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Spoken Word & Its Work of
Written Interpretation

Introduction

Here speaks the storyteller, telling by voice what was learned by ear. Here speaks a poet who did not learn language structure from one teacher and language meaning from another, nor plot structure from one and characterization from another, nor even an art of storytelling from one and an art of hermeneutics from another, but always heard all these things working together in the stories of other storytellers. And this poet, or mythopoet, not only narrates what characters do, but speaks when they speak, chants when they chant, and sings when they sing. A story is not a genre like other genres of verbal art, but is more like a complex ceremony in miniature, encompassing aphorisms, public announcements, speeches, prayers, songs, and even other narratives.

Across from the storyteller sits the mythographer, who inscribes a record of what the storyteller does by voice. But this mythographer is not scribbling furiously away in a notebook while the performer waits to see whether it will be necessary to go back or whether it will be possible to get on with the story. Instead, the initial version of the inscription is being made by a device that arranges invisible patterns of charges on a magnetic tape, charges that can later be transformed into a reasonable facsimile of the sounds that first produced them.

It is not only the voice of the storyteller that is set free by sound recording, but also the ear of the mythographer. Even as the story is being told, the ear already takes in a broader spectrum of sounds than the anxious ear that tried to hear how each word might be *spelled*. In fact, if the story is being told in a language that the mythographer has only recently begun to learn, the ear will mostly hear the *music* of the voice, the rises and falls of pitch and amplitude, the tone and timbre,

the interaction of sounds and silences. In short, the mythographer who postpones the use of pencil and notebook will hear precisely all the dimensions of the voice that the spelling ear tunes out.

And now, a second possibility. Here speaks the storyteller again, only the voice is the flat and halting one of schoolroom recitation. This time the poet starts from the spelling eye, piecing together the ancient and sometimes unfamiliar words of a story that was written down long ago, even centuries ago, but which contemporary storytellers have seldom had a chance to see. Suddenly he takes off his reading glasses and offers an interpretation, and now and again what he reads will even provoke him to tell a story, telling by voice what he learned by ear. And here again sits a mythographer, sometimes scribbling in the margins of the ancient text but also armed with a tape-recorder. This time the spelling ear comes first, listening for ways to improve the spelling and wording of the ancient text, but when the poet bursts into story the mythographer may find ways of hearing a fuller voice in the ancient text.

In either of these cases the tape, once made and removed to another time and place, has some of the properties of a written text. The patterns of charges on the tape may be likened to lines of ink on paper—though here disk recording provides a more vivid analogy, with a stylus that visibly marks a surface. But when the tape is read back, all those dimensions of the voice that the spelling ear tunes out are still there. And unless the mythographer has imitated studio technicians, producing a decontextualized voice that is in some ways the auditory equivalent of a carefully edited and printed text on a clean white page, the information on the tape is not limited to what that voice sounded like at the moment it left the lips. Even the performer's bodily movements are in evidence, affecting the sound of the voice as the head moves with respect to a microphone that was not tied around the neck. Also on the tape is evidence of the remarks or movements of an audience (including the mythographer), along with evidence as to whether the performance took place indoors or out, whether seasonal birds or insects were singing, and whether there was a violent wind or a thunderclap. Performance-oriented sociolinguists and folklorists call the mythographer away from a text-centered approach, urging that verbal art be studied in the contexts of its production, but if we come to think of everything that is fixed on a tape as our primary text, we need no longer feel torn between text and context.

Perhaps the most radical difference between a dictated text from a notebook and an audible text on a tape lies in the temporal dimension. Even though the audible text, like its predecessor, has been removed from the absolute chronological time of the original performance, the *internal* timing of the performance and the accompanying events is still there, not only in its sequences but also in the proportions of its durations. The halting hand of dictation starts up again at the same place it stopped, advancing according to the spatial needs of letters and words, but the tape keeps moving even when only the ambient sound of the room or the dooryard is there. Structuralists have said that myth is a device for the overcoming of time, but that would be a more accurate description of the dictated text of a myth than of an actual performance or an audible text.

Once the audible text is in hand, there is the question of how to make a *visible* record of its sounds. Such a record will not be necessary if the sole aim of the listener is to engage in an electronically aided apprenticeship, like that of a musician who learns new riffs not by reading them or having a teacher repeat them but by imitating tape-recorded sounds. But if the sounds from a tape are to be studied and compared at a distance from their original positions on actual tapes, some kind of visible notation will be required, sooner or later. In the case of a sound-effects technician, notation may be limited to grease-pencil marks on the tapes themselves, and ledgers indexing the footages where different classes of sounds may be found. But if the audible text is to be made available for close critical inspection and direct comparison with written literature, it must be brought to a standstill. Sounds on a tape can be repeated, slowed down, speeded up, or even reversed, but they disappear when the tape stops; the visible notation of sound, on the other hand, stays put. At the very same time, notation can make it possible for the reader to restore the temporal dimension—not only the ordering of the discrete or particulate aspects of sound in *serial* time, as in the case of alphabetic prose, but the flowing of long and short strings of sounds amid long and short silences in *measurable* time, which can be made visible through spacing. The ideal text would permit the reader to choose between the objectifying eye of stares and glances, which declares its independence from the temporality of sound, and the participating eye of what musicians call "sight-reading," in which the reader coordinates vision with the properly timed reenactment of sound.

But before we consent to a transcription of the audible text, it must be cautioned that no score can ever be so detailed and precise as to provide for the re-creation of the full sound of the tape. The audible text will remain the primary document, suggesting revisions of the dictated texts of the past and providing the basis for any number

of future transcriptions or translations of its own contents. Periodically students of human speech have been excited by the potential of mechanical devices that make visible notations from audible sources, but these have their own limitations. During the 1920s, for example, there came the kymograph; with hoses attached to the very nose and mouth of the speaker, it scratched lines on smoked paper glued to a revolving brass drum. More recently, through the mediation of electrical signals, there have come scrolls bearing separate oscillographic readouts of amplitude and pitch. Such readouts, when inspected simultaneously with an audition of the tape from which they were made, can improve the reader-listener's sensitivity to pitch, loudness, and timing, but they cannot be sight-read. Just as a musician must parallel the staff notation of a song with a text of the words of the song, so the acoustical phonetician resorts to writing in words below the squiggles on a strip of graph paper. If the notation of the audible text of a storytelling event is to provide a *performable text*, it will have to follow a path between the conventions handed down in literate tradition and the purely hypothetical goal of total notation. Considered practically, notation should not be so complex as to slow the eye of the sight-reader below the proper pace for the reader's voice.

A mythographer could begin work on a performable text by blocking in the large shapes of the sounds and silences, but the force of tradition will probably guide the first pass of the hand down the narrow channel of the spelling and word-making ear, reducing all the complexities of the audible text to rows of alphabetic characters. In the case where the work starts from an ancient text, a prior spelling ear and hand have already made a pass, and the first new task will be to tune the ear finer, correcting the spelling and sometimes the wording, weighing the contemporary storyteller's readings against received scholarly opinion. For the time being, the storyteller's independent ventures into performance will seem like digressions, but they will provide the subject of a separate project that will itself begin with the spelling ear.

At the point where the spelling ear has exhausted its contribution to the hearing of the audible text, we come to a decision that will affect everything else we do, not only in making a visible text but in carrying out the further work of poetics and hermeneutics. If we are drawn down a familiar path, we may put the tape-recorder aside for a while and go on refining what we have written through a process of decipherment, looking for structures supposedly hidden there, but if we are haunted by echoes of the voice of the storyteller, we may go right back to the tape and listen all over again. We may determine the

punctuation of our text by the deciphering eye, which will seek out patterns of syntax, but if we listen again we may discover that the "commas" and "periods" and "question marks" of the speaking voice, as signaled by pitch contours and stresses, may not obey the rules worked out by the deciphering eye. Linguists have observed that "good syntax" is more likely to be obtained in dictation than in continuous discourse, but that is not so if we give up the written sentences of our composition teacher for the "oratorical periods" of our speech teacher, allowing for *audible sentences*.

As with punctuation, so with the larger question of the general form the text should take on the page. If we follow the path of the deciphering eye, we may scan the alphabetic text already before us for repetitions of sound or sense that follow some quantifiable pattern, or if we find no scansion we may at least look for a systematic way to make the paragraph breaks called for by a prose presentation. But if we listen again we may discover that the stops and starts, the accelerations and retardations of the speaking voice, may not obey the rules worked out by the deciphering eye. As mythographers already know, "good scansion" is more likely to be obtained in dictation than in a continuous performance, but that is not so if we give up the scansion of our literature teacher for the "good timing" of our drama teacher, replacing readable measure with *audible measure*.

What we have done so far, if we have punctuated our visible text according to the rising and falling contours of oratorical periods and shaped its lines and stanzas according to the stops and starts of dramatic timing, is to begin to free ourselves from the inertia, from the established trajectory, of the whole dictation era, an era that stretches (in the West) all the way back to the making of the Homeric texts. We have begun to construct an *open text*—not a text whose notation closes in upon features that can be assigned certified membership in self-sufficient codes such as those of syntax and scansion, but a text that forces even the reading eye to consider whether the peculiarities of audible sentences and audible lines might be *good speaking* rather than *bad writing*. When an open text captures a particular configuration of contour and timing that occurs just once in just one audible text, the reader will have a chance to consider the possibility that such a configuration is not so much an error, a failure of performance to measure up to the standards of competence described by a theoretical poetics, as it is a brilliant stroke of *practical poetics* that enhances the audible impact of this one particular story.

If a story character quoted by a performer engages in formal oratory or prayer or even sings an aria, chances are that contouring, tim-

ing, and even syntax will move into a closer synchrony with one another, and the lines so produced may unfold their meaning in a parallelistic way. But even here oral delivery may not follow a pattern that could have been deciphered from a dictated prose text alone. A speech-maker, like a storyteller, is perfectly capable of making an important noun phrase, for example, *sound* like a complete sentence, while a person praying in private may make a perfect syntactical sentence *sound* like a mere phrase; in a like way, a singer may stretch a single monosyllabic word over several musical measures in one place, and rush through a long sentence in a single measure somewhere else. But if the study of an audible text does disclose passages with at least statistical patterns in the interrelationships between pitch and timing, on the one hand, and syntax and meaning, on the other, it may be possible to carry out a hypothetical reconstruction of the oral delivery of a dictated text from the past—given passages whose syntax and wording resemble those of passages from audible texts. But even then it will be difficult to predict the foregrounding of a particular meaning that is made possible by a sudden break in a pattern of pitch and timing, and it may be necessary to leave the straight narrative passages as prose, with their dramatic timing to be improvised by the reader. After all, even a musical sight-reader is sometimes confronted by a cadenza.

At a scale below that of whole words and phrases, the internal rhythms of lines in an audible text will vary every time there are major shifts in wording or syntax. The measuring out of long runs of lines with equal numbers of syllables, moras, or feet does not occur in audible texts from cultures whose verbal arts are not under the direct influence of literary traditions. In most languages, such fine-grained metrical schemes require an atomization of speech sounds that is precisely the forte of alphabetic and syllabic writing systems. As for the Homeric texts, no modern classicist holds them to be the unedited field notes of an ancient mythographer. The only *audible* epic texts with long metrical runs come from folk traditions within larger literate cultures. When we look for epics outside such cultures—a search that leads to non-Islamic Africa—metrical lines vanish in favor of a dramatic unfolding much like that of the spoken narratives we have been discussing, an unfolding in which the music provides a temporal constant against which the variability of narrative velocity stands out all the more.

Having come this far in opening up our visible text by way of the ear, already finding ourselves on a path where our lessons in grammar, composition, and Greek hexameter can no longer provide guidance, we need not fear to give our audible text still further hearings. There is, for example, the matter of amplitude. Our storyteller, making full use of a continuum of possibilities, ranges all the way from a whisper to a shout. The established images of good writing may suggest that this speaker has, in effect, used too many parentheses, underlines, exclamation points—and maybe even indulged in the use of CAPITALS! But once again, by sketching in at least the larger dimensions of the variability of the voice, the mythographer allows for the possibility that the speaker is once again following a practical poetics, foregrounding some words or lines or whole stanzas and backgrounding others in a way that helps give shape to the action of the story. The speaking storyteller is not a writer who fears to make use of the shift key, but an actor on a stage.

In the same move in which we open our visible text to the phenomena of practical poetics, we begin to extend our poetics into a region where linguistics—or a semiotics that models itself on linguistics—begins to lose its power to provide us with a paradigm. It is not just that the phenomena of contouring, timing, and amplitude have somehow been overlooked and present a new domain for decipherment, but that they have always resisted reduction to particulate units of the kind that can be ordered within a closed code. The pitch contours of an audible sentence mark it with a *degree* of incompleteness or finality; the range of possible lengths for an audible line or a silence occupies a *continuum*, and so does the range of possible loudness or softness within a line. Such phenomena have both obvious and subtle effects on the meaning of what the storyteller says, but the possible *shades* of meaning are infinite, whereas the deciphering eye allows no shadings. The eye of the mythographer can devise a system for the purpose of notating such phenomena, but this will be an improvised code for practical purposes rather than a code that aims for theoretical perfection. Some meanings will slip through its net, at one extreme, or its mesh may impose meaningless distinctions at the other, but in any case it is likely to remain a working hypothesis rather than becoming an established theory. Where linguists once saw alphabetic literacy as a code in need of economization, mythographers who seek to make performable scripts must see a poverty of expressive means.

Like an artist who sets out to work from life but discovers he has left his brush and paints at home and brought only his pens and india ink, we have so far sought graphic solutions to the problems of making a visible text. But when we listen once again and notice variability in the storyteller's tone of voice, we must either resort to the use of color or annotate the text with verbal descriptions in small capitals

or parenthesized italics, such as are sometimes introduced into the script for a play. Sometimes even an oral performer may describe a character's voice rather than enacting it, using a phrase like "his voice became tense" instead of using a tense voice. But enough performers of the past have preferred enactment to description to leave the readers of conventional transcriptions with the impression that spoken narrative gives little attention to the emotional states of its characters. This impression—a mere appearance—will remain so long as the spelling ear continues to limit the writing of visible texts. There are linguists who recognize the problem of tone of voice, but they tend to separate it from the "cognitive" realm of language proper and exile it to the "affective" realm of the individual speaker's psyche, overlooking hidden affective implications of particular choices of wording or syntax, on the one hand, and the obvious fact that a performer may deliberately *simulate* an emotional tone, on the other.

Beyond tone of voice, we come to acoustical changes in the voice that accompany the bodily movements of the performer. Here we begin to leave the realm of the voice, but not that of the story. We might still draw a hard line between voice and gesture, but the fact that bodily movements can affect the sound of the voice is only the beginning of the problem with this distinction. A performer may say "she went southward" in one place, without any gesture, and say "she went over this way" at another point in the very same story, motioning southward with the hand and turning to look in that direction. Another case where voice and body movement are intertwined is that of the "aside," which may be an aside not only in the sense that the storyteller stops to make an interpretive remark *about* the action in the midst of narrating it, but in the literal sense that the storyteller turns to face a member of the audience while making that remark. The wording of such an aside may even break with the third-person ground of the narrative—in which "you" and "I" appear only within the dialogues among the characters—to touch base with the "you" and "I" of the dialogical ground occupied by audience and narrator.

In the matter of the aside we have a reminder, within the audible text itself, that the speaking storyteller is not merely addressing a hypothetical future audience, unlike the writer. The world evidenced by the audible text, considered in its entirety, includes not only the world projected by the story proper but the world of the performer and audience. The hearers may feel an aesthetic and historical alienation from the world of the story, much like the alienation experienced by the readers of a written text from a distant time or place, but the ongoing hermeneutical task of overcoming that alienation may sometimes be faced in the very midst of a performance, here and now and for these particular hearers. This is not only a matter of making the "separate" world of the story seem attractive or internally coherent and getting the hearers to project themselves into their private versions of that world, nor is it only a matter of achieving a "fusion of horizons" where the separate worlds of audience and story seem to have some distant areas of overlap. For the speaking storyteller, there is yet a third possibility, in which the world of the story, instead of being at the other end of a journey, enters the collective experience of the very room or dooryard where it is being told. There is a fusion of intimacies when the speaker calls attention to the fact that the stage set of a scene in the story was the same as the present set of its telling, or compares a character in the story with someone in the audience. Fusion moves to the cosmic level when the time of day or weather or season of the story is compared with what it is right now, and when a character moves east and the speaker motions eastward from the spot of telling about it, there is a momentary *fusion of centers*.

Even though we have not yet attended to any sounds made by people other than the storyteller, the making of an open text has already led us to the realization that the narrative monologue unfolds on the larger ground of dialogue, and that the hermeneutical task may be taken up even before the narrative stops. Now the text must be opened to the stirrings and assents and maybe even the comments and questions of the audience, still within the same temporal movement or notational space as the story itself. Once the visible text includes this dimension, our listening would seem to be close to completion. But now we come to the question of the maker of the tape. Even if the mythographer keeps absolutely silent throughout the time of recording—a feat the natives will not necessarily consider meritorious—there must sooner or later come the jagged sound of the charges a machine leaves on a tape when someone turns it off. This final zap serves to remind us that the mythographer was one of the parties to the events recorded and that the storyteller may have subtly shaped some passages with more than the native audience in mind. There is even the possibility that the "you" of some of the interpretive asides may have been none other than yours truly, the one who now sits here writing this, or that the performer was ultimately thinking of you who now sit somewhere reading this.

Here, then, writes the mythographer, telling by typewriter what was learned by ear, by transcription, and by oral recitation. The sight-reading of transcriptions does not wait for the finished product but

takes place all along the way: just as the spelling ear and eye must test their choices by reading them back from eye to voice, so must the ear and eye that proceed to the notation of oratorical periods, dramatic timing, amplitude, tone of voice, asides, and responses. But even now there remains a distance between what the storyteller did on the occasion of the making of the audible text and the reenactment of that deed for the audience or readership of the mythographer, a distance that must be crossed by translation. Whether the work of translation is put off until there is a complete visible text in the language of the performer, or starts earlier in the listening process, it will be a different task from what it was in the days of dictation, a circumstance that is traceable to the same moment at which everything else changes. When the work of the deciphering eye, an eye that is perfectly content with what the spelling eye alone can present for its inspection, is held off in favor of continued listening, translation is itself transformed.

From the point of view of the linguist who seeks to crack the code of an unwritten language, translation from that language into his own will seem like a violation of the integrity of the discovered code, unless it takes the modest form of a series of labels or tags running alongside the words of the original language. Here the direction of movement is opposite to that of translation as practiced between two written traditions: whereas the professional translator brings what was said in another language across into the saying of his own, the professional linguist takes his own language partway across to the other, artificially creating a new variety of broken English. Not only that, but as Dell Hymes has pointed out, those who wish to keep what was said in the other language at a great distance, whether giving it the status of an early link in their own evolutionary past or filling out the spaces in a literary bestiary, will even take this broken English as a sign of authenticity.

By now we should be prepared to see that the paucity of viable translations of verbal art from spoken traditions is linked to the narrowness of established transcription practices in a single and strikingly asymmetrical economy of values. The deciphering eye, the same eye that so respects the integrity of the transcribed language as to find it untranslatable, nevertheless regards the ready-made apparatus of its own literacy—given some adjustments in the values assigned to the letters of the alphabet—as sufficient for the notation of whatever is meaningful in that other language. Keeping the transcriber's eye in service to the ear much longer than usual may not turn this economy upside down, but it does bring a practical confrontation with overlooked problems of opacity in the relationship between

speech and writing, while simultaneously revealing some transparencies between languages—or at least languages as they are spoken. A finality of contour in the speaking of one language is translatable into a finality of contour in the speaking of another; a pause that leaves the hearer dangling in one language can be translated into a dangling pause in the other. As for amplitude, a sudden loudness does not serve as a means of emphasis in one language and a way of throwing a line away in another. Tones of voice may have conventional dimensions, but a breaking voice in one language will at least not be interpreted as a firm voice in another. Gestures, too, may have their conventionalities, but what is eastward for the storyteller is at least translatable into what is eastward for the mythographer.

What we have, then, is the possibility of a performable translation. There may be any number of differences between languages, cultures, genres, or individual artists in the economy of means employed in the enactment of a story, but the attempt to preserve the general proportions of this economy in translation is well worth the effort. The written and spoken arts of the English language may turn out to have more moments of analogy with the arts of remote storytellers than anyone would have expected, though these analogies may not lie in the areas of prose fiction or metered verse. The ideal translation will be one that retains substantial areas of plausibility as spoken English, never sounding broken where the original storyteller sounded perfectly smooth, while at the same time opening the ear to the possibility of new economies of means in English. Even in the passage between two literate traditions it is seldom the aim of literary translators to leave their own language intact, though the nearness of two such traditions may make for subtler tricks of the ear than those of the translating mythographer.

My own project in mythography begins from meetings with storytellers from two communities whose languages and cultures are indigenous to the New World. The most concrete practical purpose of the earliest meetings was the recording of what I once took to be the monologues of performers, but by the end of this book I come to consider storytelling as situated within a larger dialogue that reaches even beyond the immediate audience. In between are talks and essays addressed to various combinations of anthropologists, linguists, sociolinguists, folklorists, oral historians, ethnohistorians, philosophers of religion, literary critics, semioticians, dramatists, and poets over a period of a dozen years.

One line of my work in mythography began in 1964, just a little to the Pacific side of the Great Divide of the American continent and just

a little south of the main road from New York to Los Angeles, at a town properly called Shiwin'a but more widely known as Zuni, in New Mexico. The other line began in 1975, a little to the Atlantic side of the Great Divide and a little north of the main road from Mexico City to Panama City, at a town properly called Chuua 4,ak but more widely known as Momostenango, in Guatemala. The language spoken at Zuni is an isolate (like Basque), spoken by about seven thousand people; the language spoken at Momostenango is Quiché, spoken by more than half a million people and belonging to the Mayan family, whose speakers total several millions. Both communities grow crops that are indigenous to the New World, both center everyday religious practice on the veneration of those who were once living, both have priests who visit sacred springs and peaks to pray for the living, both occupy a point at which a vertical axis passes through the center of a four-cornered world, and both think of distant places as occupying distant times. Both these towns began their relationships with Europeans by participating in armed resistance to Spanish expeditions that included Tlaxcalan Indian auxiliaries from Mexico; by comparison with neighboring Indian towns, both are traditionalist in religious matters and both are progressivist when it comes to technology.

In the matter of storytelling, the two towns could not be more different. Zuni stories are properly reserved for indoor winter evenings; sessions are often arranged in advance, and formal enough to place something of an invisible proscenium arch between performer and audience. A storyteller encountered in the middle of harnessing a horse down at his stables may turn out to be preoccupied with a silent review of the main features of a story he plans to tell a day or two later, but he will give only the barest outline on the spot. Tape-recording an actual performance presents few problems—especially not stage fright—but when the performance comes to an end and the conversation resumes, the machine must be shut off as abruptly as it was turned on. Among the Quiché, on the other hand, stories occur to people only when conversation or chance events bring them to mind. In the midst of a discussion of crocodiles and iguanas—remote beasts for the Quiché—someone says, "Well, there's a story about that," and proceeds to tell it then and there, regardless of season or time of day or whether one is indoors or out. This does not mean that storytelling is less of a performance at Momostenango than at Zuni, but that more of the Quiché art of performance consists in knowing how to seize the right moment, telling a story without leaving the thread of a conversation hopelessly far behind. Once again tape-recording is no problem, but in this case no one is bothered by having

everything recorded, whether it is a story or not. As might already be guessed, Quiché conversation is itself more formal than Zuni conversation.

Storytellers can talk *about* stories, but their observations and speculations come from accumulated experience at hearing and telling stories, not from the recollection of a lesson plan. The future storyteller begins the learning process by hearing stories whole, all at once, not by being shown their component parts and then being taught rules for how to assemble them. For the mythographer, whose education has proceeded by parts, there is something overwhelming about the making of the first tape in the field: There it is, the story is all there, too much to deal with except by disassembling it. As a concession to the piecemeal way of learning things, I have followed this introduction with a guide to the main features of the notation I have worked out for open or performable texts, together with a guide to the pronunciation of Zuni and Quiché words. But then I go on to plunge you, the reader, directly into the script of a short Zuni story. I have given you three advantages the beginning mythographer does not have: The story is already off the tape, which means it is fully open to both the participating eye and the objectifying eye; the storyteller gives a brief introduction that sketches some of the story's cultural context; and except for a proper name or two, the whole thing is in English. The storyteller is myself, speaking in 1975 before an audience in Milwaukee, but as a rhapsode rather than a bard. This is a concert reading of one of my own performable translations rather than a performance that starts from memory alone, but in converting the tape-recording of this reading into a visible text, I have included my departures from the script.

The book also ends with a script, one that includes a Quiché Maya story, only this time the story is shown in the conversational matrix in which it originally occurred. The matrix is that particular kind of asymmetrical dialogue in which the ethnographer, seeking to isolate the pieces out of which things are supposed to be made, attempts to pursue a line of questioning to its conclusion while the native sharpens his own skill at keeping topics open to the full extent of their richness. In between this final script and the opening one are others that also come directly from tapes: a long Zuni tale told in a popular Zuni style by Walter Sanchez (Chapter 2), a Zuni tale that was invented by Andrew Peynetsa (Chapter 14), and a Quiché story from a conversation with Andrés Xiloj (Chapter 10). Elsewhere, a short Zuni prayer from a text dictated and published half a century ago is partially restored to the forms of oral recitation (Chapter 6), and

the same is done for the opening section of the Popol Vuh, a sacred Quiché text first transposed into alphabetic writing during the 1550s (Chapter 4). The most direct confrontation between the performing voice and an old written text comes when Andrés Xiloj reads the Popol Vuh story of the defeat of an alligator by a crab (Chapter 15), uncovering ribaldry that had eluded a century of scholarship and finding it no presumption to introduce a story of his own. The most direct confrontation between what I have learned from storytellers and the norms of academic writing comes when I cast one of my own talks about performance in the form of a script (Chapter 3). Unlike the opening script of the book, which merely provides a setting for a story, this one tries to get the upper hand over stories by quoting small bits from lots of them.

Following the opening script are four chapters that stay close to the processes of transcription and translation. In Chapter 1, I outline a century of oral narrative translation in North America and go into detail for Zuni in particular, proposing a general method for the making of performable scripts. Chapter 2 pushes beyond the limits set in the first, especially in translating proper names, archaisms, and onomatopoeia; by Chapter 3, the kinds of verbal art considered are greatly widened, going beyond Zuni tales into song texts, sacred history, recent history, and narratives of personal experience. At the end of Part One, in Chapter 4, I survey the role of writing in the indigenous cultures of North and Middle America (both before and after the European invasion) and go into greater detail for the Maya. Then, with the Popol Vuh as my case study, I propose that even some of the older post-European texts might be opened to improved translation and interpretation through a process I call "ethnopaleography," which involves taking a text back to the descendants of those who produced it in order to draw analogies with contemporary spoken arts and obtain commentaries from contemporary readers.

The poetics explored in Part Two is of course an oral poetics, and as such it diverges from an old line of thought (passing from Aristotle down to Jakobson) that closely allies the art of poetry with the alphabetic (or phonological) dimension of language and separates it from the art of performance, thus pulling poetry hard within the domain of the reader and away from the audience. In an oral poetics, actual performance is not the imperfect realization of a playwright's lofty intentions by lowly actors, nor is it an incomplete obedience to the rules set forth in an imaginary mental handbook of the poetic art. Instead, if I may paraphrase Richard Bauman, performance is *constitutive* of verbal art, and each performance has the potential for making changes,

large or small, in the constitution of future verbal art. The comprehensive description of a poetic art, in which the critic plays the part of Logos with respect to the fleshly actions of humankind, works best (as it did for Aristotle) as an autopsy performed over the surviving corpus of a literate tradition that has come near the end of its productive life. But when the tradition is a living and oral one, poetics must remain phenomenological, exploring what has been manifested in past performances, remaining open to what may happen in future ones, and remembering that whatever durable corpus may accumulate through the efforts of mythographers is a small and nonrandom sample.

The aspects of oral poetics explored here include a whole range of Zuni techniques for achieving verisimilitude in storytelling (Chapter 5); a Zuni technique for changing normal stress and pitch patterns in order to mark what is being said (in everything from conversation to ritual chants) as carrying importance and completeness (Chapter 6); and Zuni control of the pace and quality of narrative action through the relative durations of sounds and silences, the placement of silences with respect to intonational contours, and the stretching out of vowel sounds in verbs (Chapter 7). At the end of Part Two, in Chapter 8, I take up a more traditional aspect of poetics—that of scansion—and focus on Mayan texts written down in the past, but the evidence of contemporary performance is brought in to elucidate the patterns exhibited by those texts. Further, I interpret variations of pattern not as breakdowns in the realization of an abstract poetic art but as delicate maneuvers in a shifting balance between form and meaning.

Like the poetics of the second section, the hermeneutics of the next cannot be carried over intact from its origins in written tradition. In the first two chapters of Part Three, both of which start from audible texts (Zuni in Chapter 9 and Quiché in Chapter 10), the modification begins with the fact that when a storyteller speaks to a present audience, the narrative and hermeneutical tasks may be undertaken by the same person and at the same time. The Zuni story of the Beginning (unlike Zuni tales) does exist in an authoritative liturgical version that is recited verbatim, but that simply has the effect of displacing interpretation to the telling of unofficial versions, which are (in effect) hermeneutical acts in their entirety. The case of the Quiché narrative that occurs in conversation is a fully hermeneutical matter in a different sense: Here the "text" upon which the storyteller expounds is given by the conversational topic, or by an event that just happened to the conversants. The difference between these Zuni and Quiché ex-

amples and the hermeneutical discourse in a written tradition is that however exegetical the oral performance may be, there is still the obligation to tell the *story*.

The remaining two chapters in the hermeneutical section, Chapters 11 and 12, take up a more familiar problem, that of the exegesis of a written text (here the Popol Vuh), but I carefully follow the interpretive guideposts set up by whoever authored it or dictated it to a scribe. At the most general level, the four hermeneutical chapters taken together diverge from the founding line of Western hermeneutics—the biblical line—at the fundamental level of ontogeny. Even though the Zunis preserve verbatim an oral "Book" of the Beginning, and even though the Quiché author of the Popol Vuh appeals to the authority of a visible Book, neither Zuni nor Quiché begins the world from nothing, and neither traces it to the Intention of a single Author, that monologue artist who is so obviously alphabetically literate: "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Instead, Zuni and Quiché gods need spoken dialogue just as much as humans do.

With dialogue we come to Part Four, which begins (in Chapter 13) with the revelation that even the Zuni tale, a genre that constructs a more elaborate stage for itself than the Quiché conversational story, may have performers who come right out into the audience and confront its members individually. This level of interaction is more likely to happen when the tape-recorder (and the abstract future audience it implies) is absent, thus leaving the mythographer without a text—unless (as in this case) a recording of the "same" story was made on a separate occasion, a recording that will now seem rather dull. But the unrecorded version does not constitute a more authentic performance than what took place in the recording session—if "authentic" means unaffected by an observer—since the tapeless mythographer is quite likely to be among those singled out for confrontation by the liberated storyteller. Next (in Chapter 14) we take an even longer step away from minimizing the role of the observer when a Zuni performer boldly invents a new story for the purpose of having the mythographer record it. Then comes a three-way dialogue (Chapter 15) in which a Quiché, reading a Quiché text brought to him by the fieldworker, answers an ancient story given in that text by presenting the fieldworker with a contemporary story.

If the mythographer interprets fieldwork as an uphill battle to make an "objective" record of storytelling, then the three tapes discussed in Chapters 13 to 15 are hardly likely candidates for an anthology purporting to reveal the stories nonliterate natives tell while no outsider is listening. The first is unlively by comparison with the unrecorded version of the same story, the second documents a violation of tradition, and the third was made by a native who had just taken off his reading glasses. In all three cases, the dialogical ground on which storytelling takes place opens wide enough to reveal the mythographer. If we recognize this ground not as a new object for an old kind of study but as the very ground that makes mythography (and ethnography in general) even possible, then such cases move out of the periphery and toward the center of interest. The reporting of ethnographic field experience is no longer a choice between a third-person account in which the natives talk (if at all) only to each other and a first-person confessional account in which the observer talks mainly to himself, but a problem in how to present an encounter in which two participants construct a textual world between them.

The move away from what I call the "analogical" tradition and toward a dialogical anthropology will keep us in motion, seeking not a higher vantage point but a better knowledge of roads; it will not only affect our ideas of how fieldwork might be done, but also change our notion about who might be counted among our predecessors—predecessors who will now include people from the other side of the conversation. But these are matters I will leave for Chapter 16.

At the point of finishing this introduction, I cannot resist one further remark about the difference between listening to a speaker and reading what someone has written. Introductions may come first in a book, but they are in fact written last. This one is ready for the post office, which will have its own version of what today is, but for the distant Quiché it is a day for feeding stones, especially the kinds of stones that are sometimes heard to whistle. Closer at hand—just twenty miles northwest of here, in fact—there is singing and feasting going on at Cochiti, and we'll soon be on our way over there. May the occasion of your reading be a pleasant one, as pleasant as the promise of this day.

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