

A l c h e r i n g a

(s e l e c t i o n s)



E t h n o p o e t i c s

edited by Jerome Rothenberg & Dennis Tedlock

Alcheringa was originally published from 1970 to 1980, & was edited by Dennis Tedlock & Jerome Rothenberg (with Rothenberg leaving in 1976 to found The New Wilderness Letter).

This archive is composed of works selected from eight of the original thirteen issues. As such, it can only serve as an introduction to the original project, & can never hope to reproduce its complexity & scope.

My gratitude to Jerome Rothenberg, who supplied me with copies of *Alcheringa*, & whose willingness to assist me in the development of this archive made this project possible, & to Dennis Tedlock, who graciously agreed to allow me to go forward with the project as a whole, & to the individual authors / translators who agreed to the posting of their work.

Special thanks also goes to Francis Raven who assisted in the transcription of many of these documents.

--Jerrold Shiroma

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from Alcheringa Issue One, 1970

Statement of Intention

As the first magazine of the world's tribal poetries, *ALCHERINGA* will not be a scholarly "journal of ethnopoetics" so much as a place where tribal poetry can appear in English translation & can act (in the oldest & newest of poetic traditions) to change men's minds & lives. While its sources will be different from other poetry magazines, it will be aiming at the startling & revelatory presentation that has been common to our avant gardes. Along the way we hope

—by exploring the full range of man's poetries, to enlarge our understanding of what a poem may be

—to provide a ground for experiments in the translation of tribal/oral poetry & a forum to discuss the possibilities & problems of translation from widely divergent cultures

—to encourage poets to participate actively in the translation of tribal/oral poetry

—to encourage ethnologists & linguists to do work increasingly ignored by academic publications in their fields, namely to present the tribal poetries as values in themselves rather than as ethnographic data

—to be a vanguard for the initiation of cooperative projects along these lines between poets, ethnologists, songmen, & others

—to return to complex/"primitive" systems of poetry as (intermedia) performance, etc., & to explore ways of presenting these in translation

—to emphasize by example & commentary the relevance of tribal poetry to where we are today: thus, in Gary Snyder's words, "to master the archaic & the primitive as models of basic nature-related cultures...knowing that we are the first human beings in history to have all of man's cultures available to our study, & being free enough of the weight of traditional cultures to seek out a larger identity"

—to assist the free development of ethnic self-awareness among young Indians & others so concerned, by encouraging a knowledgeable, loving respect among them & all people for the world's tribal past & present

—to combat cultural genocide in all its manifestations.

Preliminaries

ALCHERINGA..."dream time" of the Arunta..."The Eternal Dream Time"...(or) "The Dreaming"...of a sacred heroic time long long ago when man & nature came to be...a kind of narrative of things that once happened; a kind of charter of things that still happen; & a kind of logos or principle of order transcending everything significant...the act of dreaming, as reality & symbol, (by which)...the artist is inspired to produce a new song...(by which) the mind makes contact with whatever mystery it is that connects The Dreaming & the Here-&-Now.

—W.E.H. Stanner, "The Dreaming"

what the informant told Franz Boas in 1920 (Keresan)

long ago her mother
had to sing this song and so
she had to grind along with it
the corn people have a song too
it is very good
I refuse to tell it

—Armand Schwerner

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by names & adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, & whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity;
Til a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslaved the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

—William Blake (1790)

Time flows past the permanent central position...they live at a place called noon, at the center of the world, the only place where space & time intersect.

—Stanley Diamond, from "Anaguta Cosmography" (Nigeria)

O, they were hot for the world they lived in, these Maya, hot to get it down the way it was—the way it is, my fellow citizens.

—Charles Olson

Sioux Vision Event

Go to a mountain-top & cry for a vision.

It was a vast old religion, greater than anything we know: more starkly & nakedly religious...For the whole life-effort of man was to get his life into contact with the elemental life of the cosmos, mountain-life, cloud-life, thunder-life, air-life, earth-life, sun-life. To come into immediate *felt* contact, *without an intermediary or mediator*, is the root meaning of religion, & at the sacred races, the runners hurled themselves in a terrible cumulative effort, through the air, to come at last into naked contact with the very life of the air, which is the life of the lounds, & so of the rain.

—D.H. Lawrence

A Wintu Indian Statement on the Ecological Crisis

The White people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots we make little holes. When we build houses, we make little holes. When we burn grass for grasshoppers, we don't ruin things. We shake down acorns & pinenuts. We don't chop down the trees. We only use dead wood. But the White people plow up the ground, pull up the trees, kill everything. The tree says, 'Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me.' But they chop it down & cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. They blast out trees & stir it up to its depths. They saw up the trees. That hurts them. The Indians never hurt anything, but the White people destroy all. They blast rocks & scatter them on the ground. The rock says, Don't! You are hurting me.' But the White people pay no attention. When the Indians use rocks, they take little round ones for their cooking...How can the spirit of the earth like the White man?...Everywhere the White man has touched it, it is sore.

—Old woman speaking to Dorothy Lee “in a prophetic vein”

Zuni Cryptogram

teyalanne / ground
tek'inaye / the ground is wet
te'ananne / footprint
teyacchinne / cultivated field
teky'appowanne / hill

tewutso'ya / the weather is clear
tene'anaye / a strong wind is blowing
tets'enaye / the weather is cold
tehts'inaye / it is winter
telakwayi / spring

tehya / it is valuable

telhasshianne / shrine
teshkwinne / taboo
tewusu / sacred
tewusukky'a / pray
tenanne / song
tepehanne / pottery drum
telapnanne / story
tesshukw'a / yesterday
tehlhi'a / night is coming
tewani / tomorrow
tewankwin / eastward
teyaye / living
tek'ohannanne / daylight
tek'ohannan aaho'i / daylight people (mankind)

The American Indian is the vengeful ghost lurking in the back of the troubled American mind. Which is why we lash out with such ferocity & passion, so muddied a heart, at the black-haired young peasants & soldiers who are the "Viet Cong." That ghost will claim the next generation as its own. When this has happened, citizens of the USA will at last begin to be Americans, truly at home on the continent, in love with their land. The chorus of a Cheyenne Ghost Dance song—"hi-niswa'vita'ki'ni"—"We shall live again."

—Gary Snyder

He who loses his dreaming is lost.

—Australian Aborigine

Versions by Jerome Rothenberg of traditional Bantu self-praises (really descriptive namings) in which the kings on installation sing the groupings of praise-names they've inherited & others newly made for the occasion. From literal translations by Jacques Chileya Chiwale in 'Royal Praises & Praise Names of the Lunda Kazembe of Northern Rhodesia,' Central Bantu Historical Texts III, pub. Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Lusaka, 1962. Divisions of texts correspond to praises for particular rulers.

PRAISES OF THE BANTU KINGS (1-10)

1

I escort.
I go with the dead I don't escort myself.
I was foolish someone else was wise.
I was a lion but had never stretched my claws.
I have no father & no mother.
I remained.

2

I was the rain's child the rain comes from the east & drizzles.
I am a rain that drizzles.
I soaked some old men without hair.
I am the bed the dead will sleep on.
Sometimes I kept busy once I was looking for a place to cross.
I am the lion's grandson.
I was angry later I roamed their forests.
I am your king.

3

I was a tree that lost its leaves.
Am I dead?
My skin is hard now only some twigs are left for burning.

4

I am the one my name is.
I wouldn't let them bury me.
Tomorrow I will visit someone else.
I killed the king & all his children.
I killed the man who owned the island.
Once I killed his brother.

5

I love.
I overrun the country.
I am awarded lands & people.
I was scornful of their goats & sheep.

6

I was like a lion in the forest.
I had never been afraid of witchcraft.
I killed my victim then I ate his prick.

7

I am the rummager.
I dug out lily bulbs.
I searched for siftings of the corn.
I was hunger in a conquered land.

8

I am beautiful & light-skinned.
I am rain.
I carried the dead children like a stretcher.
I was the road through the cemetery no one could escape me.
I fought buffalos & strangers.
I despised their smalltown ways I only live among the great.

9

I was a marksman.
I was skilled.
I was the husband of my wife.
I wore my shirttails up.
I sported a goatee.

10

I dwelt among the crooked.
I was taught.
I straightened up.

FURTHER TALES (1-5)

1

I was your king but suffered for it.
None of my kinsmen suffer more.
I was the “firewood” & injured those who held me.

2

I was like a mushroom that appears & rots.
I heard the graves rejoicing for their dead.

3

Someone called me The Mamed Lion.
I was a river that buries the dead land.
Once I was a rotten branch a bat’s weigh breaks.
I was sand covering the hills.

4

I was lightfooted.
I was heedless through nights of revolution.
I murdered on all sides of me.
I was like a drum I was a drum’s voice in the night but sleeping.
I watched the poor rise up against me.
I slaughtered the guards who crossed the lake.

5

I was the lustful woman.
I wanted a throne of husbands in my name.
Soon I would watch the world with many eyes.
Its kings look small to me.

Fragments from the Prayers Made on Behalf of Nathaniel Tarn by the Zutuhil-Maya Priest N.C. of Tziquinaha, the House of Birds, Guatemala, 1953 & 1969

in the name of the Creator God and Angel O God I meet you
prostrated I meet you seated may you be remembered God Creator of Day and
Light Angel and Lord St. Simon remembered before creation in the fragrance of fruit
your throne is adorned with in your books in your accounts before the
World before the Savior

Father God elder among elders in the fragrance of fruit praised in a thousand
prayers son of the Incense and the Candle because you existed through the centuries
of existence that the World has existed because even below the clouds your hands and
feet exist Lord St. Simon First Angel you who are seated as one of the St. Simons of
Glory remembered in your yellow cape in your white cape in your yellow coat in
your white coat
in your yellow gaiters in your white gaiters in your yellow overcoat in your white
overcoat now I am consulting you with the help of a bunch of wax candles with the help
of a bunch of de-luxe candles now I remind you of one of your sons a descendant of
yours O God who has remembered your hands and your feet O great Master and
personage!

perhaps you are going about the World going up and down the Face of the World using
the crossroads who knows in the mission of your daily round like a sentinel or a sergeant or a
policeman and in your long march you take with you two or three great thoughts and perhaps
you meet with the sinners of the World and the Face of the Earth O Lord and Master we
aren't spying we aren't judging your acts do not drown us do not suffocate us it is not my
thing that I called your spirit that I called your sanctity it's the person here it's his thing your
son who comes to beg with wax and candlegrease with the savor of these things that your
son has brought here smoothly and with the sound of violin and guitar!

perhaps you will have to go perhaps you will have to promenade through the Holy Night
the Holy Darkness you great doctor and personage of the Holy World and who will protect
me then O God O World who have come crossing the World from a far-off
place feels very poor in your hands poor and orphaned to come to you
Father-Mother looking for your hands looking for your feet looking for your lips that
have been so highly recommended to me thanks to you Lord I have a great desire to
see you and am very happy to talk to my Father today I feel happy and am much admired
in the Face of the World because it is the Lord Angel who is leading me

O God it is I who came as the custodian of the aroma and savor of the God called
Incense the God called Candle because Incense is the ancient symbol of God you of
the white eyebrows and hair Lord of the World and the Face of the Earth ancient
knower of things remembered for your wisdom in the aroma of pataxte and cacao you
Pedestal of the Sky give your son who has brought you so smoothly and so delicately and
with such care these goods before your table before your chair Nathaniel Tarn his
name whose God this is whose Saint this is give him all power! I have come as
his helper as his right-arm as his foot before God and ask for life and health on his

behalf for that is what he wishes of this World and it is not because of distance it is not because the leagues have been many he has covered to reach you since he first heard of your name Don Pedro that he asks for your wisdom / your fragrance / your books / your accounts / your secrets / your cape and coat / your gaiters and scarves / your poncho and shawl and so God don't depreciate don't discourage he who looks for your sanctity he who looks for your hands and feet

for he is not a liar he is not an evil-doer he is not a murderer before the World for there exists a God whom he looks for and loves and we are looking for the gallant Don Pedro the Old God to do him a ritual so that we don't forget his hands his feet his adornments Don Pedro Don Pedro de Alvarado Master and personality of the World and the Face of the Earth who lives and rules among pines / firtrees / cypresses / flowers he who abandoned his father perhaps he who abandoned his mother he who came perhaps from a hundred leagues' distance to arrive here before this Holy World to present himself before the Holy Earth of Guatemala in the hands and before the table of Captain Santiago Zuhuhil and Martin-God! O thanks to you Masters I thanks you son of cloud / the son of mist / the son of *pataxte* / the son of *cacao* / the son of cypress / the son of palm / the son of *pacaya* / the son of stalk and the son of flower!

on Sunday your merits were remembered and your hands and feet before the Holy World that he might not suffer fractures that he might not suffer harm in the God Path in the God called Footpath before the spirit of the God called Field when he goes up when he goes down among the fields Lord perhaps out perhaps down but straight! From San Juan I came to San Pedro to Flores Peten to Guatemala City to Santo Tomas to Vistacion to Quezaltenango to Huehuetenango to HMazatenango to Chicago and San Antonio going through the mountains through valleys loving all the Gods all the Angels who are on their hands who are on their knees before your hands before your feet!

o that he might come here another time! o Savior called World! o World of his day and his birth / of our Grandmothers and Mothers / of our Masters and Great Gods and Angels of authorized speech and strong hands who lead the World and the Face of the Earth who bring the cloud and the mist / the earthquake / the thunder and hail / who carry in their hands and palms the Foundations of the Sky o Lords and Masters of the World and the Face of the Earth in this the navel of the World Tziquinaha

....

I implore your hands your feet because you are our fathers our brothers of great value our life and the health of our spirits O God this son of yours Nathaniel Tarn his day Nathaniel Tarn's he has remembered your hands he has remembered your feet through the God called Incense through the God called Candle the gum of the storax tree the gum of the frankincense here he is gathered remembering in his own place his own essence so that I need remember only so that I need ask only because you are the owners of *pataxte* and *cacao* / owners of cloud and mist / gathered in the Sky and in Spain O Gods maintainers of the Sun and Light before the essence of man and woman before the embrace and the privacy of those two!

your son does not ask for his voice for his speech he asks for his life for his health he implores the Angels for the prayer of the holy table before our Mothers before our Fathers chiefs of the World of mist and clouds / of rain and lightning / and thunder

our Father God in Glory our Father God in Sky made of twelve Fathers as well as Mothers because they are found in each other's company twelve also are the Gods of Chiantla who look after our sons who look after our offspring who look after our shoots

Juan Martin / Diego Martin / King Martin / Pascual Martin / Parpeta Martin / Nicolas Martin / Baltazar Martin / Chalela Martin / Staka Martin / Palvera Martin / Balion Martin and St. John Martin of all the Martins Company of the Holy World Masters of the wild animals in the forest

and Maria Sabela / Maria Salina / Maria Madalena / Maria Losia / Maria Candelaria / Maria Chiantla / Maria St. Anna / Maria Rosario / Maria Conception / Maria Dolores / Maria Saragosta / Maria Niachotiya Mothers of the Holy World great procreators midwives experts in rocking cradles and bundles and hammocks before the Face of the Earth and Maria Yashper the tripes of woman

and Angel Semanera Pastor / Mayordomo / King Monarch / King Mateksun / King Matekani / King Sakashol / Don Galisto / Francisco Sojuel / Juan Pablo / Baltazar Pablo / Jacobo Coo / Marco Rujutch Rainpriests of the Holy World with Anthony / John / Melchior / Baltazar / St. Philip of Galicia the oldest of the Galicias and also Michael, Raphael and Gabriel and thousands of others their houses in the hills their houses in the valleys their houses in the clouds where they work and share out the plants and share out food and rain

and St. Bernard the Sun who has maintained us in the World in tiled houses and in houses of various materials who extends his flight across the World to see our past and to see our future

and you who suffered pain who suffered punishment from the moment the World began from the moment the Face of the Earth began from the moment your hands and feet existed Lord God Jesuschrist who walked in the God called Cloud and in the God called Mist under the burning Sun who came bathed in sweat remembering us when the Holy World was created you suffered pain and punishment before the Cross of Passion with three hammers and a thousand lashes they laid out your hands and your feet on the Cross of Passion and with three nails held your divine body in place in order to pay for our sins for our crime we are humankind we are sinners which is how man and woman youth and girl remained on this earth!

and with San Pedro in the West / Atitlan-Tolimán in the East / Sambernawa in the North / Zunil in the South Volcanos of the Holy World

and the various places of the Holy World

....

a yellow wine a white wine a yellow beer a white beer have come to your hands and to your feet Lord of white hair and white eyebrows place him them under your power under your miracle perhaps it is the Angel St. Michael who leads him to you

because you are our Father because you are our Mother because you are twelve you the
Angels because you are the twelve chief Gods of the World take him in your arms then
and embrace him World which brings forth Justice which brings forth Sacrament a
thousand apologies a thousand pardons that the road of your son might remain
open that he avoid harm to himself that he avoid fractures of the limbs to himself
and over the World come down perhaps Lord of the white hair and eyebrows in the middle
of the day in the middle of the hour to grant permission to grant license to remain under your
protection forever!

I alone I am people I am people who live on a basis of food and drink I am not
God I am not Angel before the World and the Face of the Earth You Angels are of God
because of your divinity through being Chiefs of the World and the Face of the
Earth perhaps you keep me here in the mountains in the valleys perhaps you detain
me in your hands in your feet Lord St. Simon perhaps your witness perhaps you look
down on me perhaps I have no destination in this World but neither shall there be
anyone speaking before me or behind me God

your son has remembered you Lord St. Simon because the God of the Day looks after
him thanks then to the World to God-Father God-Son God-Holy
Ghost Amenjesus

thanks Jesuschrist my Father Ah God! this will be my table this will be my
book now that I solicit pardon for our sins for our guilt before Lord St. Simon when
we go another time and come before Captain Santiago when we come here another time
before Captain St. James of Compostela in this his town of Santiago which is also the House
of Birds Tziquinaha!

NOTE: The religion of the Highland Maya of Guatemala is syncretistic: ancient Maya ideas and rites
and icons underlie the surface Catholicism. Apart from the Saints and Angels mentioned in these prayers, two
major “pagan” figures are referred to: St. Martin who masks an ancient Lord of the Wild Animals (and whose
female companion is Yashper, the First Mother) and St. Simon, alias St. Michael Archangel, St. Peter Apostle,
St. Andrew, Pedro de Alvarado Conquistador of Guatemala and Judas Iscariot, whose real identity is Mam
(Mam-shimon or Maximon) the Old-God of the Maya. Both the Martin and the Mam are bundles rather than
icons: but the Mam bundle contains the elements of a large puppet which is taken out and dressed on certain
ritual occasions. Mam is a great walker, is bisexual and highly involved in love magic and witchcraft. Both Mam
and the Martin are looked after by special priests: among these, certain striking features are invoked in the
prayers. These are the dead priests who have become dieties and who are believed to return to earth—possibly
as reincarnations—to help the village in times of trouble. They are connected with the making of rain and the
bringing back of the good weather after the rainy season.

These prayers were recited for me as a part of an educational process which involved the possibility of
my becoming an apprentice of N.C. This priest’s style was and is the finest I have heard and his systematization
of belief the most impressive. One of his own idiosyncracies—although not unrelated to traditional calendrical
lore—involved the listing of Powers by the dozen: twelve Martins, twelve Marias and so forth. This was also an
aspect of a stylistic trick of the prayers: namely uttering one name and then repeating it as often as one can
remember names to add to it. Some of these tricks became very well known to me after a while and I caught the
habit of sensing which “slabs” of prayer N.C. would use at various times, when he would slow down and space
out, when he would go fast to the limit of his breathing capacity and so forth.

I have taken the liberties with the arrangement of these fragments and the presentation of data in them
(though no information is deliberately perverted) not only as a part of an experiment in attitudes towards

translation and translators but also, in this case, because this is precisely what I would have done had I become an *ajkun* myself. The anthropologist I was knows where these “distortions” occur and readily forgives them. My teacher and friends would probably forgive them too if the case arose insofar as the religious status I was suspected of harboring would have allowed me the greatest possible latitude in creativity had I ever wished to avail myself of that power. And a last reason is that I do not have the Zutuhil texts with me: only an indifferent Spanish version and a certain pulsation in my ears.

Nathaniel Tarn, Santa Fe July 1970

Jerome Rothenberg

A Note to Accompany "The First Horse-Song of Frank Mitchell"

This is my almost final working of the first of 17 "horse-songs" in the blessingway of Frank Mitchell (1881-1967) of Chinle, Arizona. Their power, as with most Navajo poetry, is directed toward blessing & curing, but in the course of it they also depict the stages by which Enemy Slayer, on instructions from his mother Changing Woman, goes to the house of his father The Sun, to receive & bring back horses for The People. The Navajos, of course, had no horses before the coming of the Spaniards, but a short time after the actual delivery, the myth had already taken shape, translating history into the Eternal Dreaming. The First Song has Enemy Slayer imagining the horses & other possessions he'll seek and claim.

I've been attempting total translations of all the horse-songs, accounting not only for meaning but for word distortions, meaningless syllables, music, style of performance, etc.; & since translation is at no point mere reproduction, even the music isn't free from changes. The idea never was to set English words to Navajo music, but to let a whole work emerge newly in the process of considering what kinds of statement were there to begin with. As far as I could I also wanted to avoid "writing" the poem in English, since this seemed irrelevant to a poetry that had reached a high development outside any written system.

Under the best of circumstances translation-for-meaning is no more than partial translation. Even more so for the densely textured Navajo. Right from the start, then, the opening line of the first horse-song, reading something like this

*dzo-wowode sileye shi, dza-na desileye
shiyi dzanadi sileye shiya'e*

is really a distortion of the phrase "*dzaadi sila shi*" repeated three times. A literal translation (i.e. "for meaning") would say something like "over-here they-are-here (&) mine" three times over, which would fail to get the sense of one statement presented as three distinct oral events. To do more than that, a total translation must distort words in a manner analogous to the original; it must match "meaningless" syllables with equivalents in our very different English soundings; it may begin to sing in a mode suitable to the words of the translation; & if the original provides for more than one voice, the translation will also.

The translation of the First Horse-Song follows some such program. David McAllester provided me with tapes of Frank Mitchell singing, & with texts that included transcriptions of the word-as-sung, indications of how they would be sounded in normal Navajo speech, literal & general translations, footnotes, & ready answers to such questions as I still had. I translated first for meaning & phrasing in English, adding small words to my text where the original had meaningless syllables; then distorted, first the small words so that they approximated to "mere" sound, then within the meaningful segment of each line toward more or less the density of the original; e.g. (for the opening line again) "all are & now some are there & mine" became "all ahrenow some 're there & mine," & was then distorted twice more in the forms shown in my English text. Most of the distortions were carried out on the tape recorder, & as part of the same process I went from speaking towards singing, moving rapidly from Mitchell's version to soundings of my own. Since the opening of each song (typical of Navajo) is a string, small or large, of meaningless syllables, I let my equivalents for these introductory sounds serve as "key" to which I could refer in determining my moves within the poem. Similar sounds & distortions had naturally to be carried over from song to song.

In all this what matters to me most as a poet is that the process has been a very natural one of extending the poetry into new areas of sound. Nor do I think of the result as poetry plus something else, but as all poetry, all poet's work, just as the Navajo is all poetry, where poetry & music haven't suffered separation. In that sense Frank Mitchell's gift has taken me a small way towards a new "total poetry," as well as an experiment in total translation. And that, after all, is where many of us had been heading in the first place.

The First Horse-Song of Frank Mitchell (Blue)

Navajo

Key: wnn N nnnn N gahn

All ahrenow some 're there & mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there nnnn N gahn

All ahrenow some 're there & mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there are mine all mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) because I was the boy raised ing the dawn & nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) & in the howse the bluestone home & mmmrrr but some there're all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) & in the howse the shiningwingNdgahn & some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) & ing the swollenowse his breath has blown & nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) & ing the howse the hoNloly home & mmmmm but some there 're mine (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nmmmm N gahn) ndin the house of precious cloth we walk (p)pon (N gahn) & nnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) N prayersticks that are blue N wwnnn but some there 're mine (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) with my feathers that are blue N wwnnn but some there 're mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) with those spirit horses that are blue & wwnnn but some there 're mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) with those spirit horses that are blue & dawn N nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) with those spirit horses that are bluestonawu N nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnnn N gahn) with those horses that are bluestone & nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nmmmm N gahn) with cloth of evrygind to be(e) there N rrr but some there 're mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nmmmm N gahn) with jewels of everygind to be(e) there N rrr but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnng N gahn) with hoganorses of evrygind to be(e) there N rrr but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there

(Nnnn N gahn) with sheep of evrygind to be(e) there N rrr but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) with cattle of evrygind to be(e) there N rrr but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) with men of evrygine to be(e) there N rrr but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) my howse of precious cloth in my backgwingNgahn N nnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) the house mmm precious cloth we walk (p)pon & nnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) & everything that's there before & mrrr we walk upon & nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) & everything that's more & won't be poor N gwing N gahn nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) my horses that are living to be old & blesst naht nnnn but some there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there
(Nnnn N gahn) because I am the boy who blesses to be & dlll but some there 're mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there nnnn N gahn

All ahrenow some 're there & mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there nnnn N gahn

All ahrenow some 're there & mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there are mine all (gahn) & some (gwing) there 're mine there nnnn N gaah!

from Alcheringa Issue Two, 1971

Yoruba. Jerome Rothenberg's working from the French translation of Pierre Verger. Ogun must be praised by all who use iron.

PRAISES OF OGUN

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

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

from Alcheringa Issue Three, 1971

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." Tlaçolteotl (Our-Lady-of-the-Bunghole, mother of Lord Fertility) was the patron diety 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

 Tlaçolteotl
 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
in 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 his dark house
in the house where it grows dark

o Piltzintecutli Piltzintecutli
yellow feathers
you glue all over yourself

on the ball-plating 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 to 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

Ayahuasca Sound-Poem
(Cashinahua—Eastern Peru)

é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.
é é. é. é é. é.

—version by Jerome Rothenberg
after Kenneth Kensinger

A Poem for the Origins of Human Speech

I.

our real father Ñamandu old Number One
took a little piece 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 a 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 of 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 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 reflections 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.

and 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 Ñamandu
because he wanted someone he could set his heart on
took the mother of the Ñamandus 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 Tacura Sacred Flaming Goddess"
(Guaraní)

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 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 found 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 his 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 roadblock in the
Old Man's way

—English version by Jerome Rothenberg

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

from Alcheringa Issue Four, 1972

English version by Jerome Rothenberg after Spanish prose version in Angel María Garibay's Epica Nahuatl—going back to Nahuatl sources delivered soon after the conquest. Huitzilopochtli himself was not only the war-god, but god of the Fifth Sun—of the era, that is, into which this world was moving, itself represented by the (hieroglyphic) sign movement; more specifically, according to Laurette Séjourné (Burning Water, 1956), by a movement towards liberation from contradiction & duality.

“Huitzilopochtli, image of this sun, disguised as a (humming)bird & with fire as his sign, represented the soul of a combatant in the holy war.”

The Birth of the War God (Aztec)

I.

old Coatlicue snake woman
‘s sweeping up
a feather falleth on her
more like a ball of feathers ‘twas
‘twas fluff
that moment she did pick it up
deposited it betwixt her legs
then ended
sweeping would want to take it out
from legs but nothing’s
there that instant
she’s grown pregnant
the 400 Brothers saw
their mother
pregnant
a great anger
fills them
“who hath made thee pregnant
“made thee into mother
“shame
“it lays on us
“it shames us
(says their sister Coyolxauhqui)
“brothers
“who has laid it
“on us has made
“what grows betwixt her legs
Old Mother knows it now’s
so scared a great weight
lies on her child

between her legs brings
 comfort (sez)
 “I know now what I have to do”
 Snake Woman hears her boy’s
 word
 was a great comfort
 calmed her heart
 was blowing full of
 little blisses
 2.
 thus joined
 400 Brothers would agree
 in turn
 those southerners did then
 determine
 how they would take their mother’s
 life
 for shaming them
 so fierce 400 Brothers were
 were full of
 wrath as if their hearts were
 leaving them for anger
 sweet sister Coyolxauhqui
 ‘s working up & cooling
 anger of her brothers
 will go & kill
 old mother
 they prepare for
 war
 are dressed for it
 400 Brothers
 strut like generals
 spinning & tangling
 of hair
 entanglement of headhairs
 was among them one
 brother Cuahuiticac
 but couldn’t keep his
 word
 what 400 Brothers said
 he told to Huitzilopochtli
 (answers)
 “careful
 “little uncle
 “thou should be always standing guard
 “I got
 “some planning of my own

3.

so had made up their minds to
kill her
be finished with old mother
had started marching
'twas little sister guided them
so fancy
so like a bunch of dudes
dressed up for war
had passed out
paper costumes
for adornment
(sez)
"thrust forward
"strut in files
"be like a perfect squadron
"little sister
"guide thy way

4.

but Cuahuiticac has made it
to peak of mountain
there he would speak with
Huitzilopochtli (sez)
"they're coming"
(Huitzilopochtli sez) "fix
"your sights on them
"which way they
"coming" (sez)
"now 'mongst the linnets"
(sez) "now which way"
(sez) "Snake Sands"
(sez) "now which"
(sez) "Hanging Terraces"
(sez) "now"
(sez) "Mountain Slope"
(then sez) "& now"
(sez) "at the peak now
"now 400 Brothers
"come sweet sister
"guiding

5.

was born that moment
Huitzilopochtli
lined up his gear
his shield of eagle feathers
arrowheads blue
spearheads (“turquoise –
darts” so – called) & paints
his face with
colors like the “painted child”
puts on his head a bonnet
of rare feathers
fits in earplugs (but also had
one skinny foot wore
feathered sandle on the left painted
his thighs & arms
in blue) then one
called Tochancalqui set fire to
the turquoise spears
went to give Huitzilopochtli
orders with his dart
the newborn wounds their sister
Coyolxauhqui cuts
her throat the head
‘s abandoned on Snake Mountain while
body goes rolling down the slope
smashes to smithereens
here & there
go hands
goes torso
go feet

6.

now was Huitzilopochtli
swollen now was going in pursuit of
brothers
now was stalking them
would make them shimmy down would make
400 Southerners
climb the summit of
Snake Mountain (& when
he sees them all before him
when he spots them
on the slope that instant
he pursues them

stalks them like rabbits
 around the mountain
four times Huitzilopochtli made them
 go around it four times
 pace off the circuit of Snake Mountain
would vainly try to freak him
 with din of timbrels
 vainly would tumble towards him
to sound of bells on ankles
 & banged their shields)
 they could make nothing
happen nothing
 worked out now
 now nothing for defense
they had were stalked by
 Huitzilopochtli
 drove them off
demolished them
 destroyed them
 wiped them out
did nothing so much as chase them
 hard did stalk them
 harder
& they would plead with him
 they'd say
 "enough's enough
"already

7.

 but Huitzilopochtli couldn't stop
 with greater fire
would burn his anger at them
 & pursued them
 only a few escaped his presence
squirmed from his hands they headed
 south (would afterwards be called
 the Southerners
400 brothers gone
 that one direction)
 those who had fled his hand like those
he killed on whom
 he gorged his anger
 Huitzilopochtli
did strip their clothes from
 decorations
 weapons
he took possession of & joined
 unto his office
 made them the marks of what
he would become

Hollo's versions are from the originals collected by Marjorie Edgar from "settlers from Finland and their descendants in the iron mining towns of Minnesota and the lake country surrounding them." Charms were originally used by professional loihtija or wise women. Hollo, born in raised in Finland, has extended the operations of his poetry into American speech.

Anselm Hollo

4 USEFUL POEMS

that traveled across the Atlantic

to cure the bruised hand

OOHH!

AARRGGHH!

where
did it come from?

from ugly old hags?

from raspberry bushes?

from the Hole
in the Ground

where Raven
was charred,

whence Scorching
arose –

OOHH!

AARRGGHH!

to prevent frostbite

Frost, Son of Blizzard, i tell you:
STOP freezing my fingernails
& STOP freezing my fingers, too:
go freeze the willows by the river,
go freeze the bum birchtrees, wherever!

Kangasniemi/Finland – Winton/Minnesota
Iowa City/Iowa

2:iv:72

to get ride of hiccups

go, hiccup, go:

1
 into reeds
2
 into bark
3
 into birch
4
 into needles
5
 into shrubs
6
 into spruce
7
 into fence-post
8
 into tree-stump
9
 straight up
&
10
 next door!

Kangasniemi/Finland – Winton/Minnesota
Iowa City/Iowa

2:iv:72

to make the cows come home

here, let me tie this bell round your neck
this bell round your neck, my dearest cow

clang, bell

bell, clang

clang from the farthest range
bell them right back to the Big House

you are the biggest & strongest
you'll bring home all the others

clang clang back to the Big House
back to evening smokes rising
while the sun still shines, & mid-evening
is mellow, clang, bell, clang, yellow

all in a row, all in a row

bring the holy cows home, bring them home

The Cows of Our Bounteous Mother

Oulu/Finland – Crooked Lake/Minnesota
Iowa City/Iowa

2:iv:72

Poet Nathaniel Tarn, who interviews Gary Snyder, was himself an anthropologist with training at British, French & American schools; he was later the editor (1967 - 1969) of the influential Cape Editions series of literary, political & anthropological texts. Tarn's most recently published volume of poetry is A Nowhere for Vallejo (Random House), while Snyder continues to work on further sections of Mountains and Rivers, among other poetic/religious/ecological projects. (Acknowledgement for research aid on the interview to The Rutgers University Research Council). — N.T.)

FROM ANTHROPOLOGIST TO INFORMANT: A FIELD RECORD OF GARY SNYDER

Project: Compatibility & Mutual Relevance, Anthropology/Literature.
Co-ordinated project: Amerindian Poetry.
Previous Ref.: 4/12-13/1970, Notre Dame Literary Festival:
File UK101GS
Loc.: 30 Jefferson Road, Princeton, N.J. 4/12/1971, 19h.-24. 30 h.

(From discussion on "Young America" & its greening, or not,
(File UK101GS), into:)

GS: Don't let's call it an interview, make it a conversation.

(Intention to write an article; providential visit of Informant: "Well, it is an interview...in a sense it's anthropology...." Pause, Kherdian on his concern with Amerindians in early teens. Did he ever meet any?)

GS: Yes, on this farm about 20 miles north of Seattle, when I was about 12. An old Indian came around in a truck selling smoked salmon. We also saw many Indians at the Farmers' Market in Seattle. No, I don't remember talking to them. But I do remember clearly realizing at the age of 5 or 6 that these were prior people. My parents said the old salmon-seller was here before them. I saw few other children and spent most of my time in the woods. When I asked questions about the landscape, plants, birds, etc. my parents couldn't answer. I thought perhaps they hadn't been there long enough. Then there were the Indian villages along Puget Sound. I became very conscious of the history of the American Continent, the shortness of occupation-time: the State of Washington was wild before 1860 or so. My sense of the Indian became very intense with this reading and the sense of what the White man had done to the land and to the Indians both came together very soon and aroused a sense of outrage.

(Realization that I sd. have had a tape-recorder. "You realize, I've got to reconstitute this conversation, er, interview, I've got to write Snyder." Feverish note-taking: hand no longer used to it. "What did your parents contribute to this orientation?")

GS: My father was a N.W. man, working on ships before he met my mother: as a coal-passer, then a purser. My mother had come up with her mother from Texas. She was working her way through College writing classes. She wrote a lot, got into journalism. She was the literary one, but they both provided a background of political radicalism and non-conformism, sharpened by the Depression. A sense of detachment and a critical eye for your own culture may help you towards Anthropology.

("There's going to be mile on mile of interpretation by and by. I think it's best to add the facts. Who taught you Anthropology? What excited you most about the courses and why?")

GS: I was onto this wilderness and Anthropology thing very early. As a teenager, I subscribed to the journal of the Wilderness Society: "the Living Wilderness". I'd write Congressmen about danger from timber companies on public lands; danger from bounties on coyotes. I saw the treatment of Indians and this land exploitation as the same old rip-off. My parents made the identification with Capitalism. My parents broke up when I was about 12, 13 and somehow I was left alone in the City. Yes, Portland. I made a bunch of city-urchin adaptations to a wildlife. I kept my freedom by looking after myself, paying my own rent and so on. Worked as a copy boy on a newspaper from 4 to midnight: my mother had helped me. The newspaper men liked me and showed me the insides of the City: the courts, the jails, the city government: a nitty-gritty kind of education. Yes, a kind of sociology already. I'd gotten into High School and I knew I wanted to stay with it whatever else happened. Out of this tumultuous career, there were poems - a teacher showed them to a College friend; I got into Reed on my poetry alone. My first I was a bad student. After that it was o.k.

(Anthropology at Reed?)

GS: A one-man Department: David French. He's still at Reed. He eventually became an ethnobotanist mainly and editor of the American Journal of Ethnobotany. His interest was in the Wasco and Wishram Indians on the Warm Springs reservation east of Mt. Hood. Took several courses over 4 years: Intro. to Ethnological Theory; Culture & Personality; Introduction to Linguistics; Physical Anthropology; Far Eastern Ethnology; Amerindian Ethnology. I enjoyed them.

(Remembering my own plethora of teachers and places, but had gone into it for religion, myth, weltanschauung: systems/what made them tick: from Griaule, Levy and Levi-Strauss in Paris to Redfield in Chicago. "What was your main interest?")

GS: Mythology-folklore-linguistics. I did a tutorial reading course with French on this; he didn't teach it formally. Went through the Scaninavian classical material thoroughly, the Stith Thompson stuff on folklore classification, some Jessup North Pacific Expedition material, Boas on Tsmishian Mythology, Swanton....No, not much Mesoamerican: I had a strong sense of the North West.

(Any conflict at this stage between Anthropological and Literary studies? cf.: easy to talk poetry and anthro. at Chicago in the same breath but back among the British Socio. Anths.: wow!)

GS: No: mythology and literature get along well. No conflict.

(Thesis? Is it available; has any one seen it?)

GS: Reed requires a B.A. thesis. Mine's called "Dimensions of a Myth". I like it: it's indicative of much of what happens in my poetry later whatever it's worth or not as anthropology. One Ph.D. candidate is looking at it. I have to give you a permit.

(Writes out permit on spot. "Did you ever do any field work?")

GS: No, never formally. But I hung out a lot on the Warm Springs reservation collecting folktales pretty formally: noting, taping, typing. In the summers of 51 and 54. I also did some winter seasons as a student but didn't use the material in the thesis. Then I worked as a logger (in 54) and got more information - it went in the "Berry Feast" piece. I hitched around and hung around and got onto very intimate terms with Indians.

(Powerful reminiscences of a great time. Smile. We agree to cool some of the talk. O.K. self-censorship. "Why did you put some of those Reviews into Earth House Hold? They strike me as Juvenilia, perhaps not worth reprinting?")

GS: Well, Juvenilia yes, but they're not as superficial as they might appear. They were done while I was studying Chinese: no credits involved. For "Midwest Folklore". The Clark piece is a put-down of course. I've never seen any bad reviews of it and yet it's a bad book. I really wanted to suggest that unexpurgated texts are needed rather than bowdlerized ones. But the Jaime de Angulo: well no one in Anthropology wrote a serious piece about A. But Jaime de Angulo you must realize was a great culture hero on the West Coast. He was a Spaniard with a Paris M.D., came to the South West, quit the army to live with Indians, moved to California. Self-taught linguist, a good one. He never had a regular appointment, he was just too wild. Burned a house down one night when drunk, rode about naked on a horse at Big Sur, member of the Native American Church, great friend of Jeffers - the only man Jeffers ever allowed to visit him day or night. No: I never met him or Jeffers. So: at the end of World War II, Jaime de Angulo was one of the few people alive to jazz up California. These reviews have more meaning than you think in terms of literary culture.

(Have to cool a wee bit more about J. de A's exploits. Ah the secret within the secret within the secret! "Well, this is bringing us to Indiana...")

GS: I wanted to go to Indiana to develop the study of oral literature, to study oral literature as style, as raconteur technique - yes, o.k., narrative technique. In summer 51 I'd been on the reservation. Then in the fall of 51 I had this fellowship. I only stayed one semester.

(Where was everybody at certain times? NT at Chicago working up to the Maya. When was Charles Olson at Yucatan? And Black Mountain...I think Black Mountain starting just about when NT leaving for the Maya. Why was I never told? "Who did you work with at Indiana?")

GS: Well, Charles Vogelien, Thomas Sebeok, Fred Householder and a fine ethnomusicologist George Herzog. And Dell Hymes...

(Strong reaction. Ha! Saw DH at Sussex ASA about 2-3 years ago. Conference on Linguistics: I'd already quit. Asked DH about whom to contact to get material on the secret history of the anthro-poets and he was full of suggestions. GS pleased about conference.)

GS: Dell was at Reed, one year ahead of me and, or course, at Indiana one year ahead. He helped to get me to Indiana. He was my roommate for that semester. This putting of people in touch with each other: About 4 or 5 years ago, I put Stanley Diamond in touch with Jerry Rothenberg (I'd been corresponding with Jerry for about 10 years) and it was Dell who had put Stanley in touch with me. And now we're altogether on the editorial board of Alcheringa...

("This reminds me that in 51 there was this great Wenner Gren thing in N.Y. Levi-Strauss was so surprised to see me in the corridors - I'd worked with him three years but we'd hardly exchanged as many words - that he took me for a drink along with Roman Jakobson. Do you remember about this?)

GS: No, but come to think of it I remember Sebeok talking to us about the great AnthroLinguists conference at Indiana. That must have come before it?

(Up and down the East Coast after Yale and before Chicago: Kardiner in N.Y., Stirling at the Smithsonian, Stewart and Kroeber at Columbia (Kroeber: "Young man, if you're going to Chicago, you'll need a thick scarf")...back in Yale: Murdock and Linton who could not help me get on out from under Jefferson and American Democracy: Orientation! "O.K., we're getting to the crunch: why did you quit?" We already both know this part by heart, I guess...)

GS: I decided to quit because it became evident that the things I wanted to do would be better done in poetry than in scholarship. The economic reasons for a scholarly career weren't incentive enough. At the magic-superstitious level, let's say the Muse is jealous. She won't tolerate you having several mistresses. A commitment is required. On the practical level - Dell and I talked about this a lot, Dell was going through the same kind of thing - well if you're going to do a good job it's got to be whole time. I believe in scholarship if that's what you want but it has to be well done. A Ph.D. in Anthropology is demanding. I did think about getting the Ph.D. and then quitting, but it seemed to me that the kind of effort one put into getting a Ph.D. was essentially repetitive...like proving some sort of point, almost like showing off. It wasn't an easy decision. And I'm not sure I've found anyone to do what it was I wanted to do...

(When pressed on this a little - take Barthes' highly sophisticated *S/Z* for instance I'm teaching right now - admits graciously that maybe he has not quite kept up with increasing sophistication of narrative technique studies. NT disagrees a little with feelings about Ph.D. Things start getting repetitive after the Ph.D. These blank sheets in Rangoon the second time round and a big howl of "No" inside..."Did you ever feel also that the mental orientations were ultimately in conflict: you know, a certain kind of allegiance to 'objective' fact on the one hand going against the alchemist in you on the other?")

GS: Oh yes, very much that! And then the sense that in the world of folklore and mythology there's a...wisdom tradition if you like, half buried but that poets can dig it out and anthropologists can't and aren't allowed to... Three years out of the field, I think I realized that I didn't want to be the anthropologist but the informant. That's it: wanting to be a subject by which I mean being authentically what you are. I made it a rule in Japan not to elicit information that didn't come out naturally in my relationships with people. By really living with people you can enter into certain things... but then there's the difficulty of keeping quiet, of not betraying trust. I was, yes, conscious of the "danger" of being an anthropologist; at the beginning, yes, I collected information, but in the world of Zen now, I'm an informant.

(NT: "Well like not being obliged to ask a certain type of question any more, just being allowed to be with people and not swamped by the culture coming at you 24 hours a day.")

"On the other hand, it leaves one with a certain attitude to fact, right?": cf. Note to *The Beautiful Contradictions*: "For him - the anthropologist - scientific records serve as a formal constraint, as well as a point of departure, for the imagination and faithful topography may be very near to the concept of justice")

GS: Yes, I continue to respect facts. To have your facts right is to allow yourself the latitude to be far out in other ways.

("Surrealism?")

GS: I admire it but I could never do it myself. Philip Lamantia, an old friend, is the leading Surrealist poet in America. I read him with great pleasure.

("How were other writers reacting to Anthropology?")

GS: Whalen was a great reader. He was a veteran of World War II and had a better library than Reed College in certain subjects. He had a big collection on Indian Philosophy. He read a lot of anthropology. Very remarkable man. Dell, Dell of course was more of a poet than an anthropologist, he was very romantic, revolutionary poet, a good poet. Now he's gone the other way. Yes, Kerouac and Ginsberg were interested, but they weren't respecters of the fact, you know, like people who've been through this are respecters of the fact...

("And after Indiana?")

GS: I began to move towards Oriental studies. I had the sudden realization that Anthropology was concerned with understanding human nature - but then why go to other people, why not study one's own nature? So...Zen. When I'd firmly decided that all this was to be done as a poet, then I went to Berkeley: 1953-55. I told the Head of Oriental Studies, Ed Schafer, with whom I still correspond, that I would never take a higher degree. At that time Oriental Studies had precious few people, they were glad to get students. I still tell young people, I make a pedagogical point of getting kids to learn about as many cultures as possible: Anthropology replaces History in this respect.

(Ask about any kinship felt with Olson's Sumeria, May etc. I've noticed Olson never really comes up in Snyder's work...)

GS: I never came to Olson. I was rather put off by the Mayan Letters, the Romanticism and the lack of scholarly seriousness. Around 1953. I never trusted Olson as a scholar. Maybe its an East Coast thing against a West Coast thing. Non-Americans think we're all the same, but West Coast is West Coast.

(Express surprise; instance Olson's useful work on Maya fisheries for a start - (meeting CO for the first time at Bled in 64 or so, taking him the first Cape contract, saying, on meeting, just finished the Letters/him: well? well? as a Mayanist? - But Charles, you spend the whole book telling Mayanists to go to hell! - Ah!...Well, never mind, what do you think of it, what do you think of it? Very excited...) and Dorn among the Shoshone?)

GS: I always felt that Olson was an apologist for Western Culture; the trip from Sumeria to Gloucester a sort of justification for White-America. I do dig Olson poetically. Well, not since the beginning have people gone dryshod from Europe to the U.S. and people have gone dryshod from Asia to America. That makes a difference, Ships? Well, it's not as old as walking. And animals walked before men. As for Dorn: he came late to the Shoshone and under Olson's aegis. He didn't really like living in Idaho.

Now Duncan is possibly my favorite poet, of now. Duncan is Gnostic whereas Olson was esoteric. You know: Duncan, Spicer and Blaser were all students of the great Medievalist Kantarovich at Berkeley. Spicer.....Spicer as a matter of fact was part Indian; he looked like a Sioux. I don't know what he was: I think Sioux or

Cherokee. He didn't go into Indian things specifically but if you look at the Grail poems and Billy the Kid, you'll see it was there...And Rexroth now: one of the first poets to clearly invoke Amerindian songs.

(Can we go back into the past a bit? What about Fiedler's The Return of the Vanishing America?)

GS: Fiedler: yes, but cranky. Looking for faggots under every bush. I start from someone like Lawrence who said "when you think the Indians are gone look out". And there's that kickoff I'll use for the final version of Mountains and Rivers: "Where there aint no Indians that's where you find them thickest". Jim Bridges said that, great mountain men in the 1820s and 30s.

("What I meant was" (this unerring sense of his for scholarly transmission)
"do you have any sense of lineage?")

GS: Well, Jeffers is very important to me as the man who claimed for the values of nature against those of technology. And Whitman: a sort of 19th century positive Jeffers. Lawrence I've mentioned. Pound: an American trying to construct a myth out of the lore of Europe and Asia with varying degrees of success. Rexroth a neo-classicist with his base in Greek, American Indians, etc. A great reclamer. Further back? I find it difficult to relate to past America because it's Christian. I find it easier to go back to the Greek Anthology, the Romans, the medieval Chinese.

(No mention of the great Mesoamerican phenomenon: Maya/Mexican/Inca?)

GS: No, too abstract for me. You see, it was closer for me to get to China because it LOOKS so much more like the North West Pacific Coast!

(Can't help expatiating on the glories of "my" Americas. Hold that only in a few places up here can one see the grandeur of the Center: the great Kiva at Chaco Canyon, e.g., greater than the one at Aztec that he has seen. Summer of 70: goodbye to Rothenberg at Aztec, after beginning Alcheringa I in Santa Fe...)

GS: It's the next order of business and my wife is as keen on it as I am. I want to learn Spanish and then, off to Mexico. Since India, I've felt I'd be o.k. in a place like Mexico.

("A few last shots... What about your syncretism?" (GS blank) "well, in Earth House Hold, e.g., p. 57: "involuntary gassho and bow to the virgin" note how you capitalize Buddhist icons but not others usually. I'm referring to my notion that syncretism is mankind's lot: only the very privileged can afford purism")

GS: Syncretism: yes in theory; no in practice. Both Buddhists and Gnostics agree on this. My practice is now syncretistic but on after years of orthodox practice in Rinzaï Zen. My teacher now agrees to this search here for ways of living Zen in America. Padmasambhava is my model here: the great Buddhist acculturater who took Buddhism to Tibet. Making contact with local spirits, getting onto terms with them.

("Levi-Strauss? You mention him in Earth House Hold. I wasn't quite sure there how you were seeing him?")

GS: Fascinating, a genius, but a rationalist. The insights are circumscribed by the commitment to rationalism. The dimension provided in Anthropology by someone like Casteneda is not open to Levi-Strauss. What's useful in him is the stress on the intellectual power of the primitives. This is his major insight: yes, I agree it came late in his thinking...I have read everything that Levi-Strauss has done in English.

(Notice signs of tiredness. Suggest we are drawing to a close...)

GS: Yes, that was good. It helped me put some order into my thoughts. Now you must reconstitute this conversation.

("I'll send it to you. You should check it out.")

GS: Yes, and now what do you think of all this?

from Alcheringa Issue Five, 1973

Jerome Rothenberg's redaction &/or working, based on versions by Edgar Hennecke, Max Pulver, & G.R.S. Mead from the 3rd Century gnostic source. "After a while the Christ rose & said he was very glad to see his children... 'My children, I want you to listen to all I have to say to you. I will teach you, too, how to dance a dance, & I want you to dance it.'... Then he commenced our dance, everybody joining in, the Christ singing while we dance." (Description-by Porcupine, circa 1890 - of Wovoka, the Christ of the American Indian "ghost dance" religion.)

"Acts of Saint John"

THE ROUND DANCE OF JESUS

"A praise poem

"we sing now
"will go to meet what is to come
& had us form a circle
we stood in with folded hands
himself was in the middle
(said) You answer
Amen
then started singing
praises saying
"Praises Father
circling & we answered him
Amen (said)
Praises Word (said)
Praises Grace
Amen (said)
Praises Spirit (said)
Praises Holy Holy (said)
O thee transfiguration (said)
Amen (said)
Praises Father
Thank you Sunshine Light
no darkness (said)
"I will inform you now
"the reason for this thanks
(then said)
I save
& will be saved
Amen
I free
& will be freed
Amen
I hurt
& will be hurt
Amen

Am born
& will give birth
Amen
I feed
& will be food
Amen
I hear
& will be heard
Amen
I will be known
all knowing mind
Amen
I will be washed
& I will wash
Amen
all Grace Sweet Mind the Dance is round
I blow the pipe for
all are in the Round Dance
I will pipe
all dance along
Amen
I will moan low
all beat your breasts
Amen
the One & Only Eight
plays up for us
Amen
Old Number Twelve
stomps up above
Amen
the Universe controls
the dancer
Amen
Whoever isn't dancing
's in the dark
Amen
I will go
& I will stay
Amen
I will dress thee
& I will dress
Amen
I will be Oned
& I will One
Amen
I have no house
& I have houses
Amen
I have no place

& I have places
Amen
I have no temple
& I have temples
Amen
I am a lamp to thee
who see me
Amen
I am a mirror to thee
who view me
Amen
I am a door to thee
who come thru me
Amen
I am a way to thee
wayfarer
Amen (said)
“Follow
“my Round Dance
“& see yourself in me
“the Speaker
“&seeing what I speak
“keep silent on
“my mysteries
“or dancing think of what
“I do
“make yours the suffering of a man
“that I will suffer
“yet powerless to understand your suffering
“without a word
“the Father sent language thru me
“the sufferer you saw
“& saw me suffering
“you grew restless
“shaken
“you were moved toward wisdom
“lean on me
“I am a pillow
“who am I?
“you only will know me
“when I’m gone -
“but am not he for whom
“I am now taken -
“will know it when you reach it
“& knowing suffering will know
“how not to suffer
“myself will teach you what
“you do not know
“I am your god

“not the betrayer’s
“will harmonize the Sweet Soul with my own
“the Word of Wisdom speaks in me
“says
“Praises Father
& we answered him
Amen (said)
Praises Word (said)
Praises Grace
Amen (said)
Praises Spirit (said)
Praises Holy Holy (said)
“& if thou wouldst understand that which is me
“know this all that I have said I have uttered
“playfully & I was by no means ashamed of it
“I danced
“& when you dance in understanding
“understand & say
“Amen

Jerome Rothenberg

SENECA JOURNAL 5
"The Speech of Animals"

in vision of the Baal Shem speech came
tracking thru the woods he must've
worn his famous beaver -
hat Franciscan & a little crazy Calmed
the wolf of Gubbio called him
My Brother the lonely hunter exiled
by his contemporaries stalks the woods I am
(he says) a victim of
Cherokees
the fat buck plunged an axe under
my scalp (o shall his heap of brains pour out
all wormy do the pink Fish Dance
upon the ground sob sob) I tell him
You shall be comforted Our Master
dreamed in his second vision Red Men
tongues like little fish tails
slopping from mouths o tongue
tongue dingaling saliva
pursued the Gentle Soul the hunter
little funny kid his folks
abused went crazy learned to do
the Speech of Animals
beaver talk first then wolf bear turtle
"now I can go rap with anybody"
said the Baal Shem too a simple boy they almost
kicked his ass out of Volhynia (told him) go
talk with Gentiles maybe worse 'n
White Men yes that was the terror of the olden days
for hunters those strange boys looking at
their hands a little dizzy Saw
a new language writ Instructions you will proceed
by pressure in the kidneys southward
at Red Mountain the Enemy will find you
but trust in me Strip Naked they will beat you
to the ground rip hair from scalp your earlocks
even your beard be shorn Poor Boy
he's lying helpless Comes a Bear o what enormous
Sniffer (sez) this one's our friend he speaks
the Language of Animals o little monster -
man or Indian the others come now
eager to tend him with love they dangle
a Power tiny scrapings of their Flesh

their Vital Organs fluids
strained to the finest drop they smear
first on the scalp Saliva Mucus Semen Tears
burning His scarlet cover Is a Map
this wisdom will never leave me even your lips
Funny old Bear snout Honey-ringed
open my own (grunt grunt) I eat your tongue
enormous in my mind the Bear's Head grows
I suck his eyes O Vision the respectable table
drops away the Law is innocent for once
& priceless (sez the Baal Shem) in the woods
the children break out of their caves Naked happy
between life & death the Sun
is in the cup the Baal Shem walking by
river gets Vision of the Fish
renewed in China poems that make us
laugh & swim I must be
getting old (my son sez) seven
with a long white beard he sits
learning the Speech of Animals
who love us Sometimes will bring us medicines
"this one they call the Little
"Water stirs up real easy in the dish
"could save your life

Seneca Nation
Salamanca,
New York 1972

The Baal Shem Tov used to go to a certain place in the woods & light a fire & pray when he was faced with an especially difficult task - & it was done.

His successor followed his example & went to the same place but said: "The fire we can no longer light, but we can still say the prayer." And what he asked was done too.

Another generation passed, & Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov went to the woods & said: "The fire we can no longer light, the prayer we no longer know: all we know is the place in the woods, & that will have been enough." And it was enough.

In the fourth generation, Rabbi Israel of Rishin stayed at home & said: "The fire we can no longer light, the prayer we no longer know, nor do we know the place. All we can do is tell the story." And that, too, proved sufficient.

from Alcheringa Volume Two, Number One, 1976

These are selections from work in progress that speaks from years with the Zunis in New Mexico.

Dennis Tedlock 13 Poems

Advice Received

Don't ask too many questions.
Don't ask questions about religion.
Don't take notes in front of people.
If someone is chopping wood
don't just stand there.

Dialogue

- I could tell you a story.
It's the story told to all boys when they are initiated.
Do you want me to tell it? -

- If you want to tell it go ahead. -

- Don't say that.
Say you want me to tell the story.

The Hunter's Wife

1

She looks out the window
the snow is falling
her husband went hunting for elk
the boy went along too
a neighbor thinks he saw them at Red Hill
she hasn't seen the sun all day.

2

She was out in the woods

gathering pine nuts
and there
under a tree
was a fawn
the fawn said
- Tie me up. -

3

The men left her in camp for the day
a wounded buck
charged right into the fire
she hit him over the head with a frying pan.

When Only The Breath Is Left

On the third day after her grandson died
she thought she heard his
transistor radio playing
but that wasn't even in the house
it was already
broken and buried.

On the fourth night
the door was left open for her grandson
she dreamed of masked dancers
in a row
she heard the cry of the deer
they all walked away
he was the one in the middle.

The Fire in Your Fireplace

You started it right up
with one match, it must be
your aunt loves you
it was quiet for awhile
but now
listen to that fire!
The flames go straight up
it roars!
Someone is hungry, it must be your
great-grandparents
every time you eat
take a little bread
a little meat
throw it in the fire, say

- Great-grandparents!
Eat! -
That's the shortest prayer there is.

While Eating Mutton

Here are the eyes
but that means weak eyes
here is the fat around the eyes
but that means getting tears in the wind
here is the tongue
but that means getting thirsty all the time
here is the brain
but that means snoring all night
here is the heart
but that means forgetfulness
here is a bone with marrow in it
but that means hangnails
now here is the meat on the palate, with this
I'll be able to eat cactus fruit.

Spiders

1
A spider walked across the table
he lit a match and burned it
then he said
- Bluebird!
That handsome Bluebird!
He's the one who killed you!
Shrivel up his eyes!

2
A spider bit the girl
there were big red bumps down her arm
but her aunt knew the right medicine
it was the juice of the burnt Bluebird.

The Year

First comes
Broken Branches Moon
the snow is heavy
next
Snowless Road Moon
it snows

but it doesn't stick to the road
next
Little Wind Moon
when the snow is in patches
next
Big Wind Moon
next
Nameless Moon
next
Turnabout Moon
next
Broken Branches Moon
also called Rooster Pull
the time of the rodeo
next
Snowless Road Moon
also called Get-together
Look-at-one-another
next
Little Wind Moon
next
Big Wind Moon
also called Pick-the-ears-of-corn
next
Nameless Moon
when they set the date for the dancers
next
Turnabout Moon
All these twelve together are called
time-surpasses-itself.

Winter Solstice

Here is the place of fear
for four days
no greasy foods are eaten
there is no coffee
no trade
all places of business are closed
for ten days
no sweepings
no garbage is taken out of the house
no fire is taken out of the house
not even cigarettes are lighted outside
people shouldn't use their cars
the street lights are all turned out
this is the middle of time.

Recipe

Fill a bowl with hot water
add, to taste:

dried leaves of wild mint
ground chili
onions
dried chinchweed flowers
wolfberries
and venison jerky.

This is called
hot-bowl
it is
an ancient dish.

Cornshucking

Pull down the husk
all around
then twist it all off at once
with the stem
put the dry ears in this pile
for us
put the damp ears
the moldy ears in this one
for the hogs
and throw the shucks out there
some of the ears are yellow
some are blue
red
white
some are pretty
the multicolored ones
some are black
look for the Fully-Finished-Ear
without a single kernel missing
right to the very tip
a deer, a buck
wears that one on his breast
and the Flat-Ear
with a forked tip
a doe wears that one on her breast
and the Road-Ear
with a groove down its whole length
runners wear that one on their backs

now here it is
a Fully-Finished-Ear
but it's wet
I'll put it at the edge of the good pile
and here is an ear
yellow, but
each kernel
is tinged with red
it's sort of pretty
there's no name for this one
I'll put it here on the fence rail
maybe I'll do something with it later.

When The Witches Are Out

On the road at night
we caught a deer in the headlights
he didn't know which way to go
he came toward us
turning left and right
in the lights
we stopped
he cut left through the sunflowers
into the dark
we went up to the house
so our nephew could get his rifle
on our way back down the road
there was another car coming
far off
his lights went out
we rode all the way down past
where the deer was
and there was no deer
and no car.

The Two Of Them

The Zuni
and the anthropologist
walk a narrow road
to the tip of the mesa
to see the Hopi Snake Dance
between two sheer drops
the Zuni says
to the anthropologist
- Both sides!
You jump one way
and I'll jump the other.

“Breyten Breytenbach is a poet & painter from South Africa, whom I met, 1974, at the international Poetry Festival in Rotterdam. White & married to a Vietnamese, he had been living in exile in Paris. But sometime within the last year he made a trip (“illegal”) back to South Africa, was arrested, tried, & sentenced to nine years for plotting to overthrow the government, etc. At the time I heard of his arrest, there were also letters in the mail concerning the imprisonment of Kim Chi Ha (Korea) & Martin Sostre (Puerto Rico & U.S.A.). There had of course been others.”
(J.R.)

Jerome Rothenberg

For Breyten Breytenbach in Prison

11/15/75

far now from Rotterdam
& the small talk of poets mouths
devouring little fishes
freed of the metaphor inside the act
knowledge of the world that if we face it
drives us mad
o Breyten vision of schizophrenia
is gnostic truth
division of world along its axis
of split in consciousness
sickness that doesn't heal itself it is
the way of the beginning raises
in the mouth a cry
will bring it to the light
o light
how can I think of all these friends in prison
like the world itself
(poor world)
& wonder at my safety
walk with Homero in the streets of London
with Jean Clarence in Paris
last week where we spoke of you
Breyten Breytenbach who sat with us
a year ago that other summer
asked my son to write a poem
greet the poets of the world in Rotterdam
o poets poets
we are all split for love
of woman of the world
the severed being searches out
its contrary as skin
as color cannot move too fast
but tries an assemblage for the friends
a gift of language offered

we who should withhold our speech
in anguish
should share the silence God brings on the world
each in our little corner
destiny
as Shakespeare in the mouth of Lear
“but let me not go mad”
why not?
the mind spins out its images
alone the music of
another evening now reborn
the Red Fanfare plays on the stage
a crazy march song
poets of the world
united
in vision of our common death
with all the prisoners
weird fish who eat the fish
are eaten by the fish
the tiny silver bodies
of our flesh itself in witness
to your proposition
revolution makes us what we are
o poets
minds whose minds turn upside down
reverie the oldest maddest dream
a word called freedom

from A First International Symposium on Ethnopoetics

Jerome Rothenberg

Pre-Face To A Symposium on Ethnopoetics

1. April 1975

This is a preface-pre-face-to a symposium, to the present gathering, which is itself a pre-face, one of many, to the symposium that our friend, Robert Duncan, very beautifully articulated in his role as an American poet, inheritor from Whitman of a healing & unifying vision that I think we still pursue, evade & have to face again in our very complex rush into whatever future lies before us. So Duncan, one of those who is certainly a part of this symposium though not in its attendance wrote:

The drama of our time is the coming of all men into one fate, the dream of everyone, everywhere. The fate or dream is the fate of more than mankind. Our secret Adam is written now in the script of the primal cell. We have gone beyond the reality of the incomparable nation or race, the incomparable Jehovah in the shape of a man, the incomparable Book or Vision, the incomparable species, in which identity might hold and defend its boundaries against an alien territory. All things have come now into their comparisons. But these comparisons are the correspondences that haunted Paracelsus. Who saw also that the key to man's nature was hidden in the larger nature...

The Symposium of Plato was restricted to a community of Athenians, gathered in the common creation of an arete, an aristocracy of spirit, inspired by the homoEros, taking its stand against lower or foreign orders, not only of men but of nature itself. The intense yearning, the desire for something else, of which we too have only a dark and doubtful presentiment, remains, but our *arete*, or ideal of vital being, rises not in our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms but in our identification with the universe. To compose such a symposium of the whole, such a totality, all the old excluded order must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and the failure-all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are.

I have quoted that before, but it bears repeating, as a sketch, a mapping, of a ground, a field I think he'd say, we all can share and enter into. The term that distinguishes our part of that total effort, that common, intense yearning, desire, for something else, that symposium of the whole, is *ethnos*. All such terms are relative, & *ethnos* wasn't always what we would now take it to be, not an expression of what we are as groups in isolation, centering, orbiting around ourselves, but an expression instead of otherness, a sign that points from what we are or may become to what we aren't, haven't thought ourselves to be, may fear or scorn (as in that older "hierarchy of higher forms"), or in the present instance, freed from the myth of our divine election, is what we long for, need, toward the completion of our being human. At that earlier time then, *ethnos* meant nation, people, group, or race, not as *this nation* ("us") but as *those nations* ("them" or "others"). It was the Greek equivalent for gentiles, goyim, pagan, heathen - that last work (not *ethnos* itself but a word mistaken for it) meaning people of the heath, the countryside, the wilderness, the unclaimed land, the ones in nature, natural, the lower foreign orders set apart from us, apart from cities, blocks to human progress, ancients, primitives, the fathers or the

mothers we must kill, the poets (Plato said) whom we must drive out of our cities, out of our bodies & minds in point of fact, those who scorn the new god, the abstraction, unity, the unconflicted single truth we worship. Ethnopoetics is not a new construction, then, but the reminder of an older truth or linkage: that poetry itself is this, the very language of the *ethnoi*, in the equation Plato makes. As poets we are *them*.

Poetics is the second key term here, the clincher, which makes of this a far different meeting than it would be with the other term alone. Poetics. Poetry, the process of. To take that as a process of cognition, of creation in that sense: knowing, coming into knowing where we are. To say, articulate, our sense of being in the world, however changeable, dangerous, & slippery. It has been said so many times by poets & other reasonable (I would stress *reasonable*) people, who have struggled to make, create, an instrument of language, discourse, art, to map the changes, to facilitate them, live in the hope of transformation, of a deepened, heightened, sense of who we are & where: where we have come from, where we're going. We aren't the first poets to ask questions. They were asked before, as in the Seneca story which began:

A man who was a crow was traveling. He didn't know where he had come from or which way he was going. As he moved along he kept on thinking: "How did I come to be alive? Where did I come from? Where am I going?"

He asked that, you see, but already he had become, he was, a crow. Are there those today who can transform, can change, that easily, who participate in multiple identities, whose ethnopoetics is biopoetics also? There is a mystery in that, a process to be uncovered & learned, not as "our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms" but (Duncan again) in our "identification with the universe."

In that process, of which the ethnopoetic forms a part, we break with the immediate, inherited past & find resources for our search, our meeting with the future, in something vastly older: the "nature-related cultures," as Snyder calls them, with their roots back to the Paleolithic & the Dream-time. If that was an intention of the new poetry all along, it is no wonder that the unmediated image, resonant with an older unity, beckoned to the Surrealists, say, in dream & myth. No wonder either that one like Ezra Pound, engaged in a process not all that different, wrote: "the undeniable tradition of metamorphoses teaches us that things do not remain always the same. They become other things by swift & unanalysable process. It was only when men began to mistrust the myths & tell nasty lies about the Gods for a moral purpose that these matters became hopelessly confused."

It is this questioning, requestioning, of forms that brings us to the possibility of an ethnopoetics: a poetry of sources, of a fundamental human nature. If the present search began, say, with the Romantics, it was only that they called, recalled, our attention to a late European version of a crisis felt already in the first civilizations, the first organized states - not only in the West but everywhere (Africa, Asia, the ancient Americas, & so on) that those conditions have arisen. It's that crisis, that split in the mind, the spirit, between nature & culture, wilderness & city, that turned up in the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the city was, already had become, the place where "man dies oppressed at heart / man perishes with despair in his heart / looks over the wall & sees / dead bodies floating on the river" - so turns back to wilderness, at once old home & new forbidden kingdom.

Division in nature. Division in species. Division in self. The process continued, made of the poet himself an outsider - he who had once been seer, guide. At worst he would become a lackey of the state, become what Plato had demanded of us for our admission to the Ideal City. But more often an outsider: part of an underground with others, though still tuned, hopefully, to the possibilities of process, even survival, as a *game* of changing vantages, perspectives on the real. So the poet, the artist, is into our own time the one who is "perpetually recovering his primitivism," as Stanley Diamond describes him: his ability to see, to think concretely, to sustain contradictions. Transformative. Ambiguous. "The chameleon poet," as Keats named him, who recalls us to the vision of the shaman-trickster, so begins again the work of transformation. But not alone. "We live," Charles Olson wrote nearly two decades ago, "in an age in which inherited literature is being hit from two sides,

from contemporary writers who are laying bases of new discourse at the same time that...scholars are making available...texts which are themselves eye-openers.” (In brief, the forces we have brought together here.)

And that much is already a fact. Ethnopoetics, as one practical strategy for what Tarn calls “totalization,” already exists. So we don’t have to invent it here, but to discuss the complexities, the very real problems, of presentation and definition, from our own often different perspectives: as poets, anthropologists, artists, musicians, linguists, aestheticians, human beings who share between us multiple origins & identities. This, it seems to me, has hardly been done yet. Those in the “vanguards” have tended to remain separate, sometimes hardly aware of each other or each other’s work. Some have felt, still feel, that the separation should continue, that even this small attempt at conversation is wasted effort, or worse: that you can only academicize the poet’s work by speaking of it, as you can only destroy other cultures in the attempt to bridge them. That separation & that silence seem wrong, unnatural, to me. And while I don’t want to exaggerate the importance of the “dialogue” we may be launching, or to make us feel that the move to a new poetry or life (including the sense of a new *ethnos*) depends on what we say here, I believe that the time for some deliberate exchange of information & ideas is long past - at least to keep us honest & to challenge our natural descent into platitude & slogan.

I hope at the same time that we can be aware of other challenges, of the discomforts already caused by the introduction (in a variety of ways) of an altered sense of *ethnos*. What we’ve been saying, those of us who have been pushing for a renewed poetic & human base, may seem self-evident from within this group. It may also coincide enough with social movements of great moral, political force to make open attacks on it infrequent. Or it may be accepted by schools & other established centers as a separate, isolated specialty, which doesn’t involve invasions of the old curriculum or assaults on the “hierarchy of higher forms.” But our strategy - for poetry in general or ethnopoetry in particular - shouldn’t be to rest with trivial concessions, but to continue to push for a confrontation all along the line: to smoke out the opposition, which is still strong, still entrenched, however much it plays a strategy of silence.

So I recently read with great interest an attack on *America a Prophecy*, the anthology I co-edited with George Quasha as an attempt to alter the range of our poetics in America - to celebrate the poetry already there - including but not confined to ethnopoetics. The attack is very clear, & it sets forth a fundamental question about poetry & much else in America (& with some change in terms, elsewhere in the world). The attacker this time is Donald Davie, & the attack, unlike some others, comes in the name of poets like Pound & Olson, though the misreading of both men (maybe the slavish reading in Pound’s case) is, for the time in which it appears, extraordinary, even pathological. Normally I wouldn’t want to go at something like this out of context, but Davie includes a summary sentence, which I would accept as setting the parameters for the conflict he proposes. What he says is:

...the crucial question confronting American culture right now is whether it conceives white civilization to date from 1776 if not 1620 (as Pound and Olson thought), or whether on the contrary it goes back effectively only to c. 1860 and the Open Door policy (as Rothenberg and Quasha seem to think).

The question here is very precisely put, though a prior one might be whether it’s still viable to project America as a “white civilization,” to single that out as an interest worth most favored status (as Davie seems to think). In this regard one remembers Olson writing to Creeley, “I have no doubt, say, that the American will more & more repossess himself of the Indian past” - one of the many instances of his dispute with the “European distinction.” Aside from that, Davie’s dates are instructive: 1620, which was not the time of the first White invasions, but of the first Anglo-White settlements. And “c. 1860 and the Open Door policy” that brought the great influx of non-English speaking Europeans - us other “ethnics” qua foreigners in that “hierarchy of higher forms.”

I hope, anyway, that you'll just note that for the moment, & not assume, because most of us here are likely on the other side of it, that Davie's position isn't very widespread. I hope too that the differences between some of us in this symposium - differences that the meetings should bring out - won't obscure his message & the common threat it represents.

Note: The "Pre-Face" then moved on to my written answers to a series of questions on ethnopoetics, etc., raised by William Spanos in Boundary 2 - answers I had completed just before the conference. They have since appeared in print (Boundary 2, Volume III, Number 3, 1975). - J.R.

2. July 1975

[Another key issue of ethnopoetics is the way it coincides with the movement of much contemporary poetry in the area of performance - in fact a widespread act of re-oralization. A few months after the symposium, I was able to complete the considerations begun in April & to read, talk & perform my way around the questions of "poetry & performance." The occasion was the annual meeting of the American Theater Association in Washington D.C., & what follows is a composition from notes & tapes.]

There is a Seneca Indian song, a song that is part of a medicine society & ceremony called "shaking the pumpkin" or "the society of the mystic animals" or "the society of shamans," which I have translated elsewhere in a more elaborate form than I will give here. But it is a key, in what it says, to the bewilderment I feel at where my own poetry & the poetry of my generation has taken me - to this place, for example, where I am to be celebrating a poetry of performance in our time tied up in some ways we have yet to define to a poetry of performance in those cultures we may think of as "primitive" or "primary" or "primal." The words of the Seneca song, which I translated with the Seneca singer, Richard Johnny John, go like this (the title is our own addition):

I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND
MYSELF OUT HERE &
ACTING LIKE A CROW

I didn't think I'd
shake the pumpkin
not just here & now
not exactly tonight
I didn't think I'd
rip some meat off
not just here & now
not exactly tonight

Now, I had not shaken the pumpkin before, had not sung before or sung before to a rattle: I had not done any of these things & it would have seemed foolish to me then to have done them. It did seem foolish but at a point I was doing them & it no longer seemed foolish, seemed necessary if anything I had said about it before had a meaning. My own origins, from which I had been running for most of my grown life, should have told me as well, if I had been able then to give them my attention, for the living tradition of the Jews is also "oral," from the mouth, & even in an age of writing, the word must be renewed by the processes of "speaking" & of

“sounding.” So Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai said (in the century that began the dangerous process of writing down a large body of the still existing “oral tradition,” the records of discourse called THE MISHNAH): “He who reads without melody & repeats without song, concerning him the scripture says: therefore I also gave them statutes which were not to their advantage.” It is by this sounding & voicing (this near eruption into song) that the attention is brought to focus on the sources of the poem, the song, the discourse, in the prior act of composition (making or receiving), which was itself an act of focusing attention. In creating that attention, that intensity, the Senecas, who are otherwise as removed as we are from the primitive condition, begin the ceremony by invoking those “mystic animals” who were the first keepers of the song, who came once in a vision to a hunter lost & wounded in the woods, to cure him & to leave him with a set of keys by which to summon them again. The ceremony begins in darkness, then the rattle sounds, & makes a kind of light, a heat, that moves around the circle of those joined in the performance.

(At this point there follows a chanting, with rattle, of the opening songs to “Shaking the Pumpkin,” translated by myself & Richard Johnny John.)

Now, what has happened here, at least for me, is not a separated series of events or actions but a totality that I no longer want to break into its component parts: to isolate the words, say, as the poem. For my experience is the experience of everything that happens to me in that act: the movement of my arm, the sound (& feel) of pebbles against horn, the way that breaks across my voice, the tension in my throat, the full release of breath, the emptying that leaves me weak & ready to receive the next song, the song occurring, rising out of memory, becoming voice, becoming sound, becoming physical again, & then returning into silence. And it is also this room, this time & place, these others here with me. The event is different from the event of composition (in this case, to further complicate the matter, involves a second composition-by-translation), but the poem is everything-that-happens: & if it is, then to insist that it is only part of it (the words), is to mistake the event, to miss that total presence. Before I am anything else, I am a poet & (living in the time I do) a stand-up performer of my own poetry. It is better for me to *do* poetry than to talk *about* it. I do it first & then I sound it: this is doing it a second time, a third a fourth a fifth time, to renew it by the sounding. My performance is this sounding of the poem: it is renewal of the poem, the poem’s enlivening. Without this sounding there would be no poem as I have come to do it (though, since I work by writing, there would be notes about the poem as I intended it). This is the return to voice, to song, as the poet Gary Snyder speaks of it: it is one side of the impulse towards the oral, towards a poetry of performance, as is that other side, discourse, that the poet David Antin speaks of. Poetry becomes the sounding - not the script part, the preparation or notation, but the sounding. Where there is no writing, the sounding truly renews the poem, creates it in each instance, for here there is no poem without performance. Writing, that strange aid to memory, eventually becomes its surrogate, displaces memory itself - the last, great Muse. The poetry *sounding* becomes the poetry *reading*. This is the condition under which most of us work. If others would go more deeply into orality, would bring composition & performance together in a single improvised event, that would also be welcome. But I would like to describe it as it now is for me & why I have sought my model of the poem-as-performance (the poem in action) in the domain of what I came to call “ethnopoetic.”

As a stand-up performer the poet retains a solitary stance. He is in no way the playwright of the old verse dramas, but the central (typically the *only*) figure in the performance in which he *must* play a part. The part he plays is poet-as-himself, performing in a theater as yet without an actor - or much of anything else besides what the poet brings: words & a voice. The difference between the poet & the actor is somehow crucial: the basis of the poetry performance is in fact hostile to the presence, the manner, of the professional actor. That the poet as a performer is otherwise motivated, otherwise related to the poem, is here a shared assumption: an insistence on a lack of separation between the maker & his work, & of a virtual innocence of any means of a performance beyond the ones immediately to hand. The poet’s delivery may vary, he may read easily or he may falter, he may digress, he may drift at times into a drunken incoherence, he may fulfill or disappoint our expectations of how

a poem is spoken. Somehow it is enough that he has risked himself to do as much as he can do: to stand there as a witness to his words, he who alone can sound them. That kind of witnessing is not without its precedents, as in the sounding of the written “law” within the ancient Jewish Temple, where the reader (sounder) was the witness to the meaning of a text devoid of vowels. It is one arrangement (there are others) that maintains the oral basis of poetry, its openness, once we have entered on an age of writing. In the poetry of our own time, with its use of an approximate & highly individualized notation, the measure of a poem (& much of its meaning) is likewise only clear when it is being sounded: in this case sounded by its maker. The poet when he sounds his poem is witness to the way it goes, the way it came to happen in the first place. He is in fact the witness to a (prior) vision, to an image-of-the-world expressed through word and sound. The failure to communicate is a failure to communicate his credibility: his own relation to those words, that vision. The actor may attempt to take his place (& in certain kinds of theater today the actors have become the makers & the sounders of their own words), but as a witness to the poet’s words the actor’s credibility has yet to be established.

* * * * *

There is a widespread idea that the poets of our time, the artists in general, have abandoned the possibility of relating to poets of other times as models: that we live without a vision of ourselves as historical beings but are locked into an eternal present, not so much an opportunity as a trap. I have never seen our condition in those terms - have rather seen us as freeing ourselves, on the basis of conditions in the world itself, to a wider, more generous view of the past, of the historical totality of human experience, than has ever been possible. This process has been going on at least from the time of the Romantics & it has produced a number of new images, new models or visions, of the past, from which we now can draw. (Like any historical search, it functions to heighten our awareness of the present & the future.)

Increasingly, the model, the prototype, of the poet has become the “shaman”: the solitary, inspired religious functionary of the late paleolithic. Partly this has been because of our own involvement with the kind of solitary, stand-up performance that I was just describing. But there is also a second side to it: the visionary & ecstatic, & a third perhaps: the communal. I will not concentrate on the last two (although they are in some ways the real heart of the matter) but will try to focus on the shaman’s (proto-poet’s) way of going / speaking / singing: his performance. In a deeper, if often more confused sense, what is involved here is the search for a primal ground: a desire to bypass a civilization that has become problematic & to return, briefly, often by proxy, to the origins of our humanity. Going back in time we continue to find diversity & yet, maybe because we’re looking at it from the wrong end, the picture emerges of an intertribal, universal culture (& behind it a poetics) that has a number of discernible, definable features. The most direct inheritors of this culture - up to their virtual disappearance in our time - are those hunting & gathering peoples, remnants of whom exist as an endangered & ultimately doomed “fourth world.” Far from being mere “wild men,” mere fanaticizing children, they had a world-view marked (Paul Radin tells us) by a strong sense of realism (“reality at white heat”) or, according to Stanley Diamond, “(by) modes of thinking (that) are substantially concrete, existential & nominalistic, within a personalistic context” & supremely able to “sustain contradictions.”

Here the dominant religious functionary is the shaman: he is the one who sees / the one who sings / the one who heals. He is not yet the bard, the tribal historian. He is not necessarily the speaker. He is typically withdrawn: experiences long periods of silence, other periods of exaltation. He may inherit his words, his songs, from others or he may come on them directly in a vision or a trance. He may be a prolific song-maker or he may be constantly renewing a small, fixed body of song. He may have helpers, but typically he works alone. He may improvise within the actual performance of his rites, but more often he will sound, will activate, the words or song delivered at another time & place.

So, among us the poet has come to play a performance role that resembles that of the shaman. (This is more than coincidence because there is an underlying ideology: an identification, as Gary Snyder has it, with late paleolithic ideology & organization, seen as surviving in the “great subcultures” within the later city-states, civilizations, etc.) The poet like the shaman typically withdraws to solitude to find his poem or vision, then returns to sound it, give it life. He performs alone (or very occasionally with assistance, as in the work of Jackson Mac Low, say), because his presence is considered crucial & no other specialist has arisen to act in his place. He is also like the shaman in being at once an outsider, yet a person needed for the validation of a certain kind of experience important to the group. And even in societies otherwise hostile or indifferent to poetry as “literature,” he may be allowed a range of deviant, even anti-social behavior that many of his fellow-citizens do not enjoy. Again like the shaman, he will not only be allowed to act mad in public, but he will often be expected to do so. The act of the shaman - & his poetry - is like a public act of madness. It is like what the Senecas, in their great dream ceremony now obsolete, called “turning the mind upside down.” It shows itself as a release of alternative possibilities. “What do they want?” the poet wonders of those who watch him in his role of innocent, sometimes reluctant performer. But what? To know that madness is possible & that the contradictions can be sustained. From the first shaman - that solitary person - it flows out to whole companies of shamans, to whole societies of human beings: it heals the sickness of the body but more than that: the sickness of the soul. It is a “mode of thinking” & of acting that is “substantially concrete, existential & nominalistic, within a personalistic context” & “supremely able to sustain contradictions.” It is the primal exercise of human freedom against/& for the tribe.

* * * * *

Now, as many questions are left as are answered. Does the poem really heal? Or what kind of poem or song, or discourse, does heal - or sustain contradictions - or turn the mind upside down? What is the basis for seeing in cultures & poetries so far removed from us the kind of conjunctions I have so far assumed? And if the move from the “oral” to the “literal” was tied up, as I believe it was, with the need of an emergent class of rulers for a more rigorous arrangement of society, why should we now expect a movement in the opposite direction? It is as yet hard to say, for our whole poetics (not just our *ethnopoetics*) is, like our life in general, up for grabs. What do we say about the function of our poetry, the thing that we do? That it explores. That it initiates thought or action. That it proposes its own displacement. That it allows vulnerability & conflict. That it remains, like the best science, constantly open to change: continual change in our idea of what a poem is or may be. What language is. What experience is. What reality is. That for many of us it has become a fundamental process for the play & interchange of possibilities.

And it has come out of a conflict - more or less deeply felt - with inherited forms of poetry, literature, language, discourse: not in every instance but where these are recognized as repressive structures, forms of categorical thinking that act against that other free play of possibilities just alluded to. Against these inherited forms, the conventional literature that no longer fed us, we have both searched & invented other forms. Some of us have doggedly gone from there to a re-viewing of the entire poetic past (of any poetry for that matter outside the immediate neighborhood) from the point of view of the present. Here there are two processes involved - not mutually exclusive. On the one hand the contemporary forms (the new means that we invent) make older forms visible: & on the other hand the forms that we uncover elsewhere help us in the reshaping, the resharpening, of our own tools. The past, come alive, is in motion with us. It is no longer somewhere else but, like the future, *here* - which is the only way it can be, towards a poetry of changes.

from *Alcheringa* Volume Three, Number Two, 1977

George Quasha

Soma • Onerika 15-22

Note on Soma • Onerika

*In the root meaning of Ethnopoetics (ethnos from Indo-European *Seu*, as a listed in the American Heritage Dictionary, = "self," "our people," "our kind") all poesis is implicated, because deeply everything we make involves Self-making and a reaffirmation of our link with People: it's personal and it goes beyond the personal. But more specifically Soma • onerika can be viewed in the Ethnopoetic context by its connection with alcheringa: it belongs to Dreamtime. The poems are "dictated" (to use Spicer's word) directly from the dream. For many years now I have been doing what I call oneiropoesis, which involves writing in a state of mind midway between dream and waking, maintaining and cultivating the dream and writing whatever comes. It is not so much "remembering" the dream as furthering it, by obedience to its specific energy rather than grasping after what is past. I think of it in the context of what Henry Corbin, speaking of Avicenna, calls Recital: a telling that is implicitly a Reading, to be read by the teller as he tells (or writes); that is, the tale is not grasped by him except in the making. "Reading" at root means "telling," and we may distinguish a kind or a "tradition" of poetry that is "readerly," in which the maker is actually in the position of reader. His Art is surrender. And that may be the truest sense of the Sacred that we know, a surrender to What Is without aid of doctrine or governing foreknowledge. "Readering," reader-making, laying out the word-path that takes what is Given as the only revelation. That brings us back to ourselves, or what Keats must have meant by the life as allegory, though the truer word is story, the Telling.*

Soma • Onerika 15

Sayings

1
Surrender to the room
and let the horse jump out.

2
If it's a bone,
if it's a stone,
if it speaks it speaks.

3
Picked a fight
with my own fist
and poked my
Self in the nose.

4

Trying to recall the pull of a lost place:
Sticking hand in pool to catch its flex.

5

You'll get to encounter it anyway:
It in us, in it, in us, anyway.

6

Purifying the dream
licking the lips.

7

So press the pen into the bleeding beef
to sense the blood potential in the writing.

8

Who says the sacred depends upon familiarity?
Everything said was self-
evident, and yet I remember no-
thing. Doomed
to lucidity, the Sacred Lily revealed
itself in the sacroiliac.

9

As for the Rose,
it bedevils itself to unravel itself.

10

The dream is for reading.
Notice how anything that happens
goes around the world.

Soma • Onerika 16

The Morning Changes

The morning changes
rose
in its throat.

The morning changes
Rose
in its throat.

The mornings changes
ROSE
in its throat.

Soma • Onerika 17

A Narrative Divesting Itself of Content

Two women are riding horseback.
A man and a woman ride up on horseback.
The two women pursue the man and the woman.
I'm rooting for the man and the woman, but I don't know why.
The man is the first to lose and gets his head bashed in.
Next the two women on horseback pursue the woman on
horseback. One of the two women on horseback flanks
unexpectedly to her right (our left) and enters the treetops
with her stern look.
With her stern look, on horseback, now she is traveling
at us. Riding in her purple bodysuit, on horseback,
she lunges at us, whip in hand,
she lunges at us, hip in hand, wearing purple.
So now we're in the Bardo
crossing the lower and middle regions
riding bareass. The word
puns itself free and forward.
This kind of action is always in 5-D.
Let us ask as few questions as possible
About what has just happened
lest we interfere with someone else's initiation
or disturb a birdnest.

Soma • Onerika 18

DisGeoraction
[for J.R.]

For the moment I'm convinced
that the Jews discovered America.
Wandering
over the ocean
Black Jews
who meet Red Jews

on their way to
Jerusalem
Ur-Jerusalem
Ur-Ur-Jerusalem
discovering Ur-America
and then losing track of it
beneath their feet
in the effort to regain
the literal
homeland, story-
land, the tellable
as nameable but not re-
telleable, not re-nameable, no
name sticks as long as the Man
Knows...

The one-half Jew in me
knows its name too well, it It he He
Who? knows my name too well but
not the old dis-
covered America.

Soma • Onerika 19

On the Line

Pyramidal cities
cannot hold up
better than she
who carries her tea of her belly-
line
curved around the world.

Soma • Onerika 20

Oneiropoesis, or the Dream addresses Itself

I
Dream writing. Sitting
on the page, holding
the tail of the dream
between your teeth.

2

Is the butterfly
dreaming it is me
dreaming it is he
dreaming it is me
or vice versa?

3

Is there no brain coral big enough
to make a full glass?
A glass of what?
Take it and drink.
The dream has given us permission
to think these things.

Soma • Onerika 21

The Further Self-Addressing Dream

1

Everything you will utter at the end
of this state, call it dream, call it trance, is
closer and closer
down onto a micro-
second, the
ledge
of the
gap.

2

it is it is it is
O it is it is it
is so

3

What matters is the
Bird on the page.

4

He eats the worm
flaps his wings
and lifts us over the green slime.

Soma • Onerika 22

Wearing Itself

Wear out socks.
Wear out even the sandals
of the incarnate feet.
But not being.
Can't wear out
being itself,
not on the outside,
not on the inside.
Neither being itself
nor the place on the page
where the pen goes
to wear itself.

Charles Stein
Dreams

Believing no unconscious
but the words
spilling themselves into speech

flesh made speech...

suddenly a road that
wasn't there before
finds me walking
in a new direction
presumably homeward
but I have no home
and the strangers I meet at the bridge
conduct a further detour
so that animals and disfigured
creatures of mud and formless flesh
are parts of the general entourage

and anything is possible.

9/2/76

I am drawn out
down
through
out.

At the border of the southern
jungle
clarity of mountain rocks and snows
not accessible
from regions known.

You have to go down
into sub-equatorial
regions of the globe
or underneath the surface of the earth itself
there to gain access to a spaciousness
and mountain openness of expanse
not accessible
above
in regions known.

1/4/77

In South American Jungle Swamp and Darkness
“escapees”
from North American Life
live
in carnal swamp and night among
tall white trees of bone and living muscle tissue
fucking constantly.

A woman of webs in flight
floats down the air.

At first I don't know if she is a woman,
but then she lures and attracts me
with the beautiful white dots
on the surface of her shadow-colored facial skin
until I am all amass of herself and other females -
one particularly huge mammalian creature
maternal beyond desire.

Later
we are upstairs
in a jungle restaurant
being served a meal at table
including nice hot “roles.”

This is, however, too “liberal” a possibility
for most of the jungle creatures
not willing to submit
to dining conversation and decorum.

1/4/77

Visiting Gerrit Lansing.

He shows me dime sized
coins he is collecting.

He shows me his old desk.

He shows me folded over cartoon scroll
where layers and levels of all kinds of cartoon stories
demonstrate magical layerings
of magical worlds.

The higher levels show armoured cartoon fliers
zooming down from metallic heights.

fearing to die.

Give myself over to the mythic act...

Overcome the only obstacle...

Allow the African deity to speak
be
friends with him
or them...

Put on strange masks...

Amuse my friends...

The rite is concerned with oracular enquiry.

In a book discussing Yoruba "ethics" I learn
that if a child is asked the question
the answer is oracular.

I ask a little girl among my friends

and she says

don't go on with it.

A wine bottle

long and tall

whose waters must be spilled

over the line

strung out above the altar.

Then wax congeals

and long drops hang from the line

and ZK reads them.

2/27/77

Arrive in Germany alone
and walk into a church
which is performing Lohengrin.
Singing paintings make me weep.
Vast halls and restaurants.
Orchestras play surrounding
an immense interior.
Drummers and glockenspiel
operators flail their gongers
but the beautiful haunting song which lured me in
has vanished utterly.

3/12/77

Thursday's Turtles:
a little whistle sings
an uncanny melody

By pressing her fingers
softly in wet sand
Joby Kelly has made "impressions"
and in the morning
the sand has hardened
into subtle rock forms.
I call everyone over to see
and Joby shows us how they are all turtles
of a really remarkable life-likeness to our turtle
and one of them...

but here a tiny voice
begins to repeat an
uncanny melody:
mi fa/mi mi mi fa/do re mi
mi fa/mi mi mi fa/do re mi

The last three syllables
make the word
"Lohengrin"
who is one of Joby's Turtles.

I have been working at musical composition in German
by drawing curves on paper as I hum "irrational" melodies
or tunes whose mathematic chooses
irrational intervals or numbers in their structure.
Someone objects

and says these tunes will not
be acceptable in Vienna
in spite of the references within the musical configurations
to the bass notes so
typical of that which is popular there.
I am simply preoccupied with producing these musical doodles however
which vanish anyway as I write them
likes notes on air.

3/31/77

Swimming with the ancient
barge across the ocean - pulling it
by its rope
through night time water.
The journey is an "example"
of journeys ancient
peoples took
crossing from primitive America
back towards Europe.
The barge is a mere iron frame
with a battery of oarsmen
aiming their oars
into the fiery waters
or they have statues
at each oar post
aimed "like gods"
into the blackening sea.
I am swimming
at the front of this primitive rig
and I take my shift by pulling an iron rope
attached to a large black woman
up in the prow.

6/17/77

gypsy poem

it's you puts the green sprig in my hatband
if you should ever leave me
my hat would be a dirty old thing
my heart empty, eyes full of tears
i'd look for green leaves in the woods
but they are the wilting kind
they wouldn't stay green on my hat
where could i find as good a woman
a wife, as beautiful
i'd burn my caravan, cut off my hair
& trot off to the darkest part of the woods
to sleep there in my black sorrow
weep & sleep, until the white dos comes
to take me back to you

*

my little stalk of alfalfa
i used to like to laugh a lot
with everyone i met
laugh & play with them
take them by the hand &
pull their little earlobes
then go to the tavern with them
run up some ridiculous tab
until i got bored with the booze
& felt the farts & hiccups coming on

*

moon shines on the valley
grass sleeps by river
now why don't you come
sit down with me
& love me a little
as i love you

*

i'll rig up a little hammock in the plumbtree
for you to swing in, little boy
rain will fall, to wash you
leaves will fall, & cover you
wind will rock you to sleep
goat will come, give you suck
sleep, my boy, my little duck
listen to mama, don't cry

*

sleep, baby, your mother's out reading palms
come night, she'll be back &
you'll drink her milk
sleep, little child, sleep
i am your mother's old mother
& as you now love her friendly nipples
she once loved mine

versions by Anselm Hollo based on translations made from the traditional Romany by Katerina Taikon (Sweden)
and Leo Tiainen (Finland).

With minor revisions by AH, Sept, 1999.