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Kofi Awoonor's translations of oral poetry by three Ewe masters. The poems were recorded Summer 1970 "under very informal conditions." The oldest & best known of the poets, Akpalu, is master of the dirge, for which he has "created a whole tradition." Dunyo is "the poet of the long song" & of dirge & abuse poetry; his drum is called "adzima," versatile & multifaceted. Ekpe, at 74 the youngest of the poets, is the "abuse poet par excellence."

POEMS & ABUSE-POEMS OF THE EWE

Henino Vinoko Akpalu (1888- )

1.
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.
It is in the hands of destiny
our life is in the hands of the Creator.
Songsters, listen.
My Creator sent me this way
he gave me nothing
not even looks;
so the rich ones howl in the lanes
proclaiming their wealth.
Dunyo says I know not what to do
My Creator gave me songs.
I will not refuse them
I receive them with both hands.
My song came from the Creator's house
simmering in my head.
Please, I say gently.
there is something beyond
whose leg is larger than the hippo.
I will be mute; let someone abuse me
then I will tell it to him.
The whore was forgetful; she walked
like the wandering duck into my song.
She thought it was a matter of opening legs.
She asked Dunyo, what kind of
dirty Lagos cloth are you wearing
and I have none to cover my nakedness?
Dunyo said he turned round
And behold, she wore the same dirty Lagos cloth.
I asked her what cloth is this you wear?
She said I have velvet,
if I rise up I will wear it.
Dunyo answered her: You are not the Creator
you did not create me.
Come and hear the voice of slander.
You clutch the earth like a leather bag.
On your stem you stand
like the porcupine in clothes.
You run like the bush rope.
Your back caves in rising like the hillock.
Beneath your stomach is the hyaena's ravine.
Your chest is as short as the red monkey
on the corn barn.
Will this too insult the poet? Alas,
my song shall speak the words of songs.
Listen, listen so that you can hear.
Your silk-cotton tree cannot shade the elder trees.
The ancient poets cried "Our Voices!"
The great drummers screamed "Our Hands!"
Those who stood around the ring will ask the poet,
Why can't we hear your voice?
We do not hear the song, Mr. Poet.
He answered them, answered them
saying, if it were easy, come and try it.
Death is the end of poetry.
When I die, contentment will be yours.
My songsters, no one should give birth to a whore
for she planned many ills for me.
She has planned my end; but now
she raises her voice against me.
Dunyo says I do not hate insults
they are my salvation.
That is the little world I live for.
Those who bear children, if you bring to bed a whore kill it.
For the harlot nearly ruined our homestead.
If my song hurts you,
go on a journey. Travel afar to Kedzi
Bring with you the poets there.
They and I will wrestle on this ground.
The whore knows me not,
so her insults climb the air.
My songs are beyond a million; I've cut and
kept the overflow. The harlot opened the door
and my song flows like the river
flows like the turbulent river.

2.
Think close upon these matters.
If new affairs break up
know how you speak.
Song has spoken to me in riddles,
it spoke to me Dunyo in riddles.
What death came with us we cannot know
Death hides in shadows.
I was in Song when the Anyigbes came
bringing with them a bottle of gin.
I will not offer thanks
And blessings will come.
Our song is not fetish
which I ate.
It is the white hen,
it is the gold nugget I found
and it screams upon my head.
There is death at the spear's head.
If the Creator consents
then I shall sing adzima songs.
My songsters, there is nothing in songs
It is an emptiness,
an emptiness my forebears carried.
They handed it over to us
It is now our turn.
My songsters, there is nothing in songs.
I will not refuse
When the thunder drums sound
the non-initiates come to the edge of the ring.
Farm and market will come to the edge of the ring
What the head holds comes slowly
to the heart; what the head thinks
takes long to accomplish.

3.
Something happened on this river
Dunyo says it is an evil affair.
My chorus, something came to pass.
A commotion descended upon us.
Life became the chameleon's skin
it is changing.
Dunyo says it is the harmattan
that brought this sorrow.
And fire swept over our homestead.
Ancient deities fried in the fire.
Agbayiza proclaimed the song-stool on which he sits
is reduced to ashes
Levi told him to take heart;
if the gourd cracks, the creeper plant is there.
If talismans burn, there is still alligator pepper.
We will try it and see.
If there is thunder-god's talismans
We shall try it and see.
They are the ones with the rolled skin
rolled and creased not from disease;
let disease go to those who own it;
they are the grave diggers,
diggers of the abode beyond.
The cracked-nosed one does not praise,
what your comrades praise clearly
You are bound to distort.
Dunyo says the poet
does not sing the day-god's song
Let the song come and he will sing it.
The rotten-coconut, the edge-dweller's coconut.
Before he sings,
he touched the drum;
it did not sound.
We are the velvet rope
which ties not the farm-owner.
If the man becomes wild, the rope will snap.
Agbayiza says a medicine man
came upon him with medicine.
If the creator puts not his hands on it
the medicine man cannot kill him.
If the leopard roars, let him forget his claws.
The potted crocodile says I know how to howl
but for the little ones
I do not, I do not.
I was asleep; song came
and called me "Singer"
"Yes" I said, "What is it?"
"Why" he asked "am I with you,
yet you do not sing me?"
I said "some folk say
the singer does no work."
Song said to me, "if you think
about that, the one in front
shall surpass the one behind.
He will drive me afield;
I will never come home."
Dunyo said to him gently
as we live in the homesteads
we will sing many songs.
Adzima songs became evil songs
No one sings them anymore.
He will call the rival singers
for they can watch the Adzima songsters.
They will come to the gates
Whatever matters the singer has
he will say them for you to hear;
My chorus, take heart.
There is nothing wrong with my song.
Adzima songsters, let the song come
I shall sing it;
there is death in my song
I shall die and go beyond.
Dunyo says the workers of evil medicine boasted
that the poet shall accompany them to the land beyond.
That is no matter.
Death and song are the same mother's children.
He is not afraid of death.
Let great fetishes snatch me
and drop me,
Let Kotsi snatch me
and drop me.
At night time the joy shall flee.
Adzima songs became bees
massed up on the battle ground
No one can sing them.
Alas, the bees are swarming,
war came, the bees swarmed,
the Adzima drums speak:
Nothing surpasses my song.
Komi Ekpe (1897? - )

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 Tsiame
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 Tsiame
his mouth as long as the pig
blowing the twin whistle.
Something indeed has happened.

3.
A devotee offended Yewe
and the owner of guns did not fire.
The Creator sent me along this way;
I am all alone. He is not very wise.
I joined a cult whose shrines I cannot build.
Komi Ekpe says his deity lingers in a brass pan.
The beautiful children are in rebellion.
My mother in tears passed the poet on the roadside.
Whence did you pass before entering this world?
Did you fuck a deital virgin still on her way home?
Or did you receive the power of witchcraft?
No. I went acourting, and I was forced
into marriage. My murderers swore an oath.
If I say something please understand it.
I was about to sing so I called my Creator in abuse.
I became the offender of my Creator.
Slowly, I shall go home.
I shall question him closely
for he knows not that I shiver
from companions' cold.
My enemies, I beg you,
do not eat salt till your heart hurts
I will die soon. And this town will be empty for you to crawl over one another. Questioners, what ancient laws did I break? The royal palm fruit comes down when it ripens. The salt lagoon says the strong wind touches not the tender shoots of the royal palm. The earth is empty of my loved ones. Even this bare life I lead annoys. The palm eating bird soon goes blind. Kill me, and I shall die. My life is empty. You who seek my death at the eating and drinking place and seek my death so passionately I have moved my feet away. It is man who passed the judgement of death upon me. If the elders call me I am coming. If death's messenger arrives, I shall go. I shall go. I cannot refuse to go. Kofi Lisavi, raise the shout over my head. The elders have called me I cannot refuse to go.

4. She with the jaw-bone of a cow falling upon her chest like sea egret's beak, her waist flat, earlobes hanging, oversize intestines, it was you who took my affairs to Sokpe and asked him to sing against me. I do not refuse; I am not afraid of song. I shall stay at home; if anyone likes let him come; whatever he has let him say it; I shall listen. I was far up north when Kunye of the mad ram's face
came and insulted me.
There is no one. I shall tell
a little tale to the slave;
let him open his ears wide and listen.
They heaped slave-insults upon Aheto's head
and he swore a lengthy oath
full of boasts and boasts
that he was not a slave.
Atomi carne and said it
We caught him, sold him to Zogbede
Zogbede bought him with his own wealth.
Your grandmother was taken from Yosu
from there she carne to Tsiame.
You people of Dagbame, do you wear underclothes?
A small pair of underpants was put upon your grandmother
and she burst into tears.

5.
It was the bird that sent
me into the night; I went away
with good deeds
Adzima boys, the beautiful ones cooked
for their husbands
This destiny is mine.
I salute you.
The needle follows the string
The Creator himself salutes you.
Salutations! The collapse of a town
is my divination.
The gun shall leap into the forest!
A fruitless effort, the owner of cloth
is the spinning wheel.
Monyo is nobody. I cannot marry him.
I shall wait and marry a priest
So he will give me a priestly child
The priest did not know I will survive
The priest Awoonor did not know
I will survive.
6.
I cannot walk the walk
of little infants.
The animals begat twins,
But the lion begat only one.
Why has it become a matter of such anger
I want to climb and untie the fresh leaves of the Ago palm
But I walk the walk of flesh eating birds
It fell upon evil for me.

Commentaries on the poems of Komi Ekpe

Poem Two is a typical halo or abuse poem; here, Kodzo is the opponent. But he is not the only one made the subject of the abuses; there are also his supporters, his women admirers who goaded him on into verbal contest with the poet, and Amegavi, a wealthy elder of Tsiame. "Questioners" here & elsewhere refers to the followers or vuviawo of Ekpe's drum, which he characteristically calls Question.

Poem Three refers at start to the belief that when any devotee of Yewe, the thunder god, offends, the god (owner of guns) responds with thunder and lightning on his or her homestead. When the god's interest in a person diminishes, nothing follows, not even punishment. "I am all alone" refers to the fact that all Ekpe's children died in infancy. "Deital virgins" (fiasidi) are young girls pledged to the god at Afife by their parents or relatives. They can't be married or approached by men until their devotions to the god are performed at puberty. The fine for making love to any of these girls before their "going home" to the god is astronomical and ruins the offender for life. Finally, Kofi Lisavi is Ekpe's only living brother, to whom he entrusts his final rites.

In Poem Four, "slave-insults" refers to domestic slavery, which was very prevalent in Africa and was superseded by the transatlantic slave trade. It functioned in place of prisons.

In Poem Five, the diviner or priest is seen as the only one with powers to change the path and tenor of the god's preordinations.
A major poet from Ghana, Awoonor is a master of both English and Ewe. His latest two books—Night of my Blood (poems) & This Earth, My Brother ("an allegorical tale of Africa")—were published here this year. He teaches African Literature at Stony Brook, where he is also Chairman of the Comparative Literature Program.

Kofi Awoonor

SOME NOTES ON THE POETRY OF THE EWE

Traditional poetry in Africa remains largely unwritten. This is so because it is still part of an active tradition of music and ritual performance, and an outstanding aspect of both secular and sacred communion. As a communal art, its strength lies in its regular performance from which it gains growth. But in the community of the performers the poet or the heno is still the guiding spirit, the "voice" and expression of the force and power of the word which is still a sacred phenomenon at all levels of human conduct, in both religious and profane affairs.

The poetry of the Ewes is embedded in their drums. By drums I mean not only the physical entities of leather and wood, rattlers, gongs and other instruments which are part of the African musical ensemble. I mean the variety in music and poetic (language) approach of the various drumming groups that have become part of the Ewe cultural expression. Drums come and go. Some are historical monuments, repositories of legend and mythology. Others are expressions of the attributes of occupational groups, e.g., hunters, cult priests, dietal devotees, etc. Others record as a matter of course the various facets of Ewe life: war, love and courtship, funerals, rites, royalty and chiefship, medicine and herbalism. It is from the voice of the various drums that emerges the poetry proper of the Ewes. Other poetic forms can be found in libation, cult prayers and invocation, the acquisition and practice of magic and medicine, "name" calling or salutation, halo or abuse-poems, dirges, etc.—the last two particularly well represented in the present selection.

It is in the language of the drumming songs that poetry comes into its own. In the tradition of drumming, the mood and cadences of the drums, and in the structure of the songs themselves we come face to face with form and content of what is original poetry. The songs reveal a wide range of verbal art in performance which becomes articulated at the level of mood and interpretative response through the accompaniment of musical instruments. The words receive prominence over the sounds, the latter serving only as vehicles of expanding and embellishing the imagery and allusions by the use of such devices as repetition and choral
response, deepening their scope and mood. In the performance of the famous drums, atrikpui, agbadza, the war drums; Husago, Brekete, Yeve, the medicine or ritual drums; adzro, Kete, sibisaba, tudzi, the youth and lovers drums; the poet or heno runs through the range of the poetry of the songs solo, as if reminding his followers and himself of the depth and significance of particular words and specifically emphatic points. At times he skips through the poetry at a rapid pace, at times he takes it slowly and deliberately, soliciting verbal and modal response from his followers. The drums are silent. When he is done, the rattlers and gongs and the drums pick up the beat and the heno moves into the center with his fly-whisk and with the whole chorus gives meaning to the words. The first part of this type of performance is hamekoko, the "taking apart" of the song; it is the recitation itself, it is the statement of the poetry. What follows is the arrangement of this poetic statement in emphatic structural forms marked out by choral response, dialogue between heno and yuviawo or songsters.

Who is the poet or the heno? The calling of the poet is intuitive and at times hereditary only in the sense in which a son may possess the talent of his father. But a poet emerges, he is born, out of the traditions of songs, and he is the bearer of exceptional skill in words and has the talent to weave those words into coherent poetic statements. Among the young men's and women's drumming groups, the heno will be obvious. He makes up the songs, perfects them, rearranges them, organizes them, and in turn teaches his followers in rehearsal or hakpa sessions. His talent, is self-evident, is immediately recognized in the organization of the particular drum for which he creates poetry. He may have as an assistant another singer, preferably a woman, whose function is to teach the women, and to provide the female choral counterpart in voice or accompaniment during the hamekoko or the taking apart of the song. Female poets also abound but their role is limited to exclusive women drums which are not as commonplace as the joint drums. Our young poet, of clear voice and an acclaimed ability to weave words, create allusions, and "speak," may grow from drum to drum. Some of these drums may be old drums, some may be new, or drums created by the heno. In the samples in this collection, Adzima is the poet Dunyo's drum, while Question is Komi Ekpe's drum.

To have the ability to create song, the Ewe believes, is a gift from the gods. So in the Ewe pantheon there is a god of songs or Hadzivodoo. He is the inspirer and the creator of songs. The poet or heno is only an instrument in the god's hands. That is why every poet who has a god of songs must pour libation and offer prayers to him before he appears in public to perform. Singing, like all other aspects of Ewe life, is not a purely secular act. Its sacred nature lies in the power of the god to intervene and take away a poet's voice. In the phenomenon of halo or the drum of abuse, the poet or heno is aware of rival forces marshalled against him. Among these forces are workers in evil medicine. But evil medicine, it is believed, cannot affect you if the gods do not approve. So the poet must be at harmony with both household and public gods.
Most traditional poets do not accept the function and office of Hadzivodoo. They achieve the spiritual rapport I referred to only with their household or public gods who are their protectors. Some, however, specifically acquire a Hadzivodoo and make him personal to themselves. Of our three poets in this collection, Komi Ekpe is the only one with Hadzivodoo. The poet, if he means to acquire one, goes to the diviners who establish contact with the god, and serve as intermediaries between him and the poet. Through divination and revelation, information is transmitted to the poet as to what kind of medium he must acquire. He may be required to acquire a brass pan, white clay modeled into human form, a selection of herbs, a fly-whisk, fowls, and drinks for offering. A day is set for the "placing" of the god, a day on which he is to be "established." When the ceremony, marked by offerings of drinks, food and libation is over, the poet goes home with his medium of god-image. To this he makes offerings and pours libation at the appropriate season. There may be a few taboos to observe.

Other poets, like Akpalu and Dunyo, are born poets. But they are aware of the power of the muse. Both say their songs come to them in their sleep and they wake up at the moment of its arrival, and record it in their heads. Sometimes when it comes, by the time they wake up it has fled. Then they know they must make offerings to household gods and deities who will see to it that when the muse comes, it stays. These are born poets, gifted with the power of words, but yet acknowledge the power of a divinity as the essence of song with which they must be in accord.
Pre-Columbian Sierra Chontal ritual from San Matías Petacaltepec, Oaxaca. English version by Paul F. Bufis after first Spanish version by Juan Ramirez. The English text given here is complete, but preface & notes have been shortened by the present editors. Bufis' original paper includes the complete Chontal text.

THE SACRED PRAYERS OF THE COCHINEAL RITUAL

Preface

The original version of the ritual prayers which follow is largely a typewritten version of the material which is contained in a small blue cuaderno now at Mexico’s National Museum of Anthropology and History. The prayers contained in the cuaderno were copied from an original source which, according to the informant, Juan Ramirez, exists today in the sierra Chontal town of San Matías Petacaltepec. According to Juan, because of the nature of the material (i.e. sacred, ancient, occult), such books are very difficult to find out about. His explanation for having such a book is that he obtained it from a friend with whom he has "mucho confianza."

When asked for a description of the original source, Juan stated that there were several books—possibly as many as six. Each book contains various rituals (what follows therefore, seems to be part of such a book). The books are reportedly small, approximately six inches by eight inches and about an inch thick. They were also described as being made of papel venado, which Juan assured me was not deer-skin but simply the name of an unlined paper.

The English rendering presented here may be described as interpretive rather than literal and periodically notes explanations gained from Juan about ideas which are implicit in the prayers. It retains, however, the prayer-like metaphorical elements which characterize it as an oración. The prayers, then, are not in themselves explanatory and are rather poetic by nature. They give the flavor of the ritual and some insight into its nature but remain mystical and illusive.

The cochineal (coccus cacti L.) is a small insect which lives on the nopal (opuntia L. or prickly-pear cactus). The dried body and bodily parts of this insect, often referred to as grana because of their granular appearance, have been used since pre-Columbian times to produce an intense, firm, red dye. The process is one of cultivating nopal for the expressed purpose of raising these insects which are later harvested, dried and sold to be used in the preparation of a red coloring medium.

The ritual prayers which follow reflect something of the pre-Columbian relationship between agriculture and religion. They are prayers said during a ritual designed to propitiate numerous naturalistic gods
with copal and other offerings. Though the ritual itself was not directly observed by the present translator, its general format was described by Juan.

In preparation for speaking with the gods a man must ayumar or fast. Fasting is usually for three days, nine days or forty days, depending on why or for what one is supplicating the gods. A fast for example may begin at twelve o'clock in the afternoon; at twelve o'clock the next day one may speak with the gods; after speaking to the gods one may then eat. Then another twenty-four hours fast is carried on, and this is extended for three, nine or forty days. During this time, Juan explains, "no comer, no tomar, no fumar, y no tocar mujer."

Having prepared oneself for supplicating the gods a square or pustura is formed on the ground (often inside the propitiator's house) with candles at the four corners representing the four cardinal directions. During the ceremony, while these prayers are being said, the candles are ritually lit--first to the east and the rising sun, then to the west and the setting sun, then to the south and finally to the north. Placed in the center of the square as an offering are three turkey eggs or a plate of turkey blood. As the ritual progresses various naturalistic deities are called upon in supplication, each deity receiving an offering of copal which is referred to throughout the ritual as the price to be paid. An offering of 39 means 3 groups of 9 pieces of copal; it therefore means 3 x 9 rather than 39. The nature of the spirit is revealed through the number of pieces of copal which are used in the offering. Hence, the numbers 9, 5, 6 and 3 indicate good spirits while the numbers 7, 27, 14 and 37 indicate bad spirits. This may at first seem contradictory, since deities seem to have both good and evil spirits. If we look to page 2, side II, of the ritual, however, we see that the evil spirits of insects are being propitiated. But the spirits of these insects are only evil in this context because they destroy the nopales. There is every reason to believe that in a different context these spirits may be considered good. The parasitic insects mentioned above are looked upon negatively and the number of offerings corresponds accordingly. The cochineal is also a parasite living off the nopal but serves the ultimate function of being a dying medium and is looked upon positively. The number of offerings, therefore, to the cochineal and his mother and father is 3 groups of 9 indicating a good spirit.

Periodically throughout the ritual various naturalistic gods are mentioned along with their appropriate offerings. As they are called upon, the groups of copal are placed one by one within the arranged square or pustura. Throughout the entire ritual the petitioner is in communication with the gods, speaking with them in a poetic and often metaphorical manner. Thus he speaks of his offerings of copal as the flower of smoke or the flower of gum, etc.

Much of the ritual seems repetitive and is very much like a mental dialogue; it is very prayer-like. In termination of the ritual all the ceremonial elements within the square are burned. The garza, or heron or bird or ritual, as it is called, is therefore offered.
Prayers

your word the god nopal
your hand--39 your pustura
the ocote the three the earth
the god nopal--39 the god cochineal--39
your mother and your father--39
great miracle the word miracle of life--39
the spirit saint--9 temima liana--39
the lord spirit comtas guilla--39
your spirit--99 pieces
now i have come
i am going to rise up here where you are
where i may make payment
to the lord spirit the god earth
the snake obscure red or black
the lightening black and red guel sutay
to where he burst forth
to where he was born
the god nopal here where he grew
where they raise up
snake (culebra) nopal lightening nopal
that he may give what he has in his hand
to he that was born of nopal
the black spirit guel sutay he

spirit that gave
what price do you seek
miracle north wind miracle keeper of the house (casador)
miracle daughter of the earth
miracle
i dream miracle of my home
heed that you may not see
that you may not think
he that arrives in your heart
here you taught them and you taught
grown seeds that gave flower of smoke
flower of the earth (torrónes)
here you see the nine plates
the nine that you eat
the sowing of blood
that it may not be that you frighten us
by the other heart
god nopal

i return to give the hand
the great miracle lightening man
i dig god nopal that it may blossom
the remedy to the stopping
here he taught that i may teach like the great miracle
heed that you see
or become frightened by the other heart
north wind earth
here is your good word

in order to extract the illness of the nopal earth
begins the cochineal the lower terrain--37
the lord spirit comtas guilla --37
lord seismina--37 spiny worm--7
spiny wings--7 snake worm--7
armadillo--7 gourd bowl (jicara)--7
the incense (ocote) dog--7 naypu--7 rattlesnake--7
masalengua--7 the tender one--7 the ant--7
the cricket--7 snake worm--7 winged ones--7
the good word here
a better man

the water middle of the earth--39
the lord capitogue middle of the earth--39
gods of spirit--39 the lord pieces of earth--39
the god pieces of earth--39
the sister snake--39 the god snake--39
the lord of illumination--39 the god moon--39
the lord spirit--39 the great demon--39
the great miracle--39 miracle of life--39
now i have come
i raise up the son lica muł
not even i seek lica muł

to where is the mother the father
to where is the life for living
he told him son you see
daughter that you may see
in order to live the life of earth man
the disclaiming the life
he said so look to the east where the sun is born
look to the west where the earth ends
the aura of sky
i make payment
the afternoon arrives
where your mother is
and your father
together
red
earth red eminge cumina

society of the grand
the sowing of the great miracle
in preparation for the coming
the one the two the three the four
the five the six the seven the eight
the nine where ten is made
i inform the thunderbolt cochineal ōconła
where the stream is
where you mother is and your father
that he may take the dew
the dew of thunderbolt
thunderbolt
that he may give the meal and the sea
he runs through the dew
the miracle man
made your mother and your father
look
the cooking pot for dining that you seek
the earth
great miracle
he puts it in the best milpa afoguaxco
that you strike not
the air
it is one thunderbolt lion

mother father
i take it i carry it
the light
the heart it paid
that i become castogueta
re-seed he said
assembled are the nine plates
the nine meals flower
seeds flower guixilay
i while away weeks north wind
north wind

i point out the heron
that he does not come to an understanding
that he does not agree to bring her
that she comes
point of the earth
point of the sky
i take it the thunderbolt reed (otate)
for the struggling he is told
spirit of hands humamica chite
reed spirit cula spirit of hand
it arrives i take it
my son my heart he says
no castogueta
re-seed he is told
i show them the nine plates the nine meals
the sowing the blood
he deceives he sprinkles the blood of star
i return to scratch the earth
the hand the great miracle thunderbolt man
made the thunderbolt of lions dark lions
lions
society of the great

to the arrival to the coming
the god noapl he is made
spirit the aura
he puts the offerings behind him
i speak to him the great miracle
fly here
is your mother and your father
lightening cochineal
gum of thunderbolt dew of thunderbolt
mother and father
i am going to destroy that which i gave
so that it may be
this the (letra)
the society of the great
he tells him
place the body that it may be seen

he tells him good
he tells him good son i search the earth
it greets not
they give it not
the word
leap if it greets you
they told you they adore you
unto the earth they tell you
good you understand that he may take you
your mother your father
and strikes you not
that it may come
the one the two the three the four
the five the six the seven the eight the nine
he seeks he offers the smoke
that he scatters the god nopal
that he guards the seed
the spine that spills the blood of the nopal

gnonfinchiale
(bastong) of god nopal of (tortuga)
he says
the miracle the great miracle three
i search for illness
i walk
he told him you come
not the thunder
where are you going to hide from the dust
of the spirit
i follow it
i tell him
you tell him when i come
you tell him i close when i come
that i may tell him minge
dust of the earth sutay
where is preserved this that is heard
the incense the three gums
red comes the lord seismina
he guards the great miracle
he tells him who
northwind my heart
he tells him
this daughter heart

that she may tell him the great miracle lord
my lord nothingness gueyxtogueta
re-seed he tells them
the nine plates the nine meals
the long seeds
flower of smoke flower of gum
the dog star
north wind if it is good let it be
that it may become i
he recalls
he
that he may take it
the (letra)
the (letra) of the hours the (letra) of life
the (letra) of the great society
in preparation of the knowing
my son
it does not beg it does not salute
they do not give you the word you seek
make happy your heart that it may go
where it is saluted

where it adores you
earth also your home your life
they say
son he begs you
filth that it may be drawn out
the straight path the good
it seeks you
the earth
it salutes you that it might give you the word
that it may not pass that he may not speak
i come to an end that i may not speak
you learned the word of the society
that i may be quiet great miracle
that he comes
i hid spirit dust earth
spirit chutay spirit black spirit
that seeks the incense the three
that takes a walk
this flower of hand and feet
i finish he said
great miracle flower of my life
i gave of life

i speak to him
i saw it he tells him
son my heart
i take him the best drinks
great miracle
give him thunder black nopal
he tells him
father mother daughter
i cut the nopal
i take it thunder of nopal
the two dark black plants of plants
in order to cut the face
the skin spirit guel tota
in order to cut where i beg filth
my husband came he says
that if they carry it out
he is called
so he tells him do not make a hole
the (jicara)
the (jicara) of iron

the (jicara) of great refuse
that they take the straw mat thunder
receive it great one
i fly to give the hand
lightening man
made the bowl the pieces of the bowl
refuse of the great god nopal
daughter says he gave my life
my life to live
listen look daughter heart
here life to the world that might have gone

do not frighten the other heart
the bird here is the word
the hill of spirits--39
lord of the thunder of thread--39
lord hairless lion--39
this finished and departed
the illness the felling
this the spirit where are the great spirits
the thunders
i show them the great seeds that it gave the flower of gum
flower of smoke that it passes the life
north wind god the damnation
great one of the thunder
i show them
i offer them
they show them
the great miracle the good word

the great miracle teacher of life
is going where the sun rises and
the afternoon where the sun sets
the aura of the earth
the other aura of the earth
where i saw not the light the life
he said the great miracle teacher of life
he does nothing
the light the life
your nine to the sky you will flash
lord i show you

he told him
lord light that comes
do it
he said comes your nine to the sky
he said who is it
your nine to the sky answered the lord light
he tells him nothing
asked the spirit
re-seed
nothing happened
he speaks to him
he tells him
flash of lightning flash the great miracle
miracle of life lord spirit
spirit re-seed well
that takes the miracle hill of the maiden
the miracle rows of offering
the miracle returns he tells him
the lord of the sky the black sky
the lightening sky
such is your hand your foot god nopal
he reaches the point of seeing
of hearing
it is good guard it
the place the great
that he carries that he goes forward that he comes
the sevens northwind
the nine northwind
that he rests that he continues to sleep
to your awakening
what a thought
what do you think he is not here the god nopal
he finished
and he ran to where they enter the mountain
good take it
you want the number
so that he takes the nine to the sky
where is your mother your father
the god nopal alone what do you require
what do you ask what do you say
lord of the sky darkness of the sky
give me the one to be cared for
your heart i take it i carry it
what says your mother your father
what do you make so far
what do you ask what do you say
the miracle man the miracle of life
he has not arrived the road where he sings out
he tells him the great miracle
you have not asked what is it that you request
spirit my dream
i give the word
he says spirit re-seed

in line
in order to speak
in order to struggle with oneself
in order to live
the man of the earth when they bring the seed
the blood
your word
that i take the plate of blood the plate of gum
in order to water you the earth
in order to find you the darkness
peace of the earth that aura
your plate he tells him
it waits that you take it
that you come to take it

good that you carry
that you go
that you arrived the seven northwind
the nine northwind
what do you give the northwind
the nine northwind
the one to care for lives
he rests
the great miracle the miracle of the life
lord spirit he calls it
he tells him you take it you carry it the god nopal
if you want him
what phantom
that you embrace that you take
what do you tell him what will be
that you might have been
that you put the word to life
what do you tell him dust of the earth
i pay he tells him good
that you look for it the incense
the three
that you look
for it became your hands your feet
the god nopal

he tells him great miracle miracle of the life
that you might have looked for me
he told me
my heart i am going to care for
i am going to fatten
what is your reply
great miracle great miracle of the life
what do you say what words do you send me
that it might not arrive
that i might care for it that it is fattened
what do you say the great miracle miracle of the life
here you fill the life the grand life
he puts together the nine to the sky
so i return to ask that you bring the god grain
god thread
what do you say lord of the sky
blackness of the sky
i take it i carry it god cochineal

god thread
ask your mother your father
not to be frightened to the caring to the fattening
as i told you
my word of spirit
the seed of the blood the plate of gum
do not betray the other heart
what do you say to him the great miracle
the miracle of life
that you guard that you take it that you carry it
what do you say the lightening of lions
the lions
great refuse that you send it
the herb ash your life
you tell him
don't tell of the visit until
no longer arrives your mother and your father
that i gave him the great miracle the miracle of the life
that they arrive the seven northwind
the nine northwind
he says so
you arrive to the day you arrive to the life
you go away to the hill your hill
spirit of nature where the lords are
gods lights
the four the gods
where do they run the nine of the sky
the nine to the world
he says lords
gods i carry it away
your black one your herb i begin

i return to set before you god northwind
to the giving
he says lords spirit
re-seed he says
great miracle to the seeing
the spirit the aura of the blood the plate of blood
the plate of gum
that you receive it good
that you carry that it might go
that it comes where the god nopal is
that you want that you put the hand the feet
what do you say
it is made my life my good living
i return to dig
the word god thread god nopal god northwind
what is your reply
that you take it that it lives
the man of the earth that he may speak
that you tell him
that you might give him to they that sell

that which i place
i beg the earth
that i ask thread that he enters
the god thread the god
that place of greeting i give my word
they say: the great spirit the spirit of woman
to show the life the good living
he that disturbs he that sows
which do you want he that disturbs he that sows
he that salutes he strikes the word also
he is frightened
the other heart lord great demon lord

here he will arrive they give you the word
the seven
that he carries down the course of prayer
earth lord devil that he salutes
that he prays of this earth
leap that you may go here where they salute
i give you the word
all my strength that you speak
the other heart the good
here is the good word

your house
the lord that he enlightens
lord moon--9 lord of the sky--9 lord of the world--9
lord of the great spirit--9 the northwind--9
the stone grinder (metate)--9 the bowl--9
the water--9 the parched corn--9
pieces god northwind your mother and your father
to the lord i pray in the arroyo
the god that arrives
the arroyo the incense the spirit
the northwind the great devil spirit
the great spirit--37

i arrived where the spirit of the house is
the spirit of the life
that he may go not
that he is frightened not by the other heart
he says here i show them
i advise him the great miracle
the nine plates the nine of offering
where the water is the best
where you eat the best blood
god thread northwind the god that he might harvest
that it may not be that he frightens the other heart
son the other heart
now i take you i carry you
you are going to drink the spirit of the life
that he may give you the word

of the life the bird is here
word god thread

Notes
Page numbers referred to throughout the prayers correspond to their position within the blue cuaderno.

line no.

2 39--Three separate groups of nine pieces of copal or ocote (i.e., 3 x 9 rather than thirty-nine).

pustura--The arrangement of the ceremony in the form of a square with a candle at each cardinal point.

3 ocote--Substitution incense used as an offering in place of copal.

5 mother and father--The parents of the cochineal. This is the "seed" which begins the producing of cochineal on the nopal.

34 flower of smoke--Copal when burned is metaphorically referred to as the flower of smoke and in some instances as the flower of gum.

35 flower of the earth (torrones)--This refers to the pieces of copal.

40 frighten us by the other heart--Chontal deities can be both good and evil in spirit simultaneously. The other heart, therefore, is the heart of a demon.
winged ones--7--Offerings of 7 (the numbers 7, 27, 14 and 37 are indicative of supplication to an evil spirit) are made to this and previously named insects which might be attacking the nopal plant. Offerings are being made to the spirits of the insects which seem to form part of the naturalistic spirit world.

thunderbolt (rayo)--According to Juan, thunder and lightning are calmed by the burning of a pot of copal. If the burning of copal does not cause the thunder and lightning to calm, a plate of salt is placed in a fire and heated. As the salt heats, it jumps. Salt is the enemy of thunder and lightning and causes it to stop.

afoguaxco--This was difficult to translate from the Chontal. It seems to be an ancient kind of milpa.

i while away weeks--This refers to lost days or weeks. It may have some relationship to the Aztec unlucky days which fell at the end of a year.

heron--In Spanish this was referred to as "garza." Garza does not refer to an animal however, but carries the metaphorical meaning of the entire ceremony. The heron is therefore the ceremony.

sprinkles--This refers to the sowing of blood in a sanga or canal running from east to west.

letra--This refers to the greatness of a civilization; it is a religious concept, probably meaning the understanding or knowledge of things on a grand scale--the Word.

your mother your father--This refers to the transplantation of cochineal from one plant to another. The prayer here is being directed toward the insect.

bastong and nopal de tortuga--Two useless varieties of nopal.

great refuse--The Spanish word given here is "basura" and is used in a metaphorical sense. Copal is looked upon as the cast-off or refuse of the gods. Therefore, to burn copal is to return something associated with the divine to the gods.

granó--The granó is the cochineal. It is referred to as granó because of its granular appearance.

god thread (hilo)--The cochineal or the granó is referred to as the god of thread. Juan explains that the cochineal secretes a thread very much like spider webbing. It may also be metaphorically connected to the dying process.

the herb ash--This probably refers to the herb tlapanextli (Nahuatl) which is mixed with the cochineal in preparation of the dying medium.

you eat the best blood--This obviously refers to the nine plates of blood which have been offered throughout the ritual, but it may also refer to the cochineal's eating of the nopal and growing fat like a blood blister.

the bird is here--The reference here is to the heron or ceremony being presented.
Anselm Hollo's English version, after Eduard Seler, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (1904), II, 1059-1061. Sahagún wrote: "Thus was respite given the maize every eight years. For it was said that we brought much torment to it--that we ate it, we put chili on it, we mixed salt with it; it was mixed with lime. As we troubled our food to death, thus we revived it. Thus, it is said, the maize was given new youth when this was done." Tlāçolteotl (Our-Lady-of-the-Bunghole, mother of Lord Fertility) was the patron deity of this renewal.

POEM TO BE RECITED EVERY 8 YEARS
WHILE EATING UNLEAVENED TAMALES

Aztec

1.
the flower
    my heart
    it opened
at midnight
    that lordly hour
she has arrived
Tlāçolteotl
    our mother
    goddess desire

2.
in the birth house
in the flower place
on the day called 'one flower'
    the maize god is born

in the vapor and rain place
    where we go angling for jewel-fish

    where we too make our young
3.
soon day red sky
quechol-birds in the flowers

4.
down here on earth
    you rise in the market place and say

I am lord Quetzalcoatl

let there be gladness among the flowering trees
    and the quechol-bird tribes
who are the souls of the brave

may they rejoice
    hear the word of our lord
the quechol-bird's word

'your brother whom we mourn
    will never be killed again
never again will the poison dart strike him'

5.
maize flowers
    white and yellow
I have brought from the flower place

see there is the lord of the jewel land
playing ball in his holy field

there he is the old dog god Xolotl

6.
now go look if Piltzintecutli
    lord fertility himself
has yet lain down in the dark house
    in the house where it grows dark

o Piltzintli Piltzintli
    yellow feathers
you glue all over yourself

on the ball-playing field you lie down
    and in the dark house where it grows dark

7.
here comes a merchant

a vassal of Xochiquetzal
    mistress of Cholula

(heart o heart
    I fear the maize god is still on his way)

a merchant a man from Chacalla
    sells turquoise spikes for your ears
and turquoise bands for your arms

8.
the sleeper the sleeper he sleeps

with my hand I have rolled him to sleep

9.
here
    the woman

here
    am I

here
    asleep
SOUND-POEM NO. 1: HAIR-CUTTING SONG FOR THE DEAD

Kaingáng

kaichá yūpí tê kô
wa kâ na yô anggû kâi mò a nê
yangvé yuki kunê anê vavû ho
anê vavâ kaichá yūpí tê kô
kaichá yūpí tê kô
wa kâ na yô anggû kâi mbô anê
nang vê yûki ku nê anê va vû ho
a nê vá hã
AYAHUASCA SOUND-POEM

Cashinahua (Eastern Peru)

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A POEM FOR THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN SPEECH

I.
our real father Ñamandu old Number One
took a little piece out of his own divinity
& the wisdom contained in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
caused flames & a thin fog to come to be

II.
having made himself stand tall
took the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
conceived the origins of human speech
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
created the principles of human speech
& made them part of his divinity
before the earth was there
in the middle of that primal darkness
before he had a sense of where things were
our Number One real father Ñamandu
created the basic principles of human speech
& made them part of his divinity

III.
having conceived the origins of human speech to come
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
conceived the principles of human love
before the earth was there
in the middle of that primal darkness
before he had a sense of where things were
& with his wisdom's power to create
created the origins of human love
IV.
having created the principles of human speech
having created a small supply of human love
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
out of his loneliness he made a single sacred hymn
before the earth was there
in the middle of that primal darkness
before he had a sense of where things were
he made a sacred hymn out of his loneliness

V.
out of his loneliness the principles of human speech
out of his loneliness a small supply of love
out of his loneliness a little sacred hymn
then pondered long on who to make a partner to the principles
of human speech
pondered on who to make a partner to a little love
who to make a partner to the words that formed the hymn
then having pondered long & deep
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
created the comrades to his own divinity

VI.
having pondered long & deep
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
created brave-hearted Ñamandus
along with his own wisdom's reflection in the sun
before the earth was there
in the middle of that primal darkness
created a big-hearted Ñamandu
would be the father of his many sons to be
real father to the souls of the many sons to be
created a big-hearted Ñamandu
VII.
& what's more
out of the wisdom in his own divinity
& with his wisdom's power to create
took the real father of the Karaís to be
took the real father of the Jakairas to be
took the real father of the Tupás to be
& imparted a consciousness of divinity
to those real fathers of his many sons to be
to those real fathers of the word-souls of his many sons to be
he imparted a consciousness of divinity

VIII.
& what's more
real old father Ńamandu
because he wanted someone he could set his heart on
took the mother of the Ńamandus to be
& made her the confidant to his divinity
whom he would set his heart on
& the real mother of the Karaís to be
similarly
because he wanted someone he could set his heart on
he took the real mother of the Jakairas
& made her the confidant to his divinity
similarly
he took the one he would set his heart on
& made her the confidant to his divinity
the real mother of the Tupás to be

IX.
having assimilated the wisdom in the divinity
of their own Father Number One
& after having assimilated human speech
& after having been turned on to human love
& after having assimilated the words that formed the sacred hymn
& after having been turned on to the principles of wisdom's power to create
we also call them the high real fathers of our word-souls
the mothers high real mothers of our word-souls

--English version by Jerome Rothenberg
RITUAL SONG NO. 1 "For Tacuara Sacred Flaming Goddess"

from his source our Grandfather Old Number One rose up
our Grandfather sucked the flowers of his source & fattened
as 'the-Soul-that-Crossed-the-Sky had risen from that source
after our Grandfather the fathers of all souls had risen
to join into large groups a multitude had come together
there at their juncture where the source is the-Soul-that-
_Crossed-the-Sky turned up
said to our Grandfather old Shaman "how can you make yourself
be more?"
"don't know" Grandfather said although he did know he said he
didn't
"rip loose the center of your sacred cap & make a woman" said
_the-Soul-that-Crossed-the-Sky
then ripped the center loose and blessed it
was how he gave her power
gave her the name sweet bauble-cap.
old Grandmother the Great
thou sacred flaming bamboo goddess
with thee our Grandfather did find himself for wife
did stand in posture of reduplication
then Papa Rey came forth for meeting with our Grandfather
our Grandfather was clearing off his own
knew when he turned back from it that Papa Rey had gotten to
his house
he said "I'd best be gone already
"if that was really my sweet bauble she'll be getting to my
domicile" (he said)
& cracked his lightning now was the splendor of his flashes
lighting up the road he'd travel on to leave the earth
then said to Shaman Sun "if that one was my son he'll go &
catch up with my bolts
"if that one really was my son he'll go
"& set his feet into my domicile if that one really was my
son"
then measured forces with our Grandmother
he brought the winds of Hurricane against her
our Grandmother keeps cool our Grandmother who drops a road-
block in the Old Man's way

--English version by Jerome Rothenberg
THREE GUARANÍ POEMS

The Jaguar's Song

The kui-kui's scream
scares me unfailingly
I killed the lad
who was simple-minded
I perceive my tracks
on all the paths men use

To Give Snakes a Sense of Shame

I beg you Kuñambía with your fangs
to stay well away from the paths I must take
to keep well hidden with your fangs
away from the places I must pass through
to keep your fangs cool always
far from the places I must pass through
Jarará the Great keep your many grandchildren
well away from the places I must pass through

Friendly Hummingbird Greeting

If the nectar of your flowers
made you drunk, Colibri,
how much more likely
chicha will, Colibri

--English version by Gordon Brotherston
Two men sit facing & shout sacred narratives at each other, syllable by syllable, very rapidly, while they swing their bodies back & forth to the rhythm of their shouting. One man shouts a syllable, & the second man repeats it; then the first man says the second syllable, & the second man repeats it. If the origin myth begins, "In the beginning Elohim created sky & earth," the men shout as follows:

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& so on to the end.
Two men—each with a lance over his shoulder—face one another & speak by shouting. The words are very loud & sharply contracted from what they'd be in normal speech, so that the phrases consist of no more than two to four syllables. The speaker holds his hand over his mouth while shouting each phrase twice. Early in the conversation he makes a movement with his right or lance arm to give emphasis to his words, but doesn't yet move from the spot. Later he accompanies each shouted phrase by taking one step forward, beginning with the left foot & simultaneously raising the arm with the lance, letting it fall vibrating down on his shoulder. When the first speaker has shouted a phrase several times, he stops & stands still, the other one then speaking. The whole event lasts about 15 minutes.

Sample Conversation

--LESTAWKLOUD LESTAWKLOUD
--LESMAKYKWRRRDS LESMAKYKWRRRDS
--WATSTUHSAY? WATSTUHSAY?
--HURYUPNDMEET HURYUPNDMEET
--SVENJAMRRDER SVENJAMRRDER
--WEELSSLEEPFRRWAY WEELSSLEEPFRRWAY
--SCATCHTUHBASSERS SCATCHTUHBASSERS
--DUNTLETIMNO DUNTLETIMNO
--OLEGUYSEZZO OLEGUYSEZZO
POEM FROM THE SHRUNKEN HEAD VICTORY DANCE

Jivaro (Untsuri ŝuara)

Today, today, let us greet the dawn only playing.
Today, today, let us greet the dawn only playing.
Chuwí tells me
Chuwí tells me
We are going to greet the dawn playing.
Chuwí tells me
Chuwí tells me
We are going to greet the dawn.

And they taught me previously,
I cannot sleep easily.
And I will meet the dawn together with Chuwí.
And don't you sleep!
And don't you sleep!
For now it is dawning, for now it is dawning.

--Translation by Michael Harner
FIRST SHAMAN SONG

Jivaro (Untsuri ūara)

I, I, I, I, I
I, I, I, I

I am like First Shaman
I am like First Shaman
When I drink natém
My whole body becomes cold
& I easily suck out that spirit-dart
I, I, I, I

I'm always above the clouds
& that's how come I have power
Because I drank natém
I drank enough to have power
My whole body is cold
That's how I have power to suck out that spirit-dart
I, I, I, I

There's a very large body of water
So that I'm like a great body of water
I have a crown but it's gold
A crown & it looks so lovely
Lovely when I drink natém
That's why it's easy to suck out that spirit-dart
I, I, I, I

I'm always above the clouds
That's why I can cure so easily
I have the spirit-darts of natém
I'm seated but I do feel cold
There must be lots of breezes around me
I, I, I, I
My spirit-darts are like birds
& the wings & bodies are dreams
I'm ready to start with them now
My spirit-darts are sitting all over me
& as I get to feel cold
I'll get to have power
I can easily suck out that spirit-dart
I, I, I, I

I'm like some anaconda in the Napo River
That's why I have power to suck out that spirit-dart
I, I, I, I

Wait, wait a little
Now I'm going to be dizzy
I'll be starting to see when I'm high

(pause, followed by sucking & dry vomiting)

Now I've sucked out that spirit-dart
Now the pain will soon go away

--Translated from Jívaro by Michael Harner
SHAMAN HUMMINGBIRD SONG

Campa (Eastern Peru)

hummingbirds hummingbirds they come running
hummingbirds hummingbirds dark appearance
hummingbirds hummingbirds all our brothers
hummingbirds hummingbirds they all hover
hummingbirds hummingbirds group without blemish

--Translation by Gerald Weiss

A SONG OF THE SWEET-SMELLING LOVE GRASS

Uitoto

She pulled his sweet cock
up & down
His sweet grass was driving her wild

Pulled her sweet love's cock
up & down
His sweet-smelling grass made her do it

O the hummingbird's song
O the glitterer

--English version by Jerome Rothenberg
TEN-EAGLES' SONG

Araucanian

a chief
Ten-eagles
once sang:
--I'm Ten-eagles
they put a spell on me
in the choked forest Fayucura
They gave Ten-eagles three hearts
if one dies
the others keep pumping--
says Ten-eagles.
That's why he'd never give a damn for anyone
why one of his captains
did him in
when he died they opened his chest
and ripped out the three hearts
that's how Ten-eagles died, yeah.

--English version by Armand Schwerner
THE MACHI EXORCISES THE SPIRIT HUECUVE

Araucanian

got 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
so get out Huecuve;
  the master of men
that's who sent me.
In the midpoint of the sky
I see a bull
lizard-color.
--that foul machi forced me out--:
say that to your mother and father

--English version by Armand Schwerner
She was the only daughter of a marriage. Every day she went to the mountain to watch the cattle. Her mother and father didn't have any more children than her. Because of this they sent her day after day to pasture the cattle. The girl was ready to get married, very developed and beautiful.

One day, at the top of a hill, a very refined and very thin young fellow approached her.

--Be my lover--he said to her. And he kept on talking about love.

Seeing that he was tall and strong the young girl accepted.

From then on they met on the mountain; there they made love.

--I want you to always bring me fresh toasted flour--said the young fellow to the shepherdess.

She did what her lover asked her to. And she brought him fresh cooked flour every day. They ate together and served each other.

They lived like this for a long time. The boy walked and ran with his nose to the ground, he crept, because he had many tiny little feet. It's because he was not a man. He was a serpent. But in her eyes he seemed to be a thin and tall young man.

The girl got pregnant and said to the young man:

--I am pregnant. When my parents find out they will scold me and ask me who is the father of my child. We must decide whether we are going to your house or mine.

The young man answered:

--We'll have to go to your house. And I can't enter in the open, that's not possible. Tell me, by the mortar in your house, is there a hole in the wall? Isn't there always a hole next to the mortar in which the rag is kept for cleaning the stone?

--Yes; next to the mortar there's a hole.

--You will take me there--said the young man. And the girl asked:
--What are you going to do in the hole?
--I can live there day and night.
--You won't fit. It's not possible; it's a very little hole.
--It will do. And will serve me as a house. Now I want to know where you sleep: in the kitchen or in the granary?
--I sleep in the kitchen--said the young girl--. I sleep with my parents.
--And where is the mortar?
--Our mortar is in the granary.
--When I come you'll sleep on the ground next to the mortar.
--And how am I to get away from my parents? They won't want me to sleep alone.
--You'll pretend to be afraid that thieves will steal from the granary. "I'll sleep there to watch," you will tell them. And only you will enter to grind on the mortar; don't let your parents do it. Every time that you grind flour, you will throw a little into the hole where I will be living. That will be my only nourishment. I won't eat anything else. And so they don't see me you will carefully cover the hole with the rag for cleaning the mortar.

Then the young girl asked:
--Can't you present yourself openly to my parents?
--No, I can't--he answered--. Little by little I will appear to them.
--And how are you going to live in that hole? It's very small; only a piece of wool would fit.
--You'll have to make it bigger from the inside.
--OK--she said--. You know what's good for you.
--But you have to carry me there. And leave me behind the house. At night you will lead me to the granary.
--Good--the lover answered.

That night the young girl went to her house alone. She sneaked into the granary and made the hole by the mortar bigger. The next day she went to the mountain to pasture the cattle. She met her lover in the usual place. "I've already made the rag hole bigger," she said. At nightfall they went to the lover's house. She left the young man by the corral, behind the house. And she came in the night for him; she carried him to the hole by the mortar. The young man slid smoothly into the hole. The girl said to herself while he was going into the hole: "Impos-
sible! He won't be able to do it."

This very same night the young girl said to her parents:
--My father, my mother: it's quite possible that thieves will take everything we own in our store-house. From now on I'm going to live in the room where we keep our food.
--Go, my daughter--nodded the parents.

The young girl took her bed to the store-house and laid it out on the ground next to the mortar. The serpent slipped into bed and the lovers slept together. And every night they slept together from then on.

When there was grinding to be done on the mortar, the young girl wouldn't let anyone else do it; she went, and threw handfuls of flour into the rag hole. Before going out, she closed the hole with the skin they used for cleaning the mortar. Thus neither the parents or anybody else could see what was in the hole. The parents were not suspicious; they didn't think to uncover the hole and look inside. Only when they realized that their daughter was with child did they worry and decide to talk.
--It looks like our daughter is pregnant--they said. We have to ask her who the father is.

They called her and questioned her:
--You're pregnant. Who is the father?
But she didn't answer.

So the father and mother asked her alone, one by one. But she kept silent.

Until she felt birth pains night after night. The parents took care of her. And those nights the serpent wasn't able to slide into the young girl's bed.

The serpent no longer lived in the hole. He grew much, he became enormous, and no longer could he enter the hole in the wall. Sucking the young girl's blood had made him fat and he was swollen and reddish. He scratched at the base of the mortar, made a hole there and changed his house. It was a kind of cave under the mortar, a big nest, the new house of the serpent. He had fattened completely, sideways; he was plethoric. But in his lover's eyes he was no snake, he was a young fellow. A young fellow who fattened strongly.

The lovers were no longer able to cover the cave they had scratched out under the mortar. Thus the young girl doubled her blankets every morning and piled them around the stone
In this way they were able to hide the serpent's nest from the mother and father's eyes when they entered the granary.

Because their daughter's silence was so stubborn, the parents decided to find out, they asked the people of the ayllu:

--Our daughter has appeared with child from nowhere. Haven't you seen her somewhere talking to somebody? Maybe in the fields where she fed cattle?

But everybody answered:

--No; we've seen nothing.

--Where do you put her to sleep?--somebody asked.

--In the beginning she slept with us, in the same room. But now she insists on sleeping in the store-room; there she makes her bed on the ground next to the mortar. And only she wants to grind; she won't let anyone come close to the mortar.

--And why won't she permit anyone to come close to the mortar? What does she say about this?--they asked.

--"My parents, don't come close to the mortar; you'll get my bed dirty; I alone will grind," she says--answered the parents.

--And why doesn't she want you to get close to the mortar?--they questioned.

--She has already suffered the first birth pains--answered the parents.

Then they said:

--Go to the Guesser. Ask him to look and find out. We common folks can't know what happens. What will it be!

The father and mother went to look for the Guesser. They carried a little package of coca. They asked him to see about their daughter.

--My daughter is not feeling well; we don't know what she has--they said.

The Guesser asked:

--What's going on with your daughter? What's hurting her?

--She has appeared with child. We don't know from whom. For a long time she has suffered pains night after night. And she can't give light. She won't tell us who is the father--said the woman.

The Guesser consulted the coca leaves and said:

--Something! There is something! Under the mortar of your house! And that is the father! Because the father is not like us, he's no man.
--And what can it be?--answered the old folks frightened--.
Guess everything, guess well, we beg you.

So the Guesser kept talking:
--There inside there's a serpent! It's not a man!
--And what can we do?--asked the parents.

The Guesser pondered a few minutes and spoke again, speaking to the father:
--Your daughter will be against killing the serpent. "Kill me before you kill my lover," she'll say to you. Send her away, anyplace, a day away. And even this she will refuse. Tell her this way, using the name of some town: I know that in this town there is a remedy for giving birth. Go, buy this remedy and bring it back to me. They tell me that with this remedy you will give birth. If you don't obey this time, I will hit you; I will beat you to death--you'll tell her. Only thus will you make her go. At the same time you will hire people armed with sticks, with machetes and big clubs. Then you will make your daughter carry out your command. And when she is far, you'll all go inside the granary and push over the mortar. Underneath there is a big serpent. You'll beat it to death. Beware the serpent doesn't jump on you, for if it does, it will kill you. Cut its head off well; open a grave and bury it.

--Very well sir. We will follow your instructions--said the father, and went out; his wife followed him.

Immediately he went for people; strong men who would help kill the beast. He hired ten men armed with clubs and sharp machetes.

--Tomorrow, when my daughter is gone, you'll come to my house, walking so nobody can see you--he told them.

The next morning they ordered the young girl to make a lunch basket. They made her get up early. They gave her money to make it look good, and they told her:
--With this money you'll buy the remedy to give birth. In Sumakk Marka, in that town that is on the other side of the river, you'll find the remedy.

But the young girl didn't want to obey. "I can't go--she said. I don't want to," So the parents threatened her:
--If you don't go, if you don't bring the remedy, we'll kill you with our sticks. We'll beat you until we destroy that foetus you carry in your belly.
Frightened the girl took off.

They watched her walk until she was out of sight. When she vanished on the horizon the hired men went to the father's house. They gathered in the yard. They shared what coca they had; they chewed a while, and afterwards they went into the granary; they carried all the things inside out into the yard; finally they took the wife's bed out.

And they armed themselves. With clubs on their shoulders and gripping the machetes they entered the granary; they surrounded the mortar and they waited. They pushed it over; a fat serpent was stretched out there; it had a big head like a man's; it was fattening. "Wat'akk!" the serpent jumped seeing itself discovered, its heavy body made a noise when it stood up. The ten men beat it and wounded it. They divided it in various pieces. Its head was thrown out into the garden-plot. And there it began to writhe, it jumped, it bubbled around the ground. The men followed it and pounded it, they went where it fell and tried to flatten it. They beat it from above; its blood ran over the ground; it gushed and spouted from the mutilated body. But it could not die.

And when they were beating the serpent's head, in that very moment, the wife, the lover, arrived. Seeing the people gathered in the yard, she ran to the granary, towards the mortar. The stone was bathed in blood. The serpent's nest was empty. She turned her face to look toward the yard: several hit her lover's head with clubs. Then she uttered a scream of death:

--Why, why do you rip apart my lover's head? Why do you kill him?--she shouted--. This was my husband. This is the father of my child!

She screamed again; her voice filled the house. She beheld the blood and felt horror. And by the effort she made to scream she aborted: a crowd of little snakes wriggled on the ground, they swarmed over the yard, jumping and crawling.

Finally they killed the big snake. They also killed the little snakes. They chased them and squashed them. Then some men dug a hole in the earth and others swept in the blood. They swept out the blood from the whole house, they gathered by the hole and buried the serpents and the mud of blood. And they carried the young girl to her parents' room. There they cured her. They fixed up the granary as it was. They cleaned and arranged the house. They lugged the mortar down to a waterfall of the river;
they put the stone under the fall and there they left it. And when everything was in order the young girl's parents gave to each man what was fair for his work. They received their salary and they went.

Later the parents asked their daughter:

--How, in what way could you live with a serpent? It was no man your husband; it was a demon.

Only then they young girl confessed her story; she told about her first meeting with the serpent. And everything came to be known and was cleared up. The parents cured their daughter. They took care of her and healed her from her body and from her soul. And then, much later, the young girl married a good man. And her life was happy.

--English version by Clayton Eshleman & Halma Cristina Perry
POEMS FOR A CARNIVAL

Quechua

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

--English versions by Gordon Brotherston
SONG OF CAJAMARCA

Quechua

When the Inca made war to teach his law  
He bore with him gifts and love  
And nobody died but the madmen.  
You say that your god is good  
And you kill us.  
You say that he is pious  
And you conduct yourselves with us like thieves.

--English version by W.S. Merwin

COMMENTARIES

Sound-Poem No. 1: A Hair-Cutting Song for the Dead


The song, according to Henry, is (like most Kaingang songs) "completely made up of meaningless syllables, but" (he adds) "their meaninglessness is of a peculiar character, for often the syllables themselves have meaning in an absolute sense; that is to say, they exist in the Kaingang language as meaningful elements, though in the songs their arrangement & sequence is such that no meaning is derivable from them. It is as if we were to make a song in English of the syllables to, sigh, fly, me, & so on. There are words in our language which have the same phonetic structure as these syllables, but if I make up a song of these words alone, in the sequence given, it is obvious that they have meaning only if we insist on a very arbitrary definition of the word 'meaning.'" (Henry, page 199.) Maybe so, but the possibility does in fact exist in our own work as well--as with these closing lines, say, from Jackson Mac Low's Night Walk, in which the reader as performer is encouraged
"freely group the words within them in any ways (he sees) fit," towards new readings from performance to performance:

delight evening evening warmth freezing revealing
starlight ice
sliding meaning standing coats
twigs dark
woman lips grey eyes memory remembering finding
telling clothing
sweetness eyebrows teeth hair smell evening streamsound
hands night dimness
finding being constellations darkness hugging darkness
listening sliding smiling
smiling lips constellations listening
hugging walking grey telling friends bodies thankfulness
clasping

or at least the resemblance can't be that easily dismissed.

Ayahuasca Sound-Poem

Source: Kenneth Kensinger in Hallucinogens & Shamanism (ed. Michael J. Harner), to be published in 1972 by Oxford University Press.

Chant to accompany the shaking, etc. during ayahuasca (nixi pae) trance. Writes Kensinger: "Volume of the chanting rises & falls, punctuated by shrieks of terror, retching & vomiting. No attempt is made to coordinate either the rhythm or pitch of the chants. Each man devotes his attention to what he is experiencing & his own search for knowledge." A Cashinahua shaman describes his trip:

"We drank nixi pae. Before starting to chant, we talked a bit. The brew began to move me & I drank some more. Soon I began to shake all over. The earth shook. The wind blew & the trees swayed. . . . The nixi pae people began to appear. They had bows & arrows & wanted to shoot me. I was afraid but they told me their arrows would not kill me, only make me more drunk . . . . Snakes, large brightly colored snakes were crawling on the ground. They began to crawl all over me. One large female snake tried to swallow me, but since I was chanting she couldn't succeed. . . . I heard armadillo tail trumpets & then many frogs & toads singing. The world was transformed. Everything became bright. I moved very fast. Not my body but my eye spirit . . . . I saw lots of gardens full of manioc & plantains. The storage sheds were full of corn . . . . The peanut racks were full . . . . I came down the trail to a village. There was much noise, the sound of
people laughing. They were dancing kacha, the fertility dance. Everybody was laughing. Many of the women were pregnant. I was happy. I knew we would be well & have plenty to eat."

Poem for the Origins of Human Speech

Source: León Cadogan, La Literatura de los Guaraníes, Editorial J. Mortiz, Mexico, 1965. Nande Ru (=Namandu), creator god of the Mbyás, is imaged elsewhere as Colibri (=Hummingbird).

Ritual Song No. 1: For Tacuara

Source: ditto. Part of Kaf-Paiova sacred narrative first published by Marcial Samaniego; Spanish version by Cadogan.

Jasuká (tr. "source") is also a ritual element (adorno) along with the jeguká (=sacred cap) & others not mentioned in the present section--thus linking rites & first creation. Goddess picks up one of her names (Jeguakávy, here="bauble-cap") from that. Our Grandfather = creator god Nane Ramóí, who must throw the challenge at Shaman Sun (=Pa'i Kuara) in suspicion he's the secret offspring of Papa Rey & Goddess.

Three Guaraní Poems

Source: ditto.

The first song belongs to the Chiripás, the next two to the Paí-Kaiovás. The cry of the kui-kui bird in The Jaguar's Song is a warning of the jaguar's presence; it's also understood that the jaguar's saying he's hungry for human flesh having once tasted it. Kuñambía in the second poem is the grandmother of the jungle snakes. In the third poem the colibri, or hummingbird, is a mythical creature who brings messages from the gods; "nectar of flowers" is also the religious name for the chicha drunk during the ceremonies at which such messages are received.

Language Event I

Source: Jules Henry, as above. J.R.'s arrangment, etc.

Language events--instructions, that is, for verbal happenings--turn up in the work of a good number of contemporary poets, e.g. Mac Low, Higgins, Acconci, E. Williams, among others. All of which, tribal or modern, only goes to prove that language (at least as oral performance) can't be put down as a finished (therefore dead) piece of business.
Language Event II


See the preceding commentary. The realization ("sample conversation") is the work of Jerome Rothenberg based on data supplied by Karsten.

Poem from the Shrunken Head Victory Dance


From the tsantsa (shrunken head) victory dance. Chuwí is the name of the victim.

First Shaman Song

Source: Michael Harner in *Hallucinogens & Shamanism* (ed., M. Harner) to be published in 1972 by Oxford University Press. Adapted by J.R. in collaboration with the translator.

Shaman's exhortations (curing songs) as he goes into trance. First Shaman (Tsúŋi) is, like other dream-time beings, operative into present time. Natém is a hallucinogenic drink made from the banisteriopsis vine; elsewhere = yagé or yajé (Colombia), ayahuasca (Ecuador & Peru), & caapi (Brazil). The spirit-darts (=tsentsak) themselves compose the crown of stanza three, which "is seen floating over the shaman's head," & cause the breezes as they fly around. The Napo River anacondas are "the most powerful shamans known to the Jívaro."

Shaman Hummingbird Song

Source: Gerald Weiss in *ditto*.

Part of shamanistic Campa ayahuasca ceremony. "When the shaman sings he is only repeating what he hears the spirits sing, he is merely singing along with them. At no time is he possessed by a spirit, since Campa culture does not include a belief in possession . . . . The entire atmosphere is one of decorum without frenzy, even though the shaman is in a drugged trance."
A Song of the Sweet-Smelling Love Grass

Source: K. T. Preuss, Religion und Mythologie der Uitoto, 1921.

Ten-Eagles' Song


the Machi exorcises the spirit Huecuve

Source: ditto.

Writes Schwerner, after Soustelle: "The Machi is a sorceress & healer. Men are rarely machis; when they are they let their hair grow & 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 him to die of consumption. Its obvious preference is for rich people.

The Snake's Lover

Source: Quechuan-Spanish version by José María Arguedas, who took it orally from Indians whose first language is Quechua & who speak Spanish with some difficulty but with a flair all their own. The English translators have tried to maintain the "almost banally formal, almost archaic quality that comes through the Spanish, with its echoes of the language of Peruvian officialdom, etc." The word ayllu = Quechuan word for "community."

Poems for a Carnival

Source: Quechua texts with Spanish translations by Jesus Lara in his Poesía popular quechua, Editorial Canata, La Paz, 1947.

The occasion of the poems is an eight-day carnival feast in the valleys of Cochabamba (Bolivia), in which groups of singers go around singing & making up songs in exchange for drinks of chicha.

Song of Cajamarca

Source: Jorge Basadre's Spanish version in Literatura Inca, 1938.
Midē (medicine society) songs & picture-songs of the Ojibwa, recently gathered & translated by Howard A. Norman. Older versions of picture-songs appear in Densmore & Hoffman, but the exaggerated drawings, as Norman writes, seem to introduce a "whole new realm, the 'hieroglyphical koine of visual appearance.'"

OJIBWA PICTURES & SONG-PICTURES

(First Section)

Song-Picture Number 1

The curved line above the candidate represents the request opening up from his empty mouth. This involves rattling & distribution of sacred shells, so more might ask the Midē guardian for water.

Song-Picture Number 2

This is precluded by dance inside a circle of people so that the (disease) is visible. The last line is repeated to each member of the circle, who in turn waves rattles. He then leaves in silence with shells & medicine bag.

Song-Picture Number 3

Toad woman is a manido of great protection & power. She represents much healing power of the earth & acts as an "infiltrator & scout" of other tribes. It is told she brings news by way of "changes in the earth & sky." It is good to have her pity. The Midē symbol is above her because her pity rises from earth.
I asked for water in my empty mouth
I was tired of waiting like the crooked trees
I was tired of waiting

One part of me is not dressed like the other
Will I die of it?

Toad woman has pity on me
This is what I knew would happen
(Second Section)

Following the telling of a story of a wolf, the listeners acknowledge their understanding by silence. The storyteller breaks the silence & asks the two questions. Rattling & drumming. One listener begins by "telling a laugh"...giving the wolf a strange property & acting it out if he can by facial & body expressions. As each member has a turn he shakes his rattle; thus the laughing begins & may extend for an hour & start up again later in the day.

—When will laughing surround this silence?
When will the laughing begin?

(listeners)

snow-legged wolf

fat fat belly wolf

berry-face wolf
toad-skin wolf

wolf walking on his back
Mide drawings of animals often show an exaggeration "delivered to the mind." It is told that when one sees an animal he may never see it again. So, after a long look or even a quick glance, one characteristic of the animal lingers in the mind. In the simplicity of the drawing, the exaggerated part (when present) is what is most remembered.
Sung by Dan Hanna (1912? -1968), collected by Leanne Hinton & translated in collaboration with the singer. Poem's landscape is Grand Canyon.

HAVASUPAI MEDICINE SONG

The land we always wanted  hey, heya
The land we always wanted  hey, heya

It is right here  hey, heya
It is right here  hey, heya

Red rock wall  hey, heya
Red rock wall  hey, heya

Spotted with brown  hey, heya
Spotted with brown  hey, heya

Shooting up high  hey, heya
Shooting up high  hey, heya

All around our home  hey, heya
All around our home  hey, heya

Red rock wall  hey, heya
Red rock wall  hey, heya

Shooting up high  hey, heya
It is right here  hey, heya

Down at the bottom  hey, heya
A spring will always be there  hey, heya

The spring has been ours  hey, heya
The spring has been ours  hey, heya

A very long time  hey, heya
A very long time  hey, heya
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Repeated Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the land that is ours</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right down the center</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright blue-green</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A blue-green line</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I'm thinking</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I'm thinking</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right beside the river</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The water-girl reeds</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water-girl reeds</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water foam is forming</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right beside the river</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silt layers forming</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines along the edges</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I'm thinking</td>
<td>hey, heya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is what I'm thinking
A water-walking beetle
Water-walking beetle
On top of the river
The water spreads around him
This is what I'm thinking
Grasses of the water
Grasses of the water
Bright blue-green
Bright blue-green
Under the river
Under the river
Waving to and fro
Waving to and fro
This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking
Under the river
Pebbles in the water
Tiny little pebbles
And there sliding over them
Spreading out on top of them
Is our drinking water
On, gliding on
On toward the north
On in that direction
And now it is gone
This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking
The song brings us here
The song brings us here
My body is bleeding
My body is bleeding
Here I sit down
Here I sit down
I sing me a song
I sing me a song
This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking
Medicine spirit
Medicine spirit
Man who is a shaman
Man who is a shaman
I am just like him
I am just like him
My body is bleeding
My body is bleeding
Here I sit down
Here I sit down
I sing me a song
I sing me a song
The things I have named
The things I have named
I leave them behind me
I leave them behind me
This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking
The song brings us here
The song brings us here

We're leaving the canyon
We're leaving the canyon

Out on the mesa
Out on the mesa

Horses that are mine
Horses that are mine

The place where they feed
The place where they feed

There by the junipers
Short, shrubby junipers

Small, bushy trees
They are right there

Horses that are mine
Gathered in their shade

This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking

The song brings us here
The song brings us here

We all swing around
We all swing around

Going down the wall again
Going down the wall again

White rock wall
Spotted with brown

Down at the bottom
A spring will always be there
Spring that's never dry
It will always be there

It will always be there
There I bring my horses

They are drinking water
The spring will always be there

White rock wall
Spotted with brown

Shooting up high
It is right there

Right down the center
Right down the center

The horses that are mine
The horses that are mine

There is their trail
There is their trail

A tan-colored line
A tan-colored line

A zig-zagging line
A zig-zagging line

It leads to the bottom
It leads to the bottom

It is right there
This is what I'm thinking

The song brings us here
We're going down the canyon

Red rock wall
Going down the canyon
They are right there
Down in the canyon

Many red rocks
Not very tall

I am right there
I have arrived

I go along
This is what I'm thinking

Red rock wall
Spotted with brown

Shooting up high
It is right there

Down at the bottom
Red fallen rocks

Red rock boulders
Spotted with brown

Down at the base
They are right there

Now my bleeding ends
It ends right there

This is what I'm thinking
This is what I'm thinking

NOTE. There were once, and may someday be again, Hava-
supai medicine men who dream songs and sing them as part of
the curing process. But the composition of medicine songs was
never solely the prerogative of the professional. There have
always been a few people around who dream their own songs in
time of illness, and sing them to cure themselves.
Most of these personal medicine songs are never heard by other people; they die with their composers. This song, however, was created for the informal and highly social sweathouse curing ceremony; it has therefore been heard by many people over the generations and has survived. The singer, Dan Hanna, learned it from Supai Shorty, who died a few years back at an age estimated to be close to 110. Supai Shorty in turn had learned it as a young man from an old relative of his. The original dreamer is not known.

In spite of its use in the sweathouse, this song has the formal structure and stylistic characteristics of the true medicine song. Also, like many Havasupai songs, it takes the form of a long narrative poem with a partially improvised text. Depending on the mood of the singer, it may be shortened or stretched out to an hour or more. Motifs may be glossed over or left out altogether in one performance, or dwelt on in great detail in another. Words may be stretched out by the addition of extra syllables, varying from performance to performance in sound and placement.

The song uses no instrumental accompaniment.

--L. H.
Andrew Peynetsa's account of some aspects of Zuni hunting, collected (July 1971), transcribed, & edited by Dennis Tedlock.

WHEN THE OLD TIMERS WENT DEER HUNTING

The old timers
when they went deer hunting
when they got hungry--
as soon as you kill a deer
everything's still hot inside:
you know that blood inside
the body
the blood inside--
they took a handful and drank it.
They used to do that, the old timers did.
And they ate raw lungs
RAW.
They said they tasted good, they said 'OLHTI'
to mean it tasted good, yeah.
That was the old timers,
That old man Shananapti:
he always gave us a story on that, he told us what he used to
do when he
used to go hunting.
You know way back in 1800 to 1700
you know these deer were
scattered all over and they were scarce.
There were not many deer the way there are up-to-date now,
you know.
Well these hunters
would make a plan that they were going wa------y out to
   Springerville.

They took the horses, got the burros
got their lunches on them and they went over there.
Probably they'd stay there about a week.
If they were lucky
each man killed his big
deer.
Maybe they'd stay one whole week.
And there had to be somebody to make jerky out of it, so that
guy had to be there too:
as they killed it, why he made jerky out of it
sliced them you know and
hung them on the
wood, sticks
to let them dry off.

And they
dug the ground and put the hides in there
and they
got almost, I guess, almost rotten you know
and that
hair came off.
Why it was almost just like, well it was a buckskin
but it wasn't tanned yet
but they brought it home you know.
They divided it up too:
they divided it up before they left the camp. Suppose they
wanted to come home:
why they put
this
buckskin
in layers, however many guys there were, they put their
hides in there.
They got that jerked meat out, they divided it up:
they went around with the meat
to each man
and the next time bones
whatever they had
cut up
dried up
why they divided it all up.
Maybe they had about
one deer, it looks like one deer was all dried up already
and they tied it up with that
hide.
And the
guy that was making jerky:
he got something too.
And then they came.
They used to do that.
Well they
figured on killing a lot of them
so they stayed there about one week probably.
Well at that time
they always used to make camp
and that same night they made little
hills, you know.
And that's where, between those two hills
they made a hole right in the center there
and they
fasted right there with those prayer sticks
so that they would get those deer.
They made
an entrance on both sides:
one entrance on this side and an entrance on this side
where, if they were lucky--
they said that if they were lucky--
the deer tracks would be coming in
to that hole.
But if there was BAD LUCK coming
maybe the BEAR tracks would be coming in there, that was
a dangerous
sign on it
see.
If an animal like a
wildcat or something put a track in there where that hole was
that was danger, they say
because they might see a
bear
or a lion
or maybe a wolf:
those things were dangerous in those years.
So they put up that thing to get a sign:
they might get some design on it.
(How big was it?)
Oh about that big (about a foot high)
about so:
little, small hills you know.
And they made a hole between those two hills
and that's where they planted their prayer sticks
and they fasted right there every morning:
put the corn meal on it
and every night they checked
or the next morning they went over there and checked it.
If they were lucky
the deer tracks would be coming into that hole at BOTH ENDS:
that was their
sign.
It showed they were going to get the deer.
And sure enough they'd be killing deer.
Why, as soon as they got enough
and everything--their meat, all those bones--was all dried
why they divided it up
then they came home.
That's the way they used to do that.

But later on around
1800
well around
1890-something or 1880
that was the time
there got to be so many deer around here.
I know one man named Kaskala, he used to live down below
where that Chauncey's wall is (points out the window).
Well back of it there used to be houses around there
and that's why my father always visited this guy:
a deer hunter.
Where we went up to Henry's yesterday
right up to--
you haven't been there to that spring? (No.)
Well there's a spring over there, they used to live up there
you know
in those cornfields
with their sheep you know
and this man, old man Kaskala:
he was a deer hunter.
He always killed a deer
up there because nobody
ever
saw him, because
he would just go out a little ways and kill one.
They used to live that way.
When they lived down here
my father always went over there and visited them, probably
they'd killed a deer
and when the visitor came there they
gave him some meat.
That was the first time I tasted deer meat.
May father always went to visit him you know.

Then in those days
suppose the deer hunter came in about this time
bringing the deer
on his back
and he always had something to spare
or a little meat
to eat, he'd already cut it, or else the lungs
or the heart.
Then suppose the old ladies were getting the water from this
creek
and maybe that deer hunter came around before he crossed
the creek.
There were no bridges like this you know:
well, we just crossed, and maybe the women were getting
water from the creek
and the hunter came around.
If she saw that he had a deer on his back
the woman would say, "Kesh ton aawiya?"
she'd say that.
That means they're coming.
Well
the hunter
whatever he had to spare
he'd give it to the lady
and then the lady would think about
what she was going to give to him
back to him
to thank him for it, you know, for getting the meat.
Then the next morning or evening
she'd bring a
bowl of
corn meal flour:
"chuuk'ina" they call it.
They put this chuuk'ina, they
put it in the water and
stir it and then you drink it raw.
That's the way they used to do.
Sometimes
they brought a bowl
about so (about a foot in diameter), not a big bowl, and put the
flour in there
so it could be fed to this
ky'apin ho"i
deer.
That's the way they did it, see.

NOTES. Springerville is 80 miles s.s.w. of Zuni. By "fasted" it is meant that the hunters prayed and made offerings. "About this time" means late afternoon, the time of the narration. "Kesh ton aawiya" means "Are you (plural) coming," and is thus addressed to both the hunter and the deer. "Ky'apin ho"i" means "raw person," that is, a person who, unlike a human, does not depend on cooked food.
NOTE. Richard Johnny John is one of the leading singers & makers-of-songs at the Allegany (Seneca) Reservation in western New York State: descended from singers, some of them, like the two grandfathers he mentions, very important in their own time. The narrative is a piecing-together of bits from a series of interviews between us in August 1968. I asked him to speak about his life as a songmaker (poet too in the use of both words & word-like sounds) & about the practice of his art as carried on within the heh-non-deh-not-ha or traditional Iroquois Singing Society.

The "woman's dance" songs mentioned throughout are the most popular of the secular or social dances, also the most interesting from my own point of view; i.e., they're the only ones still being made with any frequency, & they often do have words to them, whereas most Seneca pop songs (& many sacred ones as well) are "wordless." Typical structure of the contemporary woman's dance song is: intro sung by leader; repeat of intro plus 2nd part, by leader & chorus; repeat of whole by leader & chorus. Instruments are horn rattles for chorus, water-drum for lead singer. While I was at Allegany, in 1968, the principal makers of woman's songs for the Cold Spring Longhouse Singing Society were Herbert Dowdey (then absent in Canada), Avery Jimerson & Richard Johnny John.

The Kinzua Dam is the flood control project on the Allegany River, backwater from which was supposed to sweep over that part of the reservation on which most of the Senecas were living. They put up a strong fight for an alternate plan, but lost & are now resettled on two sides of the proscribed land, still waiting for the waters to come in.

The Gaiwiyo ("code" or "good message") was brought by the Four Beings to the Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake, in the last decade of the 18th Century, & resulted in a fundamental reformation of the native religion. Even so it retains many ancient features, both in the public ceremonies (or "doings") at the longhouse, & in the rituals of the various medicine societies. It is today one of the principal vehicles for retaining a deeply-rooted Indian way-of-life among the Senecas.

—Jerome Rothenberg

1.

How I really got started with songs was from the old-time Singing Society that they used to have amongst the oldtimers, amongst the older men. At that time there was a lot of older men that was in the Singing Society, and I kind of picked it off from them, the ways that they were singing. I guess everybody's got their own way of singing and how to make up songs.

There's quite a few old men that I remember. I can't forget my two grandfathers — they were both singers — and a lot of others besides. One of my grandfathers was Chauncey Johnny John naturally, and the other was Howard
Jimerson. Then that goes all along through Amos Redeye (he used to do a lot of singing), Wesley White and Willy Stevens, Clarence White, Sherman Redeye: there was quite a few of them. And old John Jimerson used to do quite a bit of singing himself, made up a lot of songs. In years back too you can’t forget Ed Currey.

All them oldtimers talked about even older men than they were, they called them oldtimers themselves, and there were still some older ones than they were. Even up till today we sometimes talk about the oldtimers, and we sing songs that’s even older than what we are as of today. Sometimes we get in the mood to sing some of these oldtimers’ songs, and they’re really, I wouldn’t be afraid to say that there may be some of the songs that we do sing today that are over a hundred years old; I wouldn’t be afraid to bet that they are older than a hundred years old, some of them. Among the social dances too — like the old Moccasin Dance we have, that’s a real oldtimer, I don’t know how long back that has started up. Some of these dances and some of the songs that they do today have been danced from way back when the Caiwiyo first came to Handsome Lake. We used to have all of these different social dances, and some of the songs are still sung as we remember them.

In the old times, you know, when all these oldtimers used to get together, they’d pick out a spot, they’d go to somebody’s house. In them days they didn’t do like we do now: sometimes we go right to the longhouse and sing at the longhouse, have the singing group come to the longhouse; but in them days there was so many of them, that sometimes on both ends of the reservation there was singing. There’d be maybe a group down in Quaker Bridge, and then there would be another group singing in Cold Spring, all on the same night, there was that many of us singers in the old days.

Now we’re so far apart and there’s so few that really can sing, but in the olden days they would mostly go on foot to these houses, they were so close together. They all lived, I guess, in one big circle right around Cold Spring and Quaker Bridge; that was right in the middle of the reservation, and most of the longhouse believers were right in that circle. It was more or less handy for them to pick out a place where they could meet and sing on this one night, and then sometimes maybe if there wasn’t any singing in Cold Spring, some of the Cold Spring people would come down to Quaker Bridge. The two groups would come together then: then you could really hear some good music.

They went to different houses too. They didn’t have a certain night where they were going to sing, but anybody could say well, tonight we’ll sing maybe at my place, and then maybe the following night they’ll say well, we’ll go down to Quaker Bridge and visit some of our friends down there. This was a spur of the moment as I would say it. It wasn’t like anything today. Today now, you’re lucky if you can get three or four singers together, cause everybody else here is riding in cars, and there’s so many things going on. Especially in the summertime: you can’t get the singing group together in the summertime too much. It’s more or less fall, winter and spring, I would say.
I've belonged to the Singing Society ever since I was 14 or 15 years old; that was in Cold Spring where we used to live. Old Lindsey Dowdey was our president at that time, and that's been a good many years ago, pretty close to, I wouldn't be afraid to say that was a good forty years ago when I first started to pay any attention to these singers.

I remember I used to sit over on the side. There was quite a few of us at that time that was about my age: some were a little younger and some just a few years older. They used to have us sit over on the side and listen to the older men sing. I guess we were just a bunch of listeners for the first time, the first three or four meetings we attended, and then pretty soon they started to ask us to come and join the older men, and that's how they told us what to do, how to play the rattle and the drum and everything. They started teaching us how to keep the beat with the drummer. And one thing that they didn't really appreciate was anybody fooling around when we were trying to learn. They always told us to take it serious when we got there and to try to learn as quick as we can.

We all started on the rattle, I guess. They taught us how to hold the rattle and how to beat it and how to keep time. For my part it didn't take me too long to learn it, because in my old homestead where my grandfather used to stay, my grandfather was always singing something; you know, practicing some of those society songs that they have, the ceremonial societies, different ones. He was always trying to have us two — that's my brother and I — try to sing along with him. A good many nights, especially in the winter, we used to sit and sing some of the ceremonial songs that he used to sing. But at that time I didn't pay much attention, so today I guess that's my misfortune. I never did pay much attention to what he was singing; now I really am sorry that I never did learn all that he used to sing.

I guess about two or three years after I started going to these meetings, there was someone I forget who it is that asked if I knew the songs my grandfather Howard used to sing. I said maybe I could remember. Well, at that time they put me in amongst the older men and, well, I got kind of nervous the first time: I was so used to the rattle that I tried to tell them that I would rather use the rattle, and they said, no, you have to use the drum. They said you can never be a singer, not unless you can play the drum right. So, there I had to, I just had to learn.

They were playing the woman's dance songs. That's what those singing societies were always singing when they ever got together; they tried to out-sing each other, I guess, in making up these woman's dance songs. So, they finally gave me the drum and they said to sit here; they said well, we want to hear some of your grandfather's songs if you can remember them all. They said at least one set anyway.

I was pretty nervous at first, and when I started singing, my voice kind of got shaky and I didn't know which way to go, or start crying or laughing. But after the first song, it was all right, and then the older folks kind of encouraged me to keep on and not to ... well, in the first place they said not to...
be bashful. They said, we can’t have you as a singer and you might as well forget it if you’re going to be bashful or anything in that way. And well, after they gave me the drum, like I say, the first song I didn’t know which way to go, either start bawling or go on and laugh with them. Well, I started it off and I pulled through pretty good.

It wasn’t until, oh maybe when I was in my twenties, I guess, when I ever started trying to make my own songs up. And after I made up one and took it into the first meeting that we had and sang it, the old folks said that was pretty good. They liked the song, and they said to keep it up and just to keep on trying to fix up songs and make up songs; and that’s how I happened to keep on going, to keep making up songs. Some of the older men started passing away, and they wanted some new songs made up, and that’s the way I happened to: right up till today, I can make up some of my own songs without any help from anybody else.

2.

At first I’d forget the songs I made. Maybe somebody else would learn the songs, and when we’d get to these singing sessions, they’d kind of remind me of the songs that I had made up. At that time we didn’t have no tape recorders or anything; we couldn’t put it on tape, so I had to depend on somebody else to kind of remind me of the songs that I had made up.

Even today when I start making up songs, I’ll take it maybe one song at a time, or when lucky I can make up two songs at once. Then I wouldn’t try to make a set (you know, six or seven songs) all at once, because it’s easy to forget. That is why I never rush myself or try to make up a whole set in just that one night or just that one time. I’d rather, for my sake, try to make up one song maybe today and memorize it so I know just what it sounds like, and maybe two or three days later, make up another one. In that way maybe it takes me a week before I can make up a whole set.

It seems to me that the songs have come easier to me now than they did when I first started that first song. I still don’t know how a song comes out, but sometimes it’s when you’re thinking about one of the old songs . . . this has happened to me. You know, I’m working off by myself on the end of the line up there in the shop, and all these late songs that I’ve made up have been made up right there in the shop, cause I’m all by myself on the end of the line and sometimes I think of the old songs — you know, just humming or whistling or whichever way I’m thinking about these old songs. Then pretty soon I try to make up a new one. That’s how I get my songs. Most of my songs. I call them my shop songs, because where they were mostly made up is right there in the shop when I’m working.

Then it all depends too how the man is feeling, what kind of a mood he’s in. Sometimes I make up three or four songs and still remember them: a
lot of times that has happened. If you're kind of happy, why you come right ahead and sing out a good song, but if you're kind of moody-like, you have a rough time trying to make a song out of it: you can't get it. This usually happens a lot of times with me when I start making up a new song. Sometimes it will just come right to my mind and I can sing it right off; then another time I try to make up a song and it takes three, four or five days before I can get it straightened out. There's some of the songs that we've made up—that is, to my experience—there are some where the words kind of get jumbled up amongst themselves and they can't straighten them out.

Well, if there's a little word or a sound that doesn't sound just right in the music, we try to cut it off or add a few words to it. Another thing that usually happens, when we do have a new song, when we get down to the Singing Society where everybody else is along, maybe a lot of times the song will straighten itself out there, because whoever's there (maybe six or seven of us singing at the same time at this one meeting) could straighten it out for you. A lot of times it has happened with me. I'd start a new song, then I can't get it just right. Well, at the next meeting we have, I try to sing this song, and the rest of the group will help and straighten the song out for me. A lot of times this has happened. Maybe I just get the introductory part to it and then I can't get the middle part, then the rest of the society would try to straighten it out, and pretty soon we've got a new song.

Or getting back to sets again, if you make two songs or three songs that sound almost alike, you can easily lose your first song to your own mind cause you've already made up two or three others that sound almost alike and it gets complicated. If you're trying to teach these songs to the rest of the singing group, it's kind of hard. Lots of times it has happened, we thought we knew all the songs and we started singing the songs: we got through with one and the head drummer started to sing another one that sounded almost just like it, and by the time we got to the halfway mark of the song, everybody was singing something else, and that kind of made us sound silly. That's why I say if you're going to make up some songs, try to make a variety of them, with different pitches to the songs, not just make up one song and then pattern six or seven right after it.

My grandfather Chauncey, when he was teaching us to sing, he'd always say when we start off with a song, if it's any kind of dance, he always said start off your singing real slow and then work up to the right tempo. He says always go according to how the dancers are doing: if they start dancing good, then he says that's where you're going to keep your speed. Like you start with this slow tempo and then work up to where the dancers are really enjoying themselves. He said never try to do it your own way, go according to how the dancers are doing, let them set your tempo. You can always notice when they start having a good time, when they start enjoying themselves, doing whatever dance you are singing to them: you know that that's just where you are going to keep your beat.
In composing songs too or in working them out, you always start off with a slow beat: in this way you can find out just where your mistakes are. Another thing is (I always said this, and that’s just the way I was taught) not to sing too high. You don’t go right up into a high pitch so you can’t reach the right pitch to the song and the words that you have put into it, cause if you’re going to teach it to the rest of the group, you have to sing it slow, so you can get the right pitch to the song and also get all the sounds in it. Now, if you start out real fast and sing high, the person you’re teaching won’t understand what you’re trying to put over, while in this other way you take it real slow and they’ve got a better chance to understand what the song is, how it’s going to sound, and the sounds that have been put into it.

As to the songs themselves, the style of the songs hasn’t changed at all, I don’t think, from the old Singing Society to this one. I don’t think that it’s changed any at all, cause some of these songs that’s being made up today are from the oldtimers’ songs. They’re based on the old-timers’ songs. Some of the songs that I’ve made up — I just can’t say which group it is, but maybe the ones I made up in ’66 — there’s two or three songs in there that I’ve based on my grandfather’s songs. What I do is take a few words or the introductory part, and put in a few words and just a few different sounds to it. Almost the same melody. But not exactly the same and it hasn’t got the same sounds in it — in some places I’ve shortened it or added to it.

Some of the songs that I’ve made up from the oldtimer’ songs used the introductory part, but in the second part to the song where the whole group is singing, then I’ve added different songs to it. Sometimes I’ve put together maybe two or three or four different old songs, just parts, and made it into one new song. Or I’ve added a few words to a song, or cut off some of it and put in new words to it and combined it with a different old song.

I guess we “modern singers,” as they call us now, the ones that are making up these new songs, really base our songs on the oldtime songs. I guess that’s the whole basic idea, to try to revive some of the oldtime songs but still add on a few sounds yourself, just to keep the melody and the song kind of in remembrance, for memorial purposes more or less.

Some of these “woman’s dance” songs that were made up come from other social dances, like the “fish dance”: there’s some songs that’s made up from the fish dance and turned into the woman’s dance. Like I say, you can take a few words out of a song and still add some on to it and make it into a woman’s song from the fish dance. Like the “war dance”: there’s quite a few songs were made up from the war dance, from the different songs, and put into the woman’s dance and a few words added on, and the tempo fell right into the woman’s dance songs.

Then there’s quite a few that’s been from the sacred songs — like the Quiver Songs, the Changing Rib and the Death Chant — quite a few songs that’s got just a little from these ceremonials dances put into the woman’s dance. I don’t know, these late years they just don’t seem to care too much for being too strict on using these sacred dance songs, and they put it into the
woman's dance songs. I guess they passed the stage where they were so strict against it—you know that years ago they didn't dare to use some of these songs and change it into a social dance.

I've got quite a few songs that I've made up, I never even taught to the group because I figures it this way: it's got too much of the sacred songs into it and I'd rather not put it out to public, because I know there are some people that are really strict against having these sacred songs put into modern woman's dance songs. You'd get criticized why we have made up songs to have the public hear, so I usually try not to put any too much sacred songs into it. Maybe I do put in maybe a little sound here and there but just not too much.

There's quite a few songs too that's been made up from hillbilly music—you know, western hillbilly music. Sometimes you'll be listening to some of our old music, and then in just a little while you turn on your T.V. or put on a few recordings of western music—well then, sometimes you can get music combined from these, you can put the two ideas together and make one good song. From the western type of Indian music too: we have tried to make up a few songs from that.

Nowadays in making up new songs I use the tape recorder quite a bit. You know, I listen to these older songs, and that's where you get your new ideas from. Tape recorders are an awful lot of help with that. Then maybe if you got an extra, empty tape, you can always put your new songs onto it. In that way you can't lose your original song that you have made up: like if you've made up a new song and try to remember it, oh maybe say two, three days after, and then try to sing it back, sometimes you lose it altogether. That has happened to me a good many times before I had the tape recorder. Then some of the other songmakers, you know, they take a notebook and write it down on notebooks. I've done that too, and I found that to be a lot of help.

That's for the words naturally, not the music. We've never had any way of writing down melodies, just go by ear, I guess, as to what it sounds like. Well, in school I did actually go into it a little bit but, you know, after I got out of school I forgot all about how to read notes from a paper. What little music that I do know of—white music—well, it's mostly hillbilly songs, like "coming around the mountain" and all that, or "hand me down my walking cane" and all that. So that was all taken up by ear: if they put it in front of me in writing, I would never know how to read it.

Mostly these new songs that we make up are for entertainment—like those gatherings we have, just to pass the time away, most of it. But there are a few, especially those that have got words in them, that are more serious. Like ever since they've started this Kinzua Dam, I guess everybody has tried to make up songs about it and how it was going to affect the Indian and everything, wondering where we were going to go after the Kinzua Dam really got up to where it's supposed to be, up to where our old houses used to be, where the water's all covered over now. Well, my brother Art's got one song that's got quite a bit to say about that, and I've got one that's a little
more, I wouldn’t say more criticizing the white people as Art’s is, but maybe I’ve got a little more meaning to it, I guess I would say.

I don’t know if I can remember just how that song did come to be. I guess one night, it was down at the longhouse at the Singing Society, we had the singing there at the longhouse one evening, and while we were singing at the middle of the council house there — we had the singers’ benches out and quite a few of us sitting there and singing — pretty soon Harry Watt come up to me. I was sitting at the end of the bench, and he says could you make up a song that would say something like what was going to happen after Kinzua Dam was in, and have a word or two saying just let the Indians go back to heaven or something like that. It took me quite a while before I finally did come up with one, and it has something about the Kinzua Dam and about the Indians going back to heaven on account of the white people taking our land away from us and putting water there where we used to live.

What I’m going to do is give you the idea of these two songs that’s been made up between my brother and me, and show you the older, original song I used in making up mine. My brother made up the first song, and after Harry heard this one, I think that’s where he got the idea that he wanted to have something with more meaning to it. Anyway, this is the way Art’s song goes:

they’re going to do us dirt
they’re going to do us dirt
when they come & build a dam
at allegany

we won’t know where to go
we won’t know where to go
when they come & build a dam
at allegany

Now, the way I made up mine, I got it from an old melody. This Canadian got married to one of the girls on our reservation, and he used to sing this at our singing gatherings and practice sessions, and this is the way it goes:

now ain’t that something!
say the singers —
of all them pretty girls
not one was dancing

yahweyho yahweyho yahweyho
heyyono noheyo
of all them pretty girls
not one was dancing
Well, afterwards Harry asked me to make up the Kinzua song, and here's the way I finally made it out:

now ain't that something!
say the singers —
the dirt we're being done
by our white brothers
the way we see it is
let's all get up & go
back to the sky —
let's get on back!

So, in this one I'd just say the original idea was from that Canadian song and that it took me quite a long while, maybe three, four weeks before I could really get it to where I wanted it. I started off with the first introductory part, the first few words there, then I couldn't put the rest of it together. I'd get just so far and then I'd get stuck. If I just started off and tried to sing it, it didn't sound right to me, so I had an awful time before I could get it straight: the melody change in the second part and the way I wanted to word it.

In non-word songs you can get that quicker than you would the word songs. Like the word songs do have quite a lot of meaning into them; like that one there, it's just more or less to remind us what has happened to us. My idea of it was to save the song as long as we can, and maybe in a few years some of the younger generation will learn it, and like everybody else they ask questions about the song. But the songs without words are just more or less for amusement, I guess. To make up non-word songs like that, just change one sound to another and combine and rearrange them some other different ways, and try to make a new song out of them.

There's no limit to the number of sounds that you use: you can use as many as you can. The whole idea of it is to try to combine and rearrange different sounds and see how many you can make up that way. There may be some odd sound that maybe you heard it by somebody saying something at one time or another, and you can try to get that certain sound into a song. Like you're just talking with somebody, and maybe he'd say some odd little thing like "hey yar" or something like that, and maybe say "I don't know," and then you say "No hey yoh see." That's how you change it. Maybe he's talking along, and maybe he'll say quite a few such words as that: then after you've talked with him, you sit around and think of what he has said and pretty soon you can almost get a song out of it.

It's not every song that's made up that way, but mostly when you combine sounds and melody, you have to think what sounds should go into the melody you're trying to follow. You have to follow a pattern. You can almost make up the words as you go along just as it comes to your mind, I guess, and then try to pull them together and make a good song out of it.
Maybe sometimes it does come out all right and sounds pretty good, and sometimes it’s just the opposite. You get the melody in and then you can’t get the sounds together to make it sound right. You can say it gets kind of muddled up there for a while and then takes quite a while to get it straightened out.

Some of the sounds that we use are more or less fixed. Like most of the woman’s dance songs start out before the introductory part with “heya” and “yo-oh-ho” or something like that. (Some of the other dance songs, they just start out without having them sounds with it.) Then I think most of the songs, even the different dances, use a lot of the “o” in them: “ho,” “yo” and “o” I guess are the most popular in all these different dance songs. I believe in all these different dances they have got a lot of that in there. Like going into the middle of the song, you use a lot of that.

Like I say, you have to follow a pattern. There are even some sounds we have that you may say rhyme or repeat themselves. Like the sounds in the introductory part. You use the whole introductory, and then in the middle and end parts you rhyme it back or repeat it. A lot of woman’s dance songs are made up that way. The old timers used to try to make it that way, but now there’s so many different songs and sounds that you hear, we’ve kind of worked away from it a little bit, like us combining three, four different songs at once, so in that way you can’t very well rhyme with the first part.

Anyway, it’s all according to how the song is started out. If you can get the beginning part, the introductory, from there you can go on to try to combine other sounds with it. Then you have to get the pitch of the song to it. I guess all composers have the same trouble as we do, even some of these great composers, the modern-day composers of English songs. Sometimes they have the words there, they have the lyrics there, and still they don’t, they won’t, they can’t be satisfied with how it’s going to sound like in the melody part. Maybe the sound is there and you want to use it, and still in your melody that you’re trying to think of at the same time, it won’t fit in. Or maybe the sound that you’re thinking of is too long to go into the melody, and then sometimes maybe it’s too short: then you have to add on a few other sounds to go with it and then fit that into the melody. Sometimes I come to see it that the sound and melody kind of contradict each other, and that sometimes gets real complicated that way. It’s not, as you would say, that it makes a song better. It just takes a little more thinking to that: sometimes it turns out to be a big joke after a while.

3.

With these social dances at the longhouse, we’re there just to have a lot of fun anyway, while with the sacred dances we’re thinking more serious of what is going on. You think that these sacred songs will help the person, whoever is sponsoring them, whatever the doings are; and I guess, to my
opinion, it has helped a lot of people—the sacred dances, that is. But even there, the attitude all depends on how the person sponsoring the doings is feeling. Like if the speaker tells us that the person who is sponsoring the doings is feeling all right, well, he notifies us right away that we can have a little fun. That’s why we get into all these comical acts that we put on when we’re dancing these pumpkin songs, for instance, just to have the sponsor have a little fun with us. Sometimes that does happen: sometimes he clowns more than the rest of the group does, so that’s a good indication that the song does help him quite a bit.

All of this has been brought down from the time the Gaiwiyo came on the earth. They had been dancing all these songs before, and now the Prophet of the Senecas had tried to stop it at that time; but later on this little girl got sick, and they tried to get the Prophet to tell her fortune. It took him a long time before he consented to tell the fortune of this little girl, and that’s what he found: it was a song that was bothering this little girl! It was one of those society songs—you know, like the Dark Dance and the Quivering and Changing-a-Rib and the Death Chant—and, well, at that time the Four Beings had told him that people should cut out all the dance songs that were on this earth. But later on the Beings came back again, and they told him that if it couldn’t be stopped, then it was to continue. Before the Gaiwiyo came on earth, you know, they used to have hard drinks at all these doings; but after they had come back, they told him that if the dancing or the songs couldn’t be stopped that one time, that they could have the berry juice, like what we use now in the Dark Dance ceremony. And they told him at that time that there was just going to be just that once, but after they did have this once for this little girl, everybody else started to get sick about something, so from then on, they started to do all these different songs and dances that they had before the Gaiwiyo came to earth. Nowadays, with most of the dances that we do, we think this is the way it should have been done years ago. But I know we have lost quite a bit from what the oldtimers used to do and what they believed in. Today it’s just, I guess, to keep it up as far as we can go with it.

The sacred songs, like I’ve said before, are already in a set group: their setting has never changed. A long time ago people were traveling in the woods—there was a lot of traveling in the woods then—and they kind of heard these songs in a way. Like the Dark Dance there: this one night, this young lad was sleeping out: pretty soon he heard all these voices, and he didn’t know where they were coming from. So he kind of crept around in the dark, and pretty soon he found a little group. There was a little group there, all in a cave, and it was awful dark, and they were singing these songs. That’s why they call it the Dark Dance.

Then later on, as the story goes, this other little boy was picked up and was taken way up on the high ledges of these mountains, and when these birds brought him up there (he didn’t know what they were at the time), but when the birds took him up on this high cliff (they had a nest there), well, as
they landed he seen these little birds kind of fluttering around, going through all different motions, and one of the young birds was kind of squawking away and making it into a song like. Well, the little boy stayed there maybe ten or twelve days with these birds, and he kept feeding them; and one night, one evening where you can still see late in the afternoon, the older birds got together and they were doing this Eagle Dance, and they were singing these songs, and that's how he happened to learn the Eagle Dance songs. Up till today, the way they dance is the imitation of the Eagle going after a piece of meat on the ground: that's why you can see them go down something like a bird pecking at a piece of meat. And that's how the Eagle Dance come to be.

But that way of getting songs and dances, I guess that's way past our stage. I guess we're too civilized nowadays, cause at that time, see, they practically lived right with the animals and out in the woods all the time. They didn't have no automobiles or airplanes flying around or anything of that sort, and they were so close to nature, I guess that's how they probably got to get some of these songs together. A lot of stories, different stories, has been told of how these songs originated, and all of it starts with them coming from the different animals that were roaming the big forest at that time. And in the mountains and places like that, along the rivers, you can hear all these different kind of songs that was made up. Then as it came along, these persons that had heard these songs had started handing them down to the younger generation, up till today. Like me learning these songs: I learnt that from me going to all these different dances when I was a young lad, just a young kid at that time, just a little boy. Well, I started dancing the Eagle Dance when I was just about eight or nine years old. So now you can see how we carry our religion and traditions and all that. Most of us that had lived right along where the longhouse is, still believe in this religion, and we try to keep up the traditions as our older folks had done years before, and I think that's just the way it's been handed down all down through the years, from generation to generation, as far as I know of.
Tom Weatherly, a young black poet, is co-editor, with Ted Wilentz, of Natural Process, an anthology of black poetry. Work from the black oral tradition will appear in future issues of Alcheringa.

Tom Weatherly

BLACK ORAL POETRY IN AMERICA: An Open Letter

Dear Ted,

There is a statement that you made in your introduction which I know is inaccurate, and the only difficulty now is to get you to acknowledge it, then we may get on with the business of searching for, discovering, and promulgating the truth. We discussed some points in the rough draft of your introduction, but I can't remember if I called you on this: "The potential was not realized because a forcibly enslaved and uneducated group could not produce much in an art form as complex and as demanding of education and a written tradition as poetry."

This statement would be quite true if you could make the substantive claim that Europeans invented poetry, and therefore had the historical privilege (not right, mind you) of defining that body of artifacts and process, and its subsequent development. Surely you do not suggest (and yessiree bob you do) that

"The work songs, gospels, and blues that have contributed so much to American poetry"

are just potential? The first weakness lies in your implication that black poets have not produced a considerable bulk of good 'original' poetry, which is true if you cannot recognise where the (fo'real) Afro-American poetic tradition is, and it is not where white critics have habitually looked for it. Racism is so deep in this society that it even affects the judgement of good men. Ask a young white radical if he is a racist, and he'll feel insulted, assuring you that he also calls his father and mother HONKIES. ASK HIM THE COLOR OF A FLESH-COLOURED BANDAID. Enuf moralising. It may be difficult for you, suckled on the Euro-American tradition which begins with the Beowulf saga and extends through Pound/Eliot/Yeats to many of my contemporaries (and partially includes me), to see that the Afro-American poetic tradition is not the mimicry practised by Phyllis Wheatley, nor the pseudo-darkie thrush singing on the American shores of alienation with hope in its black heart, as wif Paul Lawrence Dunbar, nor the self-conscious Euro-genital verse of Countee Cullen and other NEGRO poets (they should rename that library uptown the Ameer Baraka library). Our tradition is composed of those work songs, field hollers, gospels, and blues, which you have condescendingly referred to as potential. That's our poetry, our tradition, my main main, and if you put it down, you put down most of what is good in American song lyric and poetry, and you put down most of the base I build on. I thought that this kind of ethnocentrism had disappeared this far from the time
Works in preparation for ALCHERINGA 4 include:

W. T. Goodwin: EASTER SUNRISE SERMON: a "total transcription" of Black oral poetry by Peter Gold
Ulli Beier & others: A MINI-ANTHOLOGY OF NEW GUINEA TRIBAL POETRY
Simon Ortiz: COYOTE POEMS (Acoma Pueblo)
Jerome Rothenberg & Harris Lenowitz: "THE BIBLE": experimental translations of Hebrew tribal poetry
Tom Lowenstein: "Eskimo Abuse Poems," after Rasmussen
"From Anthropologist to Informant": an interview with Gary Snyder by Nathaniel Tarn

New subscription rates for ALCHERINGA: $2.50 single issue, $9.50 for four issues beginning with current (please specify). For information on back issues, please contact the editors.

NOTES. Jerome Rothenberg collected & edited the "Mini-Anthology of South American Indian Poetry." Other regional & tribal gatherings will appear in subsequent issues of ALCHERINGA. They will not seek primarily to define, but to stimulate further work. The present gathering will be followed by one of tribal poetry from New Guinea. A complete volume of New Guinea workings (gathered by Ulli Beier) is scheduled for publication by Unicorn Press (Santa Barbara). . . . Kofi Awoonor's translations, etc. are part of a book-length manuscript of "Traditional Ewe Poetry". . . . Armand Schwerner's THE TABLETS (a series of fifteen poems erupting from archaic models & the poet's comic/erotic imagination, etc.) has just been published by Grossman. . . . Jerome Rothenberg's SHAKING THE PUMPKIN: "Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas" will be published by Doubleday-Anchor in January 1972. . . . Dennis Tedlock's FINDING THE CENTER (Zuni oral poetry by Andrew Peynetsa & others) should be out from Dial in the Spring. . . . Michael Harner's anthology, HALLUCINOGENS & SHAMANISM to appear in 1972 from Oxford University, along with THE JIVARO from Natural History Press. . . . Harris Lenowitz is ALCHERINGA's newest contributing editor, with special emphasis on the translation of ancient Near Eastern texts. His versions of Ugaritic trickster materials, etc. in the second issue, give a sense of new directions in making these works continually present.

The drawings that follow are by Kauage (inside back cover) & Akis (back cover). Books of drawings by each were published by KOVAVE (New Guinea's first literary magazine) as part of a series of Special "Kovave" Publications that will "feature the work of contemporary New Guinea artists."