowhr!
 Greeeeee

GRAHHRR! RAHHR! GRAGHRR! RAHR!
 RAHR! RAHHR! GRAHHHR! GAHHR! HRAHR!

BE NOT SUGAR BUT BE LOVE

looking for sugar!

GAHHHHHHHHH!

ROWRR!

GROOOOOOOOOOH!

.....

#51

I LOVE TO THINK OF THE RED PURPLE ROSE
 IN THE DARKNESS COOLED BY THE NIGHT.
 We are served by machines making satins
 of sounds.

Each blot of sound is a bud or a stahr.

Body eats bouquets of the ear's vista.

Gahhhrrr boody eers noze eyes deem thou.

NOH. NAH-OHH

hrooor. VOOR-NAH! GAHROOOOO ME.

Nah drooooooh seerch. NAH THEE!

The machines are too dull when we
 are lion-poems that move & breathe.
 WHAN WE GROOOOOOOOOOOOOOR
 hann dree myketoth sharoo sreee thah noh deeeeeeemed ez.
 Whan eeethoooze hrohh.

Michael McClure writes, “These are spontaneous stanzas published in the order and with the natural sounds in which they were first written. If there is an ooooooooooooooooooh, simply say a long loud ‘ooh.’ If there is a ‘gahr’ simply say gar and put an h in.

“Look at stanza 51. It begins in English and turns into beast language—star becomes stahr. Body becomes boody. Nose becomes noze. Everybody knows how to pronounce NOH or VOOR-NAH or GAHROOOOO ME.”

Page 9 Genesis II

Source: Ronald M. Berndt, *Djanggalgul: An Aboriginal Religious Cult of North-Eastern Arnhem Land* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 256.

A heavy ripeness, the swelling & bursting of a teeming life-source, colors Australian views of the creation. The body of the sacred sister, heat around the clitoris, the budding tree roots, spray & blood, a swarming sense of life emerging—not two-by-two, in pairs, but *swarming*—was turned-from in the West, reduced to images of evil. Spenser’s *Error* breeds “a thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed, / Sucking upon her poisonous dugs”; & Milton’s *Sim* is the Prolific raped by her son into the production of “those yelling monsters, that with ceaseless cry / Surround me, as thou sawest, hourly conceived / And hourly born, with sorrow infinite,” etc. But Blake renamed these “the Prolific” & marked a turning in man’s relation to his “sensual existence.”

Glossary & Synopsis.

Rangga—sacred emblem; identified with the penis of the Djanggalgul Brother.

Rangga folk: those who initially emerged from the Djanggalgul Sisters; ancestors of the present-day eastern Arnhem Landers.

Djuda—tree rangga emblem, from which trees sprang up when plunged into the ground by the Djanggalgul.

Mat, or *ngainmara mat*—conically shaped; belonging to the Djanggalgul Sisters; a symbol for the uterus; a whale, etc.

A major ritual work consisting of multiple songs in a narrative sequence, the *Djanggalgul Cycle* is the best example the present editor knows of the celebration of human sexuality & birth in the work of genesis. The cycle itself follows the wanderings of the Djanggalgul Brother & his two Sisters, Bildjiwuraroiju & Miralaidj, who come to Arnhem Land from Bralgu (Land of the Eternal Beings), bringing with them ceremonies & sacred objects, & peopling the places through which they pass. The Brother “has an elongated penis, and each of the Two Sisters has a long clitoris . . . so long they drag upon the ground as they walk.” At Mara-

bai, “the long penis of the Brother and the clitorises of the Sisters [are shortened]. More people are born and some are circumcised.” Part Nine (from which the excerpt is taken) continues this action; also “the Brother has coitus with his young sister [Miralaidd], who has an arm-band within her [i.e., something blocking the vaginal passage]; the breaking of this causes blood to flow. Dancing follows.”

For more on related Australian ceremonialism, see pp. 338 & 339, with the accompanying commentaries.

Page 10 Egyptian God Names

Source: Alexandre Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), *passim*.

Poetry is I say essentially a vocabulary just as prose is essentially not.

And what is the vocabulary of which poetry absolutely is. It is a vocabulary based on the noun as prose is essentially and determinately and vigorously not based on the noun.

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.

. . . So that is poetry really loving the name of anything and that is not prose.

—G. Stein, *Lectures in America*

But the physicality of her description sticks: how she points to a material condition of poetry prior to verse or sequence, a way of thinking & feeling that treats words—all words—as substantive, measurable, having each a certain weight & extension, roots of words holding them firmly to earth, which the-man / the-woman cuts loose at will to let float up, then take root again so that their weights are again felt. And since the words are “real” (being measurable by weight & extension), they may be called forth again or withheld, & being called forth are the things called forth? This is what the man believed once who made magic—“spells” & “charms” (*carmina*) being words in search of things. Measurable words as real as measurable things where both words & things are present in the naming. And the same tangible quality of words was felt whether they were spoken (again that breath-entering-the-object Malinowski wrote of) or written or pictured or drummed. Something like that sensed then & there—rediscovered here & now.

Addenda. (1) Egyptian poetry, where it names & creates its gods, is at least as concerned with their energy as their dignity—is in fact rich in matter that Rundle Clark calls “obscene, brutal & inconsequential” & that “shows the Egyptians lived much closer to the dark powers of the unconscious than we realize.” The same force turns up in other god-namings & god-poems, as when the Polynesians call Kiho:

First-Urge
Phallus
Rising-Sap
Tumidity
The Denudation
etc.

—J. Frank Stimson, *The Cult of Kibo-Timu*

& there, too, the translation muffles the force.

(2) Among the Navajo a list of god-names became the song, called *The Twelve-Word Song of Blessing*, “a combination of names” writes Reichard “[of] tremendous power”:

TWELVE-WORD SONG

Earth
Sky
Mountain Woman
Water Woman
Talking God
xactceoyan
Boy-carrying-single-corn-kernel
Girl-carrying-single-turquoise
White-corn-boy
Yellow-corn-girl
Pollen Boy
Cornbeetle Girl

—G. Reichard, *Navaho Religion*

Consider also the Arabic/Persian “Names of the Lion” (p. 25) & the Polynesian genealogical poem below, along with the African praise-names & praise-poems (p. 39). The instances of namings as poems run a wide gamut of human experiences: the 99 names of Allah, the 950 Sikh god names of Guru Gobind Singh, the 72 names of YHVH (The Lord) in Kabbala (including “The Name” itself), & numerous namings of objects & beings (divine & mundane) by tags & by metaphors.

Addendum. “. . . the poet is the Namer, or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to every one its own name and not another’s, thereby rejoicing the intellect, which delights in detachment or boundary. The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say it, a sort of tomb of the muses. For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of

the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin” (R. W. Emerson, “The Poet,” 1844).

Page 12 *Genesis III*

Source: Translation from *Enuma Elish* by Harris Lenowitz, originally published in *Acheringal/Ethnopoetics*, n.s. 1, no. 1 (1975): 31–33, & later in H. Lenowitz & Charles Doria: *Origins: Creation Texts from the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

(1) The god-world of *Enuma Elish* starts in turbulence & struggle: a universe the makers/poets knew or dreamed-into-life & felt the terror/horror at its heart. It is this rush & crush of primal elements the poetry here translates into gods & monsters, reflecting as it does a natural & human world in chaos/turmoil. The scene it leaves for us, replete with names of gods & powers, follows a story line encountered in many other times & places. In the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, tracing back to still earlier Sumerian sources, the two primeval forces are the god Apsu (Deep-water/Freshwater) & the goddess Tiamat (Saltsea), whose offspring will eventually destroy them both & lead the way for the triumphant reign of the new god Marduk, killing the goddess off at last & using her severed corpse to form the earth & sky, with humans coming in their wake. The ferocity of word & image remains a key to poetic mind both then & now: the dark side of the joy & beauty that would be needed too to make their world & ours complete.

(2) “The *Babylonian Creation Myth* . . . relates how the universe evolved from nothingness to an organized structure with the city of Babylon at its center. When the primordial sweet and salt waters—male Apsu and female Tiamat—mingled, two beings appeared, Lahmu and Lahamu, that is, mud and muddy. The image suits the southern Babylonian view over the Persian Gulf perfectly: when the sea recedes, mud arises. A chain reaction had started . . .” (Mark Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit in Ancient Babylonia*).

And further: “The ancient Babylonians certainly were not humanists but deeply committed to a theocentric view of the world. Yet, they believed that humans could have a firm knowledge of reality as the gods had created it, and continued to direct it, because at the time of creation the gods had provided the tools for understanding, as the *Enūma Eliš* shows. Creation in that myth was a work of organization: Marduk did not fashion the universe *ex nihilo*. Rather, he created by putting order into the chaos of Tiamat’s bodily parts. And just as he ordered the physical world, he organized knowledge and structured it through writing. . . . The Babylonian theory of knowledge was . . . fundamentally rooted in a rationality that depended on an informed reading. Reality had to be read and interpreted as if it were a text. . . . ‘I read, therefore I am’ could be seen as the first principle of Babylonian epistemology.”

(3) “What’s presented here, the Babylonian genesis retold, is the paramount interest, & the work of the ones who present it is an interest almost equal; & all

of it crucial to the unfolding, changing recovery of cultures & civilizations that has now entered its latest phase. To bring across this sense of myth as process & conflict, Harris Lenowitz & Charles Doria, working as both poets & scholars in *Origins*, make use of all those ‘advances in translation technique, notation, & sympathy’ developed over the last half century, from the methods of ‘projective verse’ to those of etymological translation or of that recovery of the oral dimension of the poem that the present editor & others have, wisely or not, spoken of elsewhere as ‘total translation.’ The picture that emerges is one of richness, fecundity at every turning, from the first image of poem on page to the constantly new insights into the possibilities of ‘origin.’ And this allows that ‘clash of symbols’ which, those like Paul Ricoeur tell us, is both natural to mind & forms its one sure hedge against idolatry” (Adapted from J.R. in the pre-face to *Origins*, 1975).

(4) “We live in an age in which inherited literature is being hit from two sides, from contemporary writers who are laying bases of new discourse at the same time that . . . scholars . . . are making available pre-Homeric and pre-Mosaic texts which are themselves eye-openers” (Charles Olson, “Homer & Bible,” 1957).

[N.B. In the translation, above, god names are underlined throughout, with the English translation directly beneath.]

Page 15 Images

Sources: 1. Sung to make the sun come out by assertion of its presence, from *Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition*, 1913–1918. 2. Sung to a bow made of hawwood, from H. Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, trans. by C.M. Bowra in *Primitive Song* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1962). 3. Sung in the jackal’s language, i.e., with a special “click” not otherwise used, from Bleek & Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London: George Allen, 1911). 4. Collected by Knud Rasmussen, as quoted in Caillois & Lambert, *Trésor de la poésie universelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958) & there titled “Contre la mort.” 5. The song’s origin was a dream in which the singer became a buffalo & was given this deer-song by other buffalos, from F. Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, *Bulletins* 45, 53 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910–1913). 6. A hunting charm, power from description of the quarry, from Bleek & Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. 7. A song from the Society of the Mystic Animals, from Jerome Rothenberg & Richard Johnny John, in J.R., *Shaking the Pumpkin* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

Single-line poems, presented as such—in contrast to some of the longer works that follow & involve a linking of lines & images to make poems of greater complexity, showing development by image cluster, gaps in sequence, etc.

The poetry here is in song & image & wordplay, but only the image comes near to translating, itself enough to make a poem, or so the argument would go. What’s happened, simply, is that something has been sighted & stated & set apart (by name or by description); given its own tune, too, to make it special; fixed, held fast in all this vanishing experience. It is this double sense of sighted/sited that represents the basic poetic function (a setting-apart-by-the-creation-of-

special-circumstances that the editor calls “sacralism”) from which the rest follows—toward the building of more complicated structures & visions. But even here there is nothing naïve or minimal about the “sightings,” save their clarity & the sense that, starting now, the plot (as John Cage would say) is-going-to-thicken. Thickens, in fact, while we’re watching; for the “single perception” of an image like *a splinter of stone/which is white* can as easily be sensed as two perceptions, & placed against the subject (*blue crane*) as two or three. But the decision has been made to voice it as a single line or musical phrase, & that decision itself is a statement about how we know things—& a choice.

Addenda. (1) A typical ritual song practice (but by no means the only one presented in these pages) is to repeat (often also to distort) the one line indefinitely—or as long as the dance & ritual demand—then go on to a second song in the (ritual) sequence, a third, a fourth, etc. A turn in the ritual or dance would then represent something roughly equivalent to a strophe break, where a first series of single-line poems ends & a new, but related, series begins. This is utilized by the translators of works like *Djanggawul*, the *Goulburn Island Cycle*, certain of the African “praise-poems,” etc., who follow the “orders” of the ritual in their arrangement of single-line works into larger structures. Lines & series will often seem disconnected except when they’re performed & happen together. The impact of such juxtapositions for our own time can’t be ignored.

(2)

Nothing of that, only an image—
nothing else, utter oblivion—
slanting through the words come vestiges of light!
—Franz Kafka

(3)

After Ian Hamilton Finlay
OCEAN STRIPE SERIES 2

~~the little sail of your name~~
the little sail of your name
~~the little sail of your name~~

[*Note.* Each element in Finlay’s poem appeared originally on a separate page, broken lines in blue, words in red; thus color & the page boundary function with relation to his “single-image” as music does elsewhere. Thus, too, the further you get into it the less sense it makes to speak of a single-line poem—as in the “primitive” poems where any change in the music, even if the words remain unchanged, will alter the entire piece.]

(4) Or Aram Saroyan, at the minimum:

light

Page 16 Bantu Combinations

Source: Henri A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe* (London: Macmillan, 1912, 1927), passim.

Examples of plot-thickening in the area of “image”: a conscious placing of image against image as though to see-what-happens. Apart from its presence in song, this juxtaposing of images turns up all over in the art, say, of the riddle (see the following)—of which several of these “combinations” are, in fact, examples. Poem as opposition or balance of two or more images is also the basis of the haiku, less clearly of the sonnet. In all these the interest increases as the connection between the images becomes more & more strained, barely definable. Junod sensed this when he wrote: “What makes a Bantu address especially interesting is . . . the *power of comparison* exhibited by Bantu speakers. . . . Sometimes the imagination is so subtle that the result is almost incoherent. They are satisfied even if the point which the two things compared have in common . . . is almost infinitesimal.”

Not subtlety, though, but *energy*: the power of word & image. For it’s right here that the light breaks through most clearly; not the light of logic & simile, not even the flashing of a single image or name, but what feels “deeper” because further into it by now in the process of boxing myself into some corner, & to which (for the first time) the word “vision” might be said to apply.

Addenda. (1)

Now I a fourfold vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And three fold in soft Beulahs night
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newtons sleep
—William Blake, 1802

(2) “The image cannot spring from any comparison but from the bringing together of two more or less remote realities. . . .

“The more distant and legitimate the relation between the two realities brought together, the stronger the image will be . . . the more emotive power and poetic reality it will possess” (Pierre Reverdy).

(3) “The African image is not an image by equation but an image by *analogy*, a surrealist image. Africans do not like straight lines and false *mots justes*. Two and two do not make four, but five, as Aimé Césaire has told us. The object does not mean what it represents but what it suggests, what it creates. . . . But as you would suppose, African surrealism is different from European surrealism. European surrealism is empirical. African surrealism is mystical and metaphysical. . . . The African surrealist analogy presupposes and manifests the hierarchized universe of life-forces” (Léopold Sédar Senghor, quoted in *Symposium of the Whole*, 119–20).

(4) Contemporary Combinations

A church leaped up
exploding
like a bell.
—Phillipe Soupault

Elephants are contagious.
—Paul Eluard & Benjamin Peret

A White Hunter
A white hunter is nearly crazy.
—Gertrude Stein

In the Ranchhouse at Dawn
O corpuscle!
O wax town!
—Kenneth Koch

Wood
I repeated it.
—Clark Coolidge

A man torments the sun.
Cows are disturbed by their calves.
—Barrett Watten

the last days like this
a red stone
all we know of fire
—Robert Kelly

cicadas
termites
how much longer
being human
—John Martone

[N.B. Most of these are, like their Bantu counterparts, taken from extended series of “combinations.”]

Page 16 22 *Koyukon Riddle-Poems*

Source: Richard Dauenhauer, “Koyukon Riddle-Poems,” in *Alcheringa*, n.s. 3, no. 1 (1977): 85–90.

(1) The riddle in verbal culture is part of the stock-in-trade of academic folklore, but its relation to the poetic image has rarely been explored until recently. The workings presented here were originally published in *The Riddle and Poetry Handbook*, developed by Richard Dauenhauer as a project of the Alaska Native Education Board in Anchorage. With Nora Dauenhauer, a native Tlingit speaker, Dauenhauer was engaged for many years in translation projects (Tlingit into English, English into Tlingit) aimed at Tlingit-speaking audiences.

In working with Father Julius Jetté’s 1913 notes, Dauenhauer set the riddles up as two-part antiphonal texts, the initial image or utterance clarified or deepened by the utterance that followed. Of the mind at work here, as well as its endangerment, Dauenhauer wrote further: “The riddles in Jetté exemplify the poetic use of everyday language and the imaginative juxtaposition of everyday images, of seeing something in terms of something else, and verbalizing that picture through manipulation of the wonderful and indefinite potential of language. With suppression and eradication of Native Alaskan intellectual traditions, and with the diminished possibilities of transmitting oral tradition because of language loss among the younger generations, a situation has developed in which even the average fluent speaker of Koyukon—through no fault of his or her own—is no longer familiar with riddles and riddle style.”

The situation, since Dauenhauer wrote this in the late 1970s, may still be open to question.

(2) For a fuller accounting the reader may want to check Dauenhauer’s “Koyukon Riddle-Poems” in J.R.’s *Symposium of the Whole*, 121–23.

Page 19 *Correspondences*

Source: Selected from *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, translated from Chinese into German by Richard Wilhelm and rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, Bollingen Series 19 (New York & Princeton, NJ: Pantheon Books, Princeton University Press, 1950), 295–99.

The *I Ching*, which some have dated as far back as 2000 B.C. (& if not that old is, anyway, very ancient), is the basis in China for the kind of thought that sees life & development as a working-out or constant reshuffling of contrary forces; or, as Blake had it

without contraries is no progression;
reason & energy, love & hate, good & evil,
are all necessary to human existence.

Whereas the “practical” side of the *I Ching* deals with divination by yarrow sticks, coins, etc., some sections, like the one given here, show a developed ability to think in images, to place name against name, quality against quality, while retaining that passion for the names of things that Gertrude Stein saw as the basis of all poetry. Partly it’s a question of resemblances & analogy, but at this point in where “we” are, what’s of still greater importance is the possibility of a kind of tension, energy, etc., generated by the joining of disparate, even arbitrary, images. *Observation*: Every new correspondence acts on its subject, which it changes, & on the entire field; every change a measurable burst of energy. *Questions*: Is the correspondence *there*, is it imposed, & does it finally matter? If the common term “hot” or “dry” links “fire” with “the sun, the lightning, the upper part of the trunk,” what links it with “big-bellied” or “lances & weapons”? What common quality “justifies” the linking of nouns in the “keeping still” series, & if you find one (Confucius did!) are you gaining consistency through a loss of power? The editor can only witness to his sense of this series of “correspondences” being a handy ancient manual of poetic process (of *all* those levels of vision Blake spoke of)—& values it as such.

Addenda. (1) For further selections from, comments on, the *I Ching*, see above, p. 240, below, p. 536. The reader should note, too, that the *I Ching* functioned primarily as a system of divination & can compare it, e.g., to the poetics of divination in such African systems as Ifa & the Basuto “praises of the falls” (pp. 148, 154 & the accompanying commentaries).

(2)

André Breton

FREE UNION (1931)

My wife whose hair is a brush fire
 Whose thoughts are summer lightning
 Whose waist is an hourglass
 Whose waist is the waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger
 Whose mouth is a bright cockade with the fragrance of a star of the first
 magnitude
 Whose teeth leave prints like the tracks of white mice over snow
 Whose tongue is made out of amber and polished glass
 Whose tongue is a stabbed wafer
 The tongue of a doll with eyes that open and shut
 Whose tongue is incredible stone
 My wife whose eyelashes are strokes in the handwriting of a child
 Whose eyebrows are nests of swallows
 My wife whose temples are the slate of greenhouse roofs
 With steam on the windows
 My wife whose shoulders are champagne
 Are fountains that curl from the heads of dolphins over the ice
 My wife whose wrists are matches

Whose fingers are raffles holding the ace of hearts
 Whose fingers are fresh cut hay
 My wife with the armpits of martens and beech fruit
 And Midsummer Night
 That are hedges of privet and nesting places for sea snails
 Whose arms are of sea foam and a land locked sea
 And a fusion of wheat and a mill
 Whose legs are spindles
 In the delicate movements of watches and despair
 My wife whose calves are sweet with the sap of elders
 Whose feet are carved initials
 Keyrings and the feet of steeplejacks who drink
 My wife whose neck is fine milled barley
 Whose throat contains the Valley of Gold
 And encounters in the bed of the maelstrom
 My wife whose breasts are of the night
 And are undersea molehills
 And crucibles of rubies
 My wife whose breasts are haunted by the ghosts of dew-moistened roses
 Whose belly is a fan unfolded in the sunlight
 Is a giant talon
 My wife with the back of a bird in vertical flight
 With a back of quicksilver
 And bright lights
 My wife whose nape is of smooth worn stone and wet chalk
 And of a glass slipped through the fingers of someone who has just drunk
 My wife with the thighs of a skiff
 That are lustrous and feathered like arrows
 Stemmed with the light tailbones of a white peacock
 And imperceptible balance
 My wife whose rump is sandstone and flax
 Whose rump is the back of a swan and the spring
 My wife with the sex of an iris
 A mine and a platypus
 With the sex of an algae and old fashioned candles
 My wife with the sex of a mirror
 My wife with eyes full of tears
 With eyes that are purple armor and a magnetized needle
 With eyes of savannahs
 With eyes full of water to drink in prisons
 My wife with eyes that are forests forever under the axe
 My wife with eyes that are the equal of water and air and earth and fire
 —Translated from French by David Antin

Source: Richard A. Taylor, *Te Ika a Maui: New Zealand and Its Inhabitants* (London: William Macintosh, 1870), 109–10.

The coming of light as pivotal moment in the world's awakening gets a very lovely, very complex handling in Polynesian poetry. What's less apparent is that these light-poems (night-poems, too) are in fact genealogical tables tracing the rulers' descents from the gods, the gods from the cosmic circumstances of the beginning. Night (*Te Po*) is both a name & a period of time, a force & a god: & the language holds it in delicate balance between concrete & abstract thought; so also for Conception, Increase, Great-Night, Nothing, Midday, etc. A similar chant turns up in a version by J.C. Anderson (1907), there as pure genealogy. The reciter is Mumuhu:

THE GENEALOGY OF THE GODS
FROM PRIMAL NOTHINGNESS

1. Te Kore (the void)
2. Te Kore-tua-tahi (the first void)
3. Te Kore-tua-rua (the second void)
4. Te Kore-nui (the vast void)
5. Te Kore-roa (the far-extending void)
6. Te Kore-para (the sere void)
7. Te Kore-whiwhia (the unpossessing void)
8. Te Kore-rawea (the delightful void)
9. Te Kore-te-tamaua (the void fast bound)
10. Te Po (the Night)
11. Te Po-teki (the hanging Night)
12. Te Po-terea (the drifting Night)
13. Te Po-wha-wha (the moaning Night)
14. Hine-ruaki-moe (daughter of troubled sleep)
15. Te Po (the Night)
16. Te Ata (the Morning)
17. Te Ao-to-roa (the abiding Day)
18. Te Ao-marama (the bright Day)
19. Whai-tua (Space)

“[And] in *whai-tua* two existences formed without shape: *Maku* (moisture), a male, & *Mabora-nui-a-rangi* (the great expanse of heaven), a female; from whom sprang *Toko-mua*, *Toko-roto* & *Toko-pa*, parents of wind, of clouds, of mists, & fourth in birth, *Rangi-potiki*, who taking to wife *Papa*, produced the gods” (Johannes C. Anderson, *Maori Life in Ao-Tea*).

Addenda. (1) Paul Radin's reading of the Polynesian text (in *Primitive Man as Philosopher*) suggests a high degree of systematization: that the first section describes the development of consciousness; the second predicates a mediating

principle, the *word*; the third gives a genealogical history of matter; the fourth shows the birth of light itself. Even so there are many holes, many different texts & distributions of ages. Signifying what? Either that a closed system had come apart, or that the Polynesian mind was in constant movement toward the making of a shifting series of possibilities. (See also the Hawaiian *Kumulipo*, p. 345, above, & accompanying commentary.)

(2) Greek cosmogonies like that, say, in Hesiod are the best Western tries at this sort of thing the editor knows of—at least where the translation allows the concrete force of the namings (Sky, Gap, Pit, Gloom, Night, etc.) to come through. (See p. 282—or, where available, Charles Doria & Harris Lenowitz's *Origins*, as a gathering of ancient Mediterranean creation texts so diverse in its concretions as to knock hell out of the notion of a single authoritative text.)

(3)

Jackson Mac Low

1ST LIGHT POEM: FOR IRIS—10 JUNE 1962

The light of a student-lamp
sapphire light
shimmer

the light of a smoking-lamp

Light from the Magellanic Clouds

the light of a Nernst lamp
the light of a naphtha-lamp
light from meteorites

Evanescent light

ether
the light of an electric lamp
extra light

Citrine light

kineographic light
the light of a Kitson lamp
kindly light

Ice light
irradiation
ignition
altar light

The light of a spotlight
a sunbeam
sunrise
solar light

Mustard-oil light
Maroon light

the light of a magnesium flare
light from a meteor
Evanescent light
ether
light from an electric lamp
an extra light
Light from a student-lamp
sapphire light
a shimmer
smoking-lamp light
Ordinary light
orgone lumination
light from a lamp burning olive oil
opal light
Actinism
atom-bomb light
the light of an alcohol lamp
the light of a lamp burning anda-oil

Page 21 Aztec Definitions

Source: Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. Charles E. Dibble & Arthur J. O. Anderson (Salt Lake City & Santa Fe: University of Utah Press & the School of American Research, 1963), vol. 12, passim.

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, a Franciscan monk, began in 1547—only twenty-six years after the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan—to compile documents in Nahuatl from Indian elders who repeated what they had learned by memory in their schools, the Calmécac & the Telpochcalli. These Nahuatl texts have been preserved in three codices, two in Madrid & one in Florence. In the eleventh book of the Florentine codex—a kind of glossary of “earthly things”—the elders’ minds & words are drawn toward definitions of the most ordinary debris of their lives.

Addenda. (1) “Everything goes but the words: the fragments of speech of a people who had learned that the mind’s grain is our final clue to the real. He led them to a reconsideration, to an assemblage of ‘the things of New Spain’—of their gods, their days, their signs & omens, their sacrifices, their songs, their defeats. . . . But . . . more astonishing than all that is how the habit of their minds begins to play among the everyday debris. . . . Here the mind finds release in a strange new encounter; free of ritual & myth [The-System]; it approaches its objects as if for the first time testing their existence. IT IS DARK, IT IS LIGHT: IT IS WIDE-MOUTHED, IT IS NARROW-MOUTHED: all of this said with no apparent sense of contradiction,

as if, among these objects, the old pattern holds: of preparing chaos for the birth of something real.

“Having come to this for ourselves, we can draw close to them, can hear in these ‘definitions’ the sound of a poetry, a measure-by-placement-&-displacement not far from our own. . . . For surely it should be clear by now that poetry is less literature than a process of thought & feeling & the arrangement of that into affective utterances. The conditions these definitions meet are the conditions of poetry” (J.R., from “Introduction to Aztec Definitions,” *something* 1 [Spring 1965]: 2).

(2)

Francis Ponge
THE OYSTER (1942)
from *Le parti pris des choses*

The oyster, the size of an average pebble, has a coarser appearance, a less even color, brilliantly whitish. It is a stubbornly closed world. It can be opened however: you have to hold it in the hollow of a rag, use a chipped, rather dull knife and go at it several times. Curious fingers are cut, nails broken: it’s a rough job. Nicking it, we mark its casing with white circles, sorts of halos.

Inside we find an entire world, to eat and drink: under a pearly firmament (strictly speaking), the skies above merge with the skies below, forming a single pool, a viscous, greenish sachet that flows back and forth to both smell and sight, and that is fringed with a blackish lace.

On very rare occasions a little form beads in their pearly throats, with which we quickly adorn ourselves.

—Translation from French by Guy Bennett

(3)

David Antin
From DEFINITIONS FOR MENDY (1965)

loss is an unintentional decline in or disappearance of a value arising from
a contingency

a value is an efficacy a power a brightness

it is also a duration

to lose something keys hair someone

we suffer at the thought

he has become absent imaginary false

a false key will not turn a true lock

false hair will not turn grey

mendy will not come back

but longing is not imaginary

we must go down into ourselves

down to the floor that is not imaginary
where hunger lives and thirst
hunger imagine bread thirst imagine water
the glass of water slips to the floor
thirst is a desert
value a glass of water
loss is the glass of water slipping to the floor
loss is the unintentional decline in or disappearance of a glass of water
arising from a contingency
the glass pieces of glass
the floor is a contingency
the floor is a floor
is a contingency
made of wood
the fire is a contingency
the bread is burned
burning is not a contingency
the presence of the dead is imaginary
the absence is real
henceforth it will be his manner of appearing
so he appears in an orange jacket and workpants and a blue denim shirt
his hair is black his eyes are black
and a blue crab is biting his long fingers
he is trying to hold the bread
he is trying to bring the water to his mouth
his mouth is a desert
the glass of water will not come
the glass of water keeps slipping through his fingers
the floor is made of wood it is burning
it is covered with pieces of glass
arising from a contingency
his face is the darkened face of a clock
it is marked with radium
the glass is falling from his face
the face of a clock in which there is a salamander
whose eyes are bright with radium
radium is a value that is always declining
radium is a value that is always disappearing
lead is also a value
but it is less bright than radium
loss is an unintentional decline in or disappearance of a value arising from
a contingency
a value is an efficacy a power a brightness
it is also a duration

[N.B. “The initial definition of *loss* is quoted from p. 22 of *Principles of Insurance* by Mehr & Cammack, & the initial definitions of *value* are from *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 1927 edition” (D. A.). But the rhythm & interplay of concrete names & “facts”—here & elsewhere in Antin’s poem—bear a direct relation to the Aztec definitions first printed by him & the present editor in their magazine, *something*. That it is simultaneously an elegy for a recently dead friend is also worth noting.]

Page 25 *From The Names of the Lion*

Source: al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad ibn Khālawayh, *Names of the Lion*, translated with notes & an introduction by David Larsen (Seattle: Atticus/Finch, 2009), 33–36. Reprinted by Wave Books (Seattle, 2017).

(1) As with Gertrude Stein’s insight (above, p. 445), a poetry of names emerges, even & sometimes most powerfully in forms & genres not associated with poetry as such. In the instance of Ibn Khālawayh (d. 980 or 981 A.D.), he was a Persian-born grammarian much of whose work was devoted to curiosities and anomalies of the Arabic language. So, according to David Larsen as scholar/translator, “*Names of the Lion* comes from a long serial work called *Kitāb Laysa fī kalām al-‘arab* (The Book of ‘Not in the Speech of the Arabs’), which has never been printed in its entirety. The title comes from the formula opening each short chapter: ‘There is in the speech of the Arabs no . . .’ followed by various exceptions to the stated rule.” Apart from this larger work, *Names of the Lion* came to be read independently along with now inextant listings of his such as *Names of the Serpent* and *Names of the Hours of the Night*. That we may read these today—“in the procedural spirit of recent avant-garde tradition”—as acts of *poesis*, is an indication of how far our own practice has come in the extension of what we identify or read as poetry.

(2) Writes David Larsen further: “Asiatic lion populations were endemic to Syria and Iraq until modern times, and encounters between lions and human beings are documented in all other periods. Perhaps this is what suggested the subject to Ibn Khālawayh, who left his birthplace in western Iran to study in Baghdad, and went on to Aleppo to serve the court of Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945–967 A.D.) as a tutor of Arabic grammar. Although he was no zoologist, Ibn Khālawayh’s list of lion’s names is touched by a natural historian’s zeal for order and intelligibility. The genre to which it belongs is the thesaurus, a branch of lexicographical writing that proliferated alongside a relatively small number of dictionaries in the first centuries of Arabic literary culture. In other words, *Names of the Lion* is not a composition in verse . . . [and if it now] reads like an elegiac text, it is because we of the twenty-first century mourn the lion’s lost mastery of the earth. We are also attuned to the *list* as a poetic form in a way that readers and writers of other periods were not. *Names of the Lion* may be a masterpiece of philological literature, but Ibn Khālawayh had no conception of it as a work of poetry.”

For more on poems as namings & namings as poetry, see above, p. 445.

(3) “Victory will be above all / To see truly into the distance / To see everything / Up close / So that everything can have a new name” (Guillaume Apollinaire).

Page 27 *Genesis V*

Source: Adapted from “The Secrets of Enoch,” chapters 25 & 26, in *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Cleveland: World Publishing, [1926], 1963), 90.

God’s sexuality—lonely, hermaphroditic—is another, very natural way of imagining the creation. The most famous such account in the Near East was the Egyptian masturbation genesis:

Heaven had not been created . . .
The earth had not been created . . .
I formed a spell in my heart . . .
I made forms of every kind . . .
I thrust my cock into my closed hand . . .
I made my seed to enter my hand . . .
I poured it into my mouth . . .
I broke wind under the form of SHU . . .
I passed water under the form of TEFNUT . . .

But even the priestly Genesis (Hebrew) couldn’t unhook the mind from its old imaginings, hypotheses, etc.; *vide* the section collaged into the beginning of the fifth chapter:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, *in the likeness of God* made he him;
Male & female created he them; & blessed them, & *called their name Adam*.

But the idea—re-explored in the medieval *Zohar*—was already very old.

Page 28 *The Pictures*

Sources: 1. From www.pinterest.com/pin/500462577315075862/ & various other sources. 2, 3, 5 & 7 from Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, Annual Report No. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1888–1889), 472, 167, 499, 170. 4. From Arthur Spencer, *The Lapps* (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1978), 96. 6. From Ernst Doblhofer, *Voices in Stone* (London: Souvenir Press, 1961), 268–69. 8. Chinese calligram, undated, from Massin, *Azerty: L’alphabet du monde* (Paris: Broché, Gallimard, 2004).

Here & elsewhere in the anthology are examples of visual poetry, i.e., non-verbal &/or pictorial structures with a language function analogous to but not

(necessarily) identical with that of the poem. Workings of this kind are surprisingly widespread among “nonliterate” peoples—most only a step away from writing, some having surely crossed the line. In Japanese, the verb *kaku* means both “to write” & “to draw,” & in these examples too it is hard to keep the functions separate or to assert with any confidence that writing is a late development rather than indigenous, in some form, to the human situation everywhere. Arts merge, then, & boundaries shift, & what started as an aid to memory develops as a distinct (but never isolated) activity; or, where it becomes a system of writing, develops also into the art of calligraphy.

o o o o

1. Newly recovered images from painted caves in Indonesia and in Patagonia (Argentina), dating from as much as forty thousand years before the present, place the origins of drawing/writing/imaging in a nearly global rather than a purely European time frame. Along with depictions of animals similar to those in paleolithic European caves, the massed display of human hands, as here, is testament to a push toward writing as a work of hand & mind more ancient & more universal than ever previously imagined.

2. Depiction of “the Giant Bird Kaloo . . . most terrible of all creatures . . . who caught the [Badger-Trickster] in his claws & . . . let him drop, & he fell from dawn to sunset.”

3. The chart accompanies a tradition chanted by the members of a secret society of the Osage tribe. It was drawn by an Osage, Red Corn, & images the world & early human emergence. Tree of life & river at the top; sun, moon & stars beneath; four heavens or upper worlds at center, through which the ancestors passed before coming to this earth, etc. The pictographs are (mnemonic) clues to songs but the whole pictorial device is more-than-that (see description of the Midē songs, below, p. 532).

4. A major form of verbovisual art & divination before destruction by the missionaries, the “magic drums” of the North European Saami [Lapps] served as virtual poem-maps of the shaman’s world. “Some drums had well over a hundred pictures— . . . each picture (god, man, animal, building) a self-contained concept which is of value in reading the message of the drum. There is no intention of recording incidents, or of telling a story,” but an approximate sectioning of the drum cuts the surface into quarters, “each representing a different part of the Lapp universe.” Otherwise, an open distribution of elements by the poet-shaman—in the creation of a field. (The drum shown here dates from the seventeenth century or earlier.)

5. Pictographs in sequence (incised on an ivory bow) show hunter & shaman in postures of supplication & divination amid scenes of trees, dwellings, animals, etc., & (lower left) “a demon sent out by the shaman to drive the game in the way of the hunter.” Pictured to the demon’s left are his assistants.

6. Using pictographic images while likely crossing-over to a sounded script, the two-sided terra-cotta disc dates back to circa 1700 B.C. “The highly pictorial

signs, which show no relationship with [other] Cretan pictographs, number 241, and include forty-five symbols, such as human figures and parts of the body, animals, plants, and tools.” The signs follow a set order, possibly of a ritual text associated with a shrine of the Phoenician god Baal.

7. Easter Island *rongorongo* writing: drawn on tablets called “singing wood” or “wood with hymns for recitation”: thus (apparently) a system of writing for the transmission of (sacred) song. More recent workers have come up with tentative readings of the poems, though seldom with great assurance.

8. The art of the calligram—letters or characters used to create a visual image related to the words depicted—was invented or reinvented circa 1900 by Apollinaire who called it, as below, “the most poetic & most modern depiction of the universe.” Yet the calligram as such goes back, like much of modernism, to the advent of fixed writing systems wherever & whenever found: a further example of the blurring of boundaries between old & new in our “most modern” workings. Or Gertrude Stein again: “As it is old it is new and as it is new it is old, but now we have come to be in our own way which is a completely different way.”

o o o o

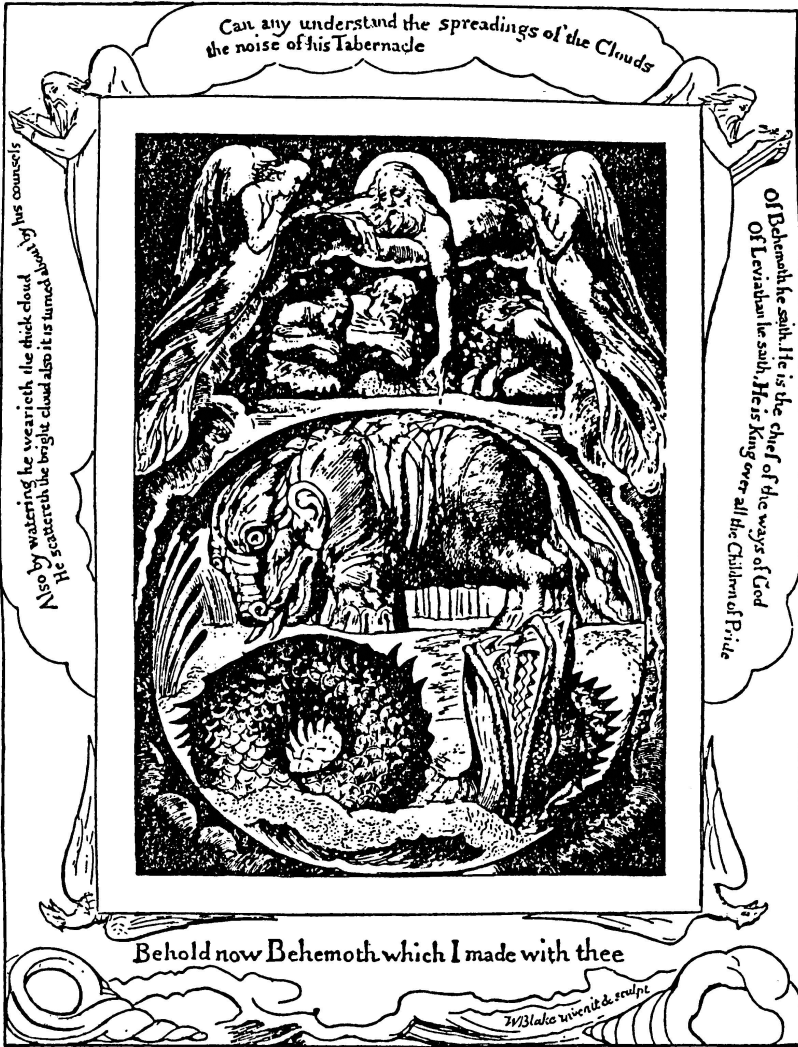
Addenda. (1) “Therefore, & in a certain measure, philosophers are painters; poets are painters & philosophers; painters are philosophers & poets. He who is not a poet & a painter is no philosopher. We say rightly that to understand is to see imaginary forms & figures; & understanding is fancy, at least it is not deprived of fancy. He is no painter who is not in some degree a poet & thinker, & there can be no poet without a measure of thought & representation” (Giordano Bruno [1591], as translated by Charles Doria & quoted by poet & artist Dick Higgins, who has published his own anthology of traditional “pattern poetry”).

(2) “The word & the image are one. Painting & composing poetry belong together. Christ is image & word. The word & the image are crucified” (Hugo Ball [1916], quoted in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters & Poets*).

(3) “Christ, these hieroglyphs. Here is the most abstract & formal deal of all the things this people dealt out—and yet, to my taste, it is precisely as intimate as verse is. Is, in fact, verse. Is their verse. And comes into existence, obeys the same laws that, the coming into existence, the persisting of verse, does” (Charles Olson, *The Mayan Letters*).

(4) Some “modern” examples, out of many, follow; other instances of picture-writings, etc., appear elsewhere (pp. 136, 173, 186, 202, 245).

Behemoth & Leviathan (1825)



Ôlho Por Ôlho (1964)



“Ôlho por ôlho” (eye for eye) is a “popcrete” poem. The original, in color, collaged from magazines, is 50 by 70 centimeters.

Filmic Frieze (1978)



Subtitle: "A Text for Scanning for Male & Female Voice."

Source: Wilhelm H.I. Bleek & Lucy C. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London: George Allen, 1911), 72.

The Bleek-Lloyd workings—the English was apparently Lucy Lloyd’s—are the best examples the editor knows of how a “literal” translation, when handled with respect for the intelligence & sense of form of the original maker, can point to the possibility of new uses in the translator’s own language. Wilhelm H.I. Bleek, German-born philologist & collector, died in 1875, so that his contributions to the *Specimens* are from before that date & those of his sister-in-law not much later. This makes their very modern sound all the more astonishing—as close to the language, say, of Gertrude Stein (see below) as the form of an African mask is to the paintings of Picasso or Modigliani.

“The Girl of the Early Race” was narrated by !lkábbo (lit. “Dream”) as told him by his mother !kwi-an. He was also the maker or transmitter of the Jackal’s song (p. 15) & the account of the “floating names” that appears in the STATEMENTS section of the present volume (p. 427).

Addenda. (1) Another characteristic of the Bleek-Lloyd translations is that they call into question the distinction (still strong among us) between poetry & prose, thus more faithful to the primitive situation; or, as Boas noted: “The form of [our] prose is largely determined by the fact that it is read, not spoken, while primitive prose is based on the art of oral delivery and is, therefore, more closely related to modern oratory than to the printed literary style. . . . In other cases [the prose passages] are of rhythmic form and must be considered poetry or chants rather than prose” (Boas, *Race, Language & Culture*).

Today, too, poetry & prose are coming to a place-of-meeting in the spoken language—& the distinctions made by previous centuries have come to mean much less.

(2)

Gertrude Stein
From LISTEN TO ME (A Play, 1936)

Act III
Scene II
The moon

No dog barks at the moon.
The moon shines and no dog barks
No not anywhere on this earth.
Because everywhere anywhere there are lights many lights and so no dog
knows that the moon is there
And so no dog barks at the moon now no not anywhere.
And the moon makes no one crazy no not now anywhere.

Because there are so many lights anywhere.
 That the light the moon makes is no matter.
 And so no one is crazy now anywhere.
 Because there are so many lights anywhere.
 That the light the moon makes is no matter.
 And no one is crazy now anywhere.
 Because there are so many lights anywhere.
 And so then there it does not matter
 The sun yes the sun yes does matter
 But the moon the moon does not matter
 Because there are so many lights everywhere that any dog knows that
 lights any night are anywhere.
 And so no dog bays at the moon anywhere.
 This is so
 This we know
 Because we wondered why,
 Why did the dogs not bay at the moon.
 They did not but why
 But of course why
 Because there are lights everywhere
 anywhere.
 And that is what they meant by never
 yesterday.

[*Note.* The editor has chosen to present the preceding as a running piece, though in the original the lines are spoken by five characters.]

Page 37 The Fragments

Sources: 1, 2, & 3. From Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts in Translation and Commentary* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), utterances 561, 501, 502. 4. From S. Langdon, *Babylonian Penitential Psalms* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), 21.

Time & chance have worked on the materials, not only to corrode but to create new structures: as if “process” itself had turned poet, to leave its imprints on the work. This explains the gaps, the holes-punched-out-by-time. But the workers who pieced such scraps together have left their marks too: not only dots as here, but brackets, parentheses, numbers, & open spaces. So something else appears: a value, a new form to attract the mind: as a Greek statue that has lost its colors, tempts the sculptor into the sight of marble: something tough as rock.

The pyramid texts themselves (arranged by Sethe & others into 714 “utterances,” over 2,000 lines) come from eight pyramids “constructed, and apparently inscribed, between the years 2350 and 2175 B.C.,” with many of the verses still older, perhaps 3000 B.C., writes Mercer, “perhaps long before.”

let us sing with the children by the knom
 let us set the children's beautiful (strange?) skulls by the hearth
 when the rain comes
 let us have rain
 let us have rain

+++++
 +++++
 +++++
 tremble

[Schwerner writes of this: “The modern, accidental form of Sumero-Akkadian tablets provided me with a usable poetic structure. They offered, among other things, ways out of closure—which I find increasingly onerous—as well as the expansion of the constricting girdle of English syntax. They also invited spontaneous phonetic improvisations, . . . made me feel comfortable in re-creating the animistic . . . & (enabled me) to put in holes wherever I wanted, or wherever they needed. . . .

“What is more, the rapid shifts in tonality & texture found in some archaic & primitive materials contribute a helpful antidote to ‘civilized’ modes concerned with characterological & dramatic imperatives of consistency. . . . [These] tonal & textural shifts . . . help place in some perspective the contemporary mystique of line-endings & their poetic importance. The question is not, Where does the line end; the question is, When is verse not charged with the power of the varied possible? The question is, What is meaningfulness?”]

(3)

Miguel de Cervantes
 from DON QUIXOTE

“I have a taste for reading, [he said], even torn papers lying in the street.”

[The reader might also be interested in Tristan Tzara’s “Manifesto on Feeble Love & Bitter Love” on p. 556, for directions on how “to make a dadaist poem.” Appropriated, collaged, & found poems have been a crucial part of conceptual forms of poetry from the early twentieth century to the present.]

Page 38 Genesis VI

Source: Translation from K. T. Preuss, *Die Religion und Mythologie der Uitoto* (1921), in *The Winged Serpent: An Anthology of American Indian Prose and Poetry*, ed. Margot Astrov (New York: John Day, 1946), 325–26.

Creation by word & thought, but more particularly, the recognition of “dream” as model for the creative process: a “reality” of a different order, of new combinations of objects: “thought” running ahead of “thinker,” toward the making of a “world.”

“Word” & “origin” & “father” immediately suggest St. John (result of Preuss’s German?)—though there the Word didn’t *make*, rather *was-with* & *was*, the father. And Aristotle too had taught that the origin of the gods was in men’s dreamings, “for when the soul is alone in sleep, then it takes its real nature.” In Australia (see below), the mythic period of the creative-beings was called the Dream Time or the Dreaming, which also included such latterday phenomena as participated in the sacred. Siberian & North American shamans received word & song in dreams, as did the Jewish prophets & certain Christian saints & poets.

In the early twentieth century, dream (like drugs later) was turned to, to sanction the use of alternative, “nonlogical” thought processes in poetry, painting, etc., until some realized that no such sanction was needed. But dreaming remains everyone’s chance for exposure to the possibilities of poetic process: of making the unknown “known.”

Addenda. (1) *Alcheringa* [from Arunta of Australia, *alcheringa*], *n.* 1. The Eternal Dream Time, The Dreaming of a sacred heroic time long ago when man and nature came to be, a kind of narrative of things that once happened. 2. A kind of charter of things that still happen. 3. A kind of *logos* or principle of order transcending everything significant. *v.* 1. The act of dreaming, as reality and symbol, by which the artist is inspired to produce a new song. 2. The act by which the mind makes contact with whatever mystery it is that connects the Dreaming and the Here-and-Now. (Adapted from W. E. H. Stanner.)

(2) “From the moment when it is subjected to a methodical examination, when, by means yet to be determined, we succeed in recording the contents of dreams in their entirety . . . we may hope that the mysteries which really are not will give way to the great Mystery. I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession” (André Breton, *The First Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924).

(3) “If the work of another translates my dream, his work is mine” (F. Picabia).

Page 38 *All Lives, All Dances, & All Is Loud*

Source: C. M. Bowra from R. P. Trilles, trans., *Les Pygmées de la Forêt Equatoriale* (Paris: Librairie Bloud and Gay, 1931), & printed in Bowra, *Primitive Song* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1962), 106.

UNIVERSAL PRIMITIVE & ARCHAIC VISION OF ALL LIFE IN MOTION &
SHARING A SINGLE NATURE WHICH IS SACRED

20TH CENTURY AMERICAN NOSTALGIA TO ADDRESS & TO ANIMATE THE
THING-WORLD

Addenda. (1) “Primitive man by no means lacks the ability to grasp the empirical differences of things. But in his conception of nature and life these differences are obliterated by a stronger feeling: the deep conviction of a fundamental and indelible *solidarity of life* that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of its single forms. . . . Life is felt as an unbroken continuous whole. . . . The limits between (its) different spheres are not insurmountable barriers; they are fluent and fluctuating. . . . By a sudden metamorphosis everything may be turned into everything. If there is any characteristic and outstanding feature of the mythical world, any law by which it is governed—it is this law of metamorphosis” (E. Cassirer).

(2)

A SONG OF THE BEAR

Sung by Eagle Shield

my paw is sacred

all things are sacred

—F. Densmore, *Teton Sioux Music*

(3)

“All things possess intelligence & a share of thought.”

—Empedocles of Akragas, *On Nature*

(4)

“For everything that lives is holy.”

—W. Blake, *A Song of Liberty*

Summary. A common ideology in what Cassirer calls “the consanguinity of all forms of life”; a common method in the free interchange of terms within the poem. *Question:* Is the order you speak of “natural” or is it “imposed”? *Answer:* Please repeat the question.

Page 39 Yoruba Praises

Source: Bakare Gbadamosi & Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Poetry* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ministry of Education, 1959), 16.

Shango—the Yoruba god of thunder; said to have been the third king of the town of Oyo.

The praise-poem (Yoruba *oriki*, Zulu *izibongo*, Basuto *lithoko*, etc.) turns up through much of Black Africa. At its simplest it’s the stringing together of a series of praise-names (usually independent utterances) describing the qualities owned by a particular person, god, animal, plant, place, etc.—anything, in short, that makes a “deep impression” on the singer (see Addendum 1, below). Often, too, it’s

not a question of “praise” but of delineation according to a certain method. The method itself is a kind of “collaging” from a fixed set of verses, lines & tags which are at the poet-diviner’s disposal & can be supplemented by new invention. Among the Yoruba, e.g., each individual has a series of praise-names in the form of “descriptive phrases . . . that may be invented by relatives or neighbors or—most frequently—by the drummers” (Gbadamosi & Beier, *Yoruba Poetry*, 7) or, particularly in the case of god names, handed down from the past. The actual singing (or drumming) of the praise-poem involves the arrangement of already existing materials into a new & coherent composition “having as its subject a single individual.” The individual poets take off from the work of the collectivity, to which they add as last in a line of makers. But their “art” is one of assemblage—the weighing of line against line.

Addenda. (1) “To the imaginative mind of the Bantu everything that causes a deep impression, even material objects, affords an occasion for the utterance of lofty phrases and words of praise. Once when traveling south of Delagoa Bay through the desert, our party arrived in the neighborhood of the Umbelozu railway. The train was heard in the distance. One of my servants was busy cleaning pots; I heard him muttering the following words:

The one who roars in the distance
The one who crushes the braves in pieces & smashes them
The one who debauches our wives—
They abandon us, they go to the towns to lead bad lives—
The seducer! And we remain alone

“He was extolling the huge thing and lamenting his misfortune and the curse it has brought upon the country” (Henri A. Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, 1912).

(2) Further examples of praise-poems appear throughout the AFRICA section, above. The reader may also be interested in the combination of praise-poem technique with “composition by chance” in the Basuto divining poems (see commentary, p. 527); also in the similarity of praise-poems to earlier Egyptian workings (see “The Cannibal Hymn,” p. 132; “Egyptian God Names,” p. 10) & to the epic genealogies of Polynesia (see commentary, p. 455). In looking for modern analogues, three areas of resemblance should be distinguished: to modern poets using techniques of assemblage or collage; to efforts, e.g., by dadaists, surrealists, & others, to write group-poems; & to poems, irrespective of method, in which a series of phrases is made to turn around a single subject-as-pivot. The first two at least witness to a modern-primitive concern with the transpersonal—but that’s just part of the story. (See also *Symposium of the Whole*, 125–28.)

(3) “The poet . . . (‘the maker of plots or fables’ as Aristotle insists) . . . is preeminently the maker of the plot, the framework—not necessarily of everything

that takes place within that framework! The poet creates a *situation* wherein he invites other persons & the world in general to be co-creators with him! He does not wish to be a dictator but a loyal co-initiator of action within the free society of equals which he hopes his work will help to bring about” (Jackson Mac Low).

(4)

Takis Sinopoulos

IOANNA RAVING

Constantinos is a door.

He is a face behind the door.

He is a door that suddenly slams and crushes your fingers.

Constantinos is an empty room.

Scream of peril in an empty room.

Constantinos is a house, a gloomy house.

Within him unexplored religions of blood smolder.

Constantinos is tomorrow tomorrow tomorrow (tomorrow countlessly repeated).

He has two bodies, one red the other black.

Sometimes I deprive him of one, sometimes of the other. Together they reduce me to ashes.

Constantinos disappears if you look at him squarely.

Constantinos appears if you dream of him.

He battles night, falls on her blind with rage and thus is filled with wounds that constantly fester.

He tortures himself with the faces, the vagueness tyrannizes him, fumbling my body, the light of my face and persistent tears shatter him.

Constantinos is the sun that determines the shadow of grass with his continuous movement.

Constantinos is the design on a carpet of stifled flowers.

Constantinos is the struggle with rooms and birds.

He always speaks of a river that will cleanse his back of the soil and impurities of this earth.

He recovers from the dark motives that excite his blood and then he sleeps.

Constantinos has much filth in his imaginary life.

Constantinos is a questionable fact.

Constantinos is a half-eaten mask.

He wears this winter coat and presumes he is constantly transforming.

Constantinos is a dark oppressive day when the wind carries dust to the windows.

Behind the face of Constantinos stirs the black Constantinos.

Constantinos burns at night with a passion more terrible than his words.
 I repeat Constantinos is a house.
 He is a house full of contrivances whose claws slash your back.
 Constantinos repents for deeds that never happened.
 He confuses what he did with what he planned to do.
 He constructed dreadful buildings and held them hopelessly in his hands
 until they tumbled and smashed us.
 Constantinos is responsible for whatever happens inside us.
 Constantinos is a mirror that shatters in endless paranoia and reflections
 of fantastic surprises.
 He always calls my face dark ravine of the moon. (My face itself is light.)
 Constantinos is terrifying when he flays the layers of his skin one by one.
 I don't know how to calm Constantinos.
 Hour after hour madness stands by him and it shines from within his
 bowels like a lighted lamp.
 This is Constantinos.
 —Translation from the Greek by George Economou

Page 40 A Poem for the Wind

Source: Translation by Robert Williams in William F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales, Containing the Cymric Poems Attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1868), vol. 1, 535–37.

I am a cell
I am a cleft
I am a restoration
I am the depository of song
I am a man of letters

The legendary poet Taliesin goes back to (probably) the sixth century A.D. & a post-Roman period of struggles with the invading Saxon kingdoms. A product, at origin, of bardic & oral traditions, the work of the Celtic seer-poets wasn't written into final form until some centuries after—in such works as the *Llyfer* (= book of) *Taliesin*. Along with the praises of warriors & poems composed on Christian & “prophetic” lines, Taliesin's oeuvre includes a kind of metamorphic praise-poetry in which the poet is the first-person speaker of his own works & transformations. Thus, in a more recent translation:

I have been a blue salmon,
 I have been a dog, a stag, a roebuck on the mountain,
 A stock, a spade, an axe in the hand,
 A stallion, a bull, a buck,
 A grain which grew on a hill,

I was reaped, and placed in an oven,
I fell to the ground when I was being roasted
And a hen swallowed me.
For nine nights I was in her crop.
I have been dead, I have been alive,
I am Taliesin.

—Translated by J.E. Caerwyn Williams in Sir Ifor Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin*

All of which leads to a story-as-explanation—but likely developed after the (shamanic) poem itself—that traces Taliesin back to one Gwion Bach, who steals from the shamaness Cyrridwen a liquid like Odin’s mead-of-poetry, taking three drops therefrom onto his finger (thumb). Pursued by Cyrridwen, he runs through the kinds of changes given in the poem—as she does, too, in pursuit—& ends as a grain of wheat that Cyrridwen qua hen swallows up, to give birth nine months later to a resurrected Gwion. Still out to get him, she sews him in a bag & drops him, as babe, into the ocean, from which Prince Elphin pulls him & “because of his lovely forehead (*tal*) renames him *Tal-iesin* (beautiful brow)”; then

. . . [Elphin] was astounded when the beautiful browed infant began to talk with the wisdom of a patriarch, not only in prose, but in flowing rhyme as well. Poems streamed out of his mouth. Gwyddno, Elphin’s father, when he came in, asked about the catch at the weir. “I got something better than fish,” his son replied. “What was that?” “A poet.” “Alas,” said the father, “what is a thing like that worth?”—using another Welsh word, *tal*, meaning worth, value. The child immediately answered back, “He is worth more than you ever got out of the weir,” punning on *Tal-iesin* again, as if it meant “fine value.” “Canst thou speak, though so small?” asked the other. “I can say more,” said Taliesin, “than thou canst ask.”

Of such knowledge, etc., the “riddle of the wind” is an example—& one that seems to hide an even older mystery & reality. But the boasts of Taliesin acknowledge that old lore as well, as in the addenda to the *Mabinogion*: “Samson got / within the towers of Babylon / all the magical arts / of Asia // I got / in my bardic song / all the magical arts / of Europe & Africa.”

Addenda. (1) The reiterated statements, “he is good, he is bad,” etc., reflect an approach to the world-at-large which is a common feature of many primitive/ archaic (= primal) thought systems, much as Gladys Reichard, say, has shown it in her studies of Navajo symbolism:

Although Navaho dogma stresses the dichotomy of good and evil, it does not set one off against the other. It rather emphasizes one quality or element in a being which in different circumstances may be the opposite. Sun, though

“great” and a “god,” is not unexceptionally good. . . . Similarly, few things are wholly bad: nearly everything can be brought under control, and when it is, the evil effect is eliminated. Thus evil may be transformed into good; things predominantly evil, such as snake, lightning, thunder, coyote, may even be invoked. If they have been the cause of misfortune or illness, they alone can correct it. . . . Good then in Navaho dogma is control. Evil is that which is ritually not under control. And supernatural power is not absolute but relative, depending on the degree of control to which it is subjected. In short, definition depends upon emphasis, not upon exclusion. (G. Reichard, *Navaho Religion*)

(2) See also William Blake’s classic formulation (“without contraries is no progression”) on p. 574, below.

Page 42 *War God’s Horse Song I*

Page 43 *War God’s Horse Song II*

Sources: I. Slightly revised from Dane & Mary Roberts Coolidge, *The Navaho Indians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 2. II. Collected by David P. McAllister & previously unpublished. Variations on the same matter from the blessing-way of Frank Mitchell (d. 1967) of Chinle, Arizona. This is one of seventeen horse songs in Mitchell’s possession—the series a major example of minimal adjustments & variations on a single theme.

Following publication of these two versions in 1968, the present editor became closely involved in an experimental translation of the Frank Mitchell horse songs (see p. 192). In the songs on which I worked, the metaphoric/metamorphic descriptions fell away, while the changes on a fixed series of utterances became overwhelming. But even more, I was led to a realization of the sound-play in the original & took it as the principal quality to be (re)created in the English. That sound & imaginal correspondences are inseparable in this poetics seems to me crucial to an understanding of the poetry enterprise anywhere—how & why it works.

The “war god” introduced into the Coolidges’ title is the primal hero, Enemy Slayer or Slayer of Monsters, who went to the house of the Sun (his father) in the search for horses. For more on the (horse) body & its treatment as *imago mundi*, see the note, immediately following, on “To the God of Fire as a Horse”—& for a related metaphoric mapping, the following poem by Aimé Césaire.

Addendum.

Aimé Césaire

HORSE / FOR PIERRE LOEB

My horse falters against skulls hoppedscotched in rust
my horse rears in a storm of clouds which are putrefactions of
shipwrecked flesh

my horse neighs in the fine rain of roses which my blood becomes in the
 carnival scenery
 my horse falters against the clumps of cacti which are the viper knots of
 my torments
 my horse falters neighs and falters toward the blood curtain of my blood
 pulled down on all the trash who shoot craps with my blood
 my horse falters before the impossible flame of the bit howled by the
 vesicles of my blood
 Great horse my blood
 my blood wine of a drunkard's vomit
 I give it to you great horse
 I give you my ears to be made into nostrils capable of quivering
 my hair to be made into a mane as wild as they come
 my tongue to be made into mustang hooves
 I give them to you
 great horse
 so that you can approach the men of elsewhere and tomorrow at the
 extreme limits of brotherhood
 on your back a child with barely moving lips
 who for you
 will disarm
 the chlorophyllous dough of the vast ravens of the future.
 —Translated from French by Clayton Eshleman & Annette Smith

Page 45 To the God of Fire as a Horse

Source: A hymn from the Rig-Veda (1500–1200 B.C.) in an English version by Robert Kelly, previously unpublished.

Agni was the Vedic Aryan god of fire & personification of the sacrificial fire itself. The connection of sun- & fire-gods with the horse is familiar enough from (say) Greek mythology, & it's interesting too that the Navajo figure identified by the Coolidges as the war-god (see "War God's Horse Song" above) appears in McAllister's variation as "son-of-the-Sun" who (like an untragic Phaeton) receives his father's multicolored horses, etc. A text from the very ancient *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* equates various parts of the sacrificial horse with elements of the cosmos, much as the Navajo does:

Dawn . . . is the head of the sacrificial horse. The sun is his eye; the wind, his breath; the sacrificial fire his open mouth; the year is the body of the sacrificial horse. The sky is his back; the atmosphere, his belly; the earth, his underbelly; the directions, his flanks; the intermediate directions, his ribs; the seasons, his limbs; the months and half-months, his joints; days and nights, his feet; the stars, his bones; the clouds, his flesh. Sand is the food in his stomach; rivers,

his entrails; mountains, his liver and lungs; plants and trees, his hair; the rising sun, his forepart; the setting sun, his hindpart. When he yawns, then it lightnings; when he shakes himself, then it thunders; when he urinates, then it rains. Speech is actually his neighing.

The reader may want to compare these compositions with the African praise-poems (see pp. 39, 139, & 145).

Page 46 The Stars

Source: J.R.'s translation from A.E. Preyre's French version as printed in Roger Caillois & Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Trésor de la poésie universelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 35. An earlier English version goes back to C.G. Leland (1902).

A 1921 version by Leland's collaborator, John Dyneley Prince, has two significant changes: *our light is a voice* > *our light is a star*, & *this is the song of the stars* > *this is a song of the mountains*.

Page 49 The Annunciation

Source: Adapted by J.R. from J. Bascot, *La vie de Marpa* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1937), 31.

Marpa (eleventh century A.D.) was third guru in the line founded by Tilo in India & successor to his own teacher, Naropa. He was the first Tibetan master of the Kargyudpa sect & the instructor of the more famous Milarepa. Theirs "was essentially a ritualist system based upon spells and diagrams (mantras & yantras), the power to use which could only be imparted directly from adept to disciple. Hence the name of [the] sect, [i.e.] the followers of the oral tradition" (Sir Humphrey Clarke, *The Message of Milarepa*). The original religion of Tibet, called Bon, had been strongly shamanistic, & the powers of the Kargyudpa teachers were such that their brand of Buddhism could easily merge with & replace it.

Marpa traveled a good deal & translated half a hundred works from Sanskrit, which earned for him his nickname of *Sgrasgyur*, the Translator. Like all the gurus of his line, he was the subject of a biography, & in it much was made of his violent temper as a child, an instability he had to master & transform. His personality was, in this sense, very much like that attributed to the shamans (see below, p. 482). Like them too, he was said to have the power of ecstasy, & his soul could leave his body & enter another's. He made many songs & spells, though Milarepa seems to have surpassed him there.

See, too, the note on Milarepa, p. 553, below.

Page 49 How Isaac Tens Became a Shaman

Source: Selected & adapted from Marius Barbeau, *Medicine-Men on the North Pacific Coast*, Bulletin No. 152 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1958), 39ff.

A. *The Experience*. The word *shaman* (Tungus: *šaman*) comes from Siberia & “in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia & Central Asia” (M. Eliade, *Shamanism*). But the parallels elsewhere (North America, Indonesia, Oceania, China, etc.) are remarkable & lead also to a consideration of coincidences between “primitive-archaic” & modern thought. Eliade treats shamanism in-the-broader-sense as a specialized technique of ecstasy & the shaman as technician-of-the-sacred. In this sense, too, the shaman can be seen as proto-poet, for almost always his technique, or hers, hinges on the creation of special linguistic circumstances, i.e., of song & invocation.

In 1870 Rimbaud first used the term *voyant* (seer) to identify the new breed of poet who was to be “absolutely modern,” etc.:

one must, I say, become a seer,
make oneself into a seer

or, as Rasmussen writes of the Iglulik Eskimos:

the young aspirant, when applying to a shaman, should always
use the following formula

takujumaqama: I come to you
because I desire to see

& the Copper Inuit called the shaman-songman “*elik*, i.e., one who has eyes.”

o o o o

Isaac Tens’s experience is not only extraordinary but typical of (1) the psychology of shamanism, (2) the shaman’s “initiation” through dream & vision, (3) the transformation of vision into song. The dream & vision aspect, in fact, goes way past any limits, however loosely drawn, of shamanism, into areas where a priesthood (as developer & transmitter of a *fixed* system) predominates, &, on the other hand, into areas where all are “shamans,” i.e., are “open” to the “gift” of vision & song. Thus:

The future [Bororo] shaman walks in the forest and suddenly sees a bird perch within reach of his hand, then vanish. Flocks of parrots fly down toward him and disappear as if by magic. The future shaman goes home shaking and uttering unintelligible words. An odor of decay . . . emanates from his body. Suddenly a gust of wind makes him totter; he falls like a dead man. At this moment he has become the receptacle of a spirit that speaks through his mouth. From now on he is a shaman. (A. Métraux, “Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l’Amérique du Sud tropicale,” 1944, in Eliade, *Shamanism*)

Then the bear of the lake or the inland glacier will come out, he will devour all your flesh and make you a skeleton, and you will die. But you will recover your

flesh, you will awaken, & your clothes will come rushing to you. (Wm. Thalbitzer, "The Heathen Priests of East Greenland," 1910, in Eliade, *Shamanism*)

He dreams of many things, and his body is muddled and becomes a house of dreams. And he dreams constantly of many things, and on awaking says to his friends: "My body is muddled today; I dreamt many men were killing me; I escaped I know not how. And on waking, one part of my body felt different from the other parts; it was no longer alike all over." (H. Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, Natal, 1870)

All Blackfoot songs, except those learned from other tribes, are said to have been obtained through dreams or visions. . . . A man may be walking along and hear a bird, insect, stone or something else singing; he remembers the song and claims it as especially given to him. A man may get songs from a ghost in the same way. (C. Wissler, "Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 7, part 2 [1912])

Anything, in fact, can deliver a song because anything—"night, mist, the blue sky, east, west, women, adolescent girls, men's hands & feet, the sexual organs of men & women, the bat, the land of souls, ghosts, graves, the bones, hair & teeth of the dead," etc.—is alive. Here is the central image of shamanism & of all "primitive" thought, the intuition (whether fiction or not doesn't yet matter) of a connected & fluid universe, as alive as a man is, or a woman—just that much alive.

And all this seems thrust upon them—a unifying vision that brings with it the power of song & image, seen in their own terms as power to heal-the-soul & all disease viewed as disorder-of-the-soul, as disconnection & rigidity. Nor do they come to it easily—this apparent separation of themselves from the normal orders of man—but often manifest what Eliade calls "a resistance to the divine election."

We're on familiar ground here, granted the very obvious differences in terminology & place, materials & techniques, etc.—recognizing in the shaman's experience that systematic derangement of the senses Rimbaud spoke of, not for its own sake but toward the possibility of sight & order. For the shaman-poet

like the sick man . . . is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world. But the primitive magician, the medicine man, or the shaman is not only a sick man; he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself. (Eliade, *Shamanism*)

So, something more than literature is going on here: for ourselves, let me suggest, the question of how the concept & techniques of the "sacred" can persist in the "secular" world, not as nostalgia for the archaic past but (as Snyder writes) "a vehicle to ease us into the future."

Addenda. (1)

Walt Whitman

from *OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING*

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)

Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?

For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you,

Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,

And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and
more sorrowful than yours,

A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

O you solitary singer, singing by yourself, projecting me,

O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you,

Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,

Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,

Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there in
the night,

By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,

The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,

The unknown want, the destiny of me.

(2)

Allen Ginsberg

PSALM IV

Now I'll record my secret vision, impossible sight of the face of God:

It was no dream, I lay broad waking on a fabulous couch in Harlem
having masturbated for no love, and read half naked an open book of

Blake on my lap

Lo & behold! I was thoughtless and turned a page and gazed on the living

Sun-flower

and heard a voice, it was Blake's, reciting in earthen measure:

the voice rose out of the page to my secret ear that had never heard
before—

I lifted my eyes to the window, red walls of buildings flashed outside,
endless sky sad in Eternity,

the sunlight gazing on the world, apartments of Harlem standing in the
universe

—each brick and cornice stained with intelligence like a vast living face—
the great brain unfolding and brooding in wilderness!—Now speaking
aloud with Blake's voice—

Love! thou patient presence & bone of the body! Father! thy careful
watching and waiting over my soul!

My son! My son! the endless ages have remembered me! My son! My son!
Time howled in anguish in my ear!
My son! My son! my Father wept and held me in his dead arms.

Sept. 1, 1957

Ischia

Note. The actual vision must have taken place in the summer of 1948. He writes of it elsewhere: “That is to say, looking out at the window, through the window at the sky, suddenly it seemed that I saw into the depths of the universe, by looking simply into the ancient sky. The sky suddenly seemed very *ancient*. And this was the very ancient place that [Blake] was talking about, the sweet golden clime. I suddenly realized that *this* existence was *it!* And, that I was born in order to experience up to this very moment that I was having this experience, to realize what this was all about—in other words that this was the moment I was born for. This initiation.”

(3) “the virtue of the mind / is that emotion / which causes / to see” (G. Oppen)

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B. *The Songs.* The songs were recorded in 1920 from Isaac Tens, an old member of the Gitenmaks tribe of the Gitksan at Hazelton, B.C. The free workings here are by J.R. & are based on Barbeau’s literal translations plus interpretations & descriptions of the accompanying visions, apparently from Tens himself. His total song property consisted of three groups of songs—twenty-three in all, or somewhat more than the average Gitksan shaman. Some of his comments follow.

“When I am called to treat a patient, I go into something like a trance, & I compose a song, or I revive one for the occasion . . . [*Of the ending of the first song*]: This cannot be explained rationally, because it is a vision, & visions are not always intelligible. In my vision I dreamt that I was very sick, & my spirit became sick like me; it was like a human being but had no name. In the same dream I saw that there had been a heavy run of salmon headed by a large Salmon. This would bring relief to the people who were starving. The huge Salmon appeared to me in my vision, although he was way down deep in the canyon. The She Robin came to me, & she lifted me out of my sickness. That is how I was cured . . . [*Commenting further on the origin of one of the songs*]: When getting ready for the songs, I fell into a trance & saw a vast fine territory. In the middle of it a house stood. I stepped into it, & I beheld my uncle Tsigwee who had been a medicine-man [*halaait*]. He had died several years before. Then another uncle appeared—Gukswawtu. Both of them had been equally famous in their day. The songs above are those I heard them sing. While they were singing, the Grizzly ran through the door, & went right around. Then he rose into the air behind the clouds, describing a circle, & came back to the house. Each of my uncles took a rattle & placed it into one of my hands. That is why I always use two rattles in

my performances. In my vision I beheld many fires burning under the house. As soon as I walked out of the house, my trance ended. From then on I sang those chants just as I had learned them in my vision.”

Addendum.

Gary Snyder
FIRST SHAMAN SONG

In the village of the dead,
Kicked loose bones
 ate pitch of a drift log
 (whale fat)
Nettles and cottonwood. Grass smokes
 in the sun

Logs turn in the river
 sand scorches the feet.

Two days without food, trucks roll past
 in dust and light, rivers
 are rising.

Thaw in the high meadows. Move west in July.

Soft oysters rot now, between tides
 the flats stink.

I sit without thoughts by the log-road
Hatching a new myth
Watching the waterdogs
 the last truck gone.

—from *Myths & Texts*, 1960

Page 52 A Shaman Climbs Up the Sky

Source: J. R.’s translation from Roger Caillois & Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Trésor de la poésie universelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 55–57. Original texts in Wilhelm Radlov, *Aus Siberien* (Leipzig, 1884), vol. 2, 20–50.

But the shamans’ techniques-of-the-sacred made them, more than modern poets, supreme physicians & custodians of the soul. The belief was enough to validate the function—that they could climb to heaven or descend to the underworld or into the sea, could find a cure or an answer to misfortune, or after death guide the soul to its place-of-rest, etc.

In the rites accompanying a climb, a tree or ladder was generally used (see “Climbing Event,” p. 98), but often too the shaman’s drum was itself viewed as vehicle-of-motion; “the drum,” said the Yakut shamans, “is our horse.” The journey—to “heaven” or “hell”—took place in stages marked by “obstacles,” the shaman-songs being the keys to unlock them. Thus, when the Altaic “black”

shaman in his descent here reaches “the Chinese desert of red sand (&) rides over a yellow steppe that a magpie could not fly across, (he) cries to the audience: ‘By the power of songs we cross it!’” In singing & dancing he has the help of assistants, & sometimes the audience joins him in chorus.

In the ascent itself, the shaman climbs from notch to notch on the tree, while singing his actions & the obstacles that meet him. A horse is sacrificed, killed by breaking its backbone so that “not a drop of its blood falls to the ground or touches the sacrificers.” The scarecrow-geese follows & overtakes the horse’s soul, while the shaman both sings & responds by imitating the bird’s cry. The climb ends with the address to Bai Ulgan, from whom he learns “if the sacrifice has been accepted & . . . what other sacrifices the divinity expects.”

The subtitles only give a sketch of the actions (events) accompanying the songs; the interested reader can consult Eliade’s *Shamanism*, pp. 190–197, for the fuller scenario.

Pages 55 *The Dog Vision*

Source: *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, as told through John G. Neihardt (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1932; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 186–91.

Hehaka Sapa or Black Elk. Born “in the Moon of the Popping Trees (December) on the Little Powder River in the Winter when the Four Crows Were Killed (1863).” Died August 1950 on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Manderson, South Dakota. Given a “great vision” in his childhood (comparable in its complexity to that of biblical Ezekiel), he was a “holy man” or “priest” (*wichasha wakon*) of the Oglala Sioux &, like his second cousin Crazy Horse, a great “visionary seer.” But unable to live out his visions for the rescue of his people, he did finally deliver to strangers a record of those sightings & of the rituals entrusted to him by the former “keepers of the sacred pipe.” And, more than eighty years after his great vision & initiation, was able to say of his “defeat”:

. . . Now that I can see it all as from a lonely hilltop, I know it was the story of a mighty vision given to a man too weak to use it; of a holy tree that should have flourished in a people’s heart with flowers and singing birds, and now is withered; and of a people’s dream that died in bloody snow.

The Dog Vision came to Black Elk at age eighteen, the culmination of that ceremony called *hanblecheyapi* or “crying for a vision,” & was, like his earlier “great vision,” not only a personal event but a testimony to his people’s struggle with the Wasichus (= Federales). Like his “great vision” too, it awaited completion in performance—serving in this case as scenario for a *heyoka* ceremony peopled with sacred clowns “doing everything wrong or backwards to make the people laugh . . . so that it may be easier for the power to come to them.” The

connections between vision & performance, the sacred & the comic, & the private & public good, have rarely been more clearly stated.

A full account of the ensuing “horse dance” can be found in J. R.’s *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 165–72.

Page 57 From the Midnight Velada

Source: Translation from Mazatec by Henry Munn, with Eloina de Estrada Gonzales, in *New Wilderness Letter* 5–6 (1978): 1–4. Munn’s more detailed English translation appears in *María Sabina: Selections*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

A major Wise One (= shaman) among the Mazatecs of Oaxaca, Mexico, María Sabina received her poems/songs through use of the *Psilocybe* mushroom at all-night curing sessions (veladas): a practice going back to pre-Conquest Mexico & witnessed by the Spanish chronicler who wrote: “They pay a sorcerer who eats them [the mushrooms] & tells what they have taught him. He does so by means of a rhythmic chant in full voice.” The sacred mushrooms are considered the source of Language itself—are, in Henry Munn’s good phrase, “the mushrooms of language.” Thus: “If you ask a shaman where his imagery comes from, he is likely to reply: I didn’t say it, the mushrooms did. No mushroom speaks, only man speaks, but he who eats these mushrooms, if he is a man of language, becomes endowed with an inspired capacity to speak. The shamans who eat them . . . are the oral poets of the people, the doctors of the word, the seers and oracles, the ones possessed by the voice. ‘It is not I who speak,’ said Heraclitus, ‘it is the logos.’” This source of the specific poem in a hypostatized Language is emphasized by the shaman’s practice of ending each chanted line with the word *tzo*, i.e., the third person singular, present tense of the verb *to say*. “The *says* at the end of each utterance,” writes Munn, “is a point of emphasis, an enunciatory mark, a vocal stop that punctuates the flow of the chant. Lacan: ‘In the unconscious, it speaks.’ Heidegger: ‘Language first of all and inherently obeys the essential nature of speaking: it says.’” (For more on María Sabina, see *Symposium of the Whole*, 187–91, 475–79.)

Addendum. As an instance of direct influences across cultures, note the following in which the American poet Anne Waldman, having come across a literal & very rough translation of the María Sabina chantings, used its revealed structure to model a work called *Fast Speaking Woman*, which she performed at poetry readings & as part of Bob Dylan’s shortlived *Rolling Thunder* movie.

o o o o

Anne Waldman
from FAST SPEAKING WOMAN (1975)
because I don’t have spit
because I don’t have rubbish
because I don’t have dust

because I don't have that which is in air
because I am air
let me try you with my magic power:

I'm a shouting woman
I'm a speech woman
I'm an atmosphere woman
I'm an airtight woman
I'm a flesh woman
I'm a flexible woman
I'm a high style woman
I'm an automobile woman
I'm a mobile woman
I'm an elastic woman
I'm a necklace woman
I'm a silk scarf woman
I'm a know nothing woman
I'm a know it all woman
I'm a day woman
I'm a doll woman
I'm a sun woman
I'm a late afternoon woman
I'm a clock woman
I'm a wind woman
I'm a white woman
I'M A SILVER LIGHT WOMAN
I'M AN AMBER LIGHT WOMAN
I'M AN EMERALD LIGHT WOMAN
I'm an abalone woman
I'm the abandoned woman
I'm the woman abashed, the gibberish woman
the aborigine woman, the woman absconding
the absent woman
the transparent woman
the absinthe woman
the woman absorbed, the woman under tyranny
the contemporary woman, the mocking woman
the artist dreaming inside her house

o o o o

An instance of María Sabina's presence within contemporary Mazatec culture & language can be found in Juan Gregorio Regino's "Where the Song Begins," p. 361.

[N.B. The reader can compare the structure of the María Sabina chants with the Celtic incantations of Taliesin & others (pp. 294, 477), the Coptic Egyptian “Thunder, Perfect Mind” (p. 287), & the various African praise-poems throughout this volume.]

Page 59 *The Dream of Enkidu*

Source: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, English version by N.K. Sandars (New York: Penguin Books, 1960), 89–90.

Gilgamesh—“The hero of the Epic; son of the goddess Ninsun & of a priest in Kullab, fifth king of Uruk (Erech) after the flood, famous as a great builder & as a judge of the dead. A cycle of epic poems has collected around his name.”

Enkidu—“Moulded by Aruru, goddess of creation, out of clay in the image of Anu, the sky-god; described as ‘of the essence of Anu’ & of Ninurta the war-god. He is the companion of Gilgamesh & is wild or natural man; he was later considered a patron or god of animals.”

Sandars’s version is a reconstruction based on previous translations from Sumerian, Akkadian, & Hittite originals. It reads very well & for many poets of the editor’s generation has been a way into the material. A “collation” (we might now call it a collage), it is in that sense, as Sandars in fact points out, like “the ‘Standard Text’ created by the scribes of Assurbanipal in the seventh century: [also] a collation.” But certainly an example of what to do with archaic material to get it back in circulation.

The reader might also check out Stuart Kendall’s more recent versified translation, as in the following:

Troubled
 alone
Enkidu spoke to Gilgamesh:
“My friend
I had a dream last night
The skies thundered
The earth echoed the call
And I was in between them
A man with a somber face
 like Anzu
 a lion-headed thunderbird
Frightening
His hands
 the paws of a lion
His nails
 eagle talons
Seized my hair
 capsized me
 like a raft

I struck him but he swung
 Like a rope
 Like a raft
 He overturned me
 like a bull
 He trampled me
 My body in a slaver
 I cried out
 ‘Save me
 my friend’
 But you did not save me
 You were afraid and did not save me. . . .”
 —from S. Kendall, *Gilgamesh*, 2012

Page 60 A List of Bad Dreams Chanted as a Cause & Cure for Missing Souls

Source: Slightly abridged, from translation by Carol Rubenstein, in C. Rubenstein, “Poems of Indigenous Peoples of Sarawak,” *Sarawak Museum Journal*, Special Monograph 2 (1973): 1:508–9. Reprinted in C. Rubenstein, *The Honey Tree Song: Poems and Chants of the Sarawak Dayaks* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984).

Part of a longer group of prayers used by the Bidayuh (Land Dayaks) of Sarawak, Malaysia, as a means for coming at the cause of illnesses brought on by soul-wandering. The chant accompanies the spirit-medium’s trance journey to the Underworld (Sebayan) & unfolds a catalogue of dream-names—as if to set down *all* those possibilities so that the real work can begin. A prototype in that sense of those deliberate dream-investigations that poets have pursued throughout the twentieth century & beyond.

For more on dreams, etc., see p. 472.

Page 63 The Killer

Source: Transcreation by J. R. from Claire Goll version in Roger Caillois & Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Trésor de la Poésie Universelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 36, & English version in James Mooney, *Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, Annual Report No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1891), 391.

“This formula is from the manuscript book of A’yuⁿini (Swimmer) who explained the whole ceremony. . . . As the purpose of the ceremony is to bring about the death of the victim, everything spoken of is symbolically colored black. . . . The declaration [at] the end, ‘It is blue,’ indicates that the victim now begins to feel the effects of the incantation, and that as darkness comes on, his spirit will shrink and gradually become less until it dwindles away to nothingness” (Mooney, *Sacred Formulas*).

As another instance of the power of obsessive, single-color imagery, Eliade describes an Altaic descent to the underworld in which “as each ‘obstacle’ is passed (the shaman) sees a new subterranean epiphany; the word *black* recurs in almost every verse. At the second ‘obstacle’ he apparently hears metallic sounds; at the fifth, waves and the wind whistling; finally, at the seventh, where the nine subterranean rivers have their mouths, he sees Erlik Khan’s palace, built of stone and black clay and defended in every direction” (Eliade, *Shamanism*).

Addendum. The best-known modern example of this fairly common technique would have to be Lorca’s *Somnambule Ballad* (Green, green, I want you green, etc.) but the editor has chosen the following as a more recent example & one that refers back directly to the Cherokee text.

o o o o

Diane Wakoski
BLUE MONDAY

Blue of the heaps of beads poured into her breasts
and clacking together in her elbows;
blue of the silk
that covers lily-town at night;
blue of her teeth
that bite cold toast
and shatter on the streets;
blue of the dyed flower petals with gold stamens
hanging like tongues
over the fence of her dress
at the opera/opals clasped under her lips
and the moon breaking over her head a
gush of blood-red lizards.

Blue Monday. Monday at 3:00 and
Monday at 5. Monday at 7:30 and
Monday at 10:00. Monday passed under the rippling
California fountain. Monday alone
a shark in the cold blue waters.

You are dead: wound round like a paisley shawl.
I cannot shake you out of the sheets. Your name is
still wedged in every corner of the sofa.
Monday is the first of the week
and I think of you all week.

I beg Monday not to come
so that I will not think of you
all week.

You paint my body blue. On the balcony
in the soft muddy night, you paint me

with bat wings and the crystal
the crystal
the crystal
the crystal in your arm cuts away
the night, folds back ebony whale skin
and my face, the blue of new rifles,
and my neck, the blue of Egypt,
and my breasts, the blue of sand,
and my arms, bass-blue,
and my stomach, arsenic;
there is electricity dripping from me like cream;
there is love dripping from me I cannot use—like acacia or
jacaranda—fallen blue & gold flowers, crushed into the street.

Love passed me in a blue business suit
and fedora.
His glass cane, hollow and filled with
sharks and whales . . .
He wore black
patent leather shoes
and had a mustache. His hair was so black it was
almost blue.

“Love,” I said.
“I beg your pardon,” he said.
“Mr. Love,” I said.
“I beg your pardon,” he said.

So I saw there was no use bothering him on the street.

Love passed me on the street in a blue
business suit. He was a banker
I could tell.

So blue trains rush by in my sleep.
Blue herons fly overhead.
Blue paint cracks in my
arteries and sends titanium
floating into my bones.
Blue liquid pours down
my poisoned throat and blue veins
rip open my breast. Blue daggers tip
and are juggled on my palms.
Blue death lives in my fingernails.
If I could sing one last song
with water bubbling through my lips
I would sing with my throat torn open,

the blue jugular spouting that black shadow pulse
and on my lips
I would balance volcanic rock
emptied out of my veins. At last
my children strained out
of my body. At last my blood
solidified and tumbling into the ocean.
It is blue.
It is blue.
It is blue.

Page 63 Spell Against Jaundice

Source: Vasko Popa, *The Golden Apple: A Round of Stories, Songs, Spells, Proverbs and Riddles*, trans. Andrew Harvey & Anne Pennington (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1980), 68–69.

Compare the poem's obsessive color imagery to that of the Cherokee charm, preceding, as an indication of the (geographical) range of this type of language-magic.

A major poet himself, Popa in his three-volume anthology of Serbian folk-workings draws principally from the collections of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1862), who started such gatherings of Slavic oral poetries & created a new literature on that base.

Addendum.

Jerome Rothenberg

A POEM IN YELLOW AFTER TRISTAN TZARA (1980)

angel slide your hand
into my basket eat my yellow fruit
my eye is craving it
my yellow tires screech
o dizzy human heart
my yellow dingdong

Page 65 A Poison Arrow

Source: J.R.'s translation from Roger Rosfelder, *Chants Haoussa* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1952).

The destructive element in poetry emerges alongside the benign & the comforting, reminding us of how language serves as a weapon aimed at the annihilation of what threatens the individual's or group's sense of its own self-sufficiency & will to survive. In the work of poets, from "then" to "now," a tradition of curses, both

feigned & real, persists—as in the following send-up from Armand Schwerner’s fictively archaic *Tablets*:

If you step on me
may your leg become green and gangrenous
and may its heavy flow of filth
stop up your eyes forever, may your face
go to crystal, may your meat be glass
in your throat and your fucking
fail. If you lift your arms in grief
may they never come down and you be known
as Idiot Tree and may you never die

Or the following incantation against witchcraft transcreated & made new by poet Ariel Resnikoff (2016) from the Maqlû “burning” series of ancient Akkadian texts (first millennium B.C.):

MEMBRANE CHANT (AFTER MAQLÛ)

membrane tied-up my membrane is bent nerves
the enchanter gods sent me in front of šamaš i have drawn yr picture
i have drawn yr figure observed yr strength
i have crafted your appearance espied the shape of yr membrane i have re-
produced yr features have bound yr membrane & bent yr nerves
i have done to you the spell you did to me
have let you under the evil-eye against *lek un shpay* i have let you suffer
my revenge my sorcery tricks evil
maleficent
plottings evil messages hate’s injustice
murder my paralysis of mouth
may yr head stop! with the water of my membrane
& the cleansing water of my hands may it be taken

Concerning which, further examples can be found immediately preceding & following this one, & as curses, exorcisms, & abuse poems elsewhere in the present volume.

Page 66 *A Breastplate against Death*

Source: Eleanor Hull, *Folklore of the British Isles* (London: Methuen, 1928), 170–71, with emendations from prose translation in David Greene & Frank O’Connor, *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 34–35.

“Ascribed to an Abbot Conry in Westmeath named Fer fio (d. 762) . . . the charm has a resemblance to Norse legends of the Norns, who wove the strands of the fate of men.” While invoking the old gods throughout, the poem in its transcribed

form ends with a Christian (Latin) benediction: “Domini est salus (3x); Christi est salus (3x); populum tuum, Domine, benedictio tua!” The term *lorica*, or breast-plate, is used for a protective charm in the pre-Christian or “druidic” tradition.

For more on the Celtic faerie-world, etc., see below, p. 581.

Page 67 *Ol’ Hannah*

Source: Transcription by Eric Sackheim, in E. Sackheim, *The Blues Line: A Collection of Blues Lyrics* (New York: Grossman, 1969), 26–28.

A prison work-blues, “Ol’ Hannah” leaps to an evocation of the Sun as female being (see commentary, below), but never abandons that use of “local & historic particulars” that makes the blues such a precise instrument when delivered by its master poets. Of the range of materials in the developed form, Samuel Charters writes:

In many of the blues which use arrangements of verses to develop emotional attitudes there is often a power of suggestion in the juxtaposition of verses that seem to have little relationship. This poetic technique has been used by several modern poets as a conscious artistic device, and it gives to the blues singers the same technical control over their material. They use it most often to compress their idiom, to imply, with the juxtaposition of verses, an association of events that would take several verses to explain and would lose the dramatic effect in the explanation. Often the blues seems to be only the lightly sketched outline of an emotional turmoil . . . sometimes so vague that it is difficult to decide on the meaning of a particular line, and the singers themselves, because the poetic language of the blues has been part of their lives, often feel that the meaning of the line is its own sense. But the imaginative power of the blues is still felt even when the meaning is obscure. (Charters, *Poetry of the Blues*)

Eric Sackheim’s transcriptions of blues verses, here & elsewhere, aim by typographical & other means to give an accurate rendering of the individual singer’s style (“breath, pause, break; spacing, weight”), even when working with traditional matter; i.e., “that he *sings* it on a particular occasion, confronts his universe with a structure of sound and meaning in a way appropriate to himself and relevant to a specific point in time.”

Page 71 *Offering Flowers*

Source: Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson & Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research, & the University of Utah, 1951, 1963), vol. 3, pp. 101–3; vol. 12, pp. 214–15.

The Aztecs (they say) rode on lakes of flowers, & decorated bodies, gods & houses with flowers, which their language made into synonyms for speech/heart/soul & for the sun as world-heart/world-flower. Participants waged a “flowering war” of

the spirit in which “if spirit wins,” writes Laurette Sejourné, “the body ‘flowers’ & a new light goes to give power to the Sun.” Only later, the Aztec rulers literalized this into a series of staged battles against already conquered peoples, that the foredoomed losers paid for (literally) with their hearts. So, too, the ceremony given here (the only monthly ritual without human sacrifice) was not devoted to Xochipilli, the god of flowers & the soul, but to the war god Huitzilopochtli.

Correspondences of heart & word & flower are repeated by the Japanese Seami, who speaks of the “flower” (the “flower-thought” of the Buddhists) as the Nō actor’s hidden ability, a matter of the heart & voice. In the dance & gesture language of India, Wilson D. Wallis tells us

when the fingers are straight and are brought together so that the tips touch, the gesture means “flower bud.” When conveyed to the mouth and thrust outward, it means “speech.” In Hawaii this gesture means “flower”; or, if made at the mouth, it means “talk” or “song.” (in Stanley Diamond, ed., *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*)

But it’s the same too in Francis of Assisi’s “little flowers” & in the dead words of our own language that speak of eloquence as “flowery” or “florid”—terms that have lost their currency, except when Carlos Williams, say, makes them alive again in *Asphodel, that greeny flower*. And there are other instances to remind us, & a memory perhaps of that “great flower” of Dante’s—“high fantasy” he called it, & “living flame.”

(For continuation of the flower poetics in a contemporary Indian/Mexican group, see p. 196 & the accompanying commentary. Other examples of “Aztec definitions” appear on p. 21.)

Addendum.

Christopher Smart
from REJOICE IN THE LAMB

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.
For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.
For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.
For the flowers have their angels even the words of God’s Creation.
For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits.
For flowers are good both for the living and the dead.
For there is a language of flowers.
For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.
For elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.
For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.
.....
For Flowers can see, and Pope’s Carnations knew him.

Bethnal Green, London
1759–1763

Source: Washington Matthews, *The Night Chant, a Navaho Ceremony* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1902), 143–45.

Tsegebi—a dwelling of the gods.

Night Chant or Night Way is only one part of the very complex Navajo system of myths & ceremonies directed mainly toward healing. Other chants or ways include Beauty Way, Blessing Way, Mountain Way, Flint Way, Enemy Way, Prostitution Way, Life Way, Shooting Way, Red Ant Way, Monster Way, Moving Up Way, etc.—each with special functions, each consisting of many songs, events, & myths-of-origin—with numerous subdivisions and reconstructions thereof. The whole chantway system is so complicated in fact that the individual priest or chanter (*hatali*, lit. a keeper-of-the-songs) can rarely keep in mind more than a single ceremony like the nine-day Night Chant, sometimes only part of one. There's also more room for variation by the individual singer than at first meets the eye—& this is itself a part of the system since, in transmitting the ceremonies, a gap is invariably left that the new singer must fill in on his own.

As with other “primitive” art of this complexity, the Night Chant is very much “intermedia,” though on the ninth night (from which this excerpt is taken) the singing dominates & is “uninterrupted . . . from dark until daylight.” At the start of this song

patient and shaman (have positions) in the west, facing the east, and the priest prays a long prayer to each god, which the patient repeats after him, sentence by sentence. . . . The four prayers are alike in all respects, except in the mention of certain attributes of the gods. . . . (The one given here is addressed) to the dark bird who is the chief of (the sacred) pollen. While (it) is being said, the dancer keeps up a constant motion, bending and straightening the left knee, and swaying the head from side to side. (Matthews, *Night Chant*)

While the complexity of Night Chant, etc., necessitates a collective effort in performance & transmission, the legend of its founding credits the inspiration to Bitahatini, literally His-Imagination, His-Visions, but freely translated as The Visionary. Carried off by the gods he brought back the rites for this chant (of sand-painting, dance & masks, etc.) along with the songs & instructions for curing. The Navajos said of him:

Whenever he went out by himself, he heard the songs of spirits sung to him, or thought he heard them sung. . . . His three brothers had no faith in him. They said: “When you have returned from your solitary walks and tell us you have seen strange things and heard strange songs, you are mistaken, you only imagine you hear these songs and you see nothing unusual.” Whenever he returned from one of these lonely rambles he tried to teach his brothers the songs he had heard; but they would not listen to him. (Matthews, *Night Chant*)

The reader may want to compare this early experience of The Visionary's with that of Isaac Tens (see above, p. 49) & the nature of his spirit-journey & its conversion to performance with Black Elk's "Dog Vision" (p. 55). While these accounts are from three Indian groups that are supposed to be far apart in their approaches to the sacred, the experiences show a common (shamanic/not priestly) pattern, with echoes throughout the "primitive & archaic" worlds. Neruda's vision of his dead friend Jiménez, with its presumably coincidental use of a Night Chant refrain (*vienes volando* = come flying, or come soaring), opens still further areas for speculation:

Amid frightening feathers, nights,
amid magnolias, amid telegrams,
with the south and west sea winds
you come flying.

Under tombs, under ashes,
under frozen snails,
under the earth's deepest waters
you come flying.

And deeper, between drowned children,
blind plants and rotting fish,
out through the clouds again
you come flying.

More distant than blood and bone,
more distant than bread, than wine,
more distant than fire
you come flying.

Etcetera

—from Clayton Eshleman's translation of Neruda, "Alberto Rojas
Jiménez Viene Volando"

Page 77 When Hare Heard of Death

Source: Paul Radin, *The Road of Life and Death: A Ritual Drama of the American Indians*, Bollingen Series 5 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), 23–24.

Hare (a trickster-figure or deific goof-up) is sent by Earthmaker to rescue the two-leggeds from the evil ones; but at the crucial moment (trying against the law of life to save his aunts & uncles from death) he looks back (like Orpheus or Lot's wife) against the instructions of his grandmother (earth), & "as he peeped, the place from which he had started, caved in completely & instantaneously." The wild scene that follows—of destructive frustration & hysteria—is surely more meaningful than Adam's "I was afraid because I was naked," etc., & leads in turn to the founding of the Winnebago Medicine Rite.

Page 78 *A Peruvian Dance Song*

Source: Margot Astrov, ed. & trans., *The Winged Serpent: An Anthology of American Indian Prose and Poetry* (New York: John Day, 1946), 344, from R. & M. D'Harcourt, *La musique des Incas et des survivances* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1925).

Page 78 *Death Song*

Source: Frances Densmore, *Papago Music*, Bulletin 90 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1929), 127.

The song was used for curing & was given to the poet (Owl Woman, called Juana Manwell) by a dead man named José Gomez. This was her ordinary way of receiving songs—from the “disturbing spirits” of dead Tohono O’odham [Papagos] “who follow the old customs & go at night to the spirit-land.” As Frances Densmore tells it in *Papago Music*:

The spirits first revealed themselves to Owl Woman when she was in extreme grief over the death of her husband and other relatives. This was 30 or 40 years prior to the recording of her songs in 1920. The spirits took her to the spirit land in the evening and brought her back in the early dawn, escorting her along a road. . . . When the spirits had taken her many times . . . they decided that she should be taught certain songs for the cure of sickness caused by the spirits. It was not necessary that she should go to the spirit land to learn the songs. It was decided that a person, at his death, should go where the other spirits are and “get acquainted a little,” after which he would return and teach her some songs. . . . She has now received hundreds of these songs, so many that she cannot remember them all. It is possible for her to treat the sick without singing, but she prefers to have the songs.

o o o o

“The Authors are in eternity.”

—W. Blake

Page 79 *From the Odyssey*

Source: Translation from Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, in Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 3–5. The last lines of the selection, given here in italics, are from Pound’s earlier “Three Cantos” (1917).

Pound opens his master-poem, *The Cantos*, with this translation of Homer (the so-called *Nekuia* or descent-to-the-underworld section), giving it back to us as a poem of beginnings. But it was a poem, even then, calling up the dead in the oldest of poetic traditions, where the journey of the central figure retains a sense, nowhere more than here, of the former ritual. It has thus remained the prototype, in the “West,” of the poem of oral, even shamanic, origins that comes into a fixed (writ-

Page 82 *Nottamun Town*

Source: Traditional folk song in performance version by Jean Ritchie.

The editor has long been haunted by the present song, though to present it in this context as a vision-of-the-dead is to say more (& less) about it than is likely needed. Ritchie, who first sang it to prominence, reports that in her childhood in Viper, Kentucky, & environs, she took it for a nonsense song but felt, always, disturbed by it & only later learned it was, at origin, a kind of magic. The meaning, though, remained mysterious beyond the simple telling; i.e., as Ritchie said, “the song was magic, & once you came to understand it, the magic was lost.”

Page 83 *The Flight of Quetzalcoatl*

Source: Transcreated by J.R. from Spanish prose translation by Angel María Garibay K., *Epica Nahuatl* (Mexico City: Biblioteca del Estudiante Universitario, 1945), 59–63.

Archaic thought is coherent & directed, but the coherence isn't based on consistency of event so much as covering the widest range of possible situations. Like a shotgun blast, say, or a saturation bombing—effective against known targets & some unknown ones as well. So, the “greatest variation in legends & interpretations of the disappearance of Quetzalcoatl” may simply be noted & would have caused the Nahua makers no special discomfort. The important thing was for any account to hit home—to present the god's doings as image of how-it-really-is.

The present version comes from Sahagún's *Historia* (see above, p. 457), with the ending from the *Anales de Quauhuitlan*, & begins *after* whatever-had-happened to get him on the road. In Sahagún three sorcerers (one with a god name, two without) came to him, got him high on “white wine” (pulque?), while working other sorceries to destroy his city, Tollan (“Tula”). But the account is shapeless & lacks the thrust or point of myth-become-poetry.

The *Anales* in this case are more articulate. In brief, the gods Tezcatlipoca, Ihuimecatl, & Toltecatl decided to force Quetzalcoatl out of his city “where we intend to live.” Tezcatlipoca thought to bring it off by “giving him his body,” so showed him a “double mirror the size of a hand's span” & “Quetzalcoatl saw himself, and was filled with fear, and said: ‘If my subjects see me, they will run away!’ For his eyelids were badly inflamed, his eyes sunken in their sockets, and his face covered all over with wrinkles. His face was not human at all!” (I. Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*).

The vision is repeated: always the terror of self-recognition, of the man in his dying body, his flesh. They get him drunk, have him sleep with his sister Quetzalpetatl, then wake up in sorrow:

And he sang the sad song he had made that he might depart thence: “This is an evil tale of a day when I left my house. May those that are absent be softened, it was hard and perilous for me. Only let the one whose body is of earth exist and sing; I did not grow up subjected to servile labor.” (L. Sejourné, *Burning Water*)

And so on. In the *Anales* there's a period of four days (= dark phase of Venus) when he lies alone in a stone casket, then heads for the sea where the transfiguration (into Venus, the morning star) takes place. Sahagún is richer in the journey itself with its further revelations (also the many place-namings typical of primitive & archaic myth); has him form the raft of serpents & set off across the sea; ends with "no one knows how he came to arrive there at Tlapallan" (i.e., in Maya country, where the "plumed serpent" is the god Kukulcan)—but that's another story.

The force of the myth is in the image in the mirror: the journey a dark night before his re-emergence through fire & transfiguration. As plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl "belonged equally to the dark abyss & the celestial splendor" (Sejourné, *Burning Water*):

Quetzalcoatl taught that human greatness grows out of the awareness of a spiritual order; his image must therefore be the symbol of this truth. The serpent plumes must be speaking to us of the spirit that makes it possible for man—even while his body, like the reptile's, is dragged in the dust—to know the superhuman joy of creation. (Sejourné, *Burning Water*)

His identification with the planet Venus says this also.

Addenda. (1) The rotting face is what we start from in knowing where we are. The god isn't simply idealized as man-more-than-man-surviving-death but imaged also as man-fallen-with-man-into-rotting-flesh:

. . . And it is said, he was monstrous.

His face was like a huge, battered stone, a great fallen rock; it [was] not made like that of men. And his beard was very long—exceedingly long. He was heavily bearded. (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*)

(2) Deeply engrained in human experience, similar images appear up to the present, as in the following:

Allen Ginsberg
from MESCALINE

Rotting Ginsberg, I stared in the mirror naked today
I noticed the old skull, I'm getting balder
my pate gleams in the kitchen light under thin hair
like the skull of some monk in old catacombs lighted by
a guard with flashlight
followed by a mob of tourists
so there is death
my kitten mews, and looks into the closet
—*Kaddish & Other Poems*, 1961

(3) Compare this with the Chinese (Na-Khi) *Song of the Dead, Relating the Origin of Bitterness* (page 245 above; commentary, p. 559).

Source: Wilhelm H.I. Bleek & Lucy C. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London: George Allen, 1911), 237.

(1) Dictated in July 1875 by Dialekwain, who heard it from his father, χ aa-ttin. The song is a lament, sung by χ aa-ttin after the death of his friend, the magician & rainmaker, !nuin | kui-ten, “who died from the effects of a shot he had received when going about, by night, in the form of a lion.” There is also the following comment:

Now that “the string is broken,” the former “ringing sound in the sky” is no longer heard by the singer, as it had been in the magician’s lifetime.

But the sense of a suspended string game (“cat’s cradle”) seems also implicit—a universal game of changes not far from the activity of magicians & poets.

(2) In the art & poetry of the Chilean artist-poet Cecilia Vicuña a still more complex & fixed system of traditional stringwork &/or knotwork—Incan *quipu* or *khipu*—is called into play, both as an old form & a new invention. From the resultant poems (with their visual accompaniments) the following:

Word is thread and the thread is language.
Non-linear body.
A line associated to other lines.
A word once written risks becoming linear,
but word and thread exist on another dimensional plane.
Vibratory forms in space and in time.
Acts of union and separation.

*

The word is silence and sound.
The thread, fullness and emptiness.

—Translation from Spanish by Rosa Alcalá

And Vicuña on the *quipu* world behind it: “*Chanccani Quipu* reinvents the concept of ‘quipu’, the ancient [Incan] system of ‘writing’ with knots, transforming it into a metaphor in space; a book/sculpture that condenses the clash of two cultures and worldviews: the Andean oral universe and the Western world of print. / In *Chanccani Quipu* breath metaphorically imprints the unspun wool floating as a shadow or unstable mark on the outer hairs of a river of fleece. / The floating words take the place of knots, and the fleece takes the place of the twisted threads. / No record of a historical or archaeological *quipu* constructed with unspun wool, or with words ‘printed’ on wool has been found. / *Chanccani Quipu* may be a command or a plea (depending on the tone of voice). / It is a prayer for the rebirth of a way of writing with breath, a way of perceiving the body and the cosmos as a whole engaged in a continuous reciprocal exchange. /

In Quechua the writer/reader of the quipu was called: *quipucamayoc* (*khipukamayuc*), literally: ‘the one that animates, gives life to the knot’” (C. Vicuña, *Chanccani Quipu*, 2012).

Page 88 *The Abortion*

Source: W. G. Archer, “The Illegitimate Child in Santal Society,” *Man in India* 24 (1944): 156–58.

The “true-poem” (“primitive” or not) doesn’t repress but confronts what’s most difficult to face—not only the great-existential-life-crises, etc., issues-of-reality, etc., but personal events outside all ritual pattern. Attempts to hold poetry to the (abstractly) Good & Beautiful, i.e., to “hymns to the gods & praises of famous men” (Plato), work against the poet’s impulse & function, thus opening the door for platitude & art-as-propaganda. Plato who attacked poets as liars-by-nature is himself revealed as the first great liar-by-reason-of-state.

Page 90 *Improvised Song Against a White Man*

Source: Arkady Fiedler, *The Madagascar I Love* (London: Orbis, 1946), 140.

The white man (*vasaba*) in question was himself the collector of the poem & the author of the book in which it appeared. The theme of sexual imperialism is dominant throughout.

Page 91 *Psalm 137*

Source: Harris Lenowitz’s translation in J. Rothenberg, *A Big Jewish Book: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1978), 489.

The Hebrew text is from circa 586 B.C.: a curse & virtual song-of-protest made *in situ* at the time of the Babylonian “captivity.” Lenowitz’s epigraph comes from a Jamaican reggae (Rastafarian) version by B. Dowe & F. McNaughton, reflecting “another movement-in-exile in which the leaders are singers” (H.L.). The reader can compare the refusal to sing with, e.g., “what the [Acoma Indian] informant told Franz Boas in 1920”:

long ago her mother
had to sing this song and so
she had to grind along with it
the corn people have a song too
it is very good
I refuse to tell it

—English version by Armand Schwerner, in *Shaking the Pumpkin*

Source: James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, Annual Report No. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1896). The versions follow Margot Astrov's condensations.

The late nineteenth-century messianic movement called the Ghost Dance was not, as sometimes viewed, a pathetic reaction to White rule or a confused attempt to suck up Christian wisdom. The ritual use of ecstasy & the dance is clearly more Indian than Christian; & the movement's central belief that the present world would go the way of all previous worlds through destruction & re-emergence had been (for all the Christian turns it was now given) widespread throughout North America & at the heart, say, of the highly developed religious systems of the Mexican plateau. It was also the mark of a collective & continuing resistance—against all odds & losses.

The “messiah” of the Ghost Dance was Wovoka (“the cutter”), also called Jack Wilson, who circa 1889 was taken up to heaven by God & there given the message of redemption, with full control over the elements, etc. His doctrine spread quickly through the Indian world, under various names but always referring to the trance-like dance at its center; thus “dance in a circle” (Paiute), “everybody dragging” (Shoshoni), “the Father's dance” (Comanche), “dance with clasped hands” & “dance craziness” (Kiowa), & “ghost dance” (Sioux & Arapaho). Wovoka's own dance was described to Mooney by a northern Cheyenne follower named Porcupine in terms reminiscent of Jesus's “round dance” with his disciples in the apocryphal & equally “unchristian” Acts of St. John (above, p. 290):

They cleared off a space in the form of a circus ring and we all gathered there. . . . The Christ [i.e., Wovoka] was with them. . . . I looked around to find him, and finally saw him sitting on one side of the ring. . . . They made a big fire to throw light on him. . . . He sat there a long time and nobody went up to speak to him. He sat with his head bowed all the time. After a while he rose and said he was very glad to see his children. . . . “My children, I want you to listen to all I have to say to you. I will teach you, too, how to dance a dance, and I want you to dance it. Get ready for your dance and then, when the dance is over, I will talk to you.” He was dressed in a white coat with stripes. The rest of his dress was a white man's except that he had on a pair of moccasins. Then he commenced our dance, everybody joining in, the Christ singing while we danced. . . . [Later] he commenced to tremble all over, violently for a while, and then sat down. We danced all that night, the Christ lying down beside us apparently dead.

Of the songs themselves Mooney writes: “All the songs are adapted to the simple measure of the dance step . . . the dancers moving from right to left, following the course of the sun . . . hardly lifting the feet from the ground. . . . Each song is started in the same manner, first in an undertone while singers stand still in their places, and then with full voice as they begin to circle around. At intervals between the songs . . . the dancers unclasp hands and sit down to smoke or talk

for a few minutes. . . . There is no limit to the number of these songs, as every trance at every dance produces a new one. . . . Thus a single dance may easily result in twenty or thirty new songs.”

Not surprisingly Wovoka, as an adjunct to his vision-search, was one of the first Indian “revivalists” to make use of peyote—thus a forerunner of the “peyote-cult” with its subsequent impact on the main U.S. culture.

[N.B. The prophecy of the final song in this sequence is a sure-fire guidepost to the section of *Survivals & Revivals* that concludes this gathering.]

Page 95 *The Book of Events (I)*

Source: Most of these originally appeared in J.R.’s *Ritual: A Book of Primitive Rites & Events* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966). The realizations throughout are by J.R., with the exception of the “Three Magic Events,” which were collected & adapted by Bengt af Klintberg.

LILY EVENTS. Adapted from W. Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937, 1958), 419.

GARBAGE EVENT. Adapted from W.R. Geddes, *Nine Dayak Nights* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957, 1961), 19–20.

BEARD EVENT. Adapted from Warner, *A Black Civilization*, 333.

STONE FIRE EVENT. Adapted from Warner, *A Black Civilization*, 318.

CLIMBING EVENT. Adapted from Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Bollingen Series 76 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 127.

FOREST EVENT. Adapted from Marianna D. Birnbaum, *An Anthology of Ugric Folk Literature: Tales and Poems of the Ostyaks, Voguls and Hungarians* (Munich: University of Munich, 1977), 6.

GIFT EVENT. Adapted from statements by Kwakiutl Indians in Helen Codere, “The Amiable Side of Kwakiutl Life: The Potlatch and the Play Potlatch,” *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 2 (April 1956).

MARRIAGE EVENT. Adapted from William Wyatt Gill, *Life in the Southern Isles* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1876), 59–60.

THREE MAGIC EVENTS. Adapted by Bengt af Klintberg from his *Svenska trollformler* (1965), in Klintberg, *The Cursive Scandinavian Salve* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), 8.

GOING-AROUND EVENT. Adapted from W. Bogoras, *The Chuckchee*, Jessup North Pacific Expedition (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1904–1909), 402–3.

LANGUAGE EVENT. Adapted from N.J. Van Warmelo, “Contribution towards Venda History, Religion and Tribal Ritual,” *Ethnological Publications* 3 (Department of Native Affairs, Union of South Africa, 1932): 49–51.

NAMING EVENTS. Based on Ruth Underhill, “Social Organization of the Papago Indians,” *Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology* 30 (1939): 174–78.

BURIAL EVENTS. Adapted from Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (London & The Hague: Oxford University Press and Mouton & Co., 1956), 517–18.

FRIENDSHIP DANCE. Adapted from Frank G. Speck & Leonard Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 65–67.

GREASE FEAST EVENT. Adapted from Franz Boas, “The Social Organization and Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians,” in *Reports of the U.S. National Museum under the Direction of the Smithsonian Institution for the Year Ending June 30, 1895* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 355–56.

PEACEMAKING EVENT. Adapted from A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922, 1933), 134–35.

WILD MAN EVENTS. Adapted from Sir James George Frazer, *The New Golden Bough* (New York: Criterion Books, 1959), 143–44.

BOOGER EVENT. Adapted from Frank G. Speck & Leonard Broom, *Cherokee Dance and Drama*, 28–36. (Boogers = ghosts, spirits, foreigners, white men.)

CRAZY DOG EVENTS. Based on accounts in Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Holt, Rinhart & Winston, 1935, 1956), 330–31.

SEA WATER EVENT. Adapted from Warner, *A Black Civilization*, 337.

TWO DREAM EVENTS. Based on accounts in Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Dreams and Wishes of the Soul,” *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 60, no. 2 (1958) & extended conversations at the Allegany Seneca Reservation in western New York.

NOISE EVENT. Adapted from the Book of Psalms.

The editor has taken a series of rituals & other programmed activities from a wide geographical area & has, as far as possible, suppressed all reference to accompanying mythic or “symbolic” explanations. This has led to two important results: (1) the form of the activities is, for the first time, given the prominence it deserves; & (2) the resulting works bear a close resemblance to those often mythless activities of our own time called events, happenings, de-coll/age, kinetic theater, performance art, sound-text, conceptual art & poetry, etc. It may be further noted that most of these “events”—like the (modern) intermedia art they resemble—are parts of total situations involving poetry, music, dance, painting, myth, magic, etc., as are many of the songs & visions presented elsewhere in this anthology. Having revealed this much, the editor does not wish to obscure by a series of explanatory footnotes the forms that have been laid bare. Although absence of such notes may result in some distortion, it’s precisely the kind of distortion that can have a value in itself. Like seeing Greek statues without their colors.

Addenda. The following examples of contemporary events & happenings may be instructive to the reader who has not been aware of the resemblances alluded to above. [N.B. The word *happening* itself has counterparts in, e.g., the Navajo word for “ceremonial,” which, Kluckhohn & Wyman tell us, translates almost literally as “something-is-going-on,” or in the widespread use by the Iroquois of the English word *doings*.]

Alison Knowles

GIVEAWAY CONSTRUCTION

Find something you like in the street and give it away. Or find a variety of things, make something of them, and give it away.

La Monte Young
COMPOSITION 1960 #15
to Richard Huelsenbeck

This piece is little whirlpools
out in the middle of the ocean.

Dick Higgins
From CLOWN'S WAY:
A Drama in Three Hundred Acts

Act Five.

Climb up a ladder. At the top, smile. Climb down again.

Bengt af Klintberg
THREE FOREST EVENTS

Number 1 (winter)

Walk out into a forest when it is winter and decorate all the spruces with
burning candles, flags, apples, glass balls and tinsel strings.

Number 2

Walk out into a forest and wrap some drab trees, or yourself, in tinsel.

Number 3

Climb up to a treetop with a saw. Saw through the whole tree-trunk from
the top right down to the root.

Emmett Williams
A SELECTION FROM "5,000 New Ways"

select 50 compound words.

split them, and turn the freed second halves into verbs.

select 50 projections and 50 sounds.

write them on cards, and shuffle them.

fast upon reading one of the 'new ways,'

show a projection, make a sound

picked at random from the pile of cards.

N.B. at a performance in Paris in 1963, the first three operations yielded these
combinations:

text: the new way the maiden heads

projection: a hundred-dollar bill

sound: draining sink

text: the new way the banana splits

projection: two left shoes

sound: firecracker

text: the new way the belly buttons
projection: great wall of china
sound: rooster

Carolee Schneemann
from MEAT JOY

The Intractable Rosette. Men gather women into circular formation. A sequence of attempts to turn women into static, then moving shapes: linking their arms, tying their legs together. They arrange them lying down, sitting up, on their backs, & every attempt to move them as a solid unit fails as they fall apart, roll over, get squashed, etc. All shouting instructions, ideas, advice, complaints. All collapse in a heap.

Serving Maid with huge tray of raw chickens, mackerel, strings of sausages, strews them extravagantly on the bodies. Wet fish, heavy chickens, bouncing hot-dogs. Bodies respond sporadically: twitching, reaching, touching. Individual instructions for fish-meat-chickens. Instances: independent woman flips, flops, slips on the floor like a fish, jumps up, throwing, catching, falling, running. Lateral woman attacked by others. Central woman sucking fish. Individual man with fish follows contours of woman's body with it. Tenderly, then wildly. All inundated with fish & chickens.

Alan Kaprow
RAINING

(Scheduled for performance in the spring, for any number of persons and the weather. Times and places need not be coordinated, and are left up to the participants. The action of the rain may be watched if desired.)

(For Olga and Billy Klüver, January 1965)

Black highway painted black
Rain washes away
Paper men made in bare orchard branches
Rain washes away
Sheets of writing spread over a field
Rain washes away
Little grey boats painted along a gutter
Rain washes away
Naked bodies painted gray
Rain washes away
Bare trees painted red
Rain washes away

A Further Note. When I first assembled these events, circa 1966, I attributed the relation between “primitive” ritual & contemporary performance art & poetry to an implicit coincidence of attitudes. Today the relation seems up-front, explicit, & increasingly comparable to the Greek & Roman model in Renaissance Europe, the Chinese model in medieval Japan, the Toltec model among the Aztecs, etc.: i.e., an overt influence but alive enough to work a series of distortions conditioned by the later culture & symptomatic of the obvious differences between the two. Some areas of estrangement & return, as they’ve entered into current work, are: the (re)creation & (re)discovery of an earth-consciousness (“earth as a religious form”—Eliade); of our links to the animal world & to our own animal natures; of body & of sexuality; of a new—& old—idea of femaleness; of rituals & performances that grow out of a careful attention to body-mind/physical-mental processes; of dreams & visions explored in so many ways since the Surrealists first projected them as central to their program of recovery; of the myths & rituals (but especially the rituals) of everyday life. The still more recent introduction of digital media & cyberlinked interconnections (often across continents) adds yet another dimension to the mix.

My own preference, for all of that, is for those intersections that operate at the less explicit—& possibly “deeper”—level of human experience. What seems inescapable, one way or another, is the return of poetry & art to “performance” as a necessary mode & a means of completion.

Vito Acconci
SECURITY ZONE

Pier 18, New York; February 1971

1. A person is chosen as my guard and/or opposition party. He is specifically chosen: someone about whom my feelings are ambiguous, someone I don’t fully trust.
2. We are alone together at the far end of the pier: I’m blindfolded, my ears are plugged, my hands are tied behind my back.
3. I walk around the pier—I attempt to gain assurance in walking around the pier (putting myself in the other person’s control—testing whether I can trust in that control). The other person decides how he wants to use the trust I am forced to have in him.
4. The piece is designed for our particular relationship: it tests that relationship, works on it, can possibly improve it.

Judy Chicago, Suzanne Lacy, Sandra Orgel, Aviva Rahmani

ABLUTIONS

A performance about rape

The performance takes place in an area strewn with egg shells, piles of rope and fresh meat. A tape of women describing their experiences of being raped plays, while a naked woman is slowly and methodically

bound with white gauze from her feet upward to her head. At the same time, a clothed woman nails beef kidneys into the rear wall of the space, thus defining the perimeter of the performance area, while two nude women bathe themselves in a series of tubs containing first eggs, then blood, and finally clay. Finally, two clothed women bind the performance set and the other performers into immobility with string and rope. As they leave the space, the tape repeats: “And I felt so helpless all I could do was just lie there. . . .”

Joseph Beuys

COYOTE: I LIKE AMERICA & AMERICA LIKES ME

For three days Joseph Beuys lived with a coyote in a room of the René Block Gallery in New York. The action as such began when Beuys, arriving from Germany, was packed into felt at Kennedy Airport and driven by ambulance to the gallery. In the gallery in a room divided by a grating a coyote was waiting for him. . . . During the action Beuys was at times entirely covered in felt. Out of the felt only a wooden cane stuck out. Beuys talked with the coyote, attempted to find an approach to him, to establish a relationship. They lived peacefully with each other in the cage, man and coyote. From time to time Beuys rang a triangle which he carried around his neck. Sounds of a turbine from a tape recorder disturbed the atmosphere, bringing a threatening nuance into the play. Fifty copies of the Wall Street Journal, lying strewn about the floor, completed the environment. The coyote urinated on the papers.
—Description by Caroline Tisdall

“Eventually everything will be happening at once: nothing behind a screen unless a screen happens to be in front” (John Cage).

Page 113 *The Book of Events (II)*

The texts in this section give a fuller account of four selected events, in order to show the realization of such activities in context. Since the editor could have done the same for many of the preceding events—at least where dialogue &/or songs were available—this section shouldn’t be thought of as an “advance” over the first but simply another way of considering ritual-theater: by letting the words, the dramatic action & the myth take a more central position.

Page 115 *Taming the Storm*

Source: Abridged from Knud Rasmussen, *The Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1932), 56–61.

Word, vision, & event come together in the work, along with the environment itself. Shakespeare’s *Lear* the classic example of the simulation of a meteorologi-

cal event in a theatrical situation; Kaprow's *Raining* (p. 510) & La Monte Young's *Composition #15* (p. 509) examples of the incorporation of natural weather conditions in a non-mythic "happening."

Page 118 *Coronation Event & Drama*

Source: Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 378–83. Reworking of dialogue by J.R.

While still in the womb Osiris & Isis, son & daughter of Earth & Sky, formed the child Horus between them. Osiris's dark counterpart was Set, his brother, who later destroyed & dismembered him, Isis & Horus becoming the means to his recovery & rebirth as judge-of-the-dead, etc. In battle Horus tore out Set's testicles, while Set ripped out Horus's black (left) eye (i.e., the moon; but some say both the white & black eyes: sun & moon) & "flung it away beyond the edge of the world, & Thoth, the moon's genius & guardian" (but also: god of words & spells) "found it lying in the outer darkness" (R.T. Rundle Clark, *Myth & Symbol in Ancient Egypt*) & restored it to Horus in the ritual of recovery here enacted.

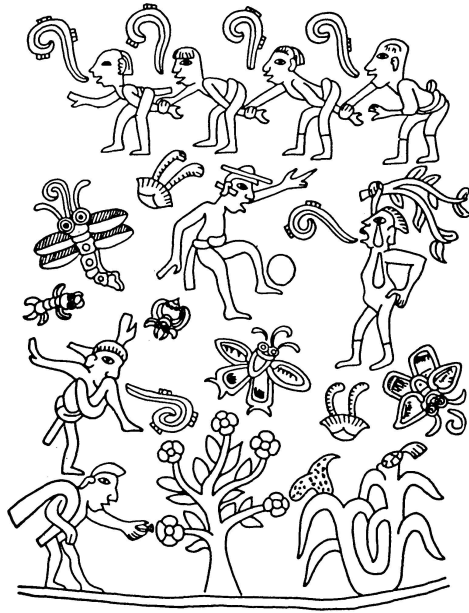
The text is from a papyrus of the Twelfth Dynasty (circa 1970 B.C.) but Kurt Sethe (who first recognized it as theater) dated the contents from the First Dynasty (circa 3300 B.C.). It "gives an account of the traditional ceremonies at the installation of the king, which was celebrated in conjunction with the New Year ceremonies during the month of Khoiak. . . . Each detail of the ritual program is, however, invested at the same time with a durative significance, and this is brought out explicitly in the form of a mythological 'key' attached to every scene" (Gaster, *Thespis*). Forty-six scenes have been preserved, of which seven are presented here. The "events" of the coronation are in small caps; the mythological key in italics.

Addenda. The classic modern example of a direct use of Egyptian funerary materials is D.H. Lawrence's *Ship of Death*. The story of Osiris & Isis has become *the* ancient myth for many of those poets who can still form attachments to the old gods *per se* (see, e.g., Ed Sanders' very free reworkings of the laments of Isis & Nephthys [p. 516]).

Page 121 *For the Rain God Tlaloc*

Source: Translation into English by Miguel León-Portilla, in M. León-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 193–96.

Tlalocan—the Paradise of the rain god Tlaloc & one of three Aztec places-of-the-dead. A virtual garden-of-delight, eternal springtime, etc., as in the dancing figures painted at Teotihuacan:



& in sharp contrast to the terrors/tears of those sacrificed to stimulate the god.

Tlaloques—the god’s assistants.

Acatonal—alternative calendrical name for Tlaloc, meaning “reed” or “stalk.”

Poyauhtlan—“region of mist,” a mountain home of Tlaloc as the god of rain.

With the destruction of “primitive” alternatives & in movement toward a “higher” civilization, the (human) stakes become suddenly incredible—a system of ritual sacrifice not only underpinning the Aztecs’ “mystic militarism” but what León-Portilla calls their “perpetual & sacred theater.” Played from day to day throughout the Aztec year, the rituals were theatrically complex & drew on great numbers of participants, including numerous, often anonymous, sacrificial victims who “contributed their blood to the maintenance of the life of the Sun.” Among all such ritual-events, the annual ceremony for the rain god Tlaloc—celebrated on his mountain & in front of the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan (Mexico City)—delivers the greatest sense of pity & horror. Writes León-Portilla:

Before the ceremony they arranged an artificial woods with trees, which was a kind of stage. In the middle of some bushes and shrubs was a very tall tree surrounded by four others oriented towards the four points of the compass. Round about flew banners spattered with melted rubber, a symbolic decoration in honor of Tlaloc. When the moment for the ceremony came, as [Fray Diego de] Durán writes: “The priest and dignitaries, all very adorned, took out a little girl of seven or eight years who was in a kind of tent, completely covered

over, where no one had seen her, where the lords had hidden the child. In this manner the priests took on their shoulders the child who had been put in that tent, all dressed in blue, which represented the great lake and all the fountains and small rivers, with a band of reddish leather around her head and fastened to it a tuft of blue feathers. They placed this little girl who was in that tent in the woods, under that tall tree, facing towards the idol, and then they brought a drum and all sat down without dancing, with the girl in front, and they sang many and varied songs” (M.L.-P., *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*).

The scenario presented here is León-Portilla’s reconstruction of one such chant & dialogue, based on sixteenth-century Nahuatl accounts gathered by Bernardino de Sahagún in the Codex Matritensis.

Page 124 From The Nine Songs: An Ancient Ritualistic Drama

Source: Previously unpublished translation by Wai-lim Yip composed for performance or dramatic reading.

The Nine Songs, appearing elsewhere in these pages in Arthur Waley’s text-only translation (p. 242), was at origin a clear example of poetry as an act of “total (ritualized) performance.” Writes Wai-lim Yip as translator & re-composer: “Recent scholarship, particularly the work of the poet-scholar Wen Yiduo, sees *The Nine Songs* by Qu Yuan [Ch’u Yuan] (332–296 B.C.) as a collection of songs of folk and oral nature used in ancient shamanistic ritualistic dramas performed near Dongting Lake in Hu’nan Province. The songs as they appear in the *Chu Ci* or *The Songs of the South* (consisting of one single, ambiguous voice and in the form of poems) are believed to have been greatly worked over by Qu Yuan. Wen Yiduo, himself a famous modern Chinese poet of the 1920s, in addition to his many essays tracing the poem to relevant origins, reconstructs *The Nine Songs* into a performable structure. The present translation is a slightly modified version based on his reconstruction.”

Page 131 Ghosts & Shadows

Source: J.R.’s translation from R.P. Trilles, *Les pygmées de la forêt équatoriale* (Paris: Librairie Bloud and Gay, 1931), reprinted in Roger Caillois & Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Trésor de la poésie universelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 27.

Interiorizing as a mode of translation: that the Baka [Pygmy] “ghosts” are as elusive as “soul” or “personality” or “unconscious”—for us the last believable remnants of the mythic underworld. But the Baka would more likely see the forest-as-a-dark-soul than as Lawrence has it.

Page 131 *The Chapter of Changing into Ptah*

Source: Adapted by Ben Moses from E. A. W. Budge, *The Papyrus of Ani (Book of the Dead)* (London: Medici Society, 1913), vol. 2, pp. 546–48.

Ptah—the lord of life, who conceived the elements of the universe with his heart & brought them into being with his tongue.

Ka—the double; separable part of the personality.

Hathor—goddess of the sky; divine cow who holds the stars in her belly.

Busiris & Heliopolis—Greek names for the Lower Egyptian cities of Tetu & Anu.

Ra—the Sun.

Tem (Atum)—oldest of the gods; creator.

Keb (Geb)—god of the earth & father of the gods; “in many places he is called the ‘great cackler’ & he was supposed to have laid the egg from which the world sprang” (Budge, *Papyrus of Ani*).

Tait—goddess of weaving.

The Book of the Dead isn’t a book but a catch-all name for the Egyptian funerary papyri, the best-known set coming from the papyrus of (the scribe) Ani written down between 1500 & 1350 B.C. As with the Egyptian “namings” (see p. 10), the concern here is not with the dignity of the god-nature so much as its energy: at once more-than-human & utterly of-this-earth. It is the same vision that makes the great fanged statue of Coatlicue or the multi-breasted Diana of Ephesus more interesting & probably more truthful than the Venus de Milo or Michelangelo’s Pietà.

o o o o

An example, partly translative, of the recovery of old Egyptian gods, glyphs, erotic visions, death symbols, etc., is Ed Sanders’s poem & assemblage, below. A seminal reading of the source & not far either from the twentieth-century scholarship of T. Rundle Clark & others.

o o o o

Ed Sanders

INCANTATION BY ISIS FOR REVIVAL OF THE DEAD OSIRIS

come to thy beloved one

BEAUTIFUL BEING triumphant!

come to Thy sister

come to thy wife

Arise! Arise! Glorious Brother!

from thy bier that I may

hover near thy genital

forever

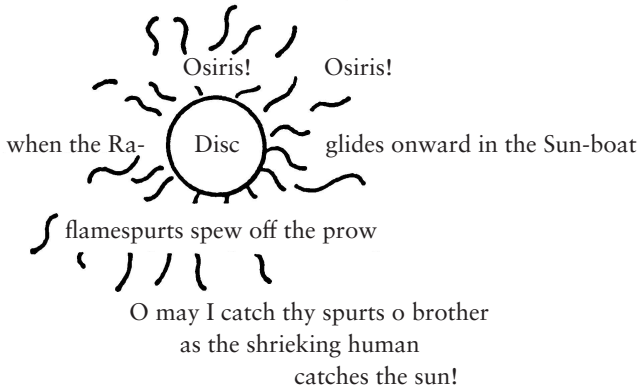
Beautiful Boy my brother come to my breasts
 take there of that milk to thy fill
 thy nuts will I guard upon
 nor shall the Fiends of Darkness tear at your Eye

 come to your house come to your house

BEAUTIFUL BEING

! Boy Body!

that your cock glide forward in radiance
 to our pavilion



Page 132 The Cannibal Hymn

Source: Ulli Beier, “Traditional Egyptian Poetry,” *Black Orpheus*, no. 18 (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1965): 6.

Unas (Unis)—the dead king.

Made up of Utterances 273 & 274 of the Pyramid Texts (for which see commentary, p. 470). Mercer’s *Pyramid Texts* indicates that the hymn consists, in fact, of a series of shorter utterances; the method of bringing them together & the resultant feeling of the poem is very reminiscent of later African praise-poems (described on p. 474) & suggests a continuity that is, but shouldn’t be, surprising. It would seem—from other evidence as well—that the disintegration which overtook Egypt was later in coming to Black Africa.

Addendum. The picture of the dead king “slaying & devouring the gods as food” (Mercer, *Pyramid Texts*) isn’t unlike the heaven of the Jews, where the souls of the Righteous were to spend eternity feasting on the flesh of Behemoth & Leviathan—the possibility too of that having its source among the god-eaters. To say nothing of the Eucharist, etc.

Page 134 *Conversations in Courtship*

Source: Excerpts from Ezra Pound's translation in *Love Poems of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ezra Pound & Noel Stock (New York: New Directions, 1962), 4-7.

"These versions are based on literal renderings of the hieroglyphic texts into Italian by Boris de Rachewiltz, which first appeared in the volume *Liriche amorose degli antichi Egiziani*, published by Vanni Scheiwiller, Milan, in 1957. Most of the original Egyptian texts have survived only in incomplete form, but, for the purpose of modern adaptation, it has seemed desirable to present each poem as complete." (E.P.)

Page 136 *The Comet*

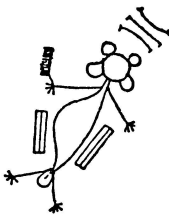
Page 137 *The Lovers*

Source: P. Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: Wm. Heineman, 1912), 455, 459.

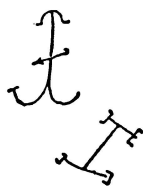
This is a form of secret-writing & gesture-language that was widespread among groups besides the Ekoi, being there the property of an all-male society called the Ngbe (= Leopard) & devoted above all (writes Robert Farris Thompson) to "the pleasurable dancing in public of secret signs and magic powers" (*Symposium of the Whole*, 286). Messages in Nsibidi script were cut or painted on split palm stems; in addition, they were "chalked on walls, embroidered or applied on cloth, painted and resist-dyed on cloth, incised on calabashes, hammered on brass containers, cut in divinatory leaves, painted on toy swords, and tattooed on human skin" (Ibid.). As a form of writing in & on space, the signs employed show a wide range of conventionalization & abstraction, e.g.:



Moon in three phases

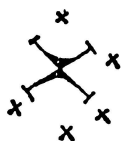


Husband & wife love each other ardently. They love to put their arms around one another (shown by extended hands). They are rich, have three tables & a pillow at each side.

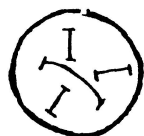


A mirror standing on a table

People arranging their hair in the mirror



Sign denoting a talkative man

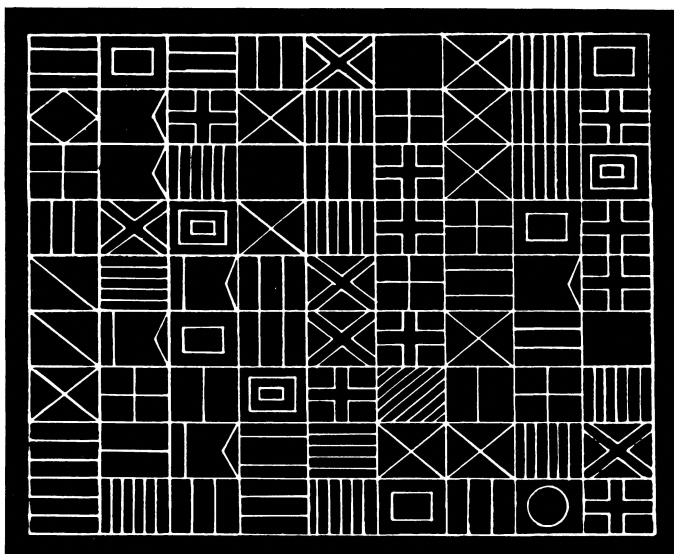


Sick man lying down in his house, with three visitors

In Nsibidi, as in other complex signing systems, a close correspondence exists between the written & mimed forms. “An incomparable art,” writes Thompson, “[that] communicates a calligraphic sense of line, sensuous and superb.”

For other picture-writings, see pp. 28, 173, & 245.

Addendum. For a contemporary work that uses a conventional coding system, the reader might consider Hannah Weiner’s *Code Poems* (1982) “taken from the International Code of Signals for the Use of All Nations[:] . . . a visual signal system for ships at sea.” E.g.:



DSJ PERSONS INDICATED PRESENT THEIR COMPLIMENTS TO

TMQ	If you please
ZGS	Do you wish to?
FBX	As you please
ZGU	If you wish
ZGV	It is my wish
LBG	Will persons please?
QTR	I or persons indicated wish to see you
ZGW	Wish to speak to you
TMW	Will you please?
ZGX	Wish you would
USR	Request the pleasure of
OCA	With pleasure. I will accept
TMU	Shall I have the pleasure to or of?
DBX	Very acceptable
OAP	Will you give me the pleasure?
TMX	With much pleasure
ZJQ	Will you write?
ZLH	Yes, I will
WRY	Will you stay or wait?
HUG	Yes, I can
JEA	Will you accompany?
DCZ	I will accompany
JGV	Will you give me the pleasure of your company at?
JGT	Very glad of your company
JGS	The pleasure of your company
TIR	I or persons indicated gratefully accept

In addition to the flag forms of the International Signal Code, Weiner's performances utilized semaphore (light signals) & morse code. The flags could be displayed both statically &, as with the Nsibidi in its most elaborated form, could be performed as "art-in-motion."

Page 138 Drum Poem #7

Source: Adapted by Ben Moses from R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 269, 280.

Among the Ashanti the drum is not used . . . [to rap] out words by means of a prearranged code, but . . . to sound or speak the actual words . . . drum-talking as distinct from drum-signalling . . . an attempt to imitate by means of two drums, set in different notes, the exact sound of the human voice. (Rattray, *Ashanti*)

Ashanti is a tonal language & “the drum gives the tones, number of syllables, & the punctuation accurately. The actual vowels & the individual consonants cannot be transmitted. It is therefore generally impossible to ‘read’ accurately any particular word when standing alone”—though the “words” are heard distinctly as parts of larger units, aided too by the use of standard or set phrases. Thus “missionary”—in the drum language of the Kele in the Congo Basin—is given as “white man spirit of the forest,” not because the latter phrase is all that common (or poetic) but because its tones leave little doubt about the meaning.

This type of poem (or poem-realization) is widespread in Africa. Among the Yoruba, e.g., “the ‘dundun’ drum can play any tone & glide of the . . . language & its range is an octave. . . . Just as in Semitic languages the consonants are so important that one can write the language without vowels, so in Yoruba the tones are of such great importance that vowels as well as consonants can be dropped” (U. Beier, *Yoruba Poetry*).

In Rattray’s transcriptions, two tones are given: for the low or male drum (M) & the high or female drum (F). These may be combined almost simultaneously (MF, FM, MM, FF) or grouped in syllables as indicated by the hyphens.

For a brief take on Trobriand Island drum-language, see p. 330, & the accompanying commentary. Ruth Finnegan’s fuller account of African drum poetry appears in *Symposium of the Whole*, 129–39.

Addenda. (1) Other forms of (so-called) “surrogate speech” turn up as horn languages, gong languages, flute languages, xylophone languages, whistling & whistle languages, yodeling, talking elephant tusks, etc. In contemporary music & (sound) poetry—particularly those forms that involve electronic manipulation & synthesis—such moves-across-media have been given a new importance. Thus, Max Neuhaus’s *Realization of Jackson Mac Low’s “The Text on the Opposite Page”* involves a reading by two voices of a dual series of typewritten letters, numbers, & signs that is then electronically recorded & lowered by four octaves, etc. The resulting “distortion” creates a musical composition which both is & isn’t the original reading. The sound is of a very deep, very resonant & percussive piece of electronic music: the voice an indiscernible but real presence.

(2) Although the effect of conveying meaning through tones alone can’t be reproduced in English, the transmission of messages with key vowels & consonants suppressed or modified enters, as a game of language, into the following verbal plays by George Brecht & Patrick Hughes:

tophalf

per.od
com,ma
c:l:n

enc

ero
1ne
2wo
3hree
4our
5ive f_oor

(3) Almost two centuries earlier in the coded correspondence of the British poet John Clare:

M Drst Mr Clngwd

M nrl wrn t & wnt t hr frm Nbd wll wn M r hv m t n prc & wnt hv dn D knw
wht r n m Dbt-- kss's fr tn yrs & lngr stll & lngr thn tht whn ppl mk sch mstks
t cll m Gds bstrd & whrs p m b shtng m p frm Gds ppl t f th w f cmmn sns &
thn tk m hd ff bcs th cnt fnd m t t hrd

Drst Mr r fthfl r d thnk f m knw wnt w sd tghtr-- dd vst m n hll sm tm bck bt
dnt cm hr gn fr t s nts bd plc wrs nd w r ll trnd Frnchmn flsh ppl tll m hv gt n
hm n ths wrld nd s dnt believe n th thr nrt t mk mslf hvn wth m drst Mr nd
sbscrb mslf rs

fr vr & vr

Jhn Clr

Page 139 Praises of Ogun

Source: J. R.'s translations selected from the French of Pierre Verger, *Notes sur le Culte des Orisha et Vodun* (Dakar: Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, 1957), 146–50, 175–206.

Ogun is the god of iron & is worshipped by all those who use iron. He is a semi-historical figure who has become an *orisha*, i.e., a “mediary between Olorun (the

supreme god) and man. . . . The orisha personifies some aspect of the divine power," & each orisha has his own set of colors, materials, etc. Assembled from a number of local variants, these "praises" of Ogun give a compound image of his range & power.

For a description of the Yoruba *oriki* (praise-poem), see p. 474. A widely practiced concept, other African praise poems appear throughout the present volume.

Page 141 Abuse Poem: For Kodzo & Others

Source: Kofi Awoonor, "Poems & Abuse-Poems of the Ewe," *Alcheringa*, o.s., no. 3 (Winter 1971): 8–9.

Typical of that range of Ewe abuse or attack poetry called *halo*. Komo Ekpe (b. 1897), as a traditional poet, or *heno*, drew power from "a personal god of songs" (= Hadzivoodoo), while maintaining a great deal of personal presence, even innovation, in his work. In the present example, Ekpe's principal opponent is the poet Kodzo, but the abuse is also aimed at Kodzo's supporters: "his women admirers who goaded him on & Amegavi, a wealthy elder of Tsiamé." The "questioners" of the poem are "the followers of Ekpe's drum, which he calls *Question*" & which, as with the "drums" of other Ewe poets, becomes the symbol of his art.

Centered at public events such as wakes & funerals, the *halo* contests remind us of traditions as diverse as Inuit song battles (above, p. 115), the flytings, etc., of pagan Europe, & the more recent African-American "dozens." A reminder too that good-feeling per se has rarely been the central aim of a poetry derived from the workings of shamans & sacred clowns engaged (more often & more like ourselves than we had previously imagined) in traditional rituals of abuse & *disruption*.

A further example of Awoonor's Ewe translations can be found on p. 418, above, & an extended essay by Awoonor in *Symposium of the Whole*, 162–68.

Page 142 What Fell Down? Penis!

Page 144 What Fell Down? Vulva!

Source: Jean Borgatti, "Songs of Ritual License from Midwestern Nigeria," *Alcheringa*, n.s. 2, no. 1 (1976): 63, 65.

The songs come from Okpenada, one of seventeen Ejeri villages & center of a shrine & cult dating back to the late nineteenth century. The present performance was part of a ceremony involving a custodial priest & a group of elders & cult members. Writes Borgatti re performance & her own transcriptions: "The songs were partially accompanied by rhythmic handclapping. A chorus, consisting of children and spectators, alternately joined and followed the lead singer. An attempt has been made to visualize the patterns of singing and accompaniment through using different type faces, symbols and spacing: Lead singer alone, SINGER WITH CHORUS, *chorus alone*, handclapping, time-keeping, and over lapping."

Source: George Economou's working from D.F. Van der Merwe, "Hurutshe Poems," *Bantu Studies* 15 (1941): 335.

Praise-poem form transposed to new matter. Whatever enters a person's field-of-vision is part of their real world.

Of praise-poems among the Hurutshe, Van der Merwe writes: ". . . A man may add a few lines to a poem heard by somebody else, with the result that a given poem may be the creation of two or even more persons. But the poems as recited by different people differ [also in that] the lines or stanzas composing the poems . . . sometimes change positions."

For more on praise-poems, see especially p. 474.

Addendum.

Walt Whitman

TO A LOCOMOTIVE IN WINTER

Thee for my recitative,
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the winter-day declining,
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat
convulsive,
Thy black cylindrical body, golden brass and silvery steel,
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling
at thy sides,
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering in the distance,
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple,
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack,
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy
wheels,
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering;
Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the
continent,
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.
Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at
night,
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earthquake,
rousing all,
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,

(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

Page 145 *Speaking the World*

Source: Judith Gleason, *Leaf and Bone: African Praise-Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 1–5. Mainly translated from the French of Solange de Ganay, *Les Devices des Dogons* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1938).

Traditional Dogon *tige*, short praise-poems that mirror “a remarkable cosmology based on ‘correspondences’” (Gleason). Bits of that cosmos (“as rich as that of Hesiod”—M. Griaule) were carried over into the Western world by ethnologists like Marcel Griaule & Germaine Dieterlen, whose practice related closely to impulses in the 1920s/30s shared directly with French Surrealism, etc. One of the resultant books—called “God of Water” in French, *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* in English—became one of the touchstones for twentieth-century artists looking for poetic technologies to which to relate their own (re)explorations of the “sacred.” (The last of the poems given here is in fact Ogotemmeli’s own praise-name.)

The use of the *tige*, as Gleason reports it, remains largely functional: to increase one’s strength for heavy work, to give power to the hoe or to the person hoeing, to keep off the recent dead through the gazelle mask & its attendant rituals. But the deeper key is the sense that humans speak a “language” which is at the same time the elementary substance of which the earth is made. This perception of a “universe where each blade of grass, each little fly is the carrier of a word” (thus: G. Calame-Griaule) is the expression of a genuine poetics & leads to speculation by Victor Turner on “the close resemblance between Dogon myth and cosmology and those of certain Neo-Platonist, Gnostic, and Kabbalistic sects and ‘heresies’ that thrive in the understorey of European religion and philosophy.” And even further: “One wonders whether, after the Vandal and Islamic invasions of North Africa, and even before these took place, Gnostic, Manichean, and Jewish-mystical ideas and practices might have penetrated the Sahara to the Western Sudan and helped to form the Dogon *Weltbild*” (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*).

More from Ogotemmeli appears in *Symposium of the Whole*, 197–200.

Pages 147–48 *Death Rites I & II*

Source: C. M. Bowra, trans., *Primitive Song* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1962), 202–3, 222–23, from R. P. Trilles, *Les pygmées de la forêt équatoriale* (Paris: Librairie Bloud and Gay, 1931).

Khvum (Khmvm)—father of the forest who “at times visits the sun to keep its fires burning;” he is otherwise connected (like Osiris) with judgment in the underworld.

Dan—a cavern in the forest at whose “gates” Khvum (as father of life & death) will meet the newly born dead.

Characteristic of Baka [Pygmy] poetry & of *all* poetry where sensitivity to the shifting polarities of light & darkness, etc., becomes a matter of cognition &, perhaps, of tragedy. “It is dark, it is light,” reads the Aztec “definition,” & the second Isaiah writes: “I form the light, & create darkness: I make peace, & create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” So too, much modern poetry (where the issue, writes David Antin, is *reality*) is witness to the recovery of darkness, i.e., of darkness & light, the relation of figure to ground, etc.

o o o o

Federico García Lorca
THE SONG WANTS TO BE THE LIGHT
The song wants to be the light.
In the darkness the song contains
threads of phosphorous and moon.
The light does not know what it wants.
On its boundaries of opal,
it meets itself face to face,
and returns.

—Translated by James Wright

The reader can also compare the second of these “death rites” to the celebration of all life forms on pp. 38, 473.

Page 148 *The Praises of the Falls*

Source: Adapted by J.R. from Father F. Laydevant, “The Praises of the Divining Bones among the Basotho,” *Bantu Studies* 7 (1933): 341–73.

The “praises”—first gathered by the Basuto writer Joas Mapetla—accompany the casting of oracle bones. Their purpose is

(1) To create, as with music, the conditions under which the bones are to be read, i.e., to provide that “coefficient of weirdness” Malinowski spoke of (see p. 439) in which the words *are* music, act upon us before their sense is clear or against the possibility of any fixed meaning;

(2) As open-ended imagery that can then—almost “falsely”—be read as secret closed statements (the functional language of the oracle) in the participants’ search for clues to the unknown: the cause of disease & misfortune, etc.

Mapetla’s description of the bones & the procedures for casting is never clear. There are apparently four to twenty in a set, or *litaola*: four principal ones from the hoofs & horns of oxen, with lesser bones from ankles & hindlegs of anteaters, springbok, sheep, goats, monkeys, also occasional shells, twigs & stones. The four major bones are designated as greater & lesser male & greater & lesser female, & are read according to the sides on which they fall, direction of fall, positions relative

to each other & to the minor bones, etc. The greater male & female have four sides called walking, standing, covering, & dying; the lesser male & female only walking & dying. Here is Mapetla's description of the casting & "praising":

When they are divining, the person who comes to ask for this service sweeps the ground where he has to throw them. Then the diviner loosens them from the string and gives them to the one who comes to consult.

This one tosses them and lets them fall on the ground.

Then the diviner examines them carefully in order to see the position they have taken.

When he sees that they have fallen in a certain position, he praises that fall for a good while.

Among the praises he mixes the affairs of people, of (various) things, of animals and sicknesses.

When he has finished the praises, he says to the person who came to consult him: Make me divine, my friend.

This one says: With these words, when you were making the praises, you pointed exactly to my case, and to my sickness.

And the diviner says: So it is, and this special position (of the bones) says the same. Then the diviner gives a charm to the consulting person, and receives a small fee from him (in exchange).

Addenda. (1) In the typical praise-poem (see p. 474) the lines or praises are independent units that the poet brings together in a kind of collage. In the present instance, however, it is the fall of the bones that suggests what verses will be used & determines their order. Thus chance—to a greater or lesser degree—serves to program the divining praises much as dice-castings, tarot-readings, random digit tables, etc., take on a structuring & selecting function for some contemporary poets. A comparison with the chance-generated poetry & music of artists like Jackson Mac Low & John Cage would also be useful.

(2) The name of a "fall" is generally that of the plant or other remedy to be used in that instance. Most African words that remain in the translations are likewise either plants or proper names—the meaning being fairly evident from the context.

(3) The editor originally printed these with some reservations about their accuracy but in the hope that others would be encouraged to do more detailed work on a body of lore & poetry that, carefully assembled, might represent an African *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*. The work of Judith Gleason (from *A Recitation of Ifa*, following) virtually fulfills that hope.

Page 154 Ika Meji

Source: Judith Gleason, with Awotunde Aworinde & John Olaniyi Ogundipe, *A Recitation of Ifa* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), 139–42.

The name of both a god & a system of divination, Ifa uses a cord of eight split seeds or sixteen randomly thrown palm-nuts to summon the poetic voice of the Yoruba oracle. In Judith Gleason's abbreviated description:

Each oracular configuration [or casting], known as Odu, is the product of sixteen times sixteen possibilities, which means that when the diviner (“father-of-secrets” or *babalawo* in Yoruba) casts for you, any one of 256 signs may appear. Further, each of these signs has many “roads” radiating out from it. To these roads are attached verses (*ese*), which are legion. When a certain Odu shows up on the board, the diviner will begin to recite some of these verses. When what he is saying seems to apply to your case, then a correct determination has been made. (*Leaf & Bone*)

The standard structure of the Ifa divination poems (“often highly lyrical & obscure in their references”) is to start with the citation of a previous, often mythic, casting, to name the diviner or diviners involved, then the name of the fictional client, the nature of his/her problem, the prescription suggested by the Odu, & the previous outcome. But further elements can enter through the intercalation of “songs and praises expressive of the ‘character’ of the Odu . . . as well as symbolic digressions on the meaning of the oracular system itself.” The result is an open-ended & complex series of language structures: a major example of the human capacity for intricate design & concept. It is also—as discussed in the previous commentary—a still existing form of poesis that functions on the level of such divinatory/synchronistic works as the Chinese *I Ching*. (See p. 452.)

In the Odu presented here, Orunmila is another name of Ifa as god, Yemoja that of an *orisha*, or deity. The name “ika meji” suggests “fingers” & “cruelty”—& a sense of danger & randomness (“existence as scattershot”) pervades the whole poem. Gleason writes further:

Ecologically, Ika Meji is the world of the forest floor envisaged as a thin substratum of poisonous invective and countervenom, a world of baneful creepers turned snares, of treacherous twigs and pricklers, a place where everything must be constantly on its guard, for anything could suddenly reveal its treacherous nature. Hypocrisy and evil intention are revealed by the diviner’s proverbial names in the first verse of this recitation. The client in the first case is a poor, small creature, barely existing; in the second sequence the client is an entire town called Ika, which, for years “tied” by witchcraft, had been under the spell of its own name—a miserable place whose occupants, “trading for years with nothing to show for it,” have, justifiably, no sense of self-respect, no ability to get themselves together without Ifa’s help.

Here is the twilight world of incantation, consciousness reduced to rigid reiteration of protective formulas—brilliantly conveyed in the Yoruba by an unremitting cacophony of “k” sounds: *ka, aka, akika, akara, akeke, akaka*, and so on, with tonal shifts left to point the way to meanings that are always verging on the meaningless. . . . The scene sounds like the song of Cock Robin turned tongue twister and illuminated by Beatrix Potter’s sinister wit. The avatars of this wicked odu are viper, hedgehog, and snail. (*A Recitation of Ifa*)

For more on divinations & randomness, etc., see pp. 527, 556, & *Symposium of the Whole*, 147–54.

Page 157 *Little Leper of Munjolóbo*

Source: Peter Seitel, *See So That We May See: Performances & Interpretations of Traditional Tales from Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 107–11.

Narrative performances among the Haya take the form of tale-swapping sessions & reflect a value placed from childhood on “the use of artistic and intentionally ambiguous speech.” As in other oral cultures, the process is active & depends on a close interplay between tellers & hearers—here summed up in the idea of a mutually shared “seeing” in which the audience encourages the narrator to “see” & “to project [the] images [of the tale] on an imaginary screen seen in their collective mind’s eye. The narrator projects these images by ‘seeing’ them himself. He describes events as though they were occurring at that very moment; he becomes one character, then another, and ‘sees’ the events of a tale as they do” (Seitel, *See So That We May See*). This process of vision & enactment underlies the formularized opening of many of the tellings: “See so that we may see.”

In bringing across this sense of an active & often highly individualized style, Seitel like some others uses a series of typographical conventions related to the “system of notation” pioneered by Dennis Tedlock (see p. 538): simple line-breaks for a normal breath (about one second); stepped lines for a shorter pause; a longer pause marked by one or two circles (°,°) at the left margin; LOUD VOICES by all caps; d-r-a-w-n o-u-t w-o-r-d-s by hyphens; singsong intonations by italics. The result, as with the performances themselves, is a heightened sense of being in-the-story.

In “Little Leper,” the *empindwi* is “an iron tool five or six inches long which resembles a needle and is used in decorative basket work.” The formulaic opening (lines 1–4) was not in fact used in this version but added from elsewhere in Seitel’s book as an indication to the reader of how-it-goes.

Page 162 *The Voice of the Karaw*

Source: Judith Gleason, *Leaf & Bone: African Praise-Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 159–60. Translation after Dominique Zahan, *Sociétés d’initiation Bambara*, vol. 1 (Paris: Mouton, 1960), 257–77.

Specialists of an already intricate use of voice & symbol, “the *karaw* (singular *kara*) are initiatory masters of the Bamanas’ Kore society . . . the last of a sequence of six secret societies, in which man realizes mystic participation in the divine being” (Gleason, *Leaf & Bone*). But the word *karaw* also refers to objects used by the masters as specific symbols of knowledge & divinity: e.g., “a spatula-shaped plank of decorated wood—an emblem both of the enlightened and of the enlightening word. During *karaw* recitations this standard (some eight or nine feet high) is set on the ground. At mouth level (as though it were a flat, elongated mask) the *kara* has an opening, through which the spokesman puts the three central fingers of his left hand—tongues of the sacred utterance.” Yori, the divinity of the present discourse, speaks to his initiates through such mouthpieces:

He characterizes his mouthpieces as last-sunset-rays-attempting-to-penetrate-the-gathering-obscurity-of-the-mystery. They rip up and tear to shreds old misconceptions and spurious hypotheses. What seems twilight to them (they are at one point pictured as impatiently slapping the face of the setting sun) is in reality dawning, a new illumination announced by cockcrow. . . . The cock announces transformation, a process compared to the transmutation of matter in a smith's furnace: . . . a womb-shaped crucible out of which the liquid ore runs through a clay pipe into a trough. This structure and its function (as well as its symbolism) are compared to a clay hut of similar shape. . . . The initiate awaiting transformation and fusion with the divine essence is like a lover waiting in the antechamber while his mistress prepares the mat inside; he is like the penis beginning to enter the corridor. (Gleason, *Leaf & Bone*)

Two of four karaw discourses are given here. The voice of the kara(w) is in italics, that of the initiate in regular (roman) type.

Page 164 Gassire's Lute

Source: Leo Frobenius & Douglas C. Fox, *African Genesis* (New York: Stackpole Sons, 1937), 97–109.

(1)

Robert Duncan
from *PASSAGES* 24

The blood
streams from the bodies of his sons
to feed the voice of Gassire's lute.

The men who mean good
must rage, grieve, turn with dismay
to see how "base and unjust actions, when they are the
objects of hope, are lovely to those that vehemently
admire them"
and how far men following self-interest can betray all
good of self.

(2) The Soninke are a small remnant group now mostly Muslim & inhabiting the desert oases of Tichit & Walatu in what used to be French West Africa; but Fox suggests that the longer epic (*Dausi*) of which this is a preserved fragment goes back to about 500 B.C., Wagadu being the legendary city of the Fasa (Fezzan in Herodotus), the other cities mentioned having ancient counterparts, etc. In the form given the song comes from the fourth to twelfth centuries A.D. & was, so he tells us, the work of "troubadours." Whatever its history, the poem's statement about the artist remains chilling.

(3)

Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones]
from BLACK MAGIC

A closed window looks down
on a dirty courtyard, and black people
call across or scream across or walk across
defying physics in the stream of their will

Our world is full of sound
Our world is more lovely than anyone's
tho we suffer, and kill each other
and sometimes fail to walk the air

We are beautiful people
with african imaginations
full of masks and dances and swelling chants
with african eyes, and noses, and arms,
though we sprawl in gray chains in a place
full of winters, when what we want is sun.

We have been captured,
brothers. And we labor
to make our getaway, into
the ancient image, into a new
correspondence with ourselves
and our black family. We need magic
now we need the spells, to raise up
return, destroy, and create. What will be
the sacred words?

Page 173 Midē Songs & Picture-Songs

Source: W.J. Hoffman, *The Midēwiwin or "Grand Medicine Society" of the Ojibwa*, Annual Report No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1891).

The Midēwiwin ("society of the Midē or shamans") consisted of four grades or degrees & involved a gradual opening-up of sense perception, powers to heal, etc. The narrative or poem-of-origin has it that Minabozho, servant of Dzhe Manido (the Midē guardian spirit), took pity on the Ojibwa ancestors, therefore delivered to "Otter" the mysteries of the Midēwiwin (sacred drum, rattles, shells, song, dance, etc.) & instructed him to pass them to the people.

The Midē songs were re-made by successive generations & recorded in pictographs "incised upon birchbark"—no mere mnemonic devices (as Hoffman gives them) but with independent meanings that varied from recorder to recorder. As verbal structures, the songs consisted (typically) of "a number of archaic words,

some of which are furthermore different from the spoken language on account of their being chanted, & meaningless syllables introduced to prolong certain accented notes." The songs could also be repeated for as long as the singer chose—"the greater the number of repetitions . . . the greater is felt to be the amount of inspiration and power of the performance" (Hoffman, *Midewiwin*).

For more on picture-poems, etc., see pp. 29, 136, 245, & the accompanying commentaries.

Page 176 *Seven Ojibwa Songs*

Source: Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, Bulletins 45, 53 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910-13).

Densmore makes each word of Ojibwa (Chippewa) equal a line of English (see note on Lakota, p. 535).

Song 2: The death-song could be given in dream-vision or composed, like this one, at the time of death. The large bear was Gawitayac's "*manido* animal" in whose guidance he had trusted.

Song 4: A war song, used in the "dog feast" after eating of dog's head, shortly before the feast's conclusion.

Song 5: A dream song . . . used in war dances.

Song 6: A Midē funeral song.

Song 7: The "game of silence" consisted of keeping still as long as possible in the face of nonsequential & far-out expressions meant to cause laughter.

Addenda. (1) The concreteness of the poems is in their images, which often touch indirectly (if at all) on the song's function; i.e., they suggest a "nonreferentiality" with relation to context, which they do not explain but within which they act.

(2) Kenneth Rexroth writes, specifically of materials collected by Densmore: "Songs, like other things which we call works of art, occupy in American Indian society a position somewhat like the sacraments and sacramentals of the so-called higher religions. That is, the Indian poet is not only a prophet. Poetry or song does not only play a vatic role in the society, but is itself a numinous thing. The work of art is holy, in Rudolph Otto's sense—an object of supernatural awe, & as such, an important instrument in the control of reality on the highest plane" (*Assays*).

Page 177 *From the Wishing Bone Cycle*

Source: Howard Norman, *The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems from the Swampy Cree Indians* (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson Publishing, [1972], 1982), 5, 20, 33-34.

Trickster stories go far back in Cree culture (as elsewhere), but the figure here is the invention, specifically, of Jacob Nibenegenesabe, "who lived for some ninety-four years northeast of Lake Winnipeg, Canada." Nibenegenesabe was also a teller (= *achimoo*) of older trickster narratives, the continuity between old & new

never being in question. But the move in the *Wishing Bone* series is toward a rapidity of plot development & changes, plus a switch into first-person narration as a form of enactment. In the frame for these stories, the trickster figure “has found the wishbone of a snow goose who has wandered into the Swampy Cree region and been killed by a lynx. This person now has a wand of metamorphosis allowing him to wish anything into existence; himself into any situation” (Norman, *Wishing Bone*). Norman’s method of translation, in turn, involves “first listening to the narratives over & over in the source language, then re-creating them in the same context, story, etc., if not able, ultimately, to get a translation word for word.”

The poems, as delivered here, represent a major example (both contemporary and tribal) of the “law of metamorphosis in thought & word” spoken of by Cassirer, the Surrealists, & others. (See above, p. 473; below, p. 577.) Thus Ezra Pound, circa 1915: “Our only measure of truth is . . . our perception of truth. The undeniable tradition of metamorphosis teaches us that things do not remain always the same. They become other things by swift and unanalysable process. It was only when men began to mistrust the myths and tell nasty lies for a moral purpose that these matters became hopelessly confused.” (E.P., “Affirmations”)

For more on tricksters, etc., see below, p. 538, & *Symposium of the Whole*, 206, 425, 434.

Addendum.

Vicente Huidobro
from ALTAZOR

Tell me are you the son of Fisher Martin
Or are you the grandson of a stuttering stork
Or of that giraffe I see in the middle of the desert
Selfishly grazing on moon grass
Or are you the son of the hanged man who had pyramid eyes?
One day we’ll know
And you’ll die without your secret
And from your tomb will spring a rainbow like a bus
From the rainbow will spring a couple making love
From the love will spring a roving forest
From the forest will spring an arrow
From the arrow will spring a hare fleeing through the fields
From the hare will spring a ribbon to go marking its way
From the ribbon will spring a river and a waterfall that will save the hare
from its pursuers
Until the hare begins to creep through a glance
And climbs to the bottom of the eye

—Translated from Spanish by Stephen Fredman

Page 180 *The Shaman of the Yellowknives: A Chipewyan Talk-Poem*

Source: François Mandeville, *This Is What They Say*, trans. Ron Scollon (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 179–84.

The poem as narrative & “talk-poem” (D. Antin’s term in a contemporary setting) emerges clearly through the Chipewyan storyteller François Mandeville (1878–1952), as passed along to the Chinese-born linguist Li Fang-kuei & translated in its present form by Ron Scollon. The opening beyond that is the presence of an actual poetics that underlies a whole range of speech acts & enlarges the field of poetry both in tribal/oral cultures & in the ongoing orality of the literate & postliterate world. Of Mandeville’s works in particular—over twenty in Scollon’s gathering—Robert Bringhurst in his introduction describes them as “Athabaskan metaphysics incarnate,” but along with that there is also an exquisite sense of everyday Chipewyan life & of the actors, large & small, who inhabited Mandeville’s world. In the attempt to bring this across, Ron Scollon returns to the Mandeville text and, as Gary Snyder describes it, “tells it again as oral performance (traditional accuracy).” And Snyder again: “You can read these stories for their gritty amorality balanced with etiquette, their fierce hunger and generosity, and their sudden senseless death. . . . The unvarnished tales of a tough people in a tough land.” In this Mandeville’s authorship is without question.

For further examples of the discovery/rediscovery of such a traditional talk poetry, the reader may want to look at pp. 157 & 379 in the present volume.

Page 185 *Three Lakota Songs*

Source: Frances Densmore, *Teton Sioux Music*, Bulletin 61 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1918), 180, 222, 237.

The first song was given by wolves in a dream; the second was sung by Charging Thunder (Wakingyanwatakpe) who learned it from his father, Bear Necklace (Matonapin). Song 3 was sung by Bear Eagle (Matowangbli) who credited its making to Shell Necklace (Pangkeskanapin).

The lines of Densmore’s translation correspond to single words in the Lakota (Teton Sioux); thus each word of Sioux equals one line of English. The result, accidental or otherwise, is to isolate the poem’s structural properties (of stops & starts, disjunctions, etc.) as basis for a new music of utterance in the translation, providing a notation (including the parenthetical additions) that closely parallels—remarkably so for the third song—the sound of much contemporary poetry in English, e.g.:

Robert Creeley
I KNOW A MAN
As I sd to my
friend, because I am
always talking,—John, I

sd, which was not his
name, the darkness
surrounds us, what
can we do against
it, or else, shall we &
why not, buy a goddamn big car,
drive, he sd, for
christ's sake, look
out where yr going.

Page 186 From Battiste Good's *Winter Count*

Source: Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, Annual Report no. 10 (Washington, D.C., Bureau of American Ethnology, 1888–1889), 311–14.

Winter-counts (*waniyetu wowapi* in Dakota) were a widespread visual-verbal form among nineteenth-century Plains Indians. In his basic account of Indian picture-writing, Mallery defines them as “the use of events, which were in some degree historical, to form a system of chronology,” i.e., to individualize each year (or winter) by a name describing an event within that year, and to record said name by a visual symbol or ideograph. While the events so selected may not always strike *us* as the most crucial—the defeat of Custer in 1876, say, isn’t mentioned in most counts for that year—a story nevertheless emerges; and in the wedding of history & naming, a form in some sense suggestive of Pound’s definition of epic as “a poem including history.”

The ideographs were mostly drawn on buffalo hides & were organized into patterns ranging from columns to spirals. In Battiste Good’s count, the ideographs appear in an ordinary paper drawing book and are painted with five colors besides black. His narrative includes a cyclical & mythic section covering the years 901 to 1700, after which the counting by year-names begins. The work is prefaced by the account of a personal vision & by a vision-drawing (for which see the Battiste Good entry in J.R.’s *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 1972).

Other Indian calendar works (moon-namings) appear also in *Shaking the Pumpkin*, & the reader may want to compare these to Alexander Marshack’s reconstruction of a paleolithic sequence from Europe (p. 277).

Page 189 *Peyote Songs*

Source: Translations by David P. McAllester, as sung by Tewaki, in McAllester, *Peyote Music* (New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, 1949).

Peyote religion in the United States goes back to at least the 1870s & was carried on thereafter through the visions of men like John Wilson, John Rave, et al. The poetry of the songs given here is typical of one line of image-making (phanopo-

etic) language: precise & minimal in its namings (though the practice here, as elsewhere, would be to extend the words through many repetitions). The content of each song is then itself a kind of vision—self-contained if one takes it to be so.

The reader may want to compare these songs—as poetry—with Australian Aborigine practice of the Kunapipi type (p. 338) or with the series of “images” presented on p. 15. A poem from the older Huichol peyote religion in Mexico appears on p. 198, commentary on p. 542.

Page 189 Song of the Humpbacked Flute Player

Source: Frank Waters & Oswald White Bear Fredericks, *Book of the Hopi* (New York: Viking Press, 1963; New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 38–39.

Frank Waters writes that the “locust *máhu* [insect which has the heat power] is known as the Humpbacked Flute Player, the *kachina* [spirit of the invisible forces of life] named Kókopilau, because he looked like the wood [*koko*—wood; *pilau*—hump]. In the hump on his back he carried seeds of plants and flowers”—the *kachina* doll often depicted with long penis to signify the sexual root of the power—“and with the music of his flute he created warmth.” During the early migrations Kókopilau “would stop and scatter seeds from the hump on his back. Then he would march on, playing his flute and singing a song. His song is still remembered, but the words are so ancient that nobody knows what they mean.” The resulting text bears inevitable resemblance to many varieties of wordless poetry, such as Indian songs, magical spells & mantras, medieval tropes, & the conscious sound poetry of more recent years (see pp. 8, 310, 330, & commentaries).

Addendum.

Gary Snyder

from THE HUMP BACKED FLUTE PLAYER

In Canyon de Chelly on the North Wall up by a cave
is the hump backed flute player laying on his back,
playing his flute. Across the flat sandy canyon wash,
wading a stream and breaking through the ice, on the
south wall, the pecked-out pictures of some Mountain Sheep
with curling horns. They stood in the icy shadow of the
south wall two hundred feet away; I sat with my
shirt off in the sun facing south, with the hump
backed flute player just above my head.
They whispered; I whispered; back and forth
across the canyon, clearly heard.

Source: Dennis Tedlock, *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians* (New York: Dial Press, 1972), 77–83.

Junco shirt—Old Lady Junco is an Oregon junco, & her “shirt” is the hood-like area of dark gray or black that covers the head, neck, & part of the breast of this species.

Prairie Wolf—Alternative term for coyote, introduced by the translator to match a similar term in the original.

Son’abchi, Lee semkonikya—Formulaic openings & closings of Zuni narratives.

(1) Although Trickster took many forms in the Americas (Raven, Rabbit, Mink, Flint, Spider, Bluejay, Jaguar, etc.), his manifestation as Coyote has had the greatest carryover into contemporary American culture. Writes Gary Snyder: “Of all the uses of native American lore in modern poetry, the presence of the Coyote figure, the continuing presence of Coyote, is the most striking.” And Simon Ortiz, in “Telling about Coyote,” from the older perspective of Acoma Pueblo brought into “modern times”:

. . . you know, Coyote
is in the origin and all the way
through . . . he’s the cause
of the trouble, the hard times
that things have. . . .
Yet, he came so close
to having it easy.
But he said,
“Things are too easy. . . .”
Of course, he was mainly bragging,
shooting his mouth.
The existential Man,
a Dostoevsky Coyote.

In the present version, as one Zuni listener told Dennis Tedlock, Coyote is “just being very foolish”—a far cry, perhaps, from his work as Creator or from the tragic, obscene, & terrifying sides of him that turn up elsewhere. (See, e.g., *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 102–16, 274–75, for a string of such versions: “*with blood-stained mouth / comes mad Coyote!*”)

(2) Tedlock’s translation is also an example of a method of representing narrative-as-performance that he pioneered & that informs a number of the translations in the present edition of this volume. His position has been amply set out in his own publications but also in the present editor’s *Shaking the Pumpkin* and *Symposium of the Whole*. For sounding “Coyote & Junco,” the reader should observe that line changes = a pause of less than one second, double spaces between lines = a two- to three-second pause, CAPITALS = loud words & passages,

smaller print = soft ones, long dashes after vowels = vowels to be held for about two seconds, a line or phrase set on different levels = line to be chanted with an interval of about three half-tones between levels. Other keys to reading aloud are given, like stage directions, in parentheses.

Writes Tedlock further: “An ethnopoetic score [or text] not only takes account of the words but silences, changes in loudness and tone of voice, the production of sound effects, and the use of gestures and props.” And again: “Prose has no real existence outside the written page.”

(3) The reader may also be interested in related translations & transcriptions on pp. 180 & 379.

Page 192 The Tenth Horse Song of Frank Mitchell

Source: Jerome Rothenberg’s translation from the Navajo, as originally published in J. Rothenberg, *The 17 Horse Songs of Frank Mitchell X–XIII* (London: Tetrad, 1970).

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AS “TOTAL TRANSLATION”: “The sounding presented here is the score for my experimental translation of the tenth of seventeen Navajo ‘horse songs’ in the blessingway of Frank Mitchell (1881–1967) of Chinle, Arizona. Their power, as with most Navajo poetry, is directed toward blessing & curing, but in the course of it they also depict the stages by which Enemy Slayer, on instructions from his mother, Changing Woman, goes to the house of his father, The Sun, to receive & bring back horses for The People. The Tenth Horse Song marks the point in the narrative where Enemy Slayer receives the horses & instructions to bring them to the house of Changing Woman. The dialogue therein is between Enemy Slayer (= Dawn Boy) & The Sun.

“With the help of ethnomusicologist David McAllester, I attempted a number of ‘total translations’ from the horse songs—total in the sense that I was accounting not only for meaning but for word distortions, apparently meaningless syllables, music, style of performance, etc. The idea never was to set English words to Navajo music but to let a whole work—words & music—emerge newly in the process of considering what kinds of statement were there to begin with. As far as I could I also wanted to avoid ‘writing’ the poem in English, since this seemed irrelevant to a poetry that reached a high development outside of any written system.

“Under the best of circumstances translation-for-meaning is no more than partial translation. Even more so for the densely textured Navajo. To present what’s essentially a sound-poem, a *total* translation must distort words in a manner analogous to the original; it must match ‘meaningless’ syllables with equivalents in our very different English soundings; it may begin to sing in a mode suitable to the words of the translation; & if the original provides for more than one voice, the translation will also. Does so, in fact, in the final recorded version as I’ve come to it.

“In all this what matters to me most as a poet is that the process has been a very natural one of extending the poetry into new areas of sound. Nor do I think of

the result as poetry plus something else, but as *all* poetry, *all* poets' work, just as the Navajo is all poetry, where poetry & music haven't suffered separation. In that sense Frank Mitchell's gift has taken me a small way toward a new 'total poetry,' as well as an experiment in total translation. And that, after all, is where many of us had been heading in the first place" (J.R., *Poems for the Game of Silence*).

Page 194 *A Song of the Winds*

Source: Dane Coolidge & Mary Roberts Coolidge, *The Last of the Seris* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1939), 216.

Santo Blanco was one of the few Seris to keep the songs in anything like their old form. He had seen the god of the cave too & described him as follows:

He lives in a little cave inside the big cave. I could see through him when he walked toward us, yet I was conscious he was coming closer and closer, until he was a hand's length from my face. It was dark as night, but I could see him. His arms were stretched out and his hands were hanging down, and from their tips water dripped. It was like ice. He came to me very slowly, and held his fingers over my head. He came again and spread his hands over me, and from the finger-tips I caught water in my palms.

The water is holy of course & cures—and he renews his supply of it (of the songs also?) by returning to the cave. Then

. . . the Spirit comes out of his inner cave and sings. The Spirit is a god, but not like the God of the Gringos. He is very much more beautiful than He Who Rules Heaven and Earth, the God in the sky. He has a white hat and a black coat, very long. To his ankles. Inside this black coat there are all kinds of bright colors. (Coolidge & Coolidge, *Last of the Seris*)

Page 194 *Six Seri Whale Songs*

Source: Dane Coolidge & Mary Roberts Coolidge, *The Last of the Seris* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1939), 68–69.

For that strange spectacle observable in all Sperm Whales dying—the turning sunwards of the head, and so expiring—that strange spectacle, beheld of such a placid evening, somehow to Ahab conveyed a wondrousness unknown before.

He turns and turns him to it—how slowly, but how steadfastly, his homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too worships fire; most faithful, broad, baronial vassal of the sun!

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Or Paulé Bartón (1916–1974), Haitian goatherd & poet:

GOING OUT TO MEET THE MOON WHALES

It was time:
high in the round fruit trees
we saw them passing
under the moon.

The manta rays lining up
to slowly flap their wings.
Then we floated out
on the manta waves.
There was no time
we were happier.

Whales, look,
I have not died too young:
I floated out
in the wood boat
I was born in fifty years ago,
when the moon whales were swimming here.

—Translated from the Creole by Howard Norman

o o o o

For more on the author of the Seri whale songs, Santo Blanco, see the preceding note.

Page 196 Flower World: Four Poems from the Yaqui Deer Dance

Source: J.R.'s setting of texts from Carleton S. Wilder, *The Yaqui Deer Dance: A Study in Cultural Change*, Bulletin 186 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1963), 176–77, 181, 187–88.

“Flower world,” “enchanted world” & “wilderness world” are among the English terms used to describe the other-than-human domain surrounding the settled Yaqui villages: “a region of untamed things into which man’s influence does not extend” (Edward Spicer). In mythic times that world (*buya aniya*) may have been *everything*, later reduced “to a specialized part of a larger whole, rather than the whole itself. . . . Not replaced, as the Jesuits would have wished . . . it became the other world, the wild world surrounding the towns” (Spicer, *The Yaquis*). Within the frame of a native & independent Catholicism, it persists in the present, into which it brings the mythic figures of sacred Deer Dancer & Pascola clowns. The songs accompanying the very taut, very classical Deer Dance are, in their totality, an extraordinary example of traditional poesis: the cumulative construction by word & image of that Flower World from which the dancer comes.

For more on the traditional uses of flower imagery, etc., see pp. 71, 496, above.

comes to us from ancient, ancient times. . . . This is a story from those very ancient times. . . . [It] is a beautiful thing, that which is our life. It is the *hikuri* [peyote]. . . . It is like a beautiful flower, as one says. It is like the Deer. It is our life. We must go so that it will enable us to see our life” (Furst, “To Find Our Life”).

The maker here is Ramón Medina Silva, a *mara’akame* & artist, who is also credited by Furst as the originator, circa 1965, of contemporary large-scale Huichol yarn-painting. Of the shaman’s function as proto-poet, Medina Silva himself says: “It is the *mara’akame* who directs everything. He is the one who listens in his dream, with his power and his knowledge. . . . Then he says to his companions, look, now we will change everything, all the meanings, because that is the way it must be. . . . As it was in Ancient Times, so that all can be united” (B. Myerhoff, *Peyote Hunt*).

For more on Huichol poetics, etc., see *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 362–65, & *Symposium of the Whole*, 116–18, 225–31.

(2) “Now if the Priests of the Sun behave like manifestations of the Word of God, or of his Logos, that is, Jesus Christ, the Priests of Peyote allowed me to experience the actual Myth of Mystery, to become immersed in the original mythic arcana, to enter through them into the Mystery of Mysteries, to look upon the face of those extreme operations by which THE FATHER MAN, NEITHER MAN NOR WOMAN, created all things” (A. Artaud, *The Peyote Dance*).

Page 199 *The Painted Book*

Source: Miguel León-Portilla, trans., *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 251–52, 244–45, 241–42.

From Mexico & elsewhere in Mesoamerica arise generations of pre-Conquest poets & books: a written tradition that reenforces & expands the spoken one. The poets’ names too (at least twenty by León-Portilla’s account) are here visible—but, above all, Nezahualcoyotl (1402–1472), author of more than thirty surviving compositions & chief of Texcoco for over forty years. While the tradition would still seem to be oral, the writings/paintings enter as a real presence: on stone monuments, fired vases, & painted books or “screenfolds.” The latter were “made of animal skins or of the *amate*-tree bark, duly prepared so as to be transformed into a kind of thick paper”; & the writing itself took the form of pictographs (“schematic drawings of objects” & events), ideograms (“symbolic representations of ideas”), & some limited forms of phonetic transcription (León-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*). But whatever the “limits” of the form, the idea of “book” & of the man or woman painting ideas (or having ideas painted through them) becomes, as here, the central image of a life lived with some hope of meaning.

Of all of that, fewer than twenty painted books have survived from Mesoamerica—their precise reading a continuous but slowly unraveling puzzle (see the following commentary). Among the poets’ names mentioned by León-Portilla & here given for the record are: Tlaltecatzin of Cuauhchinanco, Nezahualcoyotl, Cuacuauhtzin of Tepechpan, Nezahualpilli, Cacamatzin, Tochiuitzin Coyol-

chihuahui, Axayacatl, Temilotzin, Tecayehuatzin of Huexotzinco, Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin, Xicohtencatl of Tlaxcala, Chichicuepon of Chalco, & the poetess Macuilxochitzin. The name Nezhualcoyotl means Hungry Coyote.

Page 202 From Codex Boturini

Source: Karl Young's "reading" of the first four pages of the Aztec Codex Boturini. Previously unpublished.

One of a small number of surviving native books—both pre- & post-Conquest—the manuscript in question exists now only as a twenty-two-page fragment, tracing the origins & early wanderings of the Mexicas, or Aztecs. It was produced in or around Mexico City/Tenochtitlan soon after the Conquest, but shows a developed style: a simplified depiction of figures & ideas that was *one* of a number of Mexican possibilities. "As it now remains," writes Young, "the book is a strip of amatl (fig bark) paper approximately 19 cm tall and 549 cm long, folded accordion fashion into pages averaging about 24 cm across. The figures are drawn in black ink. Except for a reddish ink connecting dates, no color is used. . . . Where composition in most indigenous books is dense and crowded, suggesting the patterns in oriental rugs to some commentators, this is not the case in Codex Boturini. The scribe, as Donald Robertson has pointed out, leaves generous areas of open space, at times suggesting a spaceless landscape, an open field in which persons, dates, and place names can interact in freedom and solitude. . . . The style of Codex Boturini is deceptively simple: . . . its artist was a master who deserves our respect."

As with much Middle American writing, the Aztec system was open: a work to be interpreted, not spelled out word for word—or, as Young suggests, "despite the strong visual character of the codices, writing was an adjunct to speech in pre-Conquest Mexico and books were essentially tools for oral performance." A poet & printer himself, Young offers a minimal reading based on the relative agreements among students of the Codex. In so doing, he writes, "I have identified the icons and indicated their functions in blocks of type. I have placed these blocks of type inside rectangles below the facsimile, the placement of each block of type corresponding to the position on the page of the figure being interpreted. The facsimile is my own redrawing of the manuscript pages, rather than a photographic reproduction."

For more on "painted books," etc., see the preceding commentary & poems. The work that follows this—Mayan in its origins—is a still further advance in reading the unreadable.

Page 206 From the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield

Source: Dennis Tedlock, *2000 Years of Mayan Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 82–85.

In the half century since *Technicians of the Sacred* first appeared, the mysteries of ancient Mayan writing—what Dennis Tedlock calls "this most deeply American literary tradition"—gave way to a fuller understanding & decipherment of the

hieroglyphs as vehicles both for meaning & for sound. Building on the work of forerunners such as Yuri Knorosov, Tatiana Proskouriakoff, David Kelley & Linda Schele, Tedlock uses the breakthroughs of the last several decades as a basis for what is a truly unprecedented gathering & translation of written Mayan texts, both old & new. In the presence of his translations, we are reminded of T. S. Eliot's comment about Ezra Pound—that he had “invented China for our time.” In much the same way, Tedlock—working, unlike Pound, with a solid grounding in the language & culture in question—is making visible, for the first time, a Mayan literature in comprehensible, meaningful form.

Of the Mayan achievement now revealed & read as poetry, Tedlock writes further: “The roots of writing go deep in the American continent. Even if we apply a narrow definition of writing, demanding that it record the sequence of sounds in a spoken language, we cannot get around the fact that writing existed in the Americas long before Europeans brought the Roman alphabet here. Mayans started writing when English (even old English) had yet to be born. By the seventh century, when English literature made its first tentative appearance, Mayans had a long tradition of inscribing ornaments, pottery vessels, monuments, and the walls of temples and palaces, and they had also begun to write books. . . .

“And there is more. . . . We now know that . . . the writing of *history* began in the Americas before any European set foot here. For example, the lords who ruled the city whose ruins are known today as Palenque left behind continuous records that span four centuries (397–799 A.D.). . . . [And so] the time has now come to take a further step and proclaim that *literature* existed in the Americas before Europeans got here—not only oral literature but visible literature.”

It is as a treasury of the ancient literature that we can now approach the writings at a site like Palenque: a fusion of history & poetry, “epic” therefore by definition, & preserved in stone.

Page 210 From the Popol Vuh: Blood-Girl & the Chiefs of Hell

Source: Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala*, Publication 35 (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University, 1971).

The Popol Vuh, literally “the book of the community” (or “commonhouse” or “council”), was preserved by Indians in Santo Tomás Chichicastenango, Guatemala, & in the eighteenth century given to Father Francisco Ximénez who transcribed it in roman letters & put it into Spanish; vanished again & rediscovered in the 1850s by Carl Scherzer & Abbé Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg. It existed in picture-writing before the Conquest, & the version used by Father Ximénez (& since lost) may have been the work, circa 1550, of one Diego Reynoso. The book “contains the cosmogonical concepts and ancient traditions of [the Quiché nation], the history of their origin, and the chronicles of their kings down to the year 1550.”

The maiden's sons, Hunahpú & Xbalanqué, later go the same road to Hell (= Xibalba), where they beat its rulers at ball & by surviving ordeals in the houses of torture.

While the poems are rich in local details, there are many motifs & myths too that are “universal”—of twin heroes, underworld trees, forbidden fruit, impregnation by tree &/or spittle, heroic labors, etc. But above all—as Munro Edmonson writes—it is about “the goodness of Quiché: the people, the place, and the religious mysteries which were all called by that name. It is a tragic theme, but its treatment is not tragic: it is Mayan.”

Edmonson's translation gets away from the prose of all earlier ones (including the written Quiché) to assert an original “entirely composed in parallelistic (i.e., semantic) couplets,” much of it governed by a process he calls “keying . . . in which two successive lines may be quite diverse but must share key words which are closely linked in meaning. Many of these are traditional pairs: sun-moon, day-light, deer-bird, black-white, [but] sometimes the coupling is opaque in English, however clear it may be in Quiché, as in white-laugh,” etc.

Addendum.

AN ACADEMIC PROPOSAL

For a period of 25 years, say, or as long as it takes a new generation to discover where it lives, take the great Greek epics out of the undergraduate curricula, & replace them with the great American epics. Study the Popol Vuh where you now study Homer, & study Homer where you now study the Popol Vuh—as exotic anthropology, etc. If you have a place in your mind for the *Greek Anthology* (God knows you may not), let it be filled by Tedlock's 2000 *Years of Mayan Literature* or the present editor's *Shaking the Pumpkin* or this very volume you are reading. Teach courses in religion that begin: “This is the account of how all was in suspense, all calm, in silence; all motionless, still, & the expanse of the sky was empty”—& use this as a norm with which to compare all other religious books, whether Greek or Hebrew. Encourage other poets to translate the Native American classics (a new version for each new generation), but first teach them how to sing. Let young Indian poets (who still can sing or tell-a-story) teach young White poets to do so. Establish chairs in American literature & theology, etc. to be filled by men & women trained in the oral transmission. Remember, too, that the old singers & narrators are still alive (or that their children & grandchildren are) & that to despise them or leave them in poverty is an outrage against the spirit-of-the land. Call this outrage the sin-against-Homer.

Teach courses with a rattle & a drum.

—J.R., as originally published in *Shaking the Pumpkin*

Page 211 *Mayan Definitions*

Source: Allan F. Burns, *An Epoch of Miracles: Oral Literature of the Yucatec Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 240–43.

(1) “The oral literature of the Yucatec Maya can be best understood as a poetic form of speech in which performance is a dominant characteristic. As poetry, Yucatec Mayan oral literature does not rely on long, detailed descriptions of the context of events but, rather, assumes that the context can be understood by prosodic features such as voice quality, repetition of words and phrases, and gestures. Many of the narratives are short, lasting only a few minutes. This brevity is understandable if the forms are considered as poetic performances where well-chosen words and phrases are imaginative shortcuts to mythic concepts and actions. . . .

“The ‘definitions’ [for which Burns also implies a performative/narrative aspect] were either written down by Alonzo Gonzales M6 or dictated to me. They are experimental forms of verbal art in that they were created in order to teach me how to speak Mayan. They can also make up parts of natural conversations where such wordplay is appreciated. The form of these definitions may well be an ancient one, however, as seen in the books of Chilam Balam and the eleventh book of the Florentine Codex of the Aztecs, which contain similar items” (Burns, *Epoch of Miracles*).

For a comparison with the ancient “Aztec definitions,” see above, p. 21.

(2) “We are estranged from that with which we are most familiar” (Charles Olson, after Heraclitus).

Page 214 *From Inatoipippiler*

Source: Nils Holmer & S. Henry Wass6n, *Inatoipippiler, or The Adventures of Three Cuna Boys*, Etnologiska Studier 20 (G6teborg, Sweden: Etnografiska Museet, 1952).

Uncle Oloyailer—name of a sea monster (*yailer* = “an animal like a seal,” but the singer explains it by *nali e tule* = “shark man”).

Uncle Nia—spirit owner of a fortress reached by Inatoipippiler in his undersea journey.

Sometime around 1840, three boys from Portogand6 (on the San Blas coast of Panama) went fishing & didn’t return. A *nele* (wise-man with shamanic powers) was consulted, who revealed facts about the disappearance that form the basis of the poem. The boys, about ten years old, were never seen again & are said to have been drowned in an eddy.

The song/poem is attributed to Akkantilele (“the *nele* of Acand6”) who composed it ten days after the disaster; the present version by Belisario Guerrero (Maninibigdinapi) apparently comes in a direct line of transmission, poet to poet. Though based on an actual event, the images are visionary & in the universal tradition of underworld journeys.

“Songs of this kind,” the translators tell us, “are usually accompanied by a monotonous chant rather than singing, every line or section beginning high and

gradually falling off, amidst modulations upward and downward into a prolonged cadence. . . . Repetitions are multiplied at choice, so that the singer, when he takes his time, may not be through singing until the morning hours.” The lines of the original vary greatly in length.

Addendum, Not apparent in the translation is the use of a special narrative mode that shifts the perspective from third to first person, both to make the historical time immediate & to freely interiorize some of the objective material. Thus “they are approaching the ship” is literally “you are approaching my ship,” & (more surprisingly) “the southwind is making a noise” is literally “making a noise in me”; or elsewhere “they go to the loft to sleep when midnight has come” is literally “when you have come in me.” The translators write: “This represents the boys’ thoughts; such quasi-dialogue constructions are peculiar to Cuna poetic language.”

For more on such shifts, etc., see the note on the Fijian “Flight of the Chiefs,” p. 609, below. The most obvious modern analogues are stream-of-consciousness writers like Joyce or Faulkner, but something of the kind informs most contemporary experiments with structuring, composition-by-field, etc.

Page 216 From the Elegy for the Great Inca Atawallpa

Page 217 Three Quechua Poems

Sources: Workings of Spanish translations from “Incan” sources by W.S. Merwin, *Selected Translations 1968–1978* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 72, 73–74, 76.

Atawallpa, or Atahualpa d. 1533), one of the last embattled rulers of the Inca Empire, took control by force from his half-brother, Huáscar, but was himself imprisoned & executed by Pizarro.

The Elegy & the three Quechua poems represent various modes of native poesis pre- & post-Conquest.

o o o o o o

“An Indian [Incan] poet, called a *harauec*, that is, an inventor, composed quantities of . . . verses of all kinds. . . . The verses were composed in different meters, some short & others long . . . but they were as terse & precise as mathematics. There was no assonance, each verse being free. . . . I recall a love song, composed of four lines, from which may be judged the austerity of these terse compositions I spoke of; here it is with the translation:

<i>Caylla llapi</i>	To this tune
<i>Puñunqui</i>	you will sleep
<i>Chauptuta</i>	At midnight
<i>Samusac</i>	I shall come.”

(Thus: Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Royal Commentaries of the Inca*. Born 1539, died 1616, he was the son of an Incan princess & a Spanish conquistador. He & Pomo de Ayala [*Nueva crónica y buen gobierno*] are the chief early chroniclers of Incan history, etc.)

Page 219 *Poems for a Carnival*

Source: Translations by Gordon Brotherston (with Ed Dorn), from Quechua texts with Spanish translations in Jesus Lara, *Poesía popular quechua* (La Paz: Editorial Canata, 1947). The English versions appeared in *Alcheringa* o.s., no. 3 (Winter 1971): 58–59, & the central poem appeared also in Brotherston's *Image of the New World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979).

Contemporary “needling” pieces—writes Brotherston—“in the mode of the satirical *wawaki* songs once sung at the Old Moon festival, and sung today to elicit *chicha* (maize beer) from bystanders during Carnival in Cochabamba (Bolivia). [Such a song] intimidates obliquely, with its suggestions of a hollow laugh, like that uttered by the satirists of Inca times through their skull masks” (Brotherston, *Image of the New World*).

Page 220 *Raising the Mediating Center and the Field of Evil with the Twenty-Five Thousand Accounts & the Chant of the Ancients*

Source: Transcription & translation by F. Kaye Sharon in Eduardo Calderón, et al., *Eduardo el Curandero: The Words of a Peruvian Healer* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1982), 54–57.

“Eduardo Calderón Palomino”—writes David Guss in summary—“is a *curandero* from the Trujillo area of Northern Peru, a region famous for its practitioners of the healing arts. Common to the practice of *curanderismo* in this area is the use of a *mesa* [table], an altarlike assemblage of ‘artifacts’ arranged in various fields of power. With the aid of chants and a hallucinogen made from the San Pedro cactus, these artifacts are manipulated during the healing ceremony in order to give the *curandero* the *cuenta* or ‘account’ necessary to diagnose his patient. This ‘account,’ transpiring between the *curandero* and his *mesa*, is a psychic reading that depends on the healer’s ability to locate the appropriate ‘artifact’ through which the spirit will speak.

“Every *curandero*’s *mesa* is unique. Eduardo’s is divided into three fields: that of the right, the *Campo Justiciero*, ‘the Field of the Divine Judge’; that of the middle, the *Campo Medio*, the mediating ‘Field of San Cyprian’; and that of the left, the *Campo Ganadero*, ‘the Field of Satan,’ also known as ‘the Field of the Sly Dealer.’ Carefully arranged on these three fields are more than seventy artifacts that include, among other things, shells, stones, crystals, rattles, daggers, tobacco, pre-Columbian shards, post-Conquest *santos*, and bottles of herbs, perfumes, and holy water. Ringing the back of the *mesa* is a row of staffs and swords which Eduardo refers to as the antennae that help transmit the ‘accounts.’ The attention of the seance is on balancing the energies of these different fields. Only in this way can the patient also regain the ‘balance of power’ which is at the very center of Eduardo’s philosophy of healing” (from “Reading the Mesa: An Interview with Eduardo Calderón by David Guss,” in *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*, eds. J. R. and David Guss, 1996). In the present segment from a longer healing session, it is the middle & the left “fields” that are being raised or activated. The ceremony

as a whole—like so much numinous poetry at-its-roots—involves a juxtaposition/collage of contrary meanings toward the creation of a new—& functional—“work.”

Addenda. (1) The reader can compare Eduardo’s procedure with divination & healing practices from the Ifa oracle (pp. 154, 528) & the Chinese *I Ching* (pp. 452, 554), among many others.

(2) Calderón’s poetics (of which, as an artist himself, he is clearly conscious) emphasizes the role of “mind” (*mente*) in contrast to the literalisms of “witchcraft,” etc. In response to the question, “Is it true that witches fly,” he responds: “That witches fly, that’s asinine. What flies is the astral body, the double, the result of the vibration of man. There is nothing of the other world. The mind is what makes one fly. This is what’s called the sense of ubiquitousness, or of transportation across distance, across matter. For example, I am working here at my *mesa*, but my mind is elevating itself so that I can go to the United States, or to Virú Valley. This is a person’s mental force, nothing more, as well as the element of the ‘herb’ (the potions that I drink) working united with it, that activates the ‘third eye,’ the ‘sixth sense.’ What works is the mind. Sorcery, hexing, and curing are there. Without this, there is nothing.” And again: “A ruin is never going to ‘speak,’ except if one’s mind gives it magnetic power, gives it force. For this reason, we should not confuse ourselves that the spirit, that the evil shadows, frighten us, kill us. One frightens oneself; it is not the shadow that frightens one” (Calderón, *Eduardo el Curandero*).

Page 224 *The Machi Exorcises the Spirit Huecuve*

Source: Armand Schwerner’s translation from Georgette & Jacques Soustelle, *Folklore Chilien* (Paris: Insitut International de Cooperation Intellectuelle, 1938), 84, but originally collected by Rodolfo Lenz, circa 1897.

Writes Schwerner, after Soustelle: “The Machi is a sorceress and healer. Men are rarely machis; when they are they let their hair grow and usually dress like women.” In the exorcism the Machi works on the actual malignant spirit, whose external appearance is that of a cowhide: sometimes no more formed than that, at other times an octopus inhabiting lakes & rivers & crushing its victims in its folds. As spirit it invades the body of an animal or person, causing its victim to die of consumption. Its obvious preference is for rich people.

Page 225 *Words from Seven Magic Songs*

Source: Workings by Rochelle Owens after Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1932), 112–18.

Tatilgäk explained: “One makes magic songs when a man’s thoughts begin to turn towards another or something that does not concern him; without his hear-

ing it, one makes magic songs so that there may be calm in his mind, to make his thoughts pleasant—for a man is dangerous when he is angry.”

Of the words in those songs, Knud Rasmussen wrote as translator: “Translating magic words is a most difficult matter, because they often consist of untranslatable compounds of words, or fragments that are supposed to have their strength in their mysteriousness”—*coefficient of weirdness* in Malinowski’s good term for it (p. 438)—“or in the manner in which words are coupled together.” Obviously comprehension by others isn’t the issue here “as long as the spirits know what it is that one wants”—although the level of articulation would seem to have varied from shaman to shaman. For example, the poet Orpingalik (see the following commentary) “uttered [his magic words] in a whisper, but most distinctly & with emphasis on every word. His speech was slow, often with short pauses between the words. I have endeavored to show the pauses by means of a new line of verse”—that last a clear insight on Rasmussen’s part of poetry’s origins in other-than-song.

Addendum. Rochelle Owens’s most elaborate working of Inuit data is in her play, *The String Game*: a use of “distant” materials to trace the dimensions of the human. Also in some poems, like the following.

◦ ◦ ◦ ◦

Rochelle Owens

SONG OF MEAT, MADNESS & TRAVEL

I

dried meat

O glorious is dried meat.
my wife’s breast in my hand
we stare at dried meat
is it not strange?

II

I pity her

now I pity her the woman the woman
who calls
in a voice of white madness
Let me fetch you, let me fetch you!

III

I desired to go north

as a great singer and dancer
my ears my ears
there is singing in them
The big caribou cows and the big bulls
and men
watch for me

Page 226 *My Breath*

Source: Tom Lowenstein, *Eskimo Poems from Canada & Greenland* (London: Allison & Busby, 1973), 38–40. Lowenstein’s translations, made with Ida Lowenstein, are from material originally collected & translated into Danish by Knud Rasmussen.

Orpingalik (the name means man-with-willow-twig) was a shaman, poet, & hunter, “notably intelligent & having a fertile wit” (writes Rasmussen), who could move, like other big poets, between personal modes (as here) & “magic words” given elsewhere in these pages (for which, see the preceding commentary). Obviously into it up to his elbows, he called this song “my breath” because (he said) “it is just as necessary for me to sing as it is to breathe.” (The Netsilik word *anerca* is used in fact to mean both “breath” & “poetry.”) The breath, which is all the more visible where he came from (in the language of the Netsilik shamans, e.g., a living person is “someone smoke surrounds”), becomes the physical projection of the process of thought, etc., that goes on inside a man. Orpingalik’s extraordinary definition of poetry—“songs are thoughts sung out with the breath” (for which see p. 426)—describes an order of composition something like “projective verse”: the rediscovery, that is, of a poetics-of-the-breath that marked one major line of the “new American poetry” from the 1950s on. In Charles Olson’s classic formulation, circa 1950: “If I hammer, if I recall in, and keep calling in, the breath, the breathing as distinguished from the hearing, it is for cause, it is to insist upon a part that breath plays in verse which has not . . . been sufficiently observed or practiced, but which has to be if verse is to advance to its proper force and place in the day, now, and ahead. I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear *and* the pressures of his breath.”

Page 228 *Inuit Prose Poems*

Source: Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921–24, trans. William Worster (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1930), 268, 304, 255.

The content isn’t original—only the way-of-its-going. The larva-child, e.g., turns up in variants among other Inuit groups Rasmussen recorded, but only here touches home, as something other than fantasy. The editor recalls a similar account in Swanton’s *Tlingit Myths & Texts*—that one dealing with a chief’s daughter who rears a woodworm which, killed by the town, becomes a clan emblem, the girl’s four songs to the worm-child repeated at feasts, etc. Ivaluardjuk in his version uses the material much differently, not to define-the-origin-of but to let the language force the mind toward a lonely & disturbing vision-of-the-real. A master of that mode—like Russell Edson.

o o o o o o

Russell Edson
AN AIR BABY

A woman had an air baby, with little dust eyes that wink and blink in the sunlight.

But one day she breathed deeply and breathed her little baby into herself. So that she breathes out as hard as she can. No, that is not my baby. And she breathes out again as hard as she can. No, that is not my baby either.

Nothing is your baby, you foolish dog sitting there panting, says her husband.

No, no, I breathed it in, I sucked it out of my arms into my nose.

You foolish dog, how dare you treat my unknown heir like a smell.

I had it here: it had just wet its diapers and I was just about to throw it on the floor for wetting on me. I was just summoning my breath to jump on it for wetting on me. I was just drawing deeply on the atmosphere in preparation for the punitive feat. And I drew it into one of my nostrils, or both, breaking it between my nostrils.

You are the cruel mother that eats back her young, says her husband.

And why should I not?

Because you eat well enough without that. Why just the other day I brought you a lovely insect, remember, six legs? and how you baked it in the oven? remember how I climbed on your back and said take me to Market street, where I bought you a cookbook? and we looked through it for a recipe for baked baby, and there was none? And how you baked the cookbook and how really good it was? Don't you remember anything?

I remember something that I never had.

Page 233 *The Quest of Milarepa*

Source: Selected from Sir Humphrey Clarke, *The Message of Milarepa* (London: John Murray, 1958), 1-2, 6-9.

Mila, his actual name; *repa*, the cotton-clad, a title of those who, like him, had learned to withstand the Himalayan cold through inner heat, etc.

Tsangpo—the Brahmaputra.

Mount Tisé & Lake Mapang at its foot—originally the holy places of the Bon shamans whom Milarepa, having proved their master in magic, dispossessed in the name of Buddhism.

In Milarepa's *Life*, "as chronicled by his favorite disciple Rechung . . . we learn how, after his father's untimely death, he and his mother and sisters were despoiled of their patrimony; how he ran away . . . and learnt the black arts from a local sorcerer; conjured up a hailstorm which ruined their crops and caused the roof of their house to fall in and kill their guests at a harvest festival; how remorse overcame him; how he then set out to find the truth and met his teacher Marpa; how Marpa, as penance, for seven years disciplined him savagely till even his spirit

was almost broken, but finally initiated him; how after long contemplation in his mountain solitudes he finally attained enlightenment and was consecrated by Marpa as his successor; and how he lived to a ripe old age, teaching the faith and working miracles . . ." (Clarke, *The Message*).

Addenda. (1) For more on Marpa, Tibetan Buddhism & its relation to Bon shamanism, etc., see p. 481.

(2) The sacralization-of-the-everyday has been a rite of modern poetry since Baudelaire's perception (circa 1846) of the "heroism of everyday life." It takes many forms, but the reader at this point may especially enjoy comparing Mila's "cotton shirt" with the following.

o o o o

Pablo Neruda
ODE TO MY SOCKS

Maru Mori brought me	by
a pair	these
of socks	heavenly
which she knitted herself	socks.
with her sheep-herder's hands,	They were
two socks as soft	so handsome
as rabbits.	for the first time
I slipped my feet	my feet seemed to me
into them	unacceptable
as though into	like two decrepit
two	firemen, firemen
cases	unworthy
knitted	of that woven
with threads of	fire,
twilight	of those glowing
and goatskin.	socks.
Violent socks,	Nevertheless
my feet were	I resisted
two fish made	the sharp temptation
of wool,	to save them somewhere
two long sharks	as students
seablue, shot	keep
through	fireflies,
by one golden thread,	as learned men
two immense blackbirds,	collect
two cannons,	sacred texts,
my feet	I resisted
were honored	the mad impulse
in this way	to put them

in a golden
 cage
 and each day give them
 birdseed
 and pieces of pink melon.
 Like explorers
 in the jungle who hand
 over the very rare
 green deer
 to the spit
 and eat it
 with remorse,
 I stretched out
 my feet
 and pulled on

the magnificent
 socks
 and
 then my shoes.
 The moral
 of my ode is this:
 beauty is twice
 beauty
 and what is good is doubly
 good
 when it is a matter of two socks
 made of wool
 in winter.

—Translated by Robert Bly

Page 235 *Ocean Woman Who Already Knows*

Source: Khams-Smyon Dharma-Sengge, “Ocean Woman Who Already Knows,” trans. Steven Goodman, in *Alcheringa* 3, no. 2 (1977): 52–54.

As a further continuation of Bon shamanism (p. 481), a tradition of “holy madmen” (*smyon-pa*), including Dharma-Sengge as given here, emerged in the 15th century at both the center & the margins of Tibetan Buddhism. Acting as tricksters & traveling poets, they created in their words & acts a deliberate poetry-of-madness, covering that region of the mind that Denis Diderot, nearly three centuries before us, identified with poetry & dubbed “barbaric, vast & wild.” It was this *art brut* (= “raw art”) that Jean Dubuffet, closer to our own time, presented in its unmediated form as the art-of-the-insane (p. 584): a beacon of lost & disturbing humanities. On a verbal level too, as a kind of *poésie brute*, it is marked by transformations of thought & expression (“even if you wander around / even if this song makes no sense”) as radical & often as revelatory as those of the greatest modern experimenters, or those of traditional speakers of numinous tongues. Or George Quasha in the present instance: “These Tibetan poets fit the description that Chögyam Trungpa emphasizes under Crazy Wisdom, which for them is a high state of realization that complicates any attempt to define enlightenment in outer/external or behavioral terms.”

(2) “The hard work of expressing the inexpressible has gone on for thousands of years in India and the Himalayan regions, particularly Tibet, and has left traces, traditions still practiced today as spiritual songs (Sanskrit: *doha*), work songs (Sanskrit: *caryagiti*) and songs of experience (Tibetan: *nyams mgur*) which embody, often in highly coded language, the life experiences of professional yogis, mad mendicants (*smyon pa*), and great adepts (*mahasiddhas*). What we often find there, in these songs of experience, are revelations revealing nothing—that sublime nothing yammered about by untamed mystics everywhere, those wild crazed ones whose

business is to go beyond” (Steven D. Goodman, “The Transmission of Presence: The Tibetan Poetics of Ineffable Experience,” *Tibetan Literary Arts*, May 2007).

Page 240 *Keeping Still / The Mountain*

Page 241 *The Marrying Maiden*

Source: From *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, German translation by Richard Wilhelm, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, Bollingen Series 19 (New York: Pantheon Books, Princeton University Press, 1950), 214–17, 222–26.

“The manner in which the *I Ching* tends to look upon reality seems to disfavor our causalistic procedures. The moment under actual observation appears to the ancient Chinese view more of a chance hit than a clearly defined result of concurring causal chain processes. The matter of interest seems to be the configuration formed by chance events in the moment of observation, & not at all the hypothetical reasons that seemingly account for the coincidence” (C.G. Jung, *Foreword to Wilhelm’s I Ching*).

Thought of this kind, when applied to the field-of-the-poem, defines that field both in primitive/archaic & in much modern poetry: that whatever falls within the same space determines the meaning of that space. What Jung called “synchronicity” (with the problems it raises of indeterminacy & the observer’s part in structuring the real) becomes a principle of composition: common link between such otherwise different modes as chance poetry, automatic writing, “deep” image, projective verse, etc., & between those & the whole world of nonsequential & noncausal thought. That modern physics at the same time moves closer to a situation in which anything-can-happen, is of interest too in any consideration of where we presently are.

For more on the *I Ching*, composition by correspondence, juxtaposition, chance, etc., see above, p. 452.

Addenda. (1) The *I Ching* has been a direct influence on recent poets like Jackson Mac Low & John Cage—even an instrument for random composition. But the idea of random composition itself has other roots in the modern; thus

Tristan Tzara

from MANIFESTO ON FEEBLE LOVE & BITTER LOVE

To make a dadaist poem

Take a newspaper.

Take a pair of scissors.

Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Then cut out each of the words that make up this article & put them in a bag.

Shake it gently.

Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left
the bag.

Copy conscientiously.

The poem will be like you.

(2) “Quantum mechanics demonstrates that a subatomic particle does not exist until the moment of measurement, and that the momentum and position of a particle can be predicted in terms of probability rather than certainty. Poetry, too, comes into existence when measured and cannot be defined with certainty. . . . Sometimes poetry is the act of moving in a direction we did not think of before the poem. Poetry can be a spacetime ship piloted by the Principle of Indeterminacy” (Amy Catanzano, in *Jacketz* online, 2015).

Page 242 From the Nine Songs

Source: Arthur Waley, *The Nine Songs: A Study in Shamanism in Ancient China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), 37–38, 41–42, 47.

The Big Lord of Lives (Ta Ssu-ming)—determines human longevity; apparently also maintains the balance of the world, between Yin & Yang, etc. The shaman assists him in this. “Big” & “little” in this & the next song refer to a major & a lesser festival in which the songs were used.

Nine Provinces—China; *Nine Hills*—chief mountains of China.

Ch’iang—sound effect, without meaning.

You have no need to be downcast—addressing the god (the Little Lord of Lives).

Life-parting—where the people concerned are still alive but can’t meet.

Broom-star—i.e., a comet; used by deities to sweep away evil.

The River God (Ho-po)—“He was a greedy god, often taking a fancy to & abducting mortal men’s daughters, to add to his harem, or carrying off their sons to marry his daughters. . . . Sometimes he merely took a fancy to people’s clothes. . . . At Yeh, in the extreme north of Honan c. 400 B.C.,” shamans would round up a pretty girl each year and set her adrift “on a thing shaped like a bridal bed,” letting it finally sink. Unlike the other gods of the Nine Songs “his cult went on till modern times.”

The Chinese shaman (*wu*) has a history that both predates & outlasts these songs, which Waley figures about the third or fourth centuries B.C. though “the prototypes on which they were founded go back to a much earlier period.” They are part of the *Ch’u Tz’u* collection (“generally translated ‘Elegies of Ch’u’”) often attributed to the poet Qu Yuan (Ch’ü Yüan), & have the feel of literary reworkings of nonliterary goods. But the shamanic remnants are still strong, the sense too of an accompanying performance making use of dance & gesture, apparently meaningless sound (“at the cesura of each line is the exclamation *hsi* which may . . . represent the panting of the shamans in a trance”), etc.—all designed to invoke the gods & bring them into the shaman’s service. (For which see the alternative performance version by Wai-lim Yip on p. 124 above.)

The force of the address is erotic, i.e., “the shaman’s relation with the Spirit is represented as a kind of love affair,” though the absence of number, gender, & tense (& of an accompanying scenario) often makes it unclear whether the god or the shaman is speaking, whether the address is male to female, female to male, male to male, etc. Eliade tells of similar love-songs & sex-play between Teleut shamans (called kams) & their celestial wives:

My darling young kam
we shall sit together at the blue table
My darling husband, my young kam
let us hide in the shadow of the curtains
& let us make love together
& have fun
My husband, my young kam

& Kumandin shamans of the Tomsk region had phallic games in which “they gallop with the [wooden] phallus between their legs ‘like a stallion’ & touch the spectators.” Not surprising since in the Western world also, sexuality (however concealed or allegorized) provides the dominant thrust in the great god-poems, like the *Song of Songs* or the following:

San Juan de la Cruz

A POEM FOR THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL


On a dark night, afraid
to love you, burning
Then this joy
to find the door
(unseen)
the house so quiet
Dark & safe
to find
the secret stair, disguised
rejoicing
Dark, not touching
anything, the house so quiet
On that night, rejoicing
secretly that no one saw
me, that I looked at nothing
Had no light to lead me
only
what burned inside my shirt
that led me
like the light one afternoon
A place where someone


waited whom I knew
 And no one came on us
 Oh night that led me, that
 I loved beyond the dawn
 Oh night that held
 us close, changed
 me through what I loved
 receiving
 till the breasts were full
 I'd hidden for him, waiting
 for his head to sleep there
 Then I brought him gifts
 this fan of cedars with its night-air
 Air of armies
 stirring through his hair
 That soft hand
 hurts my neck, suspending
 all my senses
 I stayed with him, forgetting
 pressed my face against him
 Everything has left me
 gone
 My pain is fading
 vanishes among the lilies
 —Translated by J. R.

For further examples of erotically propelled god-poems, see pp. 277, 325, 516.

Page 245 Song of the Dead, Relating the Origin of Bitterness

Source: Joseph F. Rock, *The Zhi mä Funeral Ceremony of the Na-Khi of Southwest China* (Posieux, Switzerland: Studia Instituti Anthropos, 1955), 55, 58, 87, 90, 92. Adapted & arranged by J. R.

The Na-Khi tribe (a branch of the Ch'iang) settled in the Lijiang district probably during the Han Dynasty. Their main funeral ceremony, the Zhi mä, involves the chanting of various “books” & songs, preserved until recently in mnemonic picture-writing. While much of this writing is based on the rebus principle (of the  = I variety), there are places too where the pictograph seems to comment on matter in the spoken text; e.g., the first symbol in the song's title, as Rock explains “represents a large horsefly, such as occur on the high meadows in the summer, they emerge only when the sun shines and hide when overcast, they are blood suckers and a plague to both man and beast; the Na-Khi call them *mun*, here the symbol stands for *mun* = dead, it has also the meaning of old.”

But the picture itself (of a horsefly) is a presence also & adds to the meaning—whether by chance or intention is outside the present editor’s concern. There are also purely literal pictographs of the  = eye variety.

The song per se is “one of several types of funeral songs, sung at the death of an old man while the body is still in the house.” The manuscript consists of eighteen pages from which the present editor has excerpted & slightly adapted pages 2, 3, 13, 14, 15, juxtaposing pictures & words, etc. The song (to sum it up) proposes to relate “the origin of bitterness” & follows the dead man (possibly identified with the “first father”) as he sees his image reflected, learns he’s growing old, wanders to distant towns to buy long life, sees men selling silver & gold “but years he saw no one sell,” then in an empty marketplace watches leaves of the bamboo turn yellow, thinks

so trees must also die, it is the custom
there is death after all

laughs & turns back.

The song now moves to a consideration of all who have died, including apparently “the father of heaven” & “the mother of the earth,” so that “even in heaven there is bitterness.” Then come the dance sections given here as sets 3, 4, & 5—*ritual description*: “they form themselves into a circle, but not a closed one, and holding hands much like children do when at play, begin a dance”—followed by further accounts of the dead man’s ascent & the accomplishments & powers to be inherited by his son, his village, & his neighbors.

Addendum. Compare the face-in-the-mirror/flight-&-wandering themes with the Quetzalcoatl poem (p. 83 and commentary, p. 502) & the flight-&-wandering with the life-quest of the dying hero in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (p. 59). The old shamans, by the way, had the power to see their own skeletons & to undertake ritual journeys to reclaim the dead. But the editor doesn’t want to suggest that seeing an old face in the mirror is straight ritual symbolism; Ginsberg’s poem, *Mescaline*, e.g., gets the whole thing down in more personal terms. (For which see p. 503, above.)

Page 250 *A Shaman Vision Poem*

Source: Translation from Chinese by C.H. Kwock & Gary Gach. Previously unpublished.

From a virtual subcategory of Chinese poetry—consisting of poems attributed to ghosts, with or without shamanic intervention. This one, identified elsewhere as “Poem Written by a Ghost Descending on a Sorcerer,” is from the T’ang Dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries A.D.), but the reader can find examples of still older shamanism in, e.g., the selections from “The Nine Songs” reprinted above.

A comparison with the contemporary “wild ghosts” on p. 367 above is also worth making.

Page 250 *Al Que Quiere!* 11 *Pai-hua*

Source: Poems circulated during the past few centuries & made new by C.H. Kwok & G.G. Gach, previously unpublished.

Translators' notes:

U.S. or *America* is in Chinese literally *Gold Mountain*.

A Chinese colloquial for *wife* is literally *old lady*.

Unwanted babies abandoned like Moses to rivers were not an unfamiliar practice in China, even until recently, tho' for girl babies more often than for boy babies.

Cakes & soups made out of mud have not been uncommon in poorer parts of China.

Heaven's old grandfather is the Chinese equivalent to the Christian *heavenly father*, sometimes abbreviated as *heaven*.

o o o o

(1) Like its “western” counterpart, the Chinese literary tradition has made sharp distinction between “high” & “low” modes in poetry. In so doing, classicists have set aside the latter—as folklore, folk poetry, etc.—to be treated as both vital source & lesser instance. The recognition of a “folk,” even “primitive,” tradition in China goes back to at least *The Book of Songs* (500 B.C. or earlier), largely a gathering (& reworking) of folk materials from (probably) a range of regions & sources. An extension of this concern led to formation in the Han Dynasty (3rd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.) of the *Yuëh-fu* or Music Bureau, which continued the collection & transcription while unable to check the class-based attitudes of the entrenched academics. A twentieth-century resurgence of such concerns (*baihua* [*pai-hua*] = “plain speech” movement, etc.) was probably impeded as much as propelled by political/social struggles in & around China during the later twentieth century & beyond. The translators' title for these poems (“*Al Que Quiere*”) is taken from a work by William Carlos Williams.

(2) The reader may also be interested in the continuation of a *baihua*-oriented “workers poetry” in the post-Mao era, for which see p. 411 above, & commentary.

Page 254 *From the Kojiki*

Source: Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, University of Tokyo Press, 1969), 108–10.

Opo-kuni-nusi—creator god & culture hero of pre-Yamato Japanese religion.

Idumo & *Yamato*—earlier & later Japanese political & religious centers.

(1) As the oldest surviving Japanese book, the *Kojiki*, or “Record of Ancient Things,” completed on “the twenty-eighth day of the first month of the fifth year of Wadō” (712 A.D.), is an attempt to keep a grip on matters already at some distance

from the compilers & to establish the “origins” of the Japanese court & nation on (roughly) native grounds. It is, at the same time, “a compilation of myths, historical and pseudo-historical narratives and legends, songs, anecdotes, folk etymologies, and genealogies.” Like other such works (see p. 455), it begins with the generations of the gods & follows their creation of—& descent into—this-place-here.

The section on the jealousy of Suseri-bime is from the myth-centered opening book & includes one of the *Kojiki*'s 111 songs (“among the oldest recorded in the Japanese language”). Of their possible ritual origins & functions, Philippi writes: “As the texts of the songs do not always seem appropriate to the narrative in which they are incorporated, they may have an independent origin. Also, we should not forget the magico-religious role of song in the ceremonial life of the early court.” In the present instance, “the vividness of the description makes one feel that the account was written by someone who had actually witnessed the performance of such actions. The song also sounds like an accompaniment for certain actions, as if it were an element in an opera or dance-drama.” Thus, the three-part change of clothing can both be part of the narrative buildup or a description of costume changes in the accompanying dance. (Other examples of poems/songs as descriptions of their ritual frames appear on pp. 52 & 271, as well as the full-blown performance version of the “Nine Songs” on p. 124.)

(2) The fecundity & sexuality of these early gods is even clearer in Yoko Danno's more recent translation in which the creator gods Izanami and Izanaki fuck and give birth to the islands of Japan & multiple lesser divinities: an example of surreality (= poesis) as an attempt to comprehend & thereby to possess the world. So, for example: “When Izanami was delivered of the fire deity Kagu-tsuchi, her genitals were severely burnt and she was seriously ill in bed. She vomited and in her vomit a pair of ore deities came into being. In her excrement arose a pair of clay deities, and in her urine the female deity who controls irrigation water and the young deity full of procreative force whose daughter is the food goddess Toyo-uke” (*Songs and Stories of the Kojiki*, 2008).

Page 255 *A Song of the Spider Goddess*

Source: Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans: The Epic Tradition of the Ainu* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1979; Berkeley: North Point Press, 1982), 78–82.

The Ainu—native non-Japanese population of Hokkaido Island—until recently maintained a rich tradition of oral narrative & poetry. Largely the work of female reciters (almost all Ainu shamans were women), the story-poems involve a kind of projective first-person narration, in which the reciter-poet acts as a conduit for the personage (god, animal, or human) issuing through her. This sense of being-spoken-through is taken by Philippi & others as indication of the poetry's origins in shamanistic trance-possession. While the “epics” themselves don't involve trance, what survives clearly is “a form of inter-species communication in which gods or humans speak of their experience to members of their own or other spe-

cies.” Though some of the force of that survives even in written transcription, “the epic tradition itself,” writes Philippi, “has died out with the death of the last reciters.”

As verse, the songs follow a flexible structure of (usually) four to six syllables per line, sometimes as many as seven or eight. “In actual performance, each verse is usually followed by a short pause, and in the mythic epics a [single-word] burden is interjected, sometimes after every verse and sometimes sporadically between verses. A verse which is too long can be sung rapidly, and one having too few syllables can be drawn out in singing, or additional sounds or syllables can be added.” And further: “The singing of the epic would begin by the fireside in the early evening. The reciter would sit by the fireplace, beating time on the hearth frame with his *repni* (block of wood). The listeners would also each hold a *repni* in their hands, beating time on the hearth frame or on the wooden floor. From time to time, the audience would interject rhythmical exclamations of *bet! bet!* at certain points in the narrative. In this manner, a striking choral effect would be achieved. The reciter and his audience would be fused into a unity of experience, and the performance would engage the audience’s attention so closely that they would scarcely notice the coming of the dawn. It was by no means unusual for the recitation to be still in progress in the morning” (Philippi, *Songs of Gods*).

More discussion of Ainu poetics appears in *Symposium of the Whole*, 155–58.

Page 261 *Things Seen by the Shaman Karawe*

Source: Barbara Einzig’s translation from a Russian version in Waldemar Bogoras, *Materiali po izucheniyu chukotskavo yazyka i folklora* [Materials for the Study of the Chukchee Language & Folklore] (St. Petersburg, 1900). Told by the shaman Karawe on the Poginden River in 1896.

The shaman’s “powers”—of vision, of flight, of control over animals & things-come-alive—manifest here in the shadow of the Russian overlords. Among the northeastern Siberian shamans, as elsewhere, the struggle with outside forces was to maintain such powers (& that of vision foremost) against all efforts to reduce them. Compare, e.g., the use of the “blood river” as a political metaphor with its “traditional” use in the Nenets poem on p. 309.

The narrative included here is one of several shamanic *videnies*—“visions” or “things seen”—collected by Bogoras as he traveled with the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Sciences expedition toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Addenda.

(1)

I have made myself see. *I have seen*. And I was surprised and enamored with what I *saw*, wishing to identify myself with it.

In a country the color of a *pigeon’s breast* I acclaimed the flight of 1,000,000 *doves*. I saw them invade the *forests*, black with desires, and the *walls* and *seas* without end.

A string lying on my table made me see a number of young men trampling upon their mother, while several young girls amused themselves with beautiful poses.

Some exceedingly beautiful women cross a river, crying. A man, walking on the water, takes a young girl by the hand and jostles another. Some persons of a rather reassuring aspect—in fact, they had lain too long in the forest—made their savage gestures only to be charming. Someone said: “The immobile father.”

It was then that I saw myself, *showing my father’s head to a young girl*. The earth quaked only slightly.

I decided to erect a *monument to the birds*.

—Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, c. 1948

(2)

I don’t have to go nowhere to see,
Visions are everywhere.

—Essie Parrish, Pomo shaman

(3)

The eye exists in its wild state.

—André Breton, from opening sentence of *Surrealism & Painting*, 1928

Page 263 *Praise Song of the Buck-Hare*

Source: Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, [1938], 1970), 211–13. Pound’s working is from the German of Eckart von Sydow, *Dichtungen der Naturvölker* (Vienna: Phaidon Verlag, 1935) & an earlier Russian version by Wilhelm Radloff (1866).

The translation given here is one of Pound’s rare shots at a tribal-oral culture outside the boundaries of the “high” civilizations. But his contributions to the opening of other-than-Western & ancient poetries (Chinese, Greek, Egyptian, etc.) have already been noted in these pages.

Page 264 *Setchin the Singer*

Source: J. R.’s translation from the French version in Peter Domokos & Jean-Luc Moreau, *Le pouvoir du chant: Anthologie de la poésie ouralienne* (Budapest: Corvino Kiadó, 1980), 58–62.

In spite of early & late Russifications, a shamanistic poetics & religion survive among the Mansi (Vogul) of northeast Russia & western Siberia. Along with this shamanism are the remnants of that “circumpolar bear cult” that once figured so large in the imaginal life of three continents. For the Mansi, Bear was the son—sometimes the daughter—of the sky god, Numi Torem, & became the ruler &

judge of life on earth. But he was also a prime source of meat & fur, a person therefore whose death required great feasts of reconciliation. Such feasts or wakes were the occasions for extended bear-chants & for personal accountings (= “fate-songs”) on the part of hunters & shamans. In the present poem, the newly murdered bear is present & addressed, then himself becomes a speaker in the last two sections of the narrative of the hunter-shaman-singer who tracks him down with food, songs, & a final display of dancing marionettes. The musical instrument here isn’t the typical shaman’s drum but a kind of myth-sized harp fitted with strings of wolf-gut.

More on the widespread circumpolar (& central Asian) bear cult can be found on p. 384 & in the attendant commentary.

Page 268 *Mantra for Binding a Witch*

Source: Verrier Elwin, *The Baiga* (London: John Murray, 1939), 390–91.

Writing of Baiga poetry, Elwin’s workings, etc., W.G. Archer describes a basic type of Baiga poem called a *dadaria*, which involves “the pairing of one image with another, the vitally important but latent link.” Sometimes the process is one of simple juxtaposition, of placing the images together: “it is their compression into a *dadaria* which causes them to fuse and gives the incandescence of poetry.” All this is part of a general “Baiga attitude to images. . . . An image of an object is regarded not only as vivid in itself but as capable of the most powerful associations with other images. The object can, as it were, exist not only as itself but also as the other objects which it resembles. A snake is not only a snake but a stick. A deer is not only a deer but a girl. An arrow is not only an arrow but a phallus. And it is the vivid collocation of these images which is the basis of the poetry.”

Most of the combinations Archer cites, however remote they get, have a more or less precise (i.e., fixed) reference, but “in Baiga mantras, on the other hand, the relation continues, but *it is as if the effort is to make it completely obscure*. Images follow one another, all directed, it may be, at binding a witch. . . . ‘The sharp end of a knife,’ ‘the glow-worm of a virgin,’ ‘the nail of a bone,’ ‘the lamp of flesh,’—all these are probably, at bottom, sexual symbols, but *it is the strained insistence on the image, the remoteness of the reference, the strange adequacy which gives the mantra its mysterious force*. In these mantra, Baiga poetry reaches the limit of its power” (Archer, “Baiga Poetry,” *Man in India* 23 [1943]: 59).

The process is, of course, fundamental to the language of magic & ecstasy, & is a key link between “primitive” & “modern” poetry—for which see pp. 448–454.

Page 268 *The Pig*

Source: Verrier Elwin, *The Baiga* (London: John Murray, 1939), 406–7.

Bewar—forest land cleared & burnt for cultivation.

Laru—the Laru-kaj, or pig-sacrificing event (see below).

Phulera—a sort of swing in which are placed the leaf-wrapped head & liver of the pig.

The ceremony is called the Laru-kaj & is “probably the most ancient of all Baiga rituals.” It appeases a demon of disease (*Narayan deo*) after he’s been lured out of the patient’s body with a bribe of pig. The pig is given rice to eat, its phallus is scalded with boiling water, then “three men, holding the pig by its two hind legs & buttocks, push the pig’s head into [a] hole . . . half full of water. . . . Then the men begin to bump it up & down in the hole . . . [but] death . . . is due to suffocation.” As an alternative the pig may be crushed by half a dozen men sitting or standing on the ends of a plank laid across the pig’s stomach “while the fore and hind feet of the pig are pulled backwards and forwards alternately over the plank until it is crushed to death.” This is the action accompanying the first poem. The second marks the washing, singeing & bloodletting, while the third coincides with the demon’s appearance to receive his share of pig. And

it was plain that pig had
nothing on his mind. For
Christ’s sake didnt he
know what was happening
to him when one held him
by the flanks? No, nor the other
making click click, spin
spin noises, clearing his throat

writes Robert Kelly of another pig, another place. But the indifference (“coolness”) of the songs here seems deliberate.

Page 270 Two Cosmologies

Source: W. S. Merwin & J. Moussaieff Masson, *Sanskrit Love Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 111, 118; reprinted in Merwin, *The Peacock’s Egg* (Berkeley: North Point Press, 1981).

The accounts, as given here, of Vishnu & Krishna turn up in different versions throughout India. Writes Masson: “Vishnu is often represented as the cosmos. His right eye is the sun. When the sun sets, lotuses close their petals and Brahma will thereby disappear.” And the eleventh-century compiler, Mammata: “When this happens, since [Laksmi’s] hidden parts are no longer visible, her wild love-making can be unrestrained.”

Authorship of the second poem is ascribed to one Candaka.

Page 271 From The Guide to Lord Murukan

Source: A. K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 112–15.

A germinal poetic & religious movement between the sixth & ninth centuries A.D., *bhakti* signaled “a return, a creative regression” to the experience of Vedic seers & those earlier shamanisms still present in “oral & village folk traditions” through-

out India. Like other such outcroppings “then” & “now,” it moved through the work of its founding “poet-saints” toward an immediacy of experience—trance, ecstasy, possession—by means of “all the arts” (but especially poetry & dance) transformed but brought back to their oldest functions. Here the poem “evokes the primal, the essential experience of bhakti: not ecstasy, not enstasy, but an embodiment . . . a partaking of the god. [The bhakta] may pass through enstasy (withdrawal) and ecstasy (out-of-body experiences) as stages . . . [but] he needs also to sing, to dance: to make poetry, painting, shrines, sculpture; to embody [the god] in every possible way. In bhakti, all the arts become also ‘techniques of ecstasy,’ incitements to possession” (Ramanujan, *Hymns*).

Toward such ends, the poetry comes into conflict with its more literary counterparts (here “the imperial presence of Sanskrit”), & the poet-saint seeks out both new means (the freeing-up, e.g., of meter & of punctuation) & the (re)creation of what had always been there: the personal & local, the concrete, the ecstatic & erotic, the image of the poet as a saint & madman—but, above all, a new/old poetics of performance & of the living common tongue. Nakkirar’s poem, above, is itself an account of such a (shamanistic) performance; but what’s less clear in translation is the movement’s center in a language: its turning from “the language of the fathers” (Sanskrit) to an immediacy of speech & mind, in which the god “is everywhere, accessible,” like “one’s own thoughts.” In this view, Ramanujan writes, “god lives inside us as a mother tongue does, and we live in god as we live in language—a language that was there before us, is all around us in the community, and will be there after us. To lose this first language is to lose one’s beginnings, one’s bearings, to be exiled into aphasia. . . . Thus the early poet-saints required and created a poetry and a poetics of the mother tongue.”

The Tamil instance of *bhakti* is one among many in India, drawing in this case from a written literature as well as local traditions & forms. The poem printed here is transitional to all that: a sixth-century work that locates poesis among the shaman-poets (= *camiyati* = god-dancers) outside the literary tradition per se. Part of a longer poem that sets up a mystic & sacred topography to guide the initiate to the country of the god, the poem focuses on Murukan, the “red one,” as god of the mountain & fertility, who enters into & becomes the dancer-poet. Like other shamanistic poems, its origin traces back to a sacred journey: a demon capturing the poet & keeping him imprisoned in a cave, there to be rescued (along with 999 others) by the Lord Murukan, who kills the demon & delivers this poem “written in the cave [&] said to have the power to save anyone who recites it.”

Addendum. The resemblance of all this to contemporary work—at least at its most ambitious—should not be overlooked. Thus, Antonin Artaud, among a host of others:

All these pages float around like pieces of ice in my mind. Excuse my absolute freedom. I refuse to make a distinction between any of the moments of myself. I do not recognize any structure in the mind.

We must get rid of the Mind, just as we must get rid of literature. I say that the Mind and life communicate on all levels. I would like to write a Book which would drive men mad, which would be like an open door leading them where they would never have consented to go, in short, a door that opens into reality. ("The Umbilicus of Limbo," 1925, translated by Helen Weaver)

And again: "I cannot conceive of a work that is detached from life."

Page 273 For the Lord of Caves

Source: A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 151–52, 168.

The work of the Vacana (Virasaiva) poet-saints is another instance of the *bhakti* movement discussed in the preceding note. A turning, like its Tamil counterpart, away from the narrowly literary, it is marked, on its social side, by a leveling of caste & class, & on that of its poetics, by a deliberate breakdown of traditional metrics & a blurring of the boundaries between verse & prose. "The poetics of the Vacana," writes Ramanujan, "is an oral poetics," with an emphasis on "the spontaneity of free verse" & a virtual "rejection of premeditated art [&] standard upper-class educated speech" in favor of (something like) "the real language of men." The result, at its most intense, is no nostalgic simplicity but the creation of "a dark, ambiguous language of ciphers . . . baffling the rational intelligence to look through the glass darkly till it begins to see. . . . It is 'a process of destroying and reinventing language' till we find ourselves 'in a universe of analogies, homologies, and double meanings.'" But this complexity—as a return to the primal—should neither be surprising to readers of the present volume nor be taken as "mere" wordplay in a world of suns & caves in which "there can be no metaphor."

The Lord of Caves, to whom all of Allama's poems are spoken, is one of the names of Shiva, to which the poet, "obsessed with images of light & darkness," is particularly drawn. As such, it goes back to his (actual) "experience of the secret underground, the cave-temple," in which he first achieved illumination. While the translator gives a symbolic gloss to many of Allama's images & visions, the editor, in deference to Allama's denial of metaphor, will take the reading no further than that already given.

Page 277 The Calendar

Source: Alexander Marshack, "Upper Paleolithic Notation & Symbol," *Science*, November 24, 1972.

Marshack's "readings" of the marks on paleolithic bone fragments pushed the history of writing (written notation) back toward the beginnings of language itself. The present piece is a reconstruction, based on American Indian & Siberian (oral) models, of early European lunar notations & calendar namings. "The Upper Paleolithic notations . . . suggest that they were kept by some specialized

person. Leona Cope, writing of the American Indian, states: ‘. . . the more complex and highly developed the ceremonialism . . . the more careful the determination of the solstices, the lunar phases, and the time reckoning.’ . . . The compositions by Upper Paleolithic artists which illustrate or imply seasonal and other periodic ceremonies and rites suggest that at least some were ‘scheduled’ in the year as in the Siberian and American traditions.”

What the work points to, then, in brief, is the invention & reinvention of language as a fundamental act of poetry from then to now.

Addendum. Among the Ojibwa, e.g., the months (moons) appear as follows: “1. long moon, spirit moon 2. moon of the suckers 3. moon of the crust on the snow 4. moon of the breaking of snow-shoes 5. moon of the flowers & blooms 6. moon of strawberries 7. moon of raspberries 8. moon of whortle berries 9. moon of gathering of wild rice 10. moon of the falling of leaves 11. moon of freezing 12. little moon of the spirit” (L. Cope, *Calendars of the Indians North of Mexico*).

Page 277 The Vulva Song of Inanna

Source: J.R.’s English version, translated after Bette Meador, from the Sumerian text & literal translations provided by Renata Leggit. Previously unpublished.

The poetry composed around the figures of Inanna & Dumuzi (elsewhere Ishtar & Tammuz, etc.) was extensive, & the (symbolic) readings multi-leveled & contradictory in their development through time. In the fragment presented here, the direct celebration of female sexuality conjures a descent from the stone venuses & incised vulvas ▽ of an earlier time. (The accompanying yearly festival in Sumer & elsewhere was the so-called sacred marriage of the goddess & the “shepherd-king.”) This use of poetry to arouse sexuality is both a value in itself & part of an approach to a universe in which—wrote ancient Empedocles, himself a “weather-shaman”—“everything that is born / feels & has a share of thought.” Thus sex—like “nature” or like “death”—has been a power of poetry over a wide range of times & places—showing nowhere in the West as clearly or as concretely as in its Sumerian beginnings.

Further instances show up throughout this volume; but see especially, pp. 142, 325, 338, & the accompanying commentaries. An example of a contemporary awakening follows.

Addenda. (1) “From my identification with the symbology of the female body I made the . . . assumption that carvings and sculptures of the serpent form were attributes of the Goddess and would have been made [in ancient cultures] by women worshippers (artists) as analogous to their own physical, sexual knowledge. I thought of the vagina in many ways—physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to

the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers. This source of 'interior knowledge' would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship. I related womb and vagina to 'primary knowledge'; with strokes and cuts on bone and rock by which I believed my ancestor measured her menstrual cycles, pregnancies, lunar observations, agricultural notations—the origins of time factoring, of mathematical equivalences, of abstract relations. I assumed the carved figurines and incised female shapes of Paleolithic, Mesolithic artifacts were carved by women—the visual-mythic transmutation of self-knowledge to its integral connection with a cosmic Mother—that the experience and complexity of her personal body was the source of conceptualizing, of interacting with materials, of imagining the world and composing its images" (Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy*, 1979).

(2) And from the great Medieval Welsh poet Gwerful Mechain in her *Ode to the Pubic Hair*:

Every foolish drunken poet,
boorish vanity without ceasing,
(never may I warrant it,
I of great noble stock,)
has always declaimed fruitless praise
in song of the girls of the lands
all day long, certain gift,
most incompletely, by God the Father:
praising the hair, gown of fine love,
and every such living girl,
and lower down praising merrily
the brows above the eyes;
praising also, lovely shape,
the smoothness of the soft breasts,
and the beauty's arms, bright drape,
she deserved honor, and the girl's hands.
Then with his finest wizardry
before night he did sing,
he pays homage to God's greatness,
fruitless eulogy with his tongue:
leaving the middle without praise
and the place where children are conceived,
and the warm cunt, clear excellence,
tender and fat, bright fervent broken circle,
where I loved, in perfect health,
the cunt below the smock.

—after the translation by Dafydd R. Johnston

Source: Translation from the Ugaritic by Harris Lenowitz, in Lenowitz & C. Doria, *Origins: Creation Texts from the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1976), 278–80.

Anat, the Canaanite war-goddess, was sister of Baal (god of rain & fertility) whom she aided in his struggles with his counterpart Mot (god of death & sterility). The episodes involve the death & resurrection of Baal & remind us of the Egyptian myths of Isis, Osiris, & Set (see p. 513). But the fragment given here is a perfect depiction of the goddess's fury—made more fantastic perhaps by the loss of explanatory data, etc.

The Baal & Anat poems were written in Ugaritic, a Canaanite dialect spoken at Ras Shamra-Ugarit & closely related to Old Testament Hebrew. The texts date from the early fourteenth century B.C., though the matter is undoubtedly older. The work of uncovering goes back to 1929.

Addenda. (1) “The Goddess is a lovely, slender woman with a hooked nose, deathly pale face, lips red as rowan-berries, startlingly blue eyes and long fair hair; she will suddenly transform herself into sow, mare, bitch, vixen, she-ass, weasel, serpent, owl, she-wolf, tigress, mermaid or loathsome hag. . . . The reason why the hairs stand on end, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust—the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death” (R. Graves, *The White Goddess*).

See also below, p. 591.

(2)

Denise Levertov
THE GODDESS

She in whose lipservice
I passed my time,
whose name I knew, but not her face,
came upon me where I lay in Lie Castle!
Flung me across the room, and
room after room (hitting the walls, re-
bounding—to the last
sticky wall—wrenching away from it
pulled hair out!)
till I lay
outside the outer walls!

There in cold air
lying still where her hand had thrown me,
I tasted the mud that splattered my lips:
the seeds of a forest were in it,
asleep and growing! I tasted
her power!

The silence was answering my silence,
a forest was pushing itself
out of sleep between my submerged fingers.

I bit on a seed and it spoke on my tongue
of day that shone already among stars
in the water-mirror of low ground,
and a wind rising ruffled the lights:
she passed near me returning from the encounter,
she who plucked me from the close rooms,
without whom nothing
flowers, fruits, sleeps in season,
without whom nothing
speaks in its own tongue, but returns
lie for lie!

Page 281 From *The Song of Ullikummi*

Source: Charles Olson, *Archaeologist of Morning* (New York: Grossman, 1973).
Olson's principal source here is H. G. Güterbock's *The Song of Ullikummi*.

In the longer work, of which Olson's poem is as much evocation as translation, Kumarbi (father-of-the-gods) fucks the mountain to create a stone-man (Ullikummi), who will destroy the storm-god (Enlil). From this action, "stone gave birth to stone . . . who grew up / in the water / 9000 miles tall / like a tower raised," &, with his father, fought the other gods, or grew so unchecked (in Olson's view), so dangerous, "that they had to, themselves, do battle with him." The "song," then, "is actually the story of that battle and who could bring him down. Because he had a growth principle of his own, and it went against creation in the sense that nobody could stop him and nobody knew how far he might grow. . . . This diorite figure is the vertical, the growth principle of the Earth. He's just an objectionable child of Earth who has got no condition except earth, no condition but stone" (in *Muthologos*). In saying which, Olson (in the oldest tradition of translation & poesis) projects his own fascination with the matter, as in the figure of himself "stand(ing) on Main Street like the Diorite / Stone," or as part of his obsession with a rockbound earth, who takes her hero & "only / after the grubs / had done him / . . . let(s) her robe / uncover and her part / take him in."

Page 282 *From Theogony [The Godbirths]*

Source: Excerpted from Charles Doria's translation from *The Theogony*, in C. Doria & Harris Lenowitz, *Origins: Creation Texts from the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1976), 313–14, 315–17.

The energies of the old gods—as manifestation of the imaginal underworld & the “dark powers of the unconscious” (see p. 445)—persist in the wildness of Hesiod's poem-of-origin. A sense of the ferocity & strength of the other-than-human (wind, lightning, earthquake, vacuum, flood, etc.) & its expression through human brutalities, is by no means unique to the “European vision,” which has often enough favored repression over exuberance (& its attendant terrors). The force of Doria's translation is in its ability to show all of that (including Hesiod's still audible connection to older oral poetries) & to suggest, by so doing, what it may mean to be living in a state-of-myth.

Other poems-of-origin can be found in the opening section & elsewhere in the present volume. The killing (& castration) of Sky is paralleled in Babylonian accounts of the killing of the primal water-god, Apsu (= abyss), by his grandson Ea, but also in the killing of the primal-[serpent]-mother Tiamat by Marduk (see above, p. 447).

Page 285 *Fragment of a Vision*

Source: Charles Stein's translation in C. Stein, “Notes Towards a Translation of Parmenides,” at www.charlessteinpoet.com/poetry/translations.

“All art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one” (Friedrich Schlegel).

(1) If it's Plato who hawks the *ancient quarrel between philosophy & poetry*, there's no doubt either that his great predecessors among the “pre-Socratics” (Parmenides & Empedocles in particular) were themselves poets of note as much as philosophers & protoscientists, or that the “ancient quarrel” & separation simply didn't hold—not then, not now. And while their works survive only in fragments, culled from citations by others, their power as poets was well known & acclaimed as such within their lifetimes.

Much more than that in fact. Parmenides's perceptions & visions—like those of Empedocles & other “pre-Socratics”—carry forward what has been fairly described as a shamanic tradition & a linkup on the future end with an emerging philosophical poetry as a natural fusion of both philosophy & poetry. His way as with shamans before him was through dreams & healing, but with an emphasis as well on a distinction between the real & the unreal (the *is* and the *isn't*) that was as true for poetry as it was for the philosophy & science yet to come.

(2) “We want what is real / We want what is real / Don't deceive us” (Crow song, for which see also p. 621, below).

(3) And Ludwig Wittgenstein more than two millennia later: “I think I summed up my position on philosophy when I said: One should really only do philosophy

as *poetry*. From this it seems to me it must be clear to what extent my thought belongs to the present, to the future, or to the past. For with this I have also revealed myself to be someone who cannot quite do what he wishes he could do.”

Page 287 *From The Thunder, Perfect Mind*

Source: James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 271.

(1) A further example, if more is needed, of a speculative & vital poetry lost in the establishment of orthodoxies & heresies, in the Christian world & elsewhere. What is most striking here is its celebration of contraries & its emergence at the same time as an extraordinary instance of the occulted female voice. For this retrieval the groundwork was laid in the European Enlightenment & in the archeology & poetics of the romanticisms & modernisms that followed. In the present instance the work came to light in a cache of twelve leather-bound papyrus codices discovered in 1945 near the upper Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi, of which *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*, a Coptic text based on a presumed but lost Greek original, is the recovered masterwork par excellence. Among texts to which the generic designation “gnostic” has most often been applied, it is neither Gnostic nor Christian in content but the revelation of a subterranean tradition & poetry clearly older than either. As such it enters a new configuration along with other suppressed & outsidéd voices, in which the poetry resides.

(2)

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

—W. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell*

(3) The reader might also compare the iterative patterning of *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* to the selection from María Sabina, p. 57, however widely separated in time & place, along with Anne Waldman’s *Fast Speaking Woman* in the accompanying commentary.

Page 288 *Song of the Arval Brothers*

Source: Charles Doria’s English version in *Alcheringa* o.s., no. 5 (Spring–Summer 1973): 59–60. Recorded in the third century A.D. but thought to go back to at least the sixth or seventh century B.C.

Surviving songs of the Arval Brotherhood—a society of dancing priests of Mars, who made offerings every May to the field-Lares & the Semones (gods of sowing). (Arval, from *arvum*, a cultivated field, a farm; & Mars or Marmar still vis-

ible as a god of fertile powers.) The priests were also known as the Salii (= dancers or leapers) & performed “wild dances” in groups of twelve, their songs set to the rhythm of a three-step dance, in which the halves of each verse consisted of three rhythmical beats & corresponded to what H. W. Garrod describes as “the forward swing & recoil of the dance.” Along with scattered remains of Latin charms & “magic dirges” chanted by professional “wise women” (= shamans), the Arval fragments are among the oldest records of oral poetry & ritual-events in Europe.

Page 290 Birth of the Fire God

Source: Translation by Garbis Yessayan & Keith Bosley, in K. Bosley, ed., *The Elek Book of Oriental Verse* (London: Paul Elek, 1979), 191.

(1) The figure of the burning child god depicted here is elsewhere identified as Vahagn (*vahagn* = bringer-of-fire), legendary god-king of the early Armenians, whose birth-song is given in the fifth-century history of Moses of Khorni. The contrary mix—of child & man—is, like the fire itself, a sign of power.

(2)

W. Blake

from THE MENTAL TRAVELLER

The trees bring forth sweet Ecstasy
To all who in the desert roam
Till many a City there is Built
And many a pleasant Shepherds home
But when they find the frowning Babe
Terror strikes thro the region wide
They cry the Babe the Babe is Born
And flee away on Every side

(3)

Jerome Rothenberg

from THE BURNING BABE

after Southwell

a pretty babe
in air
aglow & glittering
his skin split
from the heat, his tears
a flood
but useless
cannot quench the flames
but feeds them

newly born
& burns like babe
like lamb on spit
he cries but no one
hears or feels
the heat he feels
his breast a furnace
fuelled by redhot thorns
that make him cry out
“blameless love
“o sighs & fires
“smoke & ashes
“shame & scorn
“the flames of angry justice
“mercy’s hungry smile
a babe dissolved
like molten iron
casts himself
into a pit
where others fall
& vanish
bathed with blood

Page 290 *The Round Dance of Jesus*

Source: J. R.’s redaction &/or working, based on versions by Edgar Hennecke, Max Pulver, & G. R. S. Mead from the third-century gnostic Acts of Saint John.

(1) Gnosticism, as used here, is the catch-all term for those religions—contemporary with & often a part of early Christianity—that centered on the pursuit of *gnosis* (= “knowing”) in the sense of “enlightenment” or “illumination.” What presents itself to us (in the aftermath, that is, of the later Christian orthodoxy) is the last outburst of the about-to-be-subterranean pagan world: a sense of myth as process & conflict, & a virtual *clash* of symbols (P. Ricoeur) in contrast to the fixed imagery & single vision of orthodox thought, whether religious or scientific. Of the poetics of gnosticism Elaine Pagels writes:

Like circles of artists today, gnostics considered original creative invention to be the mark of anyone who becomes spiritually alive. Each one, like students of a painter or writer, expected to express his own perceptions by revising & transforming what he was taught. . . . Like artists, they express their own insight—their *own gnosis*—by creating new myths, poems, rituals, “dialogues” with Christ, revelations, and accounts of their visions. (*The Gnostic Gospels*)

In this sense, too, the Gnostics may be seen—at least at their most heated—as carrying forward the open field of earlier speculative poetry & religion. (See also *Symposium of the Whole*, 217–24.)

(2) The image of the dancing Christ (& of Jesus as trickster, if one takes it just a little further) resurfaces in the high creativity (poesis) of the Plains Indians' Ghost Dance; for which see p. 506. Strong enough in their own terms, such versions serve us as vehicles of defamiliarization, etc., allowing the living image to emerge.

Page 294 *A Song of Amergin*

Source: Nineteenth-century translation by Douglas Hyde in *Literary History of Ireland*, with variations by J.R. after the version (1897) by Kuno Meyer.

The search for origins & for a primal poetic language focused in eighteenth-century Europe on the ancient poetries of Wales & Ireland. While the best-known version, James Macpherson's workings from the legendary poet Ossian, proved excessive, what came to surface was a genuine bardic tradition (or a series of such) with roots into what Robert Graves calls "the ancient language of poetry." As a "magical language" more than a literary one per se, this poetry dominated neolithic thought & was later carried forward by a subterranean network of poets & seers. Writes Graves:

. . . the ancient language survived purely enough in the secret Mystery-cults of Eleusis, Corinth, Samothrace and elsewhere; and when these were suppressed by the early Christian Emperors it was still taught in the poetic colleges of Ireland and Wales, and in the witch-covens of Western Europe. As a popular religious tradition it all but flickered out at the close of the seventeenth century; and though poetry of a magical quality is still occasionally written, even in industrialized Europe, this always results from an inspired, almost pathological, reversion to the original language—a wild Pentecostal "speaking with tongues"—rather than from a conscientious study of its grammar and vocabulary. (*The White Goddess*)

While the present editor is likely more sympathetic to such exuberances, it seems clear that the ancient (bardic) poets (*fili* or "seer" in Irish, *derwydd* or "oak-seer" in Welsh) were, like their shaman predecessors, masters of both ecstasy & lore. The master-poet's learning, as described by Graves, was in fact immense; & this is in line too with the estimates (by Peter Furst & others) of the learning & vocabulary of shamans in oral cultures. As seers too, the Welsh & Irish poets probably engaged in shamanistic rituals of possession, & their practice of magical language involved displays of spontaneous composition—e.g., a form of improvised divination that issues from the poet's fingers. (See p. 425.)

"A Song of Amergin," whose legendary dating would place it a millennium or more before Christ, comes to us in a later work called *Leabhar Gabhala*, or *Book*

of *Invasions*. Said to contain the “first verses ever made in Ireland,” it is a characteristic poem of the type in which the poet-speaker describes a series of self-transformations (metamorphoses) through a sequence of assertions following the pattern I-am-this, I-am-that, or I-have-been-this, I-have-been-that, etc. Other examples in the present volume can be found on pp. 57, 131, & 477, where they serve both to identify the (shaman)-poet & the power that speaks through him/her.

For more on poetry and metamorphosis, see p. 534.

Addenda.

(1)

I am Amirgen White-knee,
with pale substance and grey hair,
accomplishing my poetic incubation in proper forms,
in diverse colors.

The Gods do not give the same wisdom to everyone,
tipped, inverted, right-side-up;
no knowledge, half-knowledge, full knowledge—
for Eber Donn, the making of fearful poetry,
of vast, mighty draughts of death-spells, of great chanting;
in active voice, in passive silence, in the neutral balance between,
in rhythm and form and rhyme,
in this way is spoken the path and function of my cauldrons.

—from “The Cauldron of Poesy,” Old Irish, 7th century A.D., trans.

Erynn Rowan Laurie, in J. Rothenberg & John Bloomberg-Rissman,
Barbaric Vast & Wild, 2015

(2)

Charles Stein

from *A BOOK OF CONFUSIONS* (1981)

What the Gourd Man said
When the Gourd Man spoke
was:

I make a space
between me and this room.

What I feel of my old sadness is
a shining blue-like
body
in my body.

I am stopped up hotel clerk.
I keep check marks in a book.

I knock over gold birds.

I kick a rock.

I quarrel with Black Sun Demon.

Ogham is also called the tree alphabet, since the name of a tree (or plant) has been ascribed to each Gaelic letter thus: beith, luis, nin—birch, herb, ash . . . & so on. An *alphabet végétal*. . . .

Whatever the method of reading this script, it is steeped in the secrecy of the literate over the non literate; it's always regarded as the property of the high poets, the early medieval *fili* of Ireland, who would spend many years memorizing 150 varieties of ogham. With the above, it's possible to see the poetic possibilities, whatever ogham script is used. . . .

Because the letters on the inscribed stones are sometimes doubled up, I have used this for emphasis. Because, also, not all words in Gaelic have precise English equivalents (for example *seanachas* has overtones of biography and of tradition and of genealogy and of history and of language) I have moved between phrase oghams to use words I think best work in a given poem. Where these will not do, I have used other, appropriate translations of the Gaelic, the stone and the landscape itself to make a viable English poem from the ogham.

Page 296 From the Red Book of Hergest

Source: Translation by D. Silvan Evans in William F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales, Containing the Cymric Poems Attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1868), vol. 1, 569–71.

Like such seer-poets as Taliesin & Aneirin, the “real” Llywarch Hen may go back to the sixth century as a poet & warrior against the early English invaders. More likely, though, the poems in his name were the work of a Welsh court-poet between that time & the appearance, circa 1375, of the *Red Book of Hergest*. The figure emerging therein is that of an old man, who lives in isolation & in grief & anger over the deaths of his twenty-four sons & many companions—an image that colors all subsequent “biographies” of the poet whose last name means, literally, “the old one.” But the poems, even if late, would seem to be spoken in Llywarch’s voice to—& through—the poet who receives them: a “ritual of divination” of a kind well known in Irish & Welsh tradition. Writes Patrick K. Ford in a more recent book on Llywarch:

In the shaman-like trance which Giraldus Cambrensis described with regard to the *awenyddion* [inspired, in-breathing poets] of the twelfth century in Wales, the poets . . . go into a trance, their bodies taken over by some force . . . that apparently speaks through them. . . . The description of Celtic divination by Giraldus . . . suggests that we may think of the poet of the Llywarch poems as summoning knowledge that lay buried in the past, revealed in the person of Llywarch Hen, a denizen of that remoteness. (*The Poetry of Llywarch Hen*)

In that sense, the linking here is with a worldwide tradition of authorship that connects the Llywarch poems to the old shamans (see p. 482) & to the later assertions by, e.g., Blake that “the authors are in Eternity,” or to Jack Spicer’s sense of the poet as a receiver/retriever of messages not his own; of which he writes:

We are irritable radio sets . . . but our poems write for each other, being full of their own purposes, no doubt no more mysterious in their universe than ours in ours. And our lips are not our lips. But are the lips of heads of poets. And should shout revolution.

In silence.

Or Spicer again—to bring it home with a special finesse: “The poet is more like a catcher, but likes to think he’s a pitcher.”

Page 298 Two Poems for All-Hallows’ Eve

Source: Trefor M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1959, 1978), 134, 124. Original texts in T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore & Folk-Custom* (London: Methuen, 1930), 149–50, 146.

Of Christian festivals with Pagan (= country) carryovers, “All-Hallows’ Eve,” writes Trefor Owen, “was the weirdest. Spirits walked abroad. . . . In some parts of Wales the wandering ghosts took the form of a *ladi wen* (white lady), while in other parts . . . it was the *hwch ddu gwta* (the tailless black sow) which put terror into the hearts of men. The apparition of the black sow, in fact, was closely associated with one of the oldest *Calan gaeaf* [Winter’s Eve] customs, namely that of lighting bonfires after dark. . . . To this end large quantities of fern, gorse, straw, and thorn-bushes were carted to the hill-top site of the fire, and ordinary work would be set aside on the occasion. When the bonfire was lit, often to the blowing of horns and other instruments, potatoes and apples were placed in it to roast; there would be dancing, shouting and leaping around the fire as it burned. The roasted apples and potatoes would be eaten by the light of the fire, and, according to some accounts, the participants would run round or through the fire and smoke, casting a stone into the flames. As the fire died down all would run off to escape [the black sow]” while shouting songs like the two presented here (Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs*).

Page 299 The Fairy Woman’s Lullaby

Source: Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns & Incantations* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1928), vol. 5, 219–21. “Orally collected in the highlands & islands of Scotland & translated into English.”

As underground, localized powers, the “faeries” (Scottish: *sith*, pl. *sithich*) represented, at some level, a world of “imaginal” beings, who come down to us as elves, leprechauns, & goblins, diminished into bright but feckless images from Disneyland, etc. What’s lost—beyond the particulars & contradictions of a live tradition—is the sense of threat, even terror, in creatures whose name in English comes from the Latin *fata* (= the Fates) & who were called, by their seventeenth-century chronicler, Robert Kirk, “the subterraneans.” While that side of the tradition is probably as unsalvageable among the “folk” as elsewhere, it should be remembered that the “faeries” once functioned, like the Semitic Liliths (*lilin*),

both as sexual lures & abductors of the newborn, connected at source with the fallen angels & the spirits of the dead. In testimonies gathered by Alexander Carmichael in the nineteenth century, such figures at their spookiest were described as “hosts” or swarms, “who had left heaven and had not reached hell, [but] flew into holes of the earth ‘*mar na fámhlagan,*’ like the stormy petrels.” A sense of marginality & exile is also strong here—as reflection of a “wilderness” (of place & mind [= spirit]) now out of reach. Writes Carmichael, again:

According to one informant, the spirits fly about . . . in great clouds, up and down the face of the world like the starlings. . . . In bad nights, the hosts shelter themselves . . . behind little russet docken stems and yellow ragwort stalks. They fight battles in the air as men do on the earth. They may be heard and seen on clear frosty nights, advancing and retreating, retreating and advancing, against one another. After a battle, as I was told in Barra, their crimson blood may be seen staining rocks and stones. (*Carmina Gadelica*, vol. 2)

Of the context for the present piece, the reciter, James, son of Colin (James Campbell), crofter, Ceann Tangabhal, Barra, said, 26th September 1872: “MacLeod of Dunvegan got a child by the fairy woman; and because he would not receive herself, she sent the child home to him. But though she put him away, she was missing the child and she went to see him. The child was with MacLeod’s foster-nurse, and the fairy woman seized hold of the child, and she was hushing and caressing and fondling and nursing and rocking him back and fore, intending to snatch him from her and to sweep him away with her to the fairy mound.” The fuller work—of which this is a small excerpt—was known as “MacLeod’s Lullaby” & existed thereafter in many versions.

Addendum. Western poets (Shakespeare, Spenser, Keats, et al.) have both promoted the attractive side of the faerie proposition &, less frequently, pointed at its darkness—as in Blake’s vision, e.g., of the Fairies, Nymphs, Gnomes, & Genii standing “unforgiving & unalterable . . . four ravening deathlike Forms” at the gates of Golgonooza; or in more recent works by poets like Yeats & Duncan. And it’s also worth noting that when Lorca calls his concept of a daemonic poetic force “duende,” he has in mind a subterranean figure synonymous with “fairy” but of such a wildness as to make the Gitano singer Manuel Torres say: “All that has black sounds has duende.”

See also the discussion of the Serbian *vila*, p. 591, & of Blake’s visions of the faerie world, p. 595.

Page 300 *The Nine Herbs Charm*

Source: Translation by David Antin from the Anglo-Saxon, previously unpublished.

Although it seems likely that such herbal charms were common in pre-Christian England & Europe, this is the only one with specific Pagan reference to survive the Church’s roundups. Yet even here (in several lines omitted by the present

translator) the later Christian reviser seems to have inserted a reference to the creation of two of the herbs by “the Wise Lord / holy in heaven as he hung”—though this, again, may not be Christ but Woden (= Odin) in the same charm-gathering account as that given above, p. 304 and commentary. Used, they say, against snakebite, the poem leads into a virtual history of some of the herbs’ past doings—much like the praises of the Basuto divination bones (see p. 527)—as displayed at real &/or imaginary places like Regenmeld, Alorford, etc. The poem, which may be a fragmented version of a longer, more symmetrical work in nine parts, ends with the directions for its performance: a language “event” that works through contact between the “magic words” & the object or person toward which they’re directed. (See Malinowski’s description—p. 439—of the physical nature of language in Trobriand magic & poetics.)

Page 302 From Shakespeare’s Lear

Source: William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 4, first performed 26 December 1606.

(1) In the depiction of madness, etc., as an entry to the primal world, Shakespear(e)—his name itself a praise-name—touches on that “magic” written of by Herman Melville in a note scrawled on the last flyleaf of his copy of the Shakespeare plays:

Ego non baptizo te in nomine Patris et
 Filii et Spiritus Sancti—sed in nomine
 Diaboli.—madness is undefinable—
 It & right reason extremes of one,
 —not the (black art) Goetic but Theurgic magic—
 seeks converse with the Intelligence, Power, the
 Angel.

Nor is Shakespeare an outsider to the traditions of this book but, as a master of oral soundings & of a lore still “in the air,” is central himself to a Western *ethnopoetics* that shares the intelligence & power of those seers & keepers-of-high-words presented elsewhere in these pages. It is this lore that goes back to the old shamans, etc., & breaks through, qua vision & madness, on the folk level as well—as in the song of Tom o’ Bedlam that parallels Shakespeare’s more “complex” (= “primitive”) exploration:

From the hag and hungry goblin
 That into rags would rend ye,
 And the spirit that stands
 By the naked man
 In the book of moons, defend ye,
 That of your five sound senses
 You never be forsaken,

Now wander from
Yourselves with Tom
Abroad to beg your bacon.
While I do sing, “Any food, any feeding,
Feeding, drink, or clothing?
Come, dame or maid,
Be not afraid,
Poor Tom will injure nothing.”

Or again, in the “archaic song of Dr. Tom the Shaman” among the latterday Nuu-chah-nulth [Nootka] of western Vancouver Island:

I know thee. My name is Tom.
I want to find thy sickness. I know thy sickness.
I will take thy sickness. My name is Tom. I am a strong doctor.
If I take thy sickness thou wilt see thy sickness.
My name is Tom. I don't lie. My name is Tom. I don't talk shit.
I am a doctor. Many days I haven't eaten.
Ten days I haven't eaten. I don't have my tools with me.
I don't have my sack with me. My name is Tom.
I will take thy sickness now & thou wilt see it.

—J.R.'s working, after James Teit, 1935

(2) Writes Jean Dubuffet of what he named *art brut* (the art & poetry of the insane): “A work of art is only of interest, in my opinion, when it is an immediate and direct projection of what is happening in the depth of a person's being. . . . It is my belief that only in this ‘Art Brut’ can we find the natural and normal processes of artistic creation in their pure and elementary state” (J. Dubuffet, “Prospectus et tous écrits suivants,” 1967).

(3) Or Shakespeare again:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5, Scene 1

See also the note on Rabelais, p. 592.

Page 304 From *The Elder Edda: Odin's Shaman Song*

Source: Translation by Gavin Selerie of strophes 138–45 from the *Hávamál* (*Poetic Edda*), in G. Selerie, *Azimuth* (London: Binnacle, 1984).

Elder Edda—also called *Poetic Edda*, a late thirteenth-century gathering of pre-Christian mythologies: multiple worlds & gods shared with other northern European/Germanic peoples. Derived from oral sources & (re)composed circa 800 to circa 1200 in Iceland &/or west Norway.

Odin—(elsewhere = Woden, Wotan = madman): chief god of the Edda & remaining, as here, a (shamanic) god of poetry & of the dead. The “fire-see” of the third line is an etymological rendering of the original’s “Oðni” (Oðinn).

Bolthorn—father of Odin’s mother, *Bestla*, from whom comes the power-of-poetry (*odrerir*).

Dain—king of the “elves”; *Dvalin*—king of the dwarves; *Asvid*—king of the giants.

Thund—another of Odin’s names.

(Writes the translator: “The ‘beat’ in the first line has a musical connotation as well as the more obvious ones. The layout is exactly equivalent to the Old Norse text. I have tried to limit the alliteration, rhyme, kennings, etc., while giving some sense of that order.”)

Behind the present excerpt is the account of Odin’s theft of the elixir-(mead)-of-poetry—*odrerir*—& with it his own transformation into a virtual god-of-language. As one grasps it here, that language is both voiced & written in the form of runes, a magical alphabet in which each letter (rune) stands for a charm, an incantation, toward specific ends. Odin’s acquisition of the runes follows an apparent self-immolation on his part—from a gallows-tree in this account, from the world-tree Yggdrasil elsewhere—& ends with the delivery to him, as ur-poet, of a range of runes & charms, both “white” & “black.” A widespread—if specialized—script before the coming of Christianity, the runes (literally “mysteries, secrets”) were closely tied to the old religion & suppressed along with it. The survival of the myth-poems, in their Eddic form, has a likely connection to the late arrival of Christianity in Iceland.

The magic/mysticism of letters & alphabets is otherwise a fact of poetry through large parts of the world—for which the reader may want to check out the reference on p. 461, & the other (nonalphabetic) examples of “magic” writing on pp. 28–35, 136, 173, 245. The translations from Ogham script on p. 295 would also be of interest.

Page 305 From *Kalevala*

Source: Translated from the Finnish by Keith Bosley, in Matti Kuusi, K. Bosley, & Michael Branch, *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1977), 99–101. Collected 1839 by M. A. Castrén in Archangel Karelia (Russia), singer unknown.

Väinämöinen—central figure of the *Kalevala*, etc., who appears variously as god, hero, & shaman-poet.

Ilmarinen—wind-god & blacksmith—“culture hero.”

Manala, Mana—the “otherworld,” “underworld.”

Lake Alue, Lake Alimo—“mythical primeval lake.”

Abti, Hirska—water-god.

Tuoni—underworld ruler; Death.

Another isolated group—like the Welsh & Icelanders (see pp. 577, 585)—the Balto-Finnish peoples maintained a “backwoods”/backwash culture in which the poetic tradition survived religious oppression & cultural “refinements” until recent times. Against that tradition the Reformation preacher Jacobus Finno wrote (1582) in his hymnbook:

Because there were no sacred songs for the people to learn, they began to practice pagan rites and to sing shameful, lewd and foolish songs. . . . [They] sing them to pass the time at their festivals and on journeys, they hold contests with them, they defile and debauch the young with wicked thoughts and shameful speech, they tempt and encourage them to live a lewd and filthy life and to practice wicked ways. And because the devil, the source of all wickedness, also inspired his poets and singers into whose minds he entered and in whose mouths he shaped the right words, they were able to compose songs easily and quickly which could be learned by others and remembered more quickly than divine and Christian songs could be learned and remembered. (Kuusi, Bosley, & Branch, *Finnish Folk Poetry*)

In brief—some of the choicer adjectives aside—an active poetry still being shaped & transmitted by those, like Blake’s Milton, who were “true poet(s) & of the Devil’s party without knowing it,” etc.

The collection & transcription of Finnish poetry began in the eighteenth century & emerged in the work of Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) & of later, more “accurate” workers such as D.E.D. Europaeus. Lönnrot’s great gatherings were the *Kalevala*, an edition of fifty-plus “epic poems” published in final form in 1849, & the *Kanteletar* (1840), an anthology of 625 “lyrical poems & ballads.” An example of “old ways” at the service of the emerging nation-state, Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* involved the rewriting, linking & expansion of multiple individual pieces into a Homeric-sized collage, while often playing down the older numinities in favor of a more “rational” narrative structure. (The gathering from which the present excerpt is taken is based on raw texts compiled by Lönnrot & by others before & after him, rather than on his *Kalevala* per se.)

What shows itself, as elsewhere, is a shamanistic performance poetry—“not a heroic epic in the usual sense of the term,” writes Felix Oinas, “but a shamanistic [one] in which great deeds are accomplished, not by feats of arms, but by magical means—by the power of words and incantations.” As ritual performance, the piece presented here survived, the editors tell us, “as an incantation for treating burns. Its original function, however, is thought to have been part of a seasonal fire-lighting [new fire] ritual . . . probably performed in connection with burn-

beat [slash & burn] cultivation . . . : lighting the first fire in a new home or lighting a ritual bonfire at the summer or winter solstice” (Kuusi, Bosley, & Branch, *Finnish Folk Poetry*).

Although such functional poetry had likely ended by the time of the collectors, nineteenth-century performing & re-collaging of earlier works took many forms, including song-contests & a kind of double-voiced hand-to-hand singing in which two (male) singers sat side by side, clasping each other’s right hands, & swaying back & forth to the beat of the songs. In so doing, the one who acted as the lead singer started solo, then was joined midway through the first line, after which the line was repeated by both, & the singers went on in the same way to the second line, the third line, etc. In the women’s song tradition, the role of second singer was taken over by a group.

Page 308 *The Fox*

Source: J.R.’s translation from the French version in Peter Domokos & Jean-Luc Moreau, *Le pouvoir du chant: Anthologie de la poésie populaire ouralienne* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1980), 124–25.

Not evident from the translation, “The Fox” is an example of a type of improvised song called *yoïk* (*yoïgos*), whose performance exceeds the limits imposed by presentation of the words alone. As part of the Saami [Lapp] hunting tradition, the *yoïk* was originally connected with animal magic & healing &, assisted by the (so-called) “magic drum,” could lead the shaman-singer (*noidi*) into ecstasy, etc. Often sung without words or as a combination of words & untranslatable sounds, the *yoïk* became a complex form of improvisation on a wide range of Saami concerns. In addition, gesture & imitative sound added to the evocation of the animal or object addressed.

Yet what’s immediately striking, for all the emphasis on the poetics of sound, is the sharpness of detail in the presentation of the fox figure. While the fox as such is, in some sense, the European equivalent of Native American Coyote—i.e., as trickster-god—the Saami poet’s sense of the sheer animal particulars is also remarkable & should not be set aside as something less-than-mythic/mystic. The reader might compare it, e.g., with the equally “realistic” Seri whale songs (p. 194) on the one hand, or with the humanized Coyote trickster narrative (p. 190) on the other.

Addenda.

(1)

Pierre Joris
from THE FIRST FOX POEMS
fox, mother-
fox)
in a spring night’s
last light

I watched your brood
play
with the torn off
wing
of a bird.

Fanning the light.

.

when I found you
howling at the new
moon —

 what were you
doing,
what were you missing,
my red one?

.

Drunk
I was not.
you &
your broken leg
the only thing
we had in common
was the forest.

I turned
away from
the clearing
when they
clubbed you
to death.

(2) “It is an animal with a big tail, a tail many yards long and like a fox’s brush. I should like to get my hands on this tail some time, but it is impossible, the animal is constantly moving about, the tail is constantly being flung this way and that. The animal resembles a kangaroo, but not as to the face, which is flat almost like a human face, and small and oval; only its teeth have any power of expression, whether they are concealed or bared. Sometimes I have the feeling that the animal is trying to tame me. What other purpose could it have in withdrawing its tail when I snatch at it, and then again waiting calmly until I am tempted again, and then leaving once more?” (Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father*, translated by Ernst Kaiser & Eithne Wilkins, quoted in Borges’s *Book of Imaginary Beasts*).

Source: J.R.'s working from P. Simoncsics, "The Structure of a Nenets Magic Chant," in V. Dioszegi & M. Hoppal, *Shamanism in Siberia* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiadó, 1978), 388–89. The song was collected in December 1842 by M.A. Castrén.

The "blood river" image here may refer to the shaman cutting himself with a knife at the midpoint of the ceremony, but Simoncsics also indicates a connection to the song's possible use in childbirth with its attendant bleeding. The key image for the latter part of the chant—the "iron tent" or home of the god, where the curing is resolved—is followed, he suggests, by a kind of faltering or break in coherence on the shaman's part. Of this he writes: "After the cutting, many a shaman lies speechless and motionless, almost like a corpse, while blood is trickling from his body. The shaman losing his power of speech while in trance, and lying like a *dead body* on the ground with the *blood* flowing from him, *taken all together*, reveal more of the great mystery of shamanism than any loquacious talk: the interdependence, the secret connection, of *life* and *death*. After this it is only natural that when the shaman prepares for this 'deep dive,' his speech should become broken and his words incoherent."

The Nenets are a Finno-Ugric speaking people, living on the tundra between northeastern Europe & northwestern Siberia.

Addendum.

Linda Montano

MITCHELL'S DEATH (April 1978)

Participants: Linda Montano, Pauline Oliveros and Al Rossi.

Structure of the event: the piece was structured around a plus sign.

Horizontal: 1. a TV monitor with images of my face as I applied white makeup and put in acupuncture needles.
 2. Pauline, sitting, and playing a Japanese bowl gong.
 3. I was standing at the lectern chanting—whitened face, a black dress and acupuncture needles in my face.
 4. Al Rossi, sitting, playing a sruti box.

Vertical: 1. light was projected in back of me and created a shadow image.
 2. sound amplified and delayed three times in front of me.

The Event: I entered the space after Al and Pauline. Al began playing the sruti box and I turned on the monitor and then the light on the lectern. Both Al and Pauline were instructed to chant throughout the performance, and Pauline was to play the bowl gong whenever she felt it was necessary. I sang on one note—the story of Mitchell's death from the moment I heard about it to the moment I saw him in the mortuary. When the text was completed, I turned off the light and monitor, and left the space.

[N.B. Beyond the acupuncture needles in Montano's highly ritualized but basically gentle performance here, there are more violent blood-letting pieces in the work of early performance artists such as Hermann Nitsch, Chris Burden, Gina Payne, Marina Abramovic, & many others. The line between art & life is otherwise drawn "razor thin."]

Page 310 *Bald Mountain Zaum-Poems*

Source: Velimir Chlebnikov [Khlebnikov], *Werke 1: Poesie* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972), 406. The original poems appeared in I. Sacharov's *Skazaniya russkogo naroda* [Legends of the Russian People] (St. Petersburg, 1836).

Among the early European experimental poets, the Russian "futurist" Velimir Khlebnikov promoted a "transrational" language & poetry called *zaum*: an attempt to break through the limits of conventional syntax & meaning. Like others of his contemporaries (see p. 441 above), he saw the new work as a revival, in some sense, of a "folkloristic zaum-language"; & in a poem from 1912–1913, "A Night in Galicia," he incorporated & cited elements from the pair of northern Russian (wordless) incantations ("The Song of the Witches on Bald Mountain" & "The Magic Song of the Nymphs") reprinted here. On the language of magic & its relation to poetry, he wrote elsewhere:

Spells and incantations, what we call magic words, the sacred language of paganism, words like "shagadam, magadam, vigadam, pitz, patz, patzu" . . . are rows of mere syllables which the intellect can make no sense of, and they form a kind of beyondsense [*zaum*] language in folk speech. Nevertheless an enormous power over mankind is attributed to these incomprehensible and magic spells, a direct influence upon the fate of man. They contain powerful magic. They claim the power of controlling good and evil and influencing the hearts of lovers. The prayers of many nations are written in a language incomprehensible to those who pray. Does a Hindu understand the Vedas? Russians do not understand Old Church Slavonic. Neither do Poles and Czechs understand Latin. But a prayer written in Latin works just as powerfully as [an ordinary] sign in the street. In the same way the language of magic spells and incantations rejects judgments made by everyday common sense. . . . The magic in a word remains magic even if it is not understood, and loses none of its power. Poems may be understandable or they may not, but they must be good, they must be truthful. (Translation from the Russian by Paul Schmidt, in V. Khlebnikov, *The King of Time: Selected Writings of the Russian Futurist*)

For more on "magic words," etc., see p. 438, & *Symposium of the Whole*, 107–12.

Page 311 *A Poem for the Goddess Her City & the Marriage of
Her Son & Daughter*

Source: English translation by Jerome Rothenberg & Miodrag Pavlović, in M. Pavlović, ed., *Antologija Lirske Narodne Poesije* (Belgrade: Vuk Karadžić Publishing, 1982), 192.

(1) The figure presented herein is called *vila* (pl. *vile*) in Serbian & has been prominent up to (almost) the present in southern Slavic oral poetry. Connected with mountains & rivers, the *vile* are usually described—by folklorists, etc.—as “fairy-like beings,” but often enough there emerges a singular “white” *vila* with the attributes of the old goddesses & identified with Sun (a female in most Slavic traditions, where Moon is generally a male) &/or Morning Star. In this form she is something more than a localized being, credited with creation of the world-at-large, empowerment of the gods & saints (even of God himself for whom, elsewhere, she creates his “celestial mountain”), & with personal powers as a warrior &, as here, a master builder of great cities. In such poems, however far removed from their “pagan” sources, the description goes clearly beyond that of the faerie world (see p. 581) & touches the ferocity of ancient Anat & of that “White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living,” cited elsewhere in these pages by R. Graves (see p. 577).

Another address to the sun as female, but from a very distant source, appears on page 67, above.

(2) An evocation of the re-emergent goddess figure:

Diane di Prima
from LOBA (1978)

She raises
 in flames
 the
city
 it glows about her
 The Loba
mother wolf &
 mistress
of many
 dances she
treads
 in the severed heads
 that grow
like mosses
 in the flood
 the city
melts it
 flows past her

treading
 white feet they
curl around
 ashes & the ashes
sing, they chant
 a new
 creation myth

Page 312 *The Message of King Sakis & the Legend of the Twelve Dreams He Had in One Night*

Source: Translation by Charles Simic in *Alcheringa*, o.s., no. 1 (Autumn 1970): 24–25. It can also be found in Simic’s *The Horse Has Six Legs: An Anthology of Serbian poetry* (Minneapolis: Greywolf Press, 1992).

Part of an ancient & worldwide tradition, the old mythological consciousness expresses itself in European dream-works & autochthonous surrealisms from “then” to “now.” Writes poet Vasko Popa, editor of brilliant assemblages of Serbian folk-workings: “The only genuine bright tradition of folk poetry is in ceaseless invention and ceaseless discovery.”

For more on dream, see pp. 472, 491.

Page 313 *A Love Poem with Witches*

Source: J.R.’s version from Spanish translation in Luis L. Cortés, *Antología de la poesía popular Rumana* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1955), 127–29.

A type of charm called a *descântec*, it has, like magic language elsewhere, been a rich & constant source of poetry. What’s notable here—beyond the clash of Christian & “pagan” symbols—is the expansion of charm into story: the charm-maker’s depiction of herself in the act of conjuration. An example, too, of magic/poesis as self-reflection.

Page 315 *The Descriptions of King Lent*

Source: J.M. Cohen’s translation in F. Rabelais, *The Histories of Gargantua & Pantagruel* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1957), 516–19.

“This forest of dreams,” Michelet called it & traced its power to Rabelais’s knack for drawing from “popular *elemental* forces.” But that was deceptive too, & Rabelais stood not so much outside all of that—as mere observer—but in the middle & a part of it himself. “Nonliterary,” as Mikhail Bakhtin describes him: a primal poet whose images, etc., diverge from “the literary norms and canons” & assert their “undestroyable nonofficial nature.” And further: “No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook” (M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais & His World*).

Rabelais's tradition, in specific, is what Bakhtin speaks of as "the folk-culture of humor"—but humor writ large as something wilder & more sacred than we had previously imagined & to which our own work has now, independently, returned. "A second world," says Bakhtin again, "and a second life outside officialdom," it manifested in carnival & market, where it reflected, in shadow of church & state, the energies of the "primitive"/"primal"/"pagan" & "the ancient rituals of mocking at the deity" in the oldest of poetic/sacred traditions. By Rabelais's time, that comic life was subterranean but "deepened and rendered more complex in the process."

For which too it spoke its own language, as Bakhtin has it again: "an extremely rich idiom [of forms & symbols] . . . opposed to all that was readymade and completed, to all pretense at immutability . . . a dynamic expression . . . ever changing, playful, undefined . . . [with] a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out,' of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings." The language of this "second world"—a world inside out or upside down—is that of the sacred clowns & of ritual laughter & sexuality: a descent into the body & a "degradation [that] here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time." It is, as T. Rundle Clark described it for the ancient Egyptians, "obscene, brutal & inconsequential" (see p. 445), or as it turns up in the Jewish Gnostic image of creation:

the 7 Laughs of GOD
 Hha Hha Hha Hha Hha Hha Hha
 each laugh he gave
 engendered the 7
 god god god god god god god
 the Fore-Appealers
 who clasp everything one
 —4th-6th century A.D., translated by Charles Doria

[N.B. To take it a step further, the reader might note that Bakhtin observes the primal push around "this half-forgotten idiom" in a range of European writers such as Shakespeare & Cervantes. If so, it should be possible to see their work as not only *influenced* by the language of that "second world" but, like Rabelais's, as a manifestation & continuation of its energies. Not a backwash, then, but a vital center & a line whose re-emergence in the present is clear enough for all who care to see it.]

Page 318 Deep Song

Source: J. R.'s translation of Roma (Gypsy) poems cited in Federico García Lorca, *Obras Completas* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960), 1524-25.

(1) Of the native Andalusian music called “deep song” (*cante hondo*), Lorca wrote: “It is a very rare specimen of primitive song, the oldest in all Europe, and its notes carry the naked, spine-tingling emotion of the first Oriental races.” Its immediate source was the Roma (Gypsy) *siguriya*, a form older than flamenco, with filiations to Arab & Moorish songs &, beyond these, to the song & poetry of India. But what Lorca heard in it also—as a kind of “sung prose, [seeming to] destroy all sense of metric rhythm”—was something “deeper” & more ancient that blurred the distinction between “prose” & “verse” (really, between speech & song): “the reiterative, almost obsessive use of one same note, a procedure proper to certain formulas of incantation, including recited ones we might call prehistoric and which have made some people suppose that song is older than language.” Finally, though, it was the *language* of the songs that drew him—finding in them not only a wildness but a more precise, “exact expression” for those poets “concerned with pruning and caring for the overluxuriant lyric tree left us by the Romantics and post-Romantics.” With that much stripped away, he wrote, “deep song sings like a nightingale without eyes . . . [&] always in the night. It is a song without landscape, withdrawn into itself and terrible in the dark.” (All prose quotes from Lorca’s essay, “Deep Song,” trans. Christopher Maurer, in Lorca, *Deep Song*, 1980.)

The repercussion in Lorca’s own work is not only impressive in itself but may lay claim to being a continuation of “deep song” by other means. (See above, p. 527.)

(2) “To write through Lorca, to come back on Lorca’s wings, to return to where you’re feeling empty, like dying sweetly after love, to where a rose has left you wounded, the shadow of your childhood like a flower inside your heart, where Lorca’s road trails off into a garden, in which the morning star drops colors onto a faded dress, like paint” (J.R., from “The Return,” in *The Lorca Variations*, 1993).

Page 319 *The Canticle for Brother Sun*

Source: J.R.’s translation in *Pogamoggan* 1 (1964): 86–87.

Where the expanding human settlement draws boundaries against the wilderness, a breed of saint arises whose career commences with a journey—heterodox & pagan—to the primal world outside the human. It is as if the saint’s journey were the shaman’s journey retold: a descent into the place of “magic words,” in which, the Inuit shaman tells us, “a person could become an animal if he wanted to / and an animal could become a human being . . . and there was no difference. / All spoke the same language.” In the case of Saint Francis, then, there are the matters of the meeting with—& taming of—the wolf of Gubbio; the language of animals & plants he learned to speak; & the creation (itself a recovery) of the song-for-all-beings translated here.

The reader can compare Francis’s poem with the culturally distant (& distinct) thanksgiving prayer of the Seneca Indians; e.g., the section in praise of the sun, etc.:

Now in the sky.
He created two things.
That they should be in the sky.
They are the ones to give light.
So the people could see where they are going.
The people I created.
Now this has happened.
At this time of day.
There is plenty of light.
He has given authority.
To the one who gives light for the days to have light.
Now this time of day.
We give thanks to our Brother the Sun.
This is the way it should be in our minds.
—Translation by J. R. & Richard Johnny John

For the complete translation, see the present editor's *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 4–9.

Page 320 From Europe a Prophecy

Source: William Blake, *The Poetry & Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 58–59.

A visionary himself, Blake was part of a by then occulted tradition of poetry & vision, which he turned on its head in a series of extreme, often comic, reversals & renamings, forcing it into a virtually new life. Of his experience, e.g., of the faerie world, which the present poem explores in implicitly sexual terms, he reported elsewhere:

I was walking alone in my garden, there was great stillness among the branches and flowers and more than common sweetness in the air; I heard a low and pleasant sound, and I knew not whence it came. At last I saw the broad leaf of a flower move, and underneath I saw a procession of creatures of the size and color of green and gray grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose leaf, which they buried with songs, and then disappeared. It was a fairy funeral. (Allan Cunningham, “Life of Blake,” 1830)

But a darker image of that world—“unforgiving & unalterable”—appears in his masterwork, *Milton*, for which see above, p. 582.

Page 325 *Twelve Kura Songs from Tikopia*

Source: J.R.'s adaptation from Raymond Firth, "Privilege Ceremonials in Tikopia," *Oceania* 21 (1950): 170–75. Original reprinted in Firth, *Tikopia Ritual & Belief* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967).

The *kura* is performed when "the eldest daughter of the elder . . . reaches maturity [and] becomes the *fafine ariki*," or chief female. She is then doomed to live apart from all men &, growing older, to commit suicide by swimming out to sea, dwelling after death among "the assembly of those who have made the *kura*."

The dance itself is said to have originated with the god Rata & his consort Nau Taufiti, both very fierce, both with more-than-human sex-hunger & -power. To tap this energy in the dance, "men and women face each other in pairs, and the songs are exchanged between the two parties. . . . It is so that the men are Rata and the women Nau Taufiti." The songs, like much sacred poetry, are expected to act as a sexual stimulant; their "black humor" is also clearly within the range of the sacred.

While Kume in Song 1 is likely a separate goddess from Nau Taufiti, the rest of the songs involve a series of exchanges (sexual abuse & praise) between Rata & his principal consort. The *One-Before-Us* is Faka-sautimu, adze-god, anterior & superior to Rata. In Song 4 *cherry* is literally the puka-berry & indicates that the woman's vulva is small & pink. The *black buttocks* in Song 8 come from rubbing them against the ground in (frequent) intercourse. The *cordyline root* of the final song is "carrot-shaped and several feet long, and when cooked in the oven gets very dark in color."

Page 327 *Tolai Songs*

Source: Murray Russell, trans., *Kakaile Kakaile: Tolai Songs* (Port Moresby: Papua Pocket Poets, 1969).

S.D.A. = Seventh Day Adventists.

Song 2 is described by the translator as "a *bibolo*, a type of dance done by women." Performed with many repetitions.

The play of old & new begins in the native language & is carried into the English, where it serves as a model for a Papuan (New Guinean) "modernism" that draws power from its own past. The translators &/or collectors themselves are most often Papuan poets—thus exercising a control over their self-presentation & cultural continuities & transformations that hasn't always appeared in such a context. Writes Ulli Beier of the ethnopoetics at work here: "Poetry—if we may in fact apply our own term to this variety of forms and functions—is a *living* tradition in New Guinea. All the examples given here are *traditional* in the sense that they are part of a group of cultures whose roots go very far back and that they still use ancient forms. Many of them are *modern* in the sense that traditional forms are often used to describe or celebrate contemporary events" (U.B., *Words of Paradise*).

Further examples of traditional forms adapted to new events & images appear throughout the present volume: a tendency toward the incorporation-of-the-new at least as widespread as that toward preservation-of-the-old. The section “Survivals & Revivals” in the present edition is largely dedicated to these.

Page 328 *Pidgin Song*

Source: Transcription by Leo Morgan in *Kovave: A Journal of New Guinea Literature*, no. 1 (Boroko, Papua New Guinea, 1970): 45.

Often classed as “marginal languages”—but this “marginality” may bring them closer to the language of our own poetics—*pidgins* & *creoles* have grown out of colonial encounters, etc., throughout history. Writes Dell Hymes of certain of the issues at stake here:

. . . Pidgins arise as makeshift adaptations, reduced in structure and use, no one’s first language; creoles are pidgins become primary languages. Both are marginal, in the circumstances of their origin, and in the attitudes towards them on the part of those who speak one of the languages from which they derive.

Marginal, one might have also said, in terms of knowledge about them. These languages are of central importance to our understanding of language, and central too in the lives of some millions of people. Because of their origins, however, their association with poorer and darker members of a society, and through perpetuation of misleading stereotypes—such as that a pidgin is merely a broken or baby-talk version of another language— . . . these languages have been considered, not creative adaptations, but degenerations; not systems in their own right, but deviations from other systems. . . . Not the least of the crimes of colonialism has been to persuade the colonized that they, or ways in which they differ, are inferior—to convince the stigmatized that the stigma is deserved. (D.H., *Pidginization & Creolization of Languages*)

In New Guinea (Papua), the regional pidgin (Neo-Melanesian or *tok waitman*) has shown much expansion & development over the last several decades, including the appearance of an oral & written poetry. The preferred form of pidgin, under such circumstances, is that most distanced from the influence of English—i.e., an *active* language in the process, still, of *self-creation*. (With which the reader can compare the programs for a new language brought into early twentieth-century work by such marginal figures as Ball, Apollinaire, & Khlebnikov; see pp. 441, 461, 590.)

More on pidgins, creoles, & what Kamau Brathwaite has famously called “nation languages” can be found in the Survivals & Revivals section beginning on p. 359.

Page 328 *The Gumagabu Song*

Source: Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1922, 1961), 293–94.

Background: “Several generations ago, a canoe or two from Burakwa, in the island of Kayeula, made an exploring trip to the district of Gabu. . . . The natives in Gabu, receiving them at first with a show of interest, and pretending to enter into commercial relations, afterwards fell on them treacherously and slew the chief Toraya and all his companions. . . . The slain chief’s younger brother (Tomakam) went to the Koya of Gabu and killed the head man of one of the villages, avenging thus his brother’s death. He then composed a song and a dance which is performed to this day.”

Malinowski adds, of the poem’s non-euclidean structure & resemblance to modern poetry: “The character of this song is extremely elliptic, one might even say futuristic, since several scenes are crowded simultaneously into the picture . . . [and] a word or two indicates rather than describes whole scenes and incidents.” Thus the opening strophe moves between the Gumagabu man on top of his mountain, Tomakam’s pledge to go there, the women grieving for Toraya, the mountain again, the mist above Tomakam’s home, lastly his mother crying for revenge. The second strophe starts with dream narrative, shifting suddenly to the expedition’s arrival at Gabu & the ritual exchange of gifts. The third uses first-person narration to describe the killing. In the fourth (third-person again) there’s description of a storm at sea, but in the fifth, without transition, the party is safe at home & the chief (Tomakam) holds up a basket containing the victim’s head. The final strophe (description of a feast) slips back into first-person.

Thus the movement is complicated & very much alive—the gaps in sequence allowing that play-of-the-mind which is so highly developed a process among many “primitive” poets.

Page 330 *Three Drum Poems*

Source: Ulli Beier, “A Note on the Drum Language of the Trobriand Islands,” *Alcheringa*, n.s. 1, no. 1 (1975): 108–9.

A reversal, in effect, of African talking drums, the Trobriand usage is an imitation of drum rhythms by the human voice. “Though created as a memory aid or teaching aid,” writes Ulli Beier, “the drum language has its own compelling beauty, like poetry in some archaic language.” And he adds: “It is possible to ‘speak’ a whole drum sequence, just as the Yoruba people in Nigeria can drum a whole recitation of poetry.” (See p. 520 above.)

All three examples given here are related to drum rhythms used for the *kesawaga* dance: a ceremony performed by four drums, the smallest of which “plays the complex rhythms that serve as instructions to the dancers and that can be identified and repeated in speech patterns.” Similar methods of sounding turn up around the *canntaireachd* (wordless chants) associated with Scottish

bagpipes & the meaningless or apparently untranslatable refrains (*toti quiti toti totototo tiquiti tiquiti*, etc.) that punctuated old Aztec poetry like rhythmic markers. (The reader may also want to compare these drum poems with the Ashanti drum poem on p. 138 & with the sound-poems, etc., presented on pp. 8 & 310.)

Addenda. (1) from Philip Corner’s “Poor Man Music” (circa 1968) in which percussion sounds take the place of words:

“Poor man” because the sounds are those a person can make with his or her own body or simple extensions thereof.:

The simplest materials
and the things your own body is
and does
—claps, slaps, stamps, rubbing and scratching: body—all
parts, and clothing if any
voices, and all the sounds your voice and breath and
throat may make
/except words.

The rhythms follow the pulsebeat, faster or slower but with its
regularity—beats within the group, starting apart, meeting, changing,
entering & re-entering, meeting elsewhere, etc.

[First published in an appendix to the original edition of *Technicians of the Sacred*, 1968, as a part of *Gift Event 3: Doings & Happenings*, based on the orders of the Seneca Indian Eagle Dance & first performed at the Judson Memorial Church in New York.]

(2)

Sonia Sanchez
from *A/COLTRANE/POEM*

(softly da-dum-da da da da da da da da da/da-dum-da
till it da da da da da da da da da da
builds da-dum- da da da
up) da-dum. da. da. da. this is a part of my
favorite things.
da dum da da da da da da
da da da da
da dum da da da da da da
da da da da
da dum da da da da
da dum da da da da — — — —
(to be rise up blk / people
sung de dum da da da da

five and six to a bench;
young mothers
old men
workers on their way home stopping
off, their faces
poised in the tiredness and blankness
recouping
taking the evening coolness
five and six to a bench.
Children too young to walk,
on the knees of their mothers

make

seven and eight to a bench.

The older ones play immies
or chase each other
or pigeons.

Sun catches the roofs, one side
of the arcade;
the whole of the plaza in shadow between
seven and eight of an evening.

The man with balloons
rises above it almost
his face deflated & quiet

blank

emptied of the city
as the city is emptied of air.
The strings wrapped to his hand
go up and do not move.
He stands at the edge of the square
not calling or watching at all.

The cart
with candy has food for the pigeons . . .

A lull,

a lull in the moving,
a bay in the sea of this city
into which drift
five and six to a bench
seven and eight to a bench

Now
the air moves the palmtrees,
faces.
All of it gentle

Barcelona . 27 . VI . 55

Source: R.M. & C.H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1964; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 319.

[The translators write]: “Over the greater part of Aboriginal Australia, particularly in the Centre, most songs . . . are arranged in cycles, a few words to each song. . . . [In this] section from the sacred Dulngulg cycle of the Mudbara tribe, east of the Victoria River country, Northern Territory . . . each line represents one song, which is repeated over and over before the singers move on to the next.”

Page 333 *From George Dyungayan’s Bulu Line*

Source: Stuart Cooke, ed. & trans., *George Dyungayan’s Bulu Line: A West Kimberley Song Cycle* (Glebe, Australia: Puncher & Wattmann Poetry, 2014), 44–60.

(1) “The Bulu Line,” in Stuart Cooke’s rendition, is a collection of *nurlu* “song-poems” (17 songs & three dances in the fuller version), which make up a complete cycle or “line” of poems in Nyigina culture. The original owner here was George Dyungayan (c. 1900–c. 1995), who received them from the spirit of his late father, Bulu, residing at a waterhole called Wanydyal, “the source from which all verses and dances of *Bulu* emanate.” Of the songs themselves Cooke writes: “Nurlu are relatively ‘young’ songs. But they are distinguished from Western styles because they arrive in people’s dreams; i.e. they’re not ‘composed’ in the conventional sense of the term. . . . Instead, their composition is attributed to various spirits, either *balangan* (spirits of the dead) or *rai* (childlike forms, believed to cause pregnancy).” From dreams, then, though not from the *Bugarrigurra*, or what is often translated as “The Law” or “The Dreaming [Dreamtime].”

Writes Cooke further, about the *nurlu* poems in performance: “The other defining feature of *nurlu* is their instrumentation. The songs are accompanied by pairs of boomerangs struck together and by bodily percussion like clapping or striking the thighs with cupped hands. The dances may also feature elaborate head gear and totems, known as *wangararra*, which are worn or carried by the performers. Like Western songs however [another Aboriginal genre] *nurlu* songpoems and dances can be performed by all members of the community; usually they serve as a form of entertainment prior to more serious ceremonies.”

The songpoems themselves mark out the dream path taken by Dyungayan under the guidance of Bulu—a rare & significant example of poem as map & landscape.

(2) A point that may be missed in the presentation here of Stuart Cooke’s workings by themselves is that the actual translation process involved a still more complicated discourse: the work of two songmen/lawmen (Paddy Roe [see below, p. 618] & Butcher Joe Nangan) & of the two outsiders (Cooke & Ray Keogh) who were writing down the words. Such a discourse was also an aspect of traditional Aboriginal self-reflection: the interpretation after-the-fact of words & actions as mysteries always in need of further clarification & unraveling. Wrote

R. M. Berndt as an earlier outside observer & translator: “One of the most interesting points about these songs is that explanations are always given. It was obvious that Aborigines themselves felt impelled to comment on each in order to make clear what they understood the words to mean.” A process of mind as universal as that of poetry itself.

[N.B. The reader may also want to check the transcription of an Aboriginal “talkpoem” (p. 379, above) that draws on a similar interaction between speaker & hearer.]

Page 338 Sightings: Kunapipi

Source: Songs selected & arranged by J. R. from R. M. Berndt, *Kunapipi: A Study of an Australian Aboriginal Religious Cult* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), 121–31.

Kunapipi is the name of a major fertility cult, which centers around “a Great Mother, expressed as either a single or dual personality, her power being extended to her daughters, the Wauwalak.” In the myth, these (two) Wauwalak Sisters leave their home territory after the elder has incestuous relations with a clansman & becomes pregnant. At a sacred water-hole she gives birth to a child, blood from the afterbirth attracting a great python (Julunggul), who lives in the hole. Then, writes Berndt:

. . . the sky was shut in with clouds: a storm broke, summoned by Julunggul. They washed the baby, to get rid of the smell of blood, but it was too late. Night had fallen. They crouched in the hut by the fire while the rain poured down outside, taking it in turns to dance and to call ritually in an effort to drive away the storm. When the elder sister danced . . . the rain dwindled to almost nothing. When the younger sister did this, she could check the storm only a little. Then they sang Kunapipi songs, and the storm died down.

Later the sisters are swallowed & vomited up—thus the ancient pattern of death & resurrection, etc.

But the relation of myth to ritual-event & song is complicated far beyond the simple telling. The ceremonial ground is at once the place-of-the-snake & womb-of-the-mother; & the myth is always a real presence behind the Kunapipi songs, forming (on other ceremonial occasions) the basis of both sacred & secular cycles with a clearly “narrative” quality. Here it’s (mostly) present through allusion, the songs’ actual “content” consisting of descriptions of accompanying ceremonial activities, particularly of ritual intercourse between clansmen (fertility “magic” sanctioned by the elder sister’s incest) & of “fire-throwing” (djamala) that “symbolizes the lightning sent by Julunggul.” Bullroarers of cypress bark reproduce the python’s roaring in the storm; also, the songs & dances are said to be those of the mythic beings themselves—the Sisters dancing to postpone the coming of the snake, etc.

Of the songs per se Berndt writes: “Like the majority of songs in Aboriginal Australia, these consist of ‘key’ words, which seem to us to need further explanation,

but are usually understood by natives singing or participating in the ritual. These 'key' words, several of which constitute a song, are really word pictures. . . . In short songs of this type in particular, the meaning of a word usually depends entirely upon the context. . . . Moreover . . . a song that is sung in one context, to a specific part of the rituals, may have one meaning, while in another context it has a different meaning." There are also different classes of words with the same "meaning": some open to the whole community, some requiring special knowledge, some used only in singing, etc.

Addendum. The editor, unlike the translator, is also interested in the out-of-context "carry-over" of the songs & has arranged this selection to suggest the possibilities of a noncontextual reading. In doing so, he has taken some songs in Berndt's literal renderings, some in his freer "general translations," & has patterned them after his own *Sightings* (see below).

o o o o o o o

Jerome Rothenberg
SIGHTINGS (VI)

1. The earth shudders under the rain.
2. A hand.
Five fingers.
3. Milkweed; was it that?
4. They add in rows.
5. Beginning from the waist, slip downwards; force
a smile.
6. Perhaps a dish.
A cup.
7. Horse grey knot
fallen throat of-blood.
8. One thought, a thousand movements.

Page 339 From The Goulburn Island Cycle

Source: Ronald M. Berndt, *Love Songs of Arnhem Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 56–67.

Complex in its presentation of multiple elements, the ritual poetry of the northeast Arnhem Landers brings together fertility in man (sexual, erotic) & nature (seasonal, monsoonal) as a matter of symbolic & ecological relationships. Sexuality is thus projected beyond the human, even the biological, & "onto the universe as a whole." But the terms are immediate, explicit, not mythic so much as physical & human—a narrative, writes Berndt, "about living persons who themselves act out a series of events, in a ritualized fashion, in order to achieve a

desired result.” And further: “As we have emphasized, Aboriginal man in this region, as in others, saw himself as part of nature, for he lived close to it and was wholly dependent upon its resources. Consequently, he humanized that environment and identified cause and effect in natural sequences, as having an internal logic that was relevant to himself and could be applied all around him. However, this materialism made up only part of the process he experienced himself and which he super-imposed, through a complex mytho-ritual medium, on his environment” (Berndt, *Love Songs*).

The ritual narrative as such follows the human actions & the slowly building movements of the storm: the summoning through the songs (but also the semen & blood) of the Lightning Snake (Yulunggul) in much the same form in which he appears in the Kunapipi ritual, above. And this too is curiously distanced by setting the events on the Goulburn Islands in the west rather than at Yirkalla, where the actual rites are enacted. There, the songs tell us, the men & women “speak the western language,” & the men are uncircumcised, therefore (derisively) described as “with long penes,” etc. The approach is thus immediate & exotic at once—all of this natural enough to an art, a practice, in which “ordinary events mirror transcendental events” (or vice versa) & the Dreamtime emerges, precisely, in the here & now.

Correspondences. Sexual symbolism is overt & not, it seems, a reading from outside; thus, Berndt: “From an oblique reference to sexual activity, coitus takes place in actuality, causing blood to flow. The scene is set for the coming monsoonal period, but the significance of the acts, viewed symbolically, must be sought in the Wawalag (and other) mythology. For example, spears = penes = snakes; fighting clubs = penes, placed to attract rain clouds = females = ball bags; clouds rise = females, joined by Lightning(s) = males; snakes writhe in the sky = copulation, resulting in rain = semen = blood, fertilizing the ground. These symbolic associations reaffirm the dual function of the cycle, underlining the relationship between the sexes and correlating human sexual intercourse with the intercourse of the elements.”

Song Structure & Performance. Berndt writes elsewhere: “The songs are usually sung straight through to a particular rhythm, and then repeated any number of times; so that the whole cycle . . . is rarely completed in one evening. . . . [There also seems to be] no defined punctuation in the actual singing; sentences and phrases may run from one to the other without an apparent break. . . .” [Compare this last point to modern practice.—J.R.] “[Songs of the northeast Arnhem Land region] are remarkable [also] for the fact that they are much longer than those in other areas of the Northern Territory. . . . [Finally] the traditional structure of [the] songs . . . has [not] stylized [the songmen’s] art [or] stifled individual expression. On the contrary, the great song men add a touch of new mastery to the old rhythms, and extend or abbreviate the original versions as the mood seizes them.”

And about the present sequence, viewing each line as a separate song, Berndt says: “Each poetic-song rendering, although it can stand alone, having its own

internal consistency and its own intrinsic meaning, leads on to something else. The information it contains is extended or amplified when it is placed in relation to other songs within the same cycle. Further, sequentiality is quite strictly ordered, with one event being regarded as an outcome of what has preceded it. This method of verse construction demonstrates clearly explicit recognition of a relationship between cause and effect, a relationship that has a significant bearing on the song content. It is demonstrated too, not only in the unfolding of events from song to song, but in the complex cross-referent system between one song and the next as well as within a song, which spells out interconnectedness of past and future events.”

A complexity, in brief, that belies whatever notions of a “primitive mentality” may still survive among us.

Synopsis. Prior to the excerpt given here, the songs have described preparations for the rites that have already brought scattered storms & rain. Singing & dancing, relaxation, etc., while “the men and women paint their bodies, as well as their boomerangs and fighting sticks, with special designs representing rain. The men are uncircumcised. Around their necks hang ball bags, which they grip in their teeth when dancing, and they call invocations to the clouds. The storm reaches the mainland, lashing the waters of the billabong. . . . As the wind rushes through the trees, it calls out the names of places through which it must pass on its travels. The singing and dancing are stilled now, and the bags are hung up, since they have served their purpose—the storm has become a reality.” Song eleven then begins with the intensification of the sexual rites, which will climax in the true arrival of the Lightning Snakes: “writh[ing] in the sky, copulating, twisting and turning among the clouds.” The passages thereafter describe the winds & floods in the storm’s wake, ending with a description of a seagull skimming the waters at night, hunting “with its sharp eyes, as a lover searches for his beloved. It sees the tracks of mice among the grass and foliage, swooping to catch one in its beak. The cry of the bird and the squeaking of mice echo into the sky and across the countryside.”

Page 345 From *The Kumulipo: Night Births*

Source: Martha Warren Beckwith, ed. & trans., *The Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), passim.

Kumu-(u)li-po—literally “Beginning-(in)-deep-darkness,” but also the name of the first male god born from the Night, or *Po*.

Pimoe—“a shape-shifting being of uncertain sex, for whom in her feminine form legendary heroes go fishing.”

Paliuli—“ever verdant land of the gods where abundant food grows without labor.”

“The Hawaiian *Kumulipo*,” writes the present translator, “is a genealogical prayer chant linking the royal family to which it belonged not only to the primary gods . . . [&] to deified chiefs . . . within the family line, but to the stars in the

heavens and the plants & animals useful to life on earth, who must also be named within the chain of birth and their representatives in the spirit world thus be brought into the service of their children who live to carry on the line in the world of mankind.” Queen Liliuokalani, who first translated the work in the 1890s, dated it from about 1700 & gave the author’s name as Kealumoku.

Further, the *Kumulipo* “consists in sixteen sections called *wa*, a word used for an interval in time or space. The first seven sections” (from which all excerpts in the present volume are taken) “fall within a period called the *Po*, the next nine belong to the *Ao*, words generally explained as referring to the world of ‘Night’ before the advent of ‘Day’; to ‘Darkness’ before ‘Light’; or, as some say, to the ‘Spirit world’ in contrast to the ‘World of living men.’ . . . Of the over two thousand lines that make up the chant, more than a thousand are straight genealogies listing by pairs, male and female, the various branches . . . making up the family lines of descent. Thus, although the whole is strung together within a unified framework, it may in fact consist of a collection of independent family genealogies pieced together with name songs and hymns memorializing the gods venerated by different branches of the ancestral stock” (Beckwith, *The Kumulipo*). The chant ends with the name of the chief’s newly born son, whose claim to kingship it helps establish.

Addenda. (1) The “dog child” of the fourth excerpt is connected with “the hairless ‘Olohe people . . . dog men with the mystical shape-shifting powers of the demigods.” *Maloma* is “the place people go when they die”; the *Hula*, or dance wind, blows there.

(2) Beckwith points to the heavy punning of the original, in which “the use of double meaning in a word extends to whole passages.” In addition “the Hawaiian genius for quick transition of thought, piling up suggested images without compulsion of persistency to any one of them, makes it difficult to translate consistently.” Her own solution would lead to double renderings & much interpretive commentary; but the possibility that this Polynesian nightworld-dreamworld-punworld can be delivered through some form of Joycean translation oughtn’t to be overlooked. Sounds from *Finnegans Wake*, e.g.:

. . . Dark hawks hear us. Night! Night! My ho head halls. I feel as heavy as yonder stone. Tell me of John or Shaun? Who were Shem and Shaun the living sons or daughters of ? Night now! Tell me, tell me, tell me, elm! Night night! Telmetale of stem or stone. Beside the rivering waters of, hitherandthithering waters of. Night!

—or something like that as a way.

(3) For more on genealogies, composition-by-naming, etc., see the notes on the Maori creation poem (p. 20), the Egyptian god names (p. 10; commentary p. 445), the Arabic “names of the lion, (p. 25), & the African praise-poems (commentary, p. 474).

Page 348 *The Woman Who Married a Caterpillar*

Source: Armand Schwerner's working in *Alcheringa*, o.s., no. 4 (Autumn 1972): 34, based on *Hawaiian Stories and Wise Sayings* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College Fieldwork in Folklore, 1923).

Kumuhea—identified elsewhere as “the god of cut-worms.”

Kane—principal Hawaiian god of creation/procreation at the time of the first missionaries.

A similar theme—but with a notably different relationship & issue—turns up in the Inuit “Woman Who Took in a Larva to Nurse” (p. 228).

Page 349 *The Body-Song of Kio*

Source: J. Frank Stimson, *Tuamotuan Religion*, Bulletin No. 103 (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1933), 32–33.

Kio, or *Kiho*—supreme god & creator.

Oatea, or *Vatea*—overlord of the world of light.

“*Ruea-a-raka*” (the singer of the poem) “insists that the enumeration of the parts of *Kio*'s body was chanted by *Kio* to *Oatea* as part of the requisite ritual, and finds nothing incompatible with the god's inherent dignity in its wording; she explains that *Kio*, when conferring his *mana* upon *Oatea*, was obliged thus to detail all of the various parts of his own body whose disparate powers were consequently passed over respectively, and intact, to *Oatea*” (Stimson, *Tuamotuan Religion*).

The reader may want to compare this account of *Kio*'s body parts with Rabelais's “descriptions of King Lent” on p. 315.

Page 350 *Funeral Eva*

Source: English version by David Rafael Wang, previously unpublished.

Translator's note: “The *eva* was attributed to Chief Koroneu, who composed it over the death of his son, *Atiroa*, who had died in bed of disease. The boy had been treated by *Pangeivi*, *Tane*'s high priest.

“The performers of the *eva* blackened their faces with charcoal, shaved their heads, cut their skin to draw blood, and wore *pakoko*, filthy cloth dipped in mud.”

Page 350 *Toto Vaca*

Source: Translations by Pierre Joris from Tristan Tzara, *Poèmes Nègres*, as published in *Alcheringa*, o.s., vol. 2, no. 1 (1976): 86, 113. Tzara's French can be found in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, 1975).

Although the present translation is by now at some remove from its original, it illustrates the contribution of Tzara & other European avant-gardists to the recovery of a primal poetry & what he himself called “the exalted source of the poetic function.” By 1916 Tzara & Co. were chanting translations of African &

Oceanic poems in Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire, & Tzara was compiling an anthology of such work—never published in his lifetime. The Maori original of “Toto Vaca” was performed by Tzara as a sound-poem—therefore its appearance here. Like the rest of his *Poèmes Nègres* (“discoveries & translations” he called them), it reflects the Dadaists' desire to break the stranglehold of European art—to search, as Hugo Ball wrote, for an art that “is the key to every former art: a Solomonic key that will open all the mysteries.”

Pages 352–53 *The Lovers I & II*

Source: Kenneth P. Emory, *Kapingamarangi: Social and Religious Life of a Polynesian Atoll*, Bulletin No. 228 (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1965), 166–68. Both dictated by Tomoki.

The cunnilingus theme is explicit in the second poem but informs the first poem also. Emory writes of it: “The practice . . . of initiating intercourse by or limiting the sexual relations to cunnilingus . . . has such a prominent place in the chants that I suspect it functioned as a means of birth control, in the spacing of children. It was institutionalized to the extent that the hair-do of the men, the leaving of a point of hair on each side of the forehead . . . was consciously thought of as providing a grip for the women.”

The first poem is exactly as Emory gives it; in the second the present editor has arranged Emory's prose translation in verse lines & made some minor changes to ease the reading. The *waka mara* is “a square beam used in setting up the warps in weaving.”

Page 354 *Flight of the Chiefs (Song V)*

Source: Buell H. Quain, *The Flight of the Chiefs: Epic Poetry of Fiji* (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1942), 85–88.

Flight-of-the-Chiefs—legendary home of the ancestors of the present-day inhabitants of Bua Province, Fiji.

The-Eldest—the ruling chief at Flight-of-the-Chiefs; also called Sailing-the-Ocean.

Lady Song-of-Tonga—The-Eldest's chief wife.

Fruit-of-the-Distant-Sleep—The-Eldest's daughter, here a child but in the great Third Song (too long to reproduce here) the central figure.

Clapping-Out-of-Time—a dwarf of chiefly standing, brought to Flight-of-the-Chiefs long before The-Eldest's time, to amuse Sir Watcher-of-the-Land, who was then acting chief.

Nabosulu nabusele—the conventional closing for all epic songs.

The “composer” of this & fourteen of the fifteen songs in Quain's collection was Daubitu Velema who, as Quain explains, “[alone] among the descendants of his ancestral village (The-Place-of-the-Pandanus) . . . has inherited the right to practice [shamanistic] arts in his land-group and bears the sacred tokens. . . .

When he was a small child, people knew he was destined to become a seer. It could be seen readily in his diffidence, his excitability and his curiosity about serious things.” His mother’s brother taught him & it is this uncle’s “ancient war club and axe that give him power to compose epic songs, ‘true songs.’ . . . In trance or in sleep the songs come to him, taught him by his supernatural mentors (ancestors). He takes no personal credit for his compositions, does not even distinguish between those which he has composed himself and those old ones which his mother’s brother must surely have taught him.”

The Fijian poems are chanted by the individual composer, sometimes with the help of a chorus. “The rhythms implicit in the language are qualified by a musical style which can freely reduplicate syllables to change the stress in words. For instance, the word *cere* may become *ceyeccecyere* to suit the rhythm of the chant.” But though “the lines tend to be of equal length . . . no deliberate patterning of rhythm appears.” Rhyme is very insistent, so that the lines of Songs I & II, e.g., end consistently in U-A. Gesture, or what Quain calls “posture language,” accompanies the songs.

There’s also an interesting narrative device imbedded in the language itself, which Quain indicates by shifting to first person & past tense from the “normal” third person present. “Fijian verbs in known dialects are (in fact) timeless.” He writes of this:

Frequently in formal songs action is recounted in the first person to distinguish it from direct discourse. I have indicated this change of person by italics. The person referred to is always the most recently mentioned. . . . A particle (*wa*) which occurs frequently but not always, in these sections, has been interpreted by missionary students to indicate imperfect tense. . . . At the Place-of-Pandanus it is not used in ordinary speech. In the songs it occurs always in the first line of direct narrative and nowhere else. To distinguish those passages which are direct narrative from those which are not, I have consistently translated the former as past tense throughout, although grammatical excuses for doing so are slight.

In short there’s something going on that he can’t put his finger on but knows to be there—like those devices described by Whorf & others in which the structure of a language determines the ways its users sense reality. However far from the linguistic solution Quain’s intuition may be, the use of contrasting voices makes for meaningful movement in the English.

Compare the note on “Inatoippiler” (p. 547) & the modern analogues mentioned in that commentary.

Page 356 *Animal Story X*

Source: Buell H. Quain, *The Flight of the Chiefs: Epic Poetry of Fiji* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1942), 223.

Roko—highest native official of a province, under British regime.

Molau and *basina*—kinds of firewood; each has special function in Fijian fire-tending.

Quain further describes it as a “dance-song called *Village of the Animals* [which], though it makes but little sense . . . is filled with fine intralinear rhymes & bounding rhythms.” Okay, but its making-but-little-sense didn’t stop him from translating it, & having it now one feels an actual clarity about it: not necessarily in *what* it means (as some single equivalency) but in the positioning of the meaningful segments within it. It is very much what Rasmussen wrote of Iglulik techniques:

The Eskimo poet does not mind if here and there some item be omitted in the chain of his associations; as long as he is sure of being understood, he is careful to avoid all weakening.

Addenda. (1) For more on this last point, see, e.g., the commentary on Malinowski’s translation of “The Gumagabu Song” (p. 598).

(2) Compare the poem’s movement to the following, among many modern analogues:

Wallace Stevens
PLOWING ON SUNDAY
The white cock’s tail
Tosses in the wind.
The turkey-cock’s tail
Glitters in the sun.
Water in the fields.
The wind pours down.
The feathers flare
And bluster in the wind.
Remus, blow your horn!
I’m ploughing on Sunday,
Ploughing North America.
Blow your horn!
Tum-ti-tum,
Ti-tum-tum-tum!
The turkey-cock’s tail
Spreads to the sun.
The white cock’s tail
Streams to the moon.
Water in the fields.
The wind pours down.

Page 361 Allegory of the Land

Source: Inrasara, *The Purification Festival in April*, translation by Alec Schachner (Vietnam: The Culture and Literature Publishing House, 2015).

Of Inrasara’s re-invention & transmission of Cham & Vietnamese language & traditions—the indigenous Cham foremost—translator Alec Schachner writes:

“Like all great storytellers, Inrasara pulls from a wide network of experience, weaving together the past and the present into a tapestry of the personal and collective, blending the real and the mythical. Wandering across history, literature, folklore, music, philosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, pop culture, myth, war, peace, harvest, community, tradition, dream, language, ritual, epic and the everyday, Inrasara’s poems sing not only the song of the Cham people in modern Vietnam, but also of all human experience—of our imagining of self and of the myriad innermost emotional lives of globalization and modernity. Deeply rooted in his readings of the Cham epics, Inrasara’s verse somehow also resonates with the flowing lines of Whitman and Hughes, a montage of human experience and insight, capturing essences both singular and universal.”

Page 361 Where the Song Begins

Source: Translation by J.R. in *Like A New Sun: New Indigenous Mexican Poetry*, edited by Victor Terán & David Shook (Los Angeles: Phoneme Media, 2015), 3–13.

(1) Since the late 1970s Juan Gregorio Regino has been a leading figure in the movement—throughout Latin America—aimed at the creation of new literatures using native languages alongside the dominant Spanish. A Mazatec by birth & upbringing, Regino was a co-founder & president of the *Comité Directivo de Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas* (Association of Indigenous Writers). His poetry & other writings have appeared in his own Mazatec & Spanish versions, & in 1996 he received the *Netzahualcōyotl Prize for Indigenous Literature*. He has for some years been the general director of *Popular [Indigenous] Cultures for Conaculta* (the National Council for Culture and Arts) in Mexico. The movement in which this plays a part is groundbreaking & of the greatest importance as well to our own ideas of poetry & poetics. The relation of Regino’s own work to that of the Mazatec shaman poet María Sabina (p. 57) is also to be noted.

(2) Writes Regino elsewhere: “Our writing was interrupted many years ago, and yet we have learned by means of orality to preserve our memory. From the people of wisdom in my land I have learned to value and to cultivate the word. For my people the word is truth, feeling, memory, symbol of struggle, of resistance, of identity. . . . The indigenous languages are a patrimony of our country that should not go on developing in hiding and subordination. They are living languages whose contact with Spanish brings a mutual enrichment, because there are no pure languages and no superior or inferior ones” (“The Poet Speaks, the Mountain Sings”). (See also the opening paragraph of the 1967 Pre-face to *Technicians of the Sacred*, p. xxx, above.)

Page 366 Two for the God Aia

Source: Allan Natachee, trans., *Aia: Mekeo Songs* (Port Moresby: Papua Pocket Poets, 1968).

(1) This & the several Papuan poems elsewhere in the present volume represent not only traditional & oral work in translation but an effort by Papuan poets to

control the process & to create thereby a new English poetry in unbroken connection with the tribal past. The present translator—older than others of the emergent generation—writes of his own experience with the Mekeo poems he collects & translates here: “When I was 3 or 4 years old I used to hear the older people singing. Then when they stopped singing, I used to sing just what they had done. They were very surprised in hearing me singing. I was very fond of smearing my body with red native paint. The song I first learned to sing was one of the war songs. It bears the name of the god Aia . . . Then my poor mother died and I was taken to the nuns. There were no more war songs for me. . . .”

In the 1960s & 1970s the new movement showed itself in magazines such as *Kovave* (“New Guinea’s first literary magazine”) & *Gigibori*, as well as in the *Papuan Pocket Poets*, a series of small books edited by Ulli Beier. The two languages functioning as lingua franca are English & Papuan pidgin (see p. 328 & attendant commentary).

(2) “The power of both the old & new is in the attention to what image & word reveal as something sacred; it is also the basic cleanness of the English, in its freedom from the debris of conventional poeticisms. For the poets (the translators in the present instance) have gotten down to those ‘straight, sharp words’ that Carlos Williams talks of elsewhere, those words as ‘nails to hold together the joints of the new architecture.’ But maybe, coming from so near to the local source, they hadn’t ever lost the sense of them” (J. R., in “Postface” to Ulli Beier’s *Words of Paradise: Poetry of Papua New Guinea*, 1973).

Page 367 from The Age of Wild Ghosts

Source: Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), passim. The first song here was chanted by Luo Lizhu & the other two by Li Wenyi.

What emerges here, within the framework of a traditional “minority” culture in China is the survival of rituals of exorcism & healing, now incorporating “wild ghosts” as the invasive spirits of those doomed both as perpetrators & as victims by the violent actions of the central Chinese state, from the Great Leap Forward (& subsequent famine) of the late 1950s, to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s & 70s, to the era of Communist-sponsored state capitalism in the present. For this a charged & musical language—close to what we would think of as poetry—is again the primary instrument, whose singers & makers continue to function as native technicians of the sacred. The tension here is between the local & traditional at home as against the imaginary & distant in places of power like Beijing & Shanghai, for which the “wild ghosts” of the recent dead—in the local village & in the distant state—appear as both grim reminders & reawakened voices.

Writes Erik Mueggler elsewhere of what he calls “the geography of pain” & “the age of wild ghosts”: “In much of rural China, memories of past violence are crucial to people’s sense of their own relation to distant centers of state power. In particular, memories of death from hunger during the Great Leap famine (1958–61) and suicide during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) continue to haunt

people's imagination of state and nation in ways that those of us who did not live through these devastations are only beginning to discover. Many of the diverse, non-Han, Tibeto-Burman speaking communities scattered through the mountains of Southwest China share traditions of poetic speech, explicitly intended to deal with bodily afflictions attributed to spectral memories of the violently dead.

"In a Lolop'o (officially Yi) minority community, where I did fieldwork from 1991–1993, poetic speech is used to drive the ghosts of those who died of hunger, suicide, or other violence out of the bodies of their descendants and into the surrounding landscape. The ghosts are driven along a specific route through surrounding mountain villages. Their path eventually takes them down the nearby Jinsha river to the Changjiang (Yangtze). They make these rivers their steeds, riding them across the empire's breadth to the richly-imagined cities of Chongqing, Wuhan, Nanjing, Shanghai, and Beijing. En route, they are to feast on piles of meat and barrels of drink, buy beautiful clothing in the markets, and hobnob with officials. The fragment of one chanted exorcism, which finds the ghosts in Beijing—their penultimate destination before they disperse into sea and sky—encapsulates [these] themes

"(With the exception of proper names and terms for political meetings and airplane crashes, spoken in Mandarin . . . , [these chants are] in a sub-dialect of the Central dialect of Yi.)"

[N.B. "A prominent leader of the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao died in a 1971 airplane crash while fleeing Beijing in the wake of a failed attempt to assassinate Chairman Mao. Jiang Qing, Mao's wife and one of the Cultural Revolution's notorious Gang of Four, was publicly tried in 1980 and sentenced to death, commuted later to life in prison. To people in this mountain community, Jiang Qing and Lin Biao were the king and queen of the violently dead. And, as the seat of their spectral government, Beijing was the ultimate geographical source of all bodily afflictions attributed to memories of past violence" (Mueggler, "Spectral Subversions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1999).]

Page 369 *Three Incantations*

Source: Ambar Past, ed., *Incantations: Songs, Spells and Images by Mayan Women* (El Paso: Cincos Puntos Press, 2009).

The immediate source here is the Taller Leñateros ("woodlanders' workshop") in Chiapas, Mexico, an alliance of Mayan & mestizo women & men, founded in 1975 by the American-born Mexican poet Ambar Past. Among its self-proclaimed objectives the following: "praise & dissemination of Amerindian and popular cultural values: song, literature and plastic arts; the rescue of old and endangered techniques such as the extraction of dyes from wild plants; and generating worthwhile and decently-paid employment for women and men who have no studies, no career, no future." Of these projects the most ambitious has been the publication of an elaborately constructed bilingual book (Tzotzil/Spanish, 200 pages with 60 original silkscreens by Tzotzil and Tzeltal women artists), *Conjueros y*

ebreiedades, cantos de mujeres maya, followed by *Incantations: Songs, Spells and Images by Mayan Women*, a Tzotzil/English version. The fruit of the work of 150 people across thirty years, these are the first books written, illustrated and put together by Mayan people in nearly a thousand years, “since the First Motherfathers made their sacred codices.”

(2) Writes Ambar Past:

The Tzotzil authors of this anthology claim their spells and songs were given to them by the ancestors, the First Fathermothers, who keep the Great Book in which all words are written down. Pasakwala Kómes, an unlettered seer from Santiago El Pinar, learned her conjurations by dreaming the Book. Loxa Jiménez López of Epal Ch'en, Chamula, tells of an Anjel, daughter of the Lord of the Caves, who began whispering in her ear and then, in dreams, showed her the Book with all the magic words to be learned.

*Show me your three books,
your three letters,
the ink of the letters*

prays María Tzu to ask for the secret of black dye, directing her verses to the Ancient Earth in Flower, the Coffin Where the Secrets are Kept. Even though few of the authors of this anthology can read, even though the Tzotzil Maya have no libraries nor bookstores near their houses, a wise person is said to have ‘books in the heart,’ according to Robert M. Laughlin’s translation of a sixteenth-century Spanish-Tzotzil dictionary. The Mayan word for book, *jun* or *vun*, also means paper, and the making of paper is an important Mesoamerican tradition. During rituals ancient Mayan women pierced their tongues and dripped the blood on paper which was then burnt. Even today in the *amate* papermaking town of San Pablito Pahuatlán in Puebla, paper is still burnt as an offering to the gods.

[N.B. The reader might also consult María Sabina’s vision of the “Book of Language” (p. 432) as a comparable Mazatec version.]

Page 372 From Twenty-Eight Variations on Themes from Chuvash & Udmurt Folk Songs

Source: Gennady Aygi, *One Hundred Variations on Themes from Folk-Songs of the Volga Region*, translated from Russian by Peter France (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 2002), 74–93.

There is a struggle of languages here, & for Aygi a pull from the indigenous mother tongue (Chuvash) to the language of the dominating, still imperial Russian power. Like others Aygi, a major Russian & Chuvash poet, made the transition, translating himself into Russian while continuing, as here, as a voice for the endangered but surviving Chuvash language. Writes Peter France as Aygi’s

principal translator: “The bond and continuity with earlier generations—with Aygi’s own Chuvash forebears—is characteristic of this poet for whom poetry—including translation—was an act of communion between individuals, generations and whole peoples As well as translating into Chuvash, he worked to spread the Chuvash word abroad. The Chuvash people, speaking a Turkic language, have preserved much of their own culture and relics of their old religion in the face of centuries of Russification. It was Aygi’s belief that ‘small peoples’ such as his had their word to say in the concert of nations, an important word that larger, more confident cultures would be unwise to ignore. To this end he devoted many years to creating an anthology of Chuvash poetry, from ancient pagan prayers, through folksongs and ethnographic descriptions of festivals, to poetry of the late twentieth century Aygi himself was often called a ‘shaman’—he declined the term, but for him poetry was a ‘sacred rite’ whose role was to maintain human solidarity” (P. France, “In Memory of Gennady Aygi”).

His variations on Chuvash themes have an obvious relation to the work of composers like Bartok & Stravinsky as a means for bringing together the very old & very new toward what Apollinaire called “the most poetic & most modern depiction of the universe” (see above, p. 465).

Page 374 The Moons of Childhood

Source: Ahmatjan Osman, *Uyghurland: The Furthest Exile*, trans. from the Uyghur & Arabic by Jeffrey Yang & Ahmatjan Osman (Los Angeles: Phoneme Media, 2015).

*I will watch everything
through doubtful eyes
I am the Robinson [Crusoe] of the times
I will build my island
on the other side
of the world*

(1) Osman’s was an exile, in short, that led from a culturally suppressed East Turkistan (Xinjiang Province in China) to the University of Damascus in Syria & to a prolonged & still ongoing exile in Canada. Born into a Muslim Uyghur family in 1964, it’s his largely oral Uyghur inheritance that underlies & sustains the poetry, which reaches out from there to resources in Chinese, Arabic, & a range of newly acquired European languages & modernisms. Of all of that (the Uyghur rootedness & beyond) his own voice, as in the preface to the English language *Uyghurland* that follows, is by far the clearest testament.

(2)

Traditional Uyghur poetry is rooted in shamanism and animism, and poetic inspiration is understood as an actual presence, what is unseen, which speaks through the poet. The speaker of the poem is an inspired other that is not the

poet, for the poet exists simply as a vessel for the lyric voice, which assumes the nature of a sanctified being. Poetry is thus sanctification, and the poet a messenger between the sacred and the listener-reader.

The Uyghur poet summons an unknown presence in the absence felt by the living.

Connecting this ancient role of verse to contemporary Uyghur poetry, one can turn to Roland Barthes's idea of the death of the author. For Barthes, the poet is essentially a copyist of a text written by an anonymous author who originates in the unknown. Heidegger describes this phenomenon in a different way when he says that the poet is one who listens to language speak for us in what is spoken.

The Uyghur poet listens to the absence that inspires speech.

Mallarmé defines this poetic language as a gift from the gods, or chance, as recorded by poets across the ages to today. Rimbaud famously said, 'I is an other.'

I, too, am one of the many.

—A. Osman, "Author's Preface," *Uyghurland*

Page 378 *Two Creole Poems*

Source: Translations by Jack Hirschman & Boadiba, in Paul Laraque & Jack Hirschman, *Open Gate: An Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 2001) 5, 21.

Ogun is the god of war and fire in Haitian Voodoo religion. *Banda* is a very erotic dance, the specialty of the *Iwa Gede*. *Gede* are the family of the *Iwa* or *Loa* who embody the powers of death and fertility.

The continuity, as elsewhere, is in the language—the resistance also—emerging here in a new/old literature drawing on deep resources in Haitian mind & spirit (*esprit*). Writes Paul Laraque (Pòl Larak) as one of the founders of that literature, in *Open Gate*: "Creole is, with voodoo, one of the most important elements of Haitian culture. It is a mixture of French, spoken by the white masters, and of the Black slaves' African languages and dialects, during colonial time. It can be either a revolutionary tool in the interests of the masses, or a reactionary one if manipulated by the cruel exploiting classes. It is a beautiful language with the rhythm of the drum and the images of a dream, especially in its poetry, and a powerful weapon in the struggle of our people for national and social liberation."

For more on the nature of creoles & pidgins & their emergence as the language of a new poetry, see pp. 597 & 627.

Source: Paddy Roe, *Gularabulu: Stories from the West Kimberley*, ed. Stephen Muecke (West Kimberley: Freemantle Arts Centre Press, 1983), 31–34.

*This is all public,
You know (it) is for everybody.
Children, women, everybody.
See, this is the thing they used to tell us:
Story, and we know.*

(1)

SYNOPSIS.

A fine strong man used to provide handsomely for his two wives by hunting.

One day he thought he'd see if the *worawora* woman really existed, so he painted himself up in the required way. He left his camp and went to the right tree where the woman came out to meet him.

They hunted together, but when he wanted to share the hunt between her and his women in camp she refused, taking all the food for herself.

The man went back home empty-handed. His wives questioned him, he said he could find nothing.

Everyday he went to this woman and the same thing happened. Eventually he revealed the truth at his wives' insistence.

Then he went and decapitated the woman.

(2) Paddy Roe's choice of title, *Gularabulu* ("the coast where the sun goes down"), references his own home territory in the West Kimberley region of western Australia. But the work is an instance too of his reaching out, by the transmission in Aboriginal English of a range of narratives both traditional & contemporary. The resultant "talk poems" (D. Antin), drawn from a word-for-word transcription of his spoken account, provide a conscious transmission from him to "us," for which Stephen Muecke (identified by bold face in the text) takes on the roll of listener & scribe. In this process, Muecke writes further, "Aboriginal English is a vital communicative *link* between Aboriginal speakers of different language backgrounds. It also links blacks and whites *in* Australia, so, as it is used in these stories, it could be said to represent the language of 'bridging' between the vastly different European and Aboriginal cultures. It is therefore in this language that aspects of a new Aboriginality could be said to be emerging."

In the making of such a new "narrative art," the transcribers follow a pattern along lines developed earlier by Dennis Tedlock (p. 538 above) & analogous as well to David Antin's "talk poetry." Thus: "The texts are divided into lines whenever the narrator pauses. The length of these pauses is indicated by one dash per second of pause. Hesitations in mid-line, at which points the breath is held at the glottis, are indicated by commas. Extended vowels, 'growls' or breathy expressions, are indicated by adding more letters to the extent of one per second. The texts are also broken up into episodes."

(3) In constructing his own poetics, Paddy Roe, as Muecke describes it, “distinguishes between three types of story: *trustori* (true stories), *bigaregara* (stories from the dreaming) and *devil stori* (stories about devils, spirits, etc.).” In the last of these “something inexplicable or anomalous happens which can only be explained by the presence of some spirit being. As Paddy Roe says, in connection with the alluring Worawora spirit woman [in the episode presented here]: ‘*Sometimes we see a woman pass but, when you look again you might say: Oh yes I’ve only seen a grass. But it is the woman Worawora, she still lives today.*’”

Page 382 *They Went to the Moon Mother*

Source. Barbara Tedlock, “The Beautiful and the Dangerous: Zuni Ritual and Cosmology as an Aesthetic System,” *Conjunctions* 6 (1984): 260. Reprinted with commentary in J.R., *Shaking the Pumpkin*.

The song as presented here is an instance among many of how a surviving & resilient “stateless language” incorporates the newest-&-latest into a traditional system of poetry as “news,” in Ezra Pound’s words, “that stays news.” Barbara Tedlock in her translation of the song cites it as an example of the Zuni concept of *tso’ya*: a “multisensory aesthetic of the beautiful.” “A beautiful song text,” she writes, “consists of simultaneously literal and allegorical levels of meaning A Zuni performer-composer explained to us that this song is simultaneously about two stars (Mars as morning star and Aldebaran as Lying Star) and two American astronauts each wearing two stars on his helmet, who may or may not have been lying about their ride to the Moon Mother on the White Man’s dragonfly: a rocketship. They report back to the people on earth via their sacred rainmaking bundle, Houston Control, that the moon will bless them with silt, alluvial deposits of the kind thought by scientists to be on the moon and present in the Southwest after every heavy rain. The reiterated ‘stretching, stretching, stretching’ refers to corn plants reaching out for the rain, people reaching old age, and the rocketship reaching the moon. This song, a Zuni favorite that summer, was repeated more than twenty times by request of the Mudhead clowns who are the ultimate judges and critics of all masked performances.”

Addendum.

Etel Adnan

from “A FUNERAL MARCH FOR THE FIRST COSMONAUT”

I was in Carthage and the American
satellite was orbiting over St.
Augustin’s land. I told him: African,
today you would not have drowned yourself
in the sea of the Roman Empire
but go into that fifth ocean when the sun sets
as it rises so that it is always night

and always day and the stars we are launching
be the antennas of that beeping
pulsing thinking atom
of human life.

Seventeen sunrises in one day.

Page 383 *How Kora Was Born*

Source: Translation by Bob Holman & Papa Susso, from B. Holman, *Sing This One Back to Me* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2013), 57.

Susso's art as a griot (a *jeli* in Mandinkan) is firmly rooted, by his continuing account, in the Mandinkan oral tradition but has moved through translation & collaboration with U.S. poet Bob Holman into a written form that treats "melodies as speech," as Susso has it, thereby changing "songs" to "poems." Concerning Susso & the traditions from which his work derives, the biography on Susso's website reads:

Alhaji Papa Susso (Suntu), master *kora* player, traditional musician, oral historian, virtuoso and director of the Koriya Musa Center for Research in Oral Tradition, was born on the 29th of September, 1947, in the village of Sotuma Sere in the Upper River Division of The Republic of Gambia, West Africa.

Papa Susso hails from a long line of Griots (traditional oral historians). His father taught him to play the *kora* when he was five years old.

The *kora* was invented by the "Susso" family of the Mandinka tribe of the great Manding Empire. It is a twenty-one-stringed harp-lute unique to the westernmost part of Africa and is meant to be played only by the *Jeli* (professional musicians, praise singers and oral historians), who were traditionally attached to the royal courts. Their duties included recounting tribal history and genealogy, composing commemorative songs and performing at important tribal events. . . .

Papa Susso is a Muslim by religion. He has traveled quite extensively to East, West and Central Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Canada, and the United States of America, spreading his special message of peace and love.

Current performances are available at YouTube & elsewhere on the Internet.

Page 384 *The Prayer of the Bear*

Source: Translation from Khanty & Russian by Alexander Vaschenko & Claude Clayton Smith, in *The Way of Kinship : An Anthology of Native Siberian Literature* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 213-17.

(1) What continues into the present is the Khanty Bear Feast, still practiced on native grounds while entering into a *new* poetry that keeps alive the *old* images

& powers. Of Taragupta's connection to this, his translators write: "Born in 1945 in the village of Poslovy in the Yama-Nenets autonomous region . . . Taragupta devotes his time to restoring the ancient Khanty Bear Feast epic and native philosophy as well as restoring the art of making native musical instruments In 'The Prayer of the Bear' the son of the master of towns and hamlets is the ancient Khanty hunter who kills the Bear. The Son of the Sky is the Sacred Bear himself, son of *Nurni Torum*, the supreme god of the Khanty, Father of the Skies. The forest giants are powerful spirits, malevolent toward men, but often stupid. The White-Neck Mother is the ancient She-Deer Bear worship is known through virtually the whole of Siberia, from the Komi people west of the Ural Mountains to the Ainu of Sakhalin Island."

For more on the circumpolar bear cult, etc., see p. 264 & the attendant commentary.

(2) As a witness to the Khanty Bear Feast, the Kiowa Indian novelist N. Scott Momaday writes: "In the Khanty bear ceremony, one of the principal participants is a singer. He carries a stick on which there are a hundred notches. Each notch represents a song. The singer sings these hundred songs during the ceremony, which lasts four or five days. The songs are committed to the singer's memory. This is a remarkable feat of memorization and indicates beyond doubt that the oral tradition of the Khanty people is as vital as was the oral tradition of the Anglo-Saxons who recited *Beowulf* in the ninth century or of the Navajo singer who sings the Night Chant in the twenty-first century. Words are the keys, language is the repository of culture" (in Vaschenko & Smith, *The Way of Kinship*).

(3) A Plains Indian "death song," calling into question the singer's own bear totem as guardian power:

Big Bear
you deceive me

A view of the world, in short, open enough to put questions above answers as the mark of a truly human life.

Or a Crow song as a further accounting:

we want what is real
we want what is real
don't deceive us!

—Translated by Lewis Henry Morgan, *The Indian Journals*, 1859–62

and again from the Pawnee:

can this be real
can this be real
this life I am living?

Source: Translation from Occitan & French by Pierre Joris & Nicole Peyrafitte, in *Poems and Poetics*, ed. J.R., <http://poemsandpoetics.blogspot.com>, June 21, 2014.

Write the translators of what's at play here: "Marcela Delpastre (1925–1998) is an immense poet, prose writer & gatherer of tales & songs, an Occitan ethnopoetics practitioner from the Corrèze region of the Limousin—or 'occupied Occitania.' Though she studied philosophy & literature in high school & then decorative arts in Limoges, she gave it all up in 1945 to return to Germont, the small village where she was born & would die, & run the family farm. Writing both in Occitan & in French, she produced a massive oeuvre still in the process of being published (by Jan dau Melhau at Editions du Chamin de Sant Jaume). As one commentator put it: 'She is as much of a literary genius as Manciet or Rouquette and yet in France she is accorded much less recognition, being considered a less-valued 'peasant-poet.' A witness of the profound upheavals of the post-WW2 era, she cultivates an ongoing absolute relationship to the—her—land & to her language(s), through conscious & reactive writing & persistent anger, both nourished by ethnography & a deep knowledge of ecosystems & of the human soul. This profound relation to the earth & the spiritual world it reveals, a quasi-shamanistic process visible in the poems here published, is compacted in the term she insisted on using to define herself: the low-Limousin word meaning 'peasant,' which is a homophone of the French word '*paien*,' meaning 'pagan.'"

Addendum. An echo too of Rimbaud, circa 1870: "If I have a taste for anything it's only for earth & stones." To which later in acknowledgement:

Charles Olson
from *THE KINGFISHERS* (1953)

It works out this way, despite the disadvantage.

I offer, in explanation, a quote:

si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guères
que pour la terre et les pierres.

Despite the discrepancy (an ocean courage age)

this is also true: if I have any taste

it is only because I have interested myself
in what was slain in the sun

I pose you your question:

shall you uncover honey / where maggots are?

I hunt among stones

Page 389 *The North Wind Whips*

Source: Translation by David Shook in *Like A New Sun: New Indigenous Mexican Poetry*, edited by Victor Terán & David Shook (Los Angeles: Phoneme Media, 2015), 131.

A significant array of stateless languages & cultures, while positioned outside the reach of dominant nation-states, have begun more recently to create new literatures as vehicles for those outsiders by the ruling powers. In Latin America alone, writers in indigenous or subaltern languages & creoles have appeared from multiple directions—Mapuche, Mayan, Mazatec, Nahutal, Quechua, Zapotec, among others. Like others so engaged, & perhaps more than most, Víctor Terán begins from a base in the Zapotec language spoken—& now written—on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec & in Oaxaca, & pushes outward to merge & become a part of the poetry & literature of the world at large. Writes David Shook as Terán’s translator & co-editor: “Víctor Terán may live on a small isthmus in Southern Mexico, he may write in a language with a mere 100,000 speakers and even fewer readers, but he is a world poet. His most recent personal project attests to that: an anthology of forty poems by forty world poets, from Basho to Cavafy to Hikmet, Shakespeare to Whitman to Eliot, all translated for the first time into Isthmus Zapotec by Terán himself, who uses Spanish cribs. *The Spines of Love*, Terán’s first selected poems in any language, and the first ever trilingual Isthmus Zapotec-Spanish-English book that I know of, proves that he belongs in those esteemed poets’ company.”

The importance of these poetries for a new poetry & poetics of the Americas is by now irreversible . . . or should be.

Page 391 *What Indians?*

Source: Simon Ortiz, *Out There Somewhere* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 45–54.

Umatilla Street—in Sellwood, near Portland, Oregon, through which the Willamette River passes to join the Columbia River.

Hanob—Acoma word for “people.”

(1) In the process of preparing this third expanded edition of *Technicians of the Sacred* with a particular emphasis on survivals & revivals of indigenous cultures & poetries, my attention turns again to the work of poets like Simon Ortiz. A native of Acoma Pueblo (New Mexico), Ortiz provides a significant continuity between old & new modes, with a strong sense of the possibilities & losses involved therein. To the questions, “Why do you write? Who do you write for?” Ortiz replies: “Because Indians always tell a story. The only way to continue is to tell a story and that’s what Coyote says. The only way to continue is to tell a story and there is no other way. Your children will not survive unless you tell something about them—how they were born, how they came to this certain place, how they continued.” And to the further question, “Who do you write for besides

yourself?": "For my children, for my wife, for my mother and my father and my grandparents and then reverse order so that I may have a good journey on my way back home" (in *Symposium of the Whole*, 1977).

It is hard to imagine a genuine ethnopoetics without his authoritative voice & presence.

(2) The following, written in both Acoma & English:

HIHDRUUTSI: IN THE WAY OF MY OWN LANGUAGE
THAT IS MY NAME

Hihdruutsi. I am of the Eagle People.

Aacqu is my home.

I am of the Acoma people.

That is the way therefore I regard myself.

I cannot be any other way or person.

You must learn this well.

That is the way therefore you will recognize me.

When you see me somewhere to the north, west, south, east,
that is the only way you will recognize me.

You will say: Why that is Hihdruutsi!

I wonder where he has been traveling at?

I wonder if he has been well?

And then you will say:

How are you, Hihdruutsi!

Have you been well?

Yes, that is the way you will recognize me.

—from *Out There Somewhere*

Page 396 Old Man Beaver's Blessing Song

Source: Translation by J.R. & Richard Johnny John, from J. Rothenberg, *A Seneca Journal* (New York: New Directions, 1978), 9.

(1) The source here is a song-poem created by Seneca songmaker Johnson Jimseron for use by him in a "friendship event," a ceremony in which a newly composed song renews the ties between the singer & friends or relatives while walking back & forth across the width of the traditional longhouse. In translating the song with its *minimal* use of words & vocables (an important marker of Seneca song-poetry), the choice of the translators was to use contemporary concrete/visual poetry to present that centuries-old minimalism in a printed format—another (if minor) point these translations were making.

A small gathering of such translations can be found in *Shaking the Pumpkin*, 15–37.

(2) "Seneca poetry, when it uses words at all, works in sets of short songs, minimal realizations colliding with each other in marvelous ways, a very light,

very pointed play-of-the-mind, nearly always just a step away from the comic (even as their masks are), the words set out in clear relief against the ground of the ('meaningless') refrain Given the 'minimal' nature of much of the poetry (one of its *strongest* features, in fact) there's no need for a dense response in English. Instead I can leave myself free to structure the final poem by using the English of my co-translator as a base: a particular enough form of the language to itself be an extra tool for that 'continuation of journalism by other means' that Walter Lowenfels defined poetry as being in the first place" (J.R., "Total Translation: An Experiment in the Translation of American Indian Poetry," in *Pre-Faces & Other Writings*, 1981).

Page 397 The Myth of the Dragon-Fly

Source: Jordan Abel, *The Place of Scraps* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2015), 67–91.

(1) The turnabout here, many years after the fact, takes as its starting point the mid-twentieth-century account by the ethnographer Marius Barbeau, who worked assiduously to preserve & protect First Nations cultures while purchasing totem poles & potlatch items for sale &/or donation to Canadian museums & other collections. It's this cultural contradiction & displacement that Jordan Abel calls into question here, using Barbeau's prose text as a source which he remakes by a process of "erasure," to discover & create poems long hidden, now emerging from its pages. The result is a newly minted masterwork, truly Nisg'a in its origins & with a shared awareness of modern & postmodern experiments with visual & conceptual poetry.

(2) In their published form Abel's poems are printed on right-hand pages only, with facing left-hand pages standing blank. And along with the Barbeau excerpts & the erased poems there is a running account of Abel's own discoveries of the displaced totem poles in his early years as a poet. Thus:

25.12.2010

The poet exchanges gifts with his family; he gives his mother a book, a graphic novel, which is read immediately. The poet's mother identifies a section of the text and indicates that the page in question is a shared component of their past. The page depicts a totem pole in the Royal Ontario Museum. The poet's mother inquires if he remembers being there. But the poet does not hold that memory. The poet simply recalls the train car and the heat. Momentarily, the poet is surprised and ashamed that the pole that was removed from his ancestral village has also been excavated from his own memories.

The combination of old & new (survivals & revivals) is devastating.

Addendum. An alternative erasure poem after Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Ronald Johnson
from *RADI OS* (1977)

The radiant image

the only
Garden

On the bare outside of this World

no bars of Hell, nor

far off Heaven,
And Man there placed,

the sole command,

create

or love

Page 402 *The First Truck at Tambrey*

Source: C. G. von Brandenstein & A. P. Thomas, *Taruru: Aboriginal Song Poetry from the Pilbara* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1975), 21–24.

A major example, from the Pilbara section of Australia's northwest, of contemporary "tabi" singing, in which (as contrasted to group or corroboree style) "the poet sets his words to his own or a borrowed tune, and normally he alone sings his song." The payoff is a poetry of close observation & (often) fine detail, typical of old Aboriginal practice & of twentieth-century (re)innovation—both at work here. The sense of locality & landscape, always essential to Aborigine ritual mappings (= "walkabouts"), conditions the response to a new technology—of railways, airplanes, dams, & mines, or (as here) the coming of the first trucks in the 1920s.

What's less clear at this distance is the verbal play & high-energy condensation ("gaps in sequence") that define the tabi-poet's art, along with a measure based on the repetition & variation of phrasal units in five-word lines & three-line

stanzas. The maker of the present poem, Toby Wiliguru Pambardu, is described by the translators as “the greatest master of tabi-making in the Pilbara in this century.” Concerning his artistry as displayed here, they write: “Considering the many songs Pambardu made, to make a song of such strict measuring without writing anything down is the sign of a really great bard and of a superior individual. Unfortunately, little is known as yet of his personality. One peculiar habit has been reported: he used to sit alone listening intently to some imaginary person behind his shoulder, at the same time striking an imaginary mirrimba [wooden bow or scraper] on his forearm.” Pambardu (also called “the blind”) died in 1934, & the version sung & recorded thirty years later is by his friend & fellow poet, Gordon Mackay.

Page 405 Angel/Engine

Source: *Alcheringa*, n.s. 2, no. 1 (1976): 51–58. Reprinted in this form in K. Brathwaite, *Ancestors* (New York: New Directions, 2001), 131–38.

The resources of what Kamau Brathwaite began calling “nation language” in the 1970s have entered by now into a range of writings & performances in the Caribbean & the African diaspora, of which Brathwaite has written in *The History of the Voice*: “Influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World / Caribbean heritage . . . [it is the English] of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people.” An occasional but powerful practitioner himself, Brathwaite looks with particular favor on reggae & dub artists like Miss Queenie & Michael (Mikey) Smith, “not concerned with written script at all,” who “publish” rather “in all the large or little places in Jamaica where [they’re] constantly invited to appear.” Of “this submerged culture, which is, in fact, an emerging culture,” he writes: “At last, our poets today are recognizing that it is essential that they use the resources which have always been there, but which have been denied to them—and which they have sometimes themselves denied.” Room here too for the clash & merging of Pentecostal religion & worship centered on African powers like Shango.

Addendum.

Linton Kwesi Johnson
from *SENSE OUTA NANSENSE*

di innocent an di fool could pass fi twin
but a rat is a rat
an a mouse is a mouse
a flee is a flee
an a louse is a louse
yet di two a dem in common share someting
dem is awftin decried an denied

dem is awftin ridiculed an doungraded
dem is sometimes congratulated an celebrated
dem is sometimes suprised an elated
but as yu mite have already guess
dem is awftin foun wantin more or less

[Jamaica & England]

[N.B. The reader may also be interested in comparing this with the sometimes related “pidgins” & “creoles” on p. 597, above.]

Page 411 *Six Poems of Labor & Desperation*

Source: Eleanor Goodman, “Obituary for a Peanut: The Creatively Cynical World of Worker Poet Xu Lizhi,” in *China Labour Bulletin*, www.clb.org.hk/en/content/obituary-peanut-creatively-cynical-world-worker-poet-xu-lizhi, January 6, 2016.

What emerges here is something beyond a state- & party-controlled “workers poetry” but the continuation & development of a popular literature (above, pp. 250, 561) written in the vernacular & confronting the fullest range of human thoughts & feelings, even the most skeptical, negative & self-destructive. Of Xu Lizhi (1990–2014), Eleanor Goodman writes as translator: “Xu Lizhi is an excellent example of a modern incarnation of the century-old *baihua*, or vernacular, poetry tradition. His language comes out of the factory and life lived in the lower rungs of society, and revolves largely around nouns: words like screw and work-sheet and twice-cooked meat. He tells the stories of workers, of his immediate world, and of his own psyche in plain but moving terms. The *baihua* movement began as a revolt against the rarified and largely inaccessible language of traditional Chinese literature. Today, there is no longer a strong division between Chinese as formally written and as spoken, or between common speech and ‘literary’ speech. Nevertheless, a strong division remains in literature in terms of subject matter and approach. Rather than serving as a removed observer or a sympathizer of the plight of workers, farmers, and the poor in contemporary China, Xu experienced this all first hand. The fact that he could write about it with such eloquence and simplicity is a testament to his skill with the language of everyday life, as well as with poetic technique.”

And further: “I first came across Xu Lizhi’s poetry in the film *Our Verses*, a documentary that follows six different manual laborers who also write highly accomplished poetry. As I translated the poetry and then the subtitles for the film, I was immediately attracted to Xu’s straightforwardness, honesty, and darkness. Although his life was clearly unhappy—indeed, he committed suicide at the age of twenty-four by jumping out of a Foxconn factory dormitory window a little over a year ago—there is very little self-pity evident in his poetry. Rather, he casts a cold eye on the larger society, on the conditions in which he worked, and on himself. His reality was one that millions of other people face across China, but particularly in the south, which has become a center of production and exploita-

tion. His 'poem of shame' is not a personal one, but a public and national one" (E. Goodman, "Obituary for a Peanut").

Page 414 *Two Poems on Poetry*

Source: Rodrigo Rojas, from "Three Mapuche Poets," in J.R. & J. Bloomberg-Rissman, *Barbaric Vast & Wild: A Gathering of Outside & Subterranean Poetry from Origins to Present* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2015), 248-51.

The following commentaries by the translator, Rodrigo Rojas, are another indicator, if still needed, of the persistence of indigenous languages & cultures & of their reemergence against all odds in a dominating culture that has long suppressed them. As such the work at hand is representative of a range of poets, in Latin America & elsewhere, who have begun to create new literatures as vehicles of survival for those outsidied by the ruling powers.

(1) "The Mapuche are a native nation of South America that by their own reckoning has lived from the beginning of time in the central valley of Chile and in the grasslands across the Andes, in Argentina. Their language, Mapudungun, has been studied since the Spanish and other Catholic Missions were established in the region and was admired only by a few dedicated scholars throughout the centuries. From their very first contact with the Spaniards in the 1540s they have been fighting for the survival of their culture."

(2) "Born in 1955 in the town of Quechurewe, Chihuailaf is perhaps the most translated poet of Mapudungun. In a sense he prepared the ground for the younger generation of poets such as Lionel Lienlaf and Jaime Huenún . . . [Mapuchan poets like these] use a wide array of poetic resources to refer to violence and discrimination and their search for roots that imply their whole history of struggle, not only against a dictator or the state, but against western civilization. They may use slang, mix Spanish and Mapudungun, use archaisms, or translate from languages other than Spanish into Mapudungun. They are mainly bilingual, and this has allowed them to enter more than one world at a time and not be fixed under one interpretation."

(3) Elicura Chihuailaf Nahuelpán (his full name) has been referred to as the *lonco*, or chieftain, of Mapudungun poetry, and works at recording & preserving the oral traditions of his people. *Elicura* is from the Mapudungun phrase for "transparent stone," *Chihuailaf* means "fog spread on the lake," and *Nahuelpán* is "tiger/cougar."

Page 415 *Essie Parrish in New York*

Source: George Quasha, "Somapoetics 73," *Alcheringa* n.s. 1, no. 1 (1975): 27-29.

(1) Essie Parrish (1902-1979), a Kashaya Pomo healer & Dreamer from California & the final leader, along with Mabel McKay, of the revitalized Dreamer religion, spoke at the New School in New York on March 14, 1972. The text as given here is a reconstruction by poet/artist George Quasha of her narrative of a

dream-vision, based on notes he took as she spoke. He remarks that “the greater portion of the lines are as I wrote them in the notebook. I’m just a humble scribe.” And further: “My only ‘formal’ concern was to distort her tone and overall temporal curve as little as possible. What I’m concerned with in the Essie vision is Dharma transmission. It was clear to me that, despite her sharp irony about talking to white people and the protective distance she kept, she was offering us a portion of the sacred. What would it mean to take it on (as in Yeats’s ‘Did she put on his knowledge with his power . . .’)? To my mind it meant getting the *words* and their hidden *alcheringa*. And that’s literal enough.”

(2) “Language is Delphi” (Novalis).

Page 418 “With Other Poets”

Source: Kofi Awoonor, “Poems & Abuse Poems of the Ewe,” first published in *Alcheringa*, o.s., 3 (Winter 1971): 1–2.

The translation by Awoonor comes from the same tradition as that of *halo* (abuse) poetry on p. 141 & of what Awoonor elsewhere calls “dirge poetry,” but the assertion here of the shared origin with other poets & the power of poetry as such is also to be noted. Of equal importance to the present editor is the role played by Kofi Awoonor as a friend & comrade in the early days of ethnopoetics & as a contributing editor to my magazine, *Alcheringa Ethnopoetics*, in which his crucial translations from Ewe oral poetry first appeared. The sorrow & shock of his death some forty years later, a victim with nearly 200 others in the September 2013 shootings & massacre at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, is yet another horror to live with in the century ahead. With this in mind Akpalu’s poem as given to us by Awoonor is almost a memorial in itself & a reminder both of the promise of poetry & of the terrors that can still undo us.

Page 421 *The Statements*

1. Paul Radin, *The Road of Life and Death*, Bollingen Series 5 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), 6.

2. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922, 1961), 408–9.

3. Robert D. Scott, *The Thumb of Knowledge in Legends of Finn, Sigurd and Taliesin* (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, 1930), 103–4. From a tenth-century text.

4. Knud Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1931), 321. For more on Orpingalik, see p. 552.

5. W. H. I. Bleek & Lucy C. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London: George Allen, 1911), pp. 303–5. Ilkábbo is the narrator of “Girl of the Early Race Who Made the Stars,” p. 36.

6. Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian: The Kwakiutl* (1915).

7. English version by Denise Levertov in *O Taste and See* (New York: New Directions, 1964).

8. "The Cauldron of Poesy," trans. Erynn Rowan Laurie, in J. R. & J. Bloomberg-Rissman, *Barbaric Vast & Wild* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2015), 54-57. From a 7th century A.D. text. See also above, p. 578.

9. Ezra Pound, *Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 36-37. From the *Ta Hsio* (Great Digest), i.e., "Confucius' words as Tseng Tsze has handed them down." The statement here (really a group of quotes) takes the form of Tseng's later commentary.

10. Alvaro Estrada, *María Sabina: Her Life and Chants* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1981), 47-48. See also pp. 57, 488, and Henry Munn's essay, "Writing in the Imagination of an Oral Poet," in *Symposium of the Whole*.

11. *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 144.

12. The Book of Daniel, 10:7-10.

POST-FACE

WOULD-THAT-THEY-ALL-KNEW-THESE-SONGS
is what I think of you.

It seems as if we were beginning to walk.

It seems as if we were going
as far as the earth is good.

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