Fourth Word:
Verbal Art on Its Own Terms:
Ethnopoetics

Q: Does oral poetry need to be read differently?
A: Diverse oral poetries need to be read diversely.

Our second way of reading also focuses on the nontextual, but it enlists textual representation as part of its overall program. As the name etymologically indicates, ethnopoetics—the poetics of each *ethnos* (of each group, nation, or tribe)—starts by stipulating that poetries are plural. Each has its own shape, identity, and rules. Given the tyranny of Western poetic models, such advocacy of pluralism marks an enormous step forward. By keeping this simple, common-sense precept in mind, we can avoid egregious errors like classifying Native American verbal art as prose because it lacks a syllabic line, or denying the presence of epic in Africa because extended narratives from that continent little resemble the "classic" Homeric epics.[1] And what emerges after we discard crippling preconceptions and stop trying to force round (non-Western) pegs into square (Western) holes? At the very least, we open up the liberating possibility of suiting our way of reading to the way in which the oral poetry actually works.

Reading, Representing, and Reperforming

As an approach, ethnopoetics follows a three-part agenda. First, it seeks to *read* or understand oral poetry on its own terms, within the indigenous cultural matrix. For Dennis Tedlock, one of the originators of this method, that impulse has meant learning to hear and interpret the performative aspects of oral poetry—everything that gets lost as we transfer the story-event to a story-item. Voice quality, volume control, intonation, and especially silence are taken as constitutive dimensions that deserve decoding because they're part of the performance.

For Dell Hymes, the other early architect of ethnopoetics, the shortfall between our presumptions and the reality of oral poetry is chiefly structural. By failing to recognize units like lines, verses, stanzas, scenes, and acts—all of them defined by rules different from those we're accustomed to—we've unjustly denied the title of "poetry" to a great deal of Native American verbal art. For both scholars, the fault lies in unexamined assumptions that have masked the true nature of oral poetries. We have assumed that we know what we're looking for, and that it's always the same thing, no matter what the cultural background. By ignoring the individual poetry's reality, we've deleted crucial aspects of the poet's and tradition's art. It's as though we removed every second or third word or paragraph from a novel and then tried to make sense of it; oral poetry read from the wrong perspective becomes a shadow, an unintelligible echo of itself.

To correct this misapprehension and to restore as fully as possible the experience of each poem, ethnopoetics proposes the latter two actions on its agenda: to *represent* oral poetry on its own terms and by doing so to foster the reader's more faithful *reperformance*. This commitment has led to new insights as well as to some radical experiments that test the limits of page-bound representation. Hymes's structural scoring of Northwest Coast tales, most of them originally transcribed in run-on prose in the early twentieth century, reveals balances, relationships, divisions, and correspondences of detail that the hypothesis of prose had submerged. Not only the texture of the story but its characterization, its dénouement, and even its most basic plot come into clearer focus as ethnopoetics dissolves the parallax induced by employing the wrong rules for reading. Tedlock uses variations in typography to stimulate the reader's re-creation of the performance by portraying loudness, rising and falling intonations, pauses, and the like, and thereby to restore part of Zuni oral poetry's heard reality. Capital letters, lines rising and falling in waves, various fonts, verse boundaries—all of these visual cues are made to serve an acoustic purpose. In both cases the arena of the page also becomes an arena for reading, representing, and reperforming oral poetry.

Scoring Oral Poetry

All types of oral poetry can profit, to varying degrees and in different ways, by approaching them through ethnopoetics, by asking what particular features a culture understands as constituting poetry. The most obvious application is to Oral Performances, which depend so directly on the very signals that ethnopoetics seeks to recover and to encourage the reader to take into account as part of the reading and reperforming process. In relation to the Tršić *guslar* described in the Third Word, a number of performance-based cues would have

to be added. Beyond the usual strategy of separating out poetic lines and the like, a performance-text could also include coding for vocal and instrumental music, for phrases that serve proverbial purposes, for couplets and other small groupings that amount to whole "words," and for larger narrative segments. Why? Because each of these dimensions is more than inessential or ancillary; each of them is part of the song's meaning. Our usual method of text-making, based on written Western poetry, has accustomed us to think of rhetorical strategies as confined to the black-and-white medium of spatialized words—what we take as the "core" of poetic expression. But the fact is that what we privilege as the single truly important channel for communication is only one of many channels. By reducing a South Slavic oral epic performance—or any oral performance—to a staid, sanitized procession of uniform, one-dimensional lines tidily arranged on the page, by effectively stripping the life from it, we fall victim to a reading so partial that it must be called a misreading. Ethnopoetics aims at rebuilding the living organism of oral poetry instead of rummaging through its calcified bones. In that sense it amounts to a forensics of oral poetry.[2]

Meanwhile, in the interest of briefly illustrating the range of ethnopoetic applications, let's focus on Voiced Texts and Voices from the Past. I choose these two categories because, as we should expect given the endemic diversity of oral poetry, each demands a different perspective in order to achieve optimal results. Looking at the two of them opposite one another will give us some idea of the range of this approach. For Voiced Texts, whose origin is textual but whose medium is live performance, the methods espoused by Tedlock are more useful and appropriate. By attending to the *performative* dimensions of slam poetry—to vocal qualities of all kinds including the rhetorical force of pausing and silence—we can lift the poet's creation off the page and embody it in our own reperformance. For Voices from the Past, on the other hand, whose oral-connectedness remains in play but whose performed reality is forever masked by fragmentary textual remains, the strategies used by Hymes are more penetrating. Here it is the *structural* dimensions of poems like *Beowulf* that call for attention because of the expressive responsibility they bear. Experiencing a work of verbal art according to the units and patterns in which it was made amounts to playing by the rules—to reading, representing, and reperforming it on its own terms.

Voiced Texts: Slam Poetry

To show how ethnopoetics can open up dimensions of oral poetry that conventional printed media institutionally ignore or obscure, I offer a compari-

son of two versions of Lynne Procope's "elemental woman." What is provided immediately below is the beginning and the end of the poem, with the two parts separated by a row of asterisks. The left-hand column presents the text as formally published in the collection entitled *Burning Down the House* (Bonair-Agard et al. n.d.), frozen outside of its natural life in performance. The right-hand column is my transcription of Procope's live performance of the same poem—or is it the same?—as recorded on the videotape *nycSLAMS* (Hemstreet et al. 2000).[3] To make sense of the transcription, you as reader and reperformer must do two things: first, consult the digest of symbols that precedes it to learn your cues; and second, perform it aloud yourself. This exercise, like ethnopoetics itself, is participatory. It will work only if you directly and personally experience the difference between visually perusing the minimally coded published text and reperforming the living poem according to the textual prompts.[4]

line = breath-group bounded by pauses

\# = short pause (less than one second)

\#\# = long pause (one second or longer)

rising letters = rising intonation

falling letters = falling intonation

CAPITALS = loudness

italics = words spoken rapidly and together

undividedwords = phrase spoken as a single word

<u>underlining</u> = hand gestures (as observable)

[] = a continuous poetic line

(**occasional stage directions**) bold & parentheses

Published Text	**Live Performance**
I want to be some kind of elemental woman	I know I need to be someKINDof
the original born before my time	\#\# elemental woman
i have lived this life before;	you <u>know</u> # the o<u>ri</u>ginal
on the banks of the orinoco,	SORTof
the ganges,	*born before my time*
the nile . . .	because we have

lived this life before
on the banks of
the Ori<u>no</u>co # the <u>Ga</u>nges # and the <u>Nile</u>

disbelieving the line,
    because i have struggled
    down freedom's road and
    marched blood red streets in
       new york city

SORTof
DISbelieving the LINE
because # I have
[STRUGgled down^{FREE}dom's ROAD
    and
marched BLOOD red STREETS in New
    York City]

un-repressed by religion
    even though i have burned in salem
    and been stoned in Jerusalem
    yet still i am faithful, elemental
       woman

TYPEof
UNrePRESSED by religion
because I have # BURNED in Salem
and been STONED # in # Jerusalem
yet # STILL # FAITHful
ele^{men}tal woman

i need to be an elemental woman
not for this moment but for my life

I think I need to be someKINDof
ele^{men}tal woman
not for THIS MOment
but for my LIFE

  *   *   *   *   *   *   *   *

i want to be an elemental caribbean
    woman

I need to be someKINDof
ele^{men}tal Ca^{rib}bean woman

(**smile**)

and i will sing a love song—
i will be that love song.
resonating so i can hear it sung in my
    next life!
a millennium from now to wonder;

who that woman really was!?!

And I # I think I need to sing a love song
oh, maybe no,
I need to <u>BE</u> that love song

[resoNATing so # I can hear it sung in
    my NEXT life
a milLENnium from now and wonder]
WHO # THAT # WOMAN # really WAS

that hint of melodic memory in the
   minds of
men who passed my pride in the street
and wondered when i learned respect
    was spelt—self
	I need to BE that love song
	[a hint of a melodic memory in the
	   minds of
	men who PASS my PRIDE in the
	    STREET and
	wonder when I learned respect]
	was spelt SELF

that song—of my sisters who stood be-
   side me
before the mirror, to help me wash off
another layer of paint and fade cream
sisters who stand with me now as i speak
   my reality
	I need to BE that love song
	
	[of my sisters who STAND beside me
	before the mirror and watch me wash off
	another layer of # paint and fade cream]
	sisters who SING with me
	as I # SPEAK # MY # REALITY

	(more softly and ethereally)
that i am the womb before the creation of space	[that I am the womb before the <u>creation of space</u>]
that i have recreated my self in my own image	[I have # *recreated my self* in my # <u>*OWN image*</u>]

to find the spirit of the living goddess is
   in me
that she is me and always will be
—elemental woman
	so that *the <u>secret</u> of the living goddess* is <u>IN</u>
	   me
	<u>sister</u> # she <u>IS me</u>
	<u>and</u> she <u>always</u> <u>WILL be</u>
	# <u>ele</u><u>men</u>tal <u>wo</u>man

    Even more than keeping track of visual discrepancies between the two columns, actually performing the transcription illustrates how ethnopoetics works and what enacted features it foregrounds. If performance is the embodiment of a Voiced Text like "elemental woman," then an ethnopoetic transcription amounts to a "how-to manual" for that embodiment. Of course, there are disclaimers to consider. No version of such a manual, no matter how carefully or exhaustively planned and executed, can ever capture the whole reality of the oral poem. In the final analysis, the experience and its representation

are never the same thing; they are neither superimposable nor interchangeable. One person's "take" may emphasize certain features while another person's script may concentrate on other sets of cues. And the danger always looms of so burdening the prompt-text that the reader may find it difficult or impossible to follow all of the directions concurrently; there can be too many balls to juggle all at once. But an ethnopoetic transcription does offer a way to partially recover what the conventional printed page deletes: the living, present dimensions that constitute a performance. It invites readers to take an active and participatory role, to join the oral poet's oral audience.

Let's do precisely that, keeping an eye on the published version and an ear on the transcription. We can start very generally by noticing that the performance diverges from the fixed text in a number of ways, demonstrating the trademark suppleness, or variation within limits, that is a hallmark of most forms of oral poetry. More specifically, those departures take the form of a preference for breath-group units and oral-style, delivery-friendly rephrasing. Instead of the declarative free verse of the book-poem version, the performance organizes itself in bytes of utterance, usually marked at both ends by short or long pauses. Silence, not white space, provides the line its bookends. And just as pauses punctuate the flow of the performance, defining its "words," so small expletives like "SORTof" and "TYPEof" announce and introduce its parts, weaving them together in an aural fabric. These features have little if any meaning for the writing poet or her text-bound readership, but without their expressive contribution the performed poem loses a great deal.

Procope uses many other performative strategies to (re)make her poem in living form, strategies that are not employed—can't be employed—in the fixed medium of the unvoiced text. Pauses lead to syncopation and emphasis within breath-groups, and stanzaic structures appear as not only logical but also performance-based units. Additionally, recurrent lines resonate along the acoustic length of the poem. The title phrase "elemental woman" is one of these echoes, always in the sound-shape

　　　# ele^{me}n$_{tal}$ woman,

indicating a rising and then falling intonation preceded by a short pause. As the performance proceeds, this phrase acoustically knits the presentation together, lyrically amplifying its unity. The performed poem does more than sit impassively on the page: by keeping the multidimensional vocal reality of the idea front and center, it plays on our ears rather than our eyes. Likewise with the refrain-like "I need to BE that love song," which occurs only once in the published version but three times in the performance. The latter two instances are hardly "added" or "extra," however. By serving as an acoustic division and

an interface between significant, integral ideas, this echo reinforces the stanzaic logic of the latter part of the poem. And again it does so aurally, not visually. Each of these sets of recurrences is in effect a key to performance, an invitation to the audience to respond on a designated channel.

Depending on how much of a burden we feel comfortable in placing on the reader (and reperformer), we can also include nonverbal signals such as gestures and facial expressions in such prompt-texts. I've inserted a few such signals in the transcription. Underlining, for instance, indicates that Procope accompanied her speaking with rhythmic hand movements, and the stage direction (**smile**) describes her facial rhetoric just before she begins the last section of the performance.[5] Coding such features encourages the audience-participant to understand the performance as an embodied, visceral experience, as not only a sounded but also a felt reality. Of course, no symbols or markings, no matter how specific, can ever convey the precise ways in which the poet used staccato jabs to drive home her vocal emphases as opposed to the encompassing, spherical motions with which she manually illustrated her statement

> [that I am the womb
> before the <u>creation of space</u>].

But the mere notation and realization that her physical body is an expressive instrument awakens us to what performance is and how we must approach its urgent reality. If such transcriptions of performative features succeed in helping readers voice and literally em-*body* texts, they accomplish their purpose.

Now that you've reperformed Procope's "elemental woman," visit the *HROP* home page and join her audience. The selection presented there is the video from which I made the performance-text given above. You might even want to try scoring her performance yourself.

Voices from the Past: *Beowulf*

Most people encounter the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* in one of a number of modern English translations. Not unexpectedly, these translations strive after "good poetry" in the modern idiom, so that the work will stand on its own. If the only contact between poem and reader is through a translation, so goes the argument, then the translation cannot afford to look backward; it has to be its own poem, no matter how "unfaithful" to the original. The problem is that even such a praiseworthy aim as this masks a deeper problem: under such conditions, we simply aren't reading *Beowulf* on its own terms. To be more

precise, only to the extent that Old English and modern English poetics overlap are we reading this oral poem on its own terms. Even spending the time and effort required to learn the Old Germanic tongue of Old English won't entirely solve the problem, of course. We'll still be left with the nagging matter of textual representation. How do we score the poem in order to foster playing by the rules? How do we put the voice back into *Beowulf*?

Let's start with a word about method. With Voices from the Past, which survive only in manuscript and are typically accompanied by little or no descriptive information, we can't identify the kind of living performative cues typical of voiced texts or oral performances. The truth is that we won't even be able to pronounce finally and definitively on the relationship between our unique manuscript of *Beowulf*, enshrined in run-on lines across a series of sheepskins, and its active performance in Anglo-Saxon England. Such is the inevitable price imposed by time and circumstance. Still, we can't afford to ignore the expressive dimensions of what is—notwithstanding the mute memorial—an oral poem. How then should we proceed?

Instead of relinquishing our responsibility to read *Beowulf* on its own terms, we can profitably turn to another, equally useful brand of ethnopoetics, one that has been effectively employed to enhance both live performances and long-silent texts: the structural focus championed by Dell Hymes. His strategy is to foreground the oral poem's most basic organization, and to do so on its rather than on our terms. Thus he seeks to reinstitute those features that survive the journey to written records: fundamental units and divisions, from the level of the line through large narrative increments, units that conventional text-making obscures or overrides. In the process, texts are reinvigorated with something of their lost idiomatic force. Indeed, it should be stressed that Hymes developed this method specifically to breathe life back into Native American texts whose recording left only faint, run-on prose traces of complex and poetically sophisticated works. Instead of settling for the misreading of prose, he urges us to conceive of a different kind of poetry, one in which the texture of verses, stanzas, scenes, and acts is partner to the story line. By portraying Native American texts according to their own rules rather than defaulting to our unexamined assumptions, he restores the poetry in them. He makes "words" from words.[6]

We can do something similar with other Voices from the Past, provided that we are willing to think within the target language. As an experiment to illustrate what sorts of representation are possible and useful, I include immediately below two versions of the opening lines of *Beowulf*. On the left is a literal, word-for-word translation of what the manuscript contains; on the right is an ethnopoetic, "word"-for-"word" translation. Of course, any edition or

translation of the poem already moves significantly away from the crude, bulky block of print on the left and toward what we have learned to expect of poetry—lines, word order, punctuation and capitalization, and so forth. But here's the catch. These conventional editions and translations aren't moving toward *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon poetics, but rather toward a "party-line" or consensus concept of what poetry ought to be—how it ought to look and how it ought to work. Since Anglo-Saxon poetics overlaps with this modern concept to some degree, since its terms converge in some ways with our terms, any such presentation can claim ethnopoetic progress. But along with that illusory progress comes the distortion inherent in converting a poem to something it isn't, in reading it into submission. The right-hand column reinstitutes some of the major units and patterns found in the original Old English as a guide to becoming a more fluent audience for the poem.[7]

Literal translation from the manuscript	*Ethnopoetic translation*
	Prologue
Lo of the spear-danes in	Lo! We've heard in year-days
year-days of the chieftain-	of the Spear-Danes' glory, the chieftain-kings',
kings the glory we have	how these noblemen performed valor.
heard how these noblemen	**Inset story**
valor performed often scyld	Often Scyld Scefing withheld mead-benches
scefing from troops of injur-	from troops of injurers, from many tribes; 5
ers from many tribes mead-	he terrified princes after the destitute one
benches withheld terrified	was first found; he experienced comfort for this,
princes after first became	grew up under the clouds, prospered with honors
the destitute one found he	until each one of the neighbors
of this a remedy experi-	over the whale-road had to obey him, 10
enced grew up under clouds	to yield tribute to him. That was a brave king!
with honors prospered until	
to him each of the neigh-	
bors over the whale-road	
obey had to tribute to yield	
that was a brave king	

[The story of Scyld, the first hero, continues; lines 12–19]

Proverb

So must a young man good	So must a young man accomplish good things 20
things accomplish with brave	with brave gifts in his father's household,

gifts in his father's household
so that by him in old age af-
terwards may stand chosen
companions when war may
come the people may serve
by praiseworthy deeds must
among of nations each a per-
son prosper.

so that chosen companions   may stand by him
afterwards in old age,   his people may serve him,
when war may come;   by praiseworthy deeds
must a man prosper   among each of nations.   25

Sea voyage / Ship-burial scene (26–52)

Danish royal genealogy (53–67a)

Building of Heorot (67b–85)

In making the ethnopoetic transcription in the right-hand column, I have tried to transfer as many of the oral poetic features of Anglo-Saxon verse as possible.[8] Thus the passage illustrates the typical metrical structure of *Beowulf* and other Old English poems in both whole lines and half-lines (the latter marked by mid-line spaces). That is, the poetry is inherently duplex: the increments in which it is made are not just lines or half-lines but both. Although this two-tiered organization usually goes unrepresented in translations, it contributes a crucial expressive dimension. For one thing, the characteristic pulsing rhythm—not of syllables or textual words but rather of larger "words" organized by stress patterns—identifies the channel for communication, setting the reader on the poet's and tradition's track. It helps to designate the special language in which the communication will take place and thereby to activate the idiomatic associations that a poet and fluent audience bring to the transaction. It makes a connection and opens the dialogue between poet and reader.

This two-level rhythm also supports the additive, paratactic style that further determines *how* as well as *what* the poem means. By presenting the information in small, relatively self-contained, byte-size nuggets, this style requires readers to participate in making poetry; it asks them to merge the segments into an integral whole, to weave the individual threads into a single handsome fabric. Thus the "Spear-Danes" of line 2a and the "chieftain-kings" of line 2b identify the same people, elsewhere called the Scyldings after their eponymous ancestor Scyld Scefing; each name is another facet of the same jewel. In line 5 the Danes' enemies are collectively identified as both "troops of injurers" and "many tribes." Within the poet's way of speaking, this doesn't constitute tiresome repetition but rather a pair of alternate pathways to the same reality. If we linked this excerpt to a larger sample of Old English poetry, we would see that many lines and half-lines also recur in other poems, that they are themselves traditional and bear idiomatic meaning. Even within this limited selection, however, we can appreciate the general poetic strategy. And we can see the pressing need to rescue both lines and half-lines, as well as the

trademark rhetorical style they support, from misrepresentation and consequent misreading. Neither the run-on prose of the manuscript nor the customary left-justified increments so dear to Western poetries will suffice: what we need is a representation of the kind of poetry that *Beowulf* really is. We need an ethnopoetically defensible poem-script.

Toward that end I have added some segmentation and labels to cue the reader's reperformance of the poem's early stages. The first "word," the **prologue** (lines 1–3), has numerous parallels throughout Old English poetry. Its typical components—in particular, the exclamatory "Lo!" together with an idiomatic phrase summoning the mythic past ("in year-days") and a verb of hearing that includes the audience as part of its collective subject "we"—combine to produce a clear, recognizable signal that marks a heroic beginning and forecasts a traditional tale.[9] From this ritualized start the poet proceeds to the first of many **inset stories** in *Beowulf*.[10] Although such loops in the narrative have lives of their own, they always maintain a reliable connection to the main story; for example, they commonly rehearse the history of an important ancestor or heroic exploit that has some direct linkage to matters at hand. But they also entail switching gears, or perhaps switching "words," a practice that the *Beowulf* poet describes as finding "another word bound in truth" and as "exchanging words" (870b–71a, 874a). By labeling the story of Scyld Scefing as one of these tales-within-a-tale, we identify the traditional poetic strategy behind it and help the reader to understand the story on its own terms.

Another strategy frequently employed by the poet is the **proverb.** This common gambit embeds the specifics of a particular situation in the overarching traditional network that informs all individual moments. It builds a bridge between the particular and the generic, the momentary and the traditional. How better to round off the description of Scyld Scefing's model heroism and kingship (4–19) than to link his brief biography to approved cultural practice via a proverb (20–25)? Inserted proverbs are a common strategy in oral poetry, especially epic,[11] and it's not too broad a generalization to say that much of the language of oral poetry is in some way proverbial. Proverb, idiom, and traditional expression are closely related.

The next byte of narrative, ethnopoetically labeled **Sea voyage / Ship-burial scene** (26–52) highlights the double focus of *Beowulf* and so many other Voices from the Past in their portrayal of a unique event via a traditional pattern. Although the apparent subject of this passage is the ship-burial of Scyld Scefing, it is also and equally a sea voyage. That is, the poet, called the *scop* in Old English, describes the funeral by deploying a five-part sequence of actions that he elsewhere uses to narrate an actual journey over water; the same se-

quence structures Beowulf's trips to and from Denmark later in the poem.[12] In all three cases he's unfolding the same map of traditional expectation: (1) the men accompany the hero to the ship; (2) the vessel waits, moored; (3) the men board, carrying treasure; (4) the ship departs; and (5) the passengers reach the destination and encounter a coast-guard. But what the *scop* does at the poem's outset is intriguingly different—and remarkable. He uses that same traditional structure, presumably a familiar pattern for both poet and audience, for a nontraditional purpose: to point up the uncertainty of what lies at the end of Scyld Scefing's voyage. Everything proceeds as expected except that no destination is cited; "men don't know," says the poet, "who received that burden" (50b–52). The funeral is a voyage whose destination remains unspecified, while nothing is known about the coast-guard who may or may not await Scyld's arrival. The shortfall is striking. In this hybrid poetics, the words indicate a ship-burial while the "word" suggests a journey by sea, a journey that lacks the customary completion. The "word" causes another shift of gears and an arresting effect.

Beyond this point the narrative of *Beowulf* moves toward a history of the Danish regency, in preparation for the introduction of the current king Hrothgar, and eventually to the building of the great hall Heorot, the symbol of political might, social order, and cosmic balance that is compromised every night by the monster Grendel's attacks. A faithful ethnopoetic description will chart these and other structural increments as the expressive bytes they are.

At all levels, then, from the half-line and whole line through the largest units and patterns, the structural brand of ethnopoetics can help make us aware of the impact of these "chunks" on the poetry they constitute. By scoring *Beowulf* and other voices from the past, by encouraging reperformance not on our imposed terms but on their inherent terms, we can learn to read and reperform such oral poems better. By insisting on the "words" as well as the words, we can in some ways join an audience from whom we're separated by centuries or even millennia.

From the performative and structural brands of ethnopoetics we now turn our attention to a third "way of reading," the approach called Immanent Art. This method concentrates on the trajectory from structure to meaning, and asks not just what the expressive units are but, as precisely as possible, *how they mean*. Our itinerary for the Fifth Word will include tracing the genesis of Immanent Art from what is widely known as the Oral-Formulaic Theory, as well as constructing a model for its application to various categories of oral poetry.

Notes

1. Johnson 1980, entitled "Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa."

2. On editing projects aimed at this goal, see the Post-Script at the end of this volume.

3. Let me acknowledge my debt to Anne-Marie Foley for her invaluable assistance in transcribing this performance.

4. In one respect this transcription utterly fails to represent the reality of the performance situation: it doesn't take account of the audience reaction and participation. I have not tried to include that dimension here (a) because I wanted to avoid overloading the page with instructions and (b) because in reperforming this oral poem you're not interacting with *that audience.*

5. Note that the alternation between medium shots and close-ups on the videotape makes it impossible to see, and therefore to chart, all of Procope's hand gestures. What I include here is meant only as an illustrative sample.

6. This method has now been extended to more than thirty Northwest Coast Native American traditions.

7. One word of caution: reading ethnopoetic transcriptions, as you may already have discovered with the scored prompt-text of "elemental woman" above, is harder work than plowing more familiar fields. Reacting to and processing poetry that is configured in a radically different way is something like confronting culture shock: it requires patience and an appetite for diversity.

8. Let me stipulate that one substantial casualty of the transferral to modern English has been the required alliteration between half-lines that governs Anglo-Saxon verse. Modern English, so distant in some ways from its Germanic roots, does not offer the resources to effectively mirror this feature.

9. For details on this signal, see Foley 1991: 214–23.

10. On the role of such inset stories, often called "episodes and digressions," in *Beowulf,* see Bjork 1997.

11. See further Foley 1994.

12. See lines 205–303a and 1880b–1919. For a fuller discussion of these passages, see Foley 1990: 336–44.

Further Reading

Ethnopoetics (overview): DuBois 1998; Foley 1995a: esp. 17–27
Performative ethnopoetics: Tedlock 1983, 1990, 1999 (Zuni, Quiché Maya)
Structural ethnopoetics: Hymes 1981, 1989, 1994 (Northwest Coast Native American)
Application of ethnopoetics to text-making: Fine 1994; Foley 1995b; Hanks 1989