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mayordomo juo pablo rafael rector
 nehuatl onitlaCuilo domingo ramos
 esnos

Pablo Rafael, rector. I did the writing, Domingo Ramos, notary.

9. Care, Ingenuity, and Irresponsibility: The Bierhorst Edition of the *Cantares Mexicanos*

Bierhorst, John, transl. *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985. xiii + 559 pp. including appendix, bibliography, and index.

Bierhorst, John. *A Nahuatl-English Dictionary and Concordance to the Cantares Mexicanos: With an Analytical Transcription and Grammatical Notes*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985. 751 pp. including appendix and references.

Nahuatl, the primary indigenous language of central Mexico, is blessed with a written legacy unique among American Indian languages for its extent and time depth. One outstanding feature of that legacy is a body of songs set down mainly in the sixteenth century, the primary monument being the collection known as the *Cantares Mexicanos*. The *Cantares* set contains well over half of all the known songs (91, some of which are song cycles) and greatly surpasses all other collections as to the variety of its materials and the sufficiency of its orthographic and other conventions. Ethnohistorians, cultural anthropologists, literary scholars, and others have long been interested in the texts, and several generations of scholars in Mexico and elsewhere, including some figures of high distinction, have devoted serious attention to them. Yet not until the appearance of the work now under review was there an adequate transcription of the *Cantares Mexicanos*, or a complete translation of them into any modern language.

John Bierhorst's edition is thus distinctly a major event in Nahuatl studies, and it makes several very important contributions. It also has some outstanding faults. But first the contributions. Among them is a splendid transcription which for the first time makes the original Nahuatl of the entire *Cantares* easily accessible to scholars, arranged by the original units, reproducing the orthography as exactly as can be done in print, and spacing the letters into blocks following modern grammatical principles. The last part, a necessary but extremely difficult task (depending as it does on correct lexical and morphological analysis of texts of maximum complexity), is beautifully done. Though I would rearrange a few passages which I interpret differently, the transcription is in effect definitive. I have repeatedly checked suspicious-looking spots against a photocopy of the original and have yet to

find a single error as to the reproduction of letters and diacritics. Some may exist, but overall the transcription is unusually trustworthy.

The translation too represents a large advance in many ways. Unlike previous major translations of this material, it scrupulously respects all the original units, allowing the reader to see the true structure of the songs. By virtue of being the first to survey the entire corpus systematically and simultaneously, Bierhorst has for the first time recognized many conventions of the *Cantares* vocabulary. His work has also profited from a great improvement in Nahuatl grammatical studies in recent years, involving the work of J. Richard Andrews (1975) and the rediscovery of Horacio Carochi, the great seventeenth-century grammarian. Bierhorst knows both well, and his translations show it. He also clearly has a gift of his own for understanding language, a subtlety and ingenuity that he has often exercised in an original fashion and with good effect. He has combed Spanish histories and Nahuatl codices for every scrap relevant to the *Cantares*. The texts are heavily sprinkled with the names of indigenous historical personages of central Mexico from both prequest and early postquest periods, and Bierhorst has had surprising success in identifying them. Some figures elude identification or remain unrecognized, and the identifications may not all stand the test of time, but the biographical information greatly enhances our understanding of the ethnic and historical dimensions of the texts and increases their general intelligibility.

Adding to the value of the edition is a large accompanying volume containing a dictionary-concordance and an analytical transcription of the Nahuatl. The former has entries for all words occurring in the texts, including proper names, and the latter allows one to see in detail how Bierhorst interprets the morphology and to some extent the syntax of individual passages. The concordance aspect, even though coverage is not exhaustive, will be invaluable for further research into the *Cantares*.

Bierhorst has written a substantial introduction containing much new material of great merit. His discussion of the organization of the songs is first-rate,¹ he has enlightening and reasonable things to say on the cloudy question of the drum beats meant to accompany the songs, and he establishes, to my satisfaction at least, that the texts in their present form originated primarily in the generation starting about 1550. Many deal with events and personnel of the Spanish conquest or the postquest years, and the majority show some Spanish-Christian influence on vocabulary and concepts. In addition to all the reasons that Bierhorst adduces, the timing he proposes coincides perfectly with a general phenomenon, the flourishing of the partly Hispanized indigenous corporations of central Mexico in the

second half of the sixteenth century. After the present edition, we can no longer treat the songs as virtually pure compositions of the prequest period, altered only by the word "God" patched in over the names of indigenous deities. In an oral tradition, however, in which each singer often composes anew on the basis of a version already existing, in effect creating only a minimally new variant, the corpus could still be predominantly prequest in ultimate origin.

Along with the new dating comes a different perspective on authorship. Bierhorst maintains that the (mainly prequest) kings and lords who figure so largely in the songs, often speaking in the first person, are by no means to be taken as their authors. Such a title as "The song of Neçahualcoyotl," says Bierhorst, is best understood as "song about Neçahualcoyotl." Moreover, the songs usually make it clear that the main character is already deceased, much of the purpose of the composition being to exalt him and revive his memory. With those few songs where a composer is named, he proves to be distinct from the person or persons feted. Bierhorst puts much of the blame for the poet-king myth on the seventeenth-century Tetzococan chronicler Ixtlilxochitl, who had little understanding of the songs and was intent on magnifying the fame of one of his ancestors. This has the ring of truth; I too, in totally unrelated research on sociopolitical organization, have found Ixtlilxochitl to be a great distorter of earlier phenomena, far less knowledgeable and trustworthy than his immediate predecessors such as Tezozomoc and Chimalpahin.

I do think that Bierhorst goes too far in trying to expunge any tradition that poet-kings existed in prequest times or later. The *Cantares* are saturated with royalty and high nobility. I would be surprised if kings and lords did not compose songs both before and after the conquest, and the persons exalted in the *Cantares* may well have done so. They may even have composed prototypes of some of the songs we know. They do not, however, appear to have composed the songs we know in the form in which they have come down to us. I agree with Bierhorst that the appearance of a personage as protagonist in a song is not *prima facie* evidence that he composed it, but on the contrary makes it more likely that he did not. Not all the uncertainties are resolved. For example, in the case of specific persons named as composing songs in the postquest period, the main verb used is *tecpana*, "to order, put in order," which could very well apply to a (possibly very slight) rearrangement of an already existing composition. Whether there was a sharp distinction between composer and performer is something we still do not know. In any case, Bierhorst's work should bring

about a considerable change in the traditional general position on the authorship of the songs.

Taken together, the contributions I have been discussing can be considered a legitimate breakthrough, that is, they put the study of Nahuatl song on a new level and will facilitate a new cycle of research, translation, and interpretation. These merits, however, are not destined to be the most frequent topic of public discussion in connection with the Bierhorst edition. It is Bierhorst's "ghost-song" interpretation that is bound to catch the eye of colleagues and lay readers alike. I regret the amount of attention that must be given here to this topic, but one has no choice, for the interpretation not only dominates the commentary and large sections of the introduction but has worked its way deeply into the dictionary-concordance and the translation itself.

Bierhorst calls all the compositions of the *Cantares* "ghost songs." According to him (pp. 3-4),

the Aztec ghost song may be described as a musical performance in which warrior-singers summon the ghosts of ancestors in order to swell their ranks and overwhelm their enemies. . . . In response to the music, ghost warriors from paradise, led by ancestor kings, supposedly came "scattering," "raining," "flying," or "whirling" to earth in the form of flowers or birds. . . .

For Bierhorst a song's principal ancestral figure is the "muse," whom he sees as producing further ghosts (in Bierhorst's terminology "revenants"). The singer of the song may take a "song trip" to the heavens; living persons involved in the songs often die and ascend to heaven as "payment" for the "revenants." Eighty-six pages of commentary to the individual songs are devoted almost exclusively to explaining which persons are ascending or descending through the heavens, or have just done so, or are about to do so. Yet an unsuspecting reader who had not seen the introduction or the commentary might proceed indefinitely through the translation without the slightest notion of such heavenly traffic, resuscitation, and sacrificial death, for hardly any of it is explicit.

Inordinate skepticism, however, is not necessarily called for. In the North American West, the well known ghost dances of the plains Indians offer a close parallel to the *Cantares* as Bierhorst sees them, and Bierhorst as originally a translator of North American Indian song is quick to make the connection. Revitalization movements with similar notions have been occurring for centuries across the world and have appeared within the borders of Mexico as well. Moreover, Nahuatl incantations collected in central Mexico in the early seventeenth century speak openly of calling down gods

and spirits to bring about cures and other desired effects, and sometimes the speaker seems to go into the other world to retrieve the spirit (as seen in the early seventeenth-century treatise of Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón). On the other hand, although millenarian movements, with unmistakable external manifestations, were endemic from the sixteenth century forward in the non-sedentary north of Mexico, and not unheard of in the more sedentary but isolated south, they were virtually nonexistent in the center, the land of the Nahuas. Revitalization phenomena are characteristic of people who feel that their sociopolitical units and whole way of life are in imminent danger of extinction. Such was not the case in central Mexico, where a network of local states survived the conquest intact as entities, with their essential mechanisms still functioning. Yet it must be admitted that Mexico Tenochtitlan, the former imperial center and the focus of the *Cantares*, was unique within central Mexico; it alone had been the unequivocal loser in the great shifts occurring through the conquest, and its reaction could have been different from that of other indigenous states.

One might ask how the often noticed lyricism of the *Cantares* can be reconciled with the notion of martial "ghost songs" in Bierhorst's sense. The apparent incongruity is not *per se* insurmountable. It was already understood that war is one of the main themes of the songs. With the entire corpus of texts now intelligibly transcribed before us, it becomes apparent that the great idiosyncrasy of Nahuatl song as it has survived is that in it the topics of war, the afterlife, and ethnic patriotism are associated not with epic narrative but with conventional elements of worldwide lyrical expression.

The validity, or the extent of the validity, of the ghost-song interpretation cannot be decided by arguments on a general plane. The issue must be dealt with out of the texts themselves; either the language to support such an interpretation can be adduced, or it cannot be. I will have to enter deeply, then, into matters of translation difficulty, translation error, and the reason for such error. I do not do so lightly or gladly. In the past I have committed egregious errors in translating older Nahuatl texts, and I expect to commit more in the future. Every Nahuatl translator of this century and the past has made deplorable errors; it is simply part of the process of trying to bring the understanding of at least one Indian language up to the standard for the major European languages, and we must have the freedom to reach into the unknown without ridicule. Moreover, as I have said above, I consider Bierhorst on balance a very good translator. Nevertheless, the ghost-song interpretation turns on specific translations and inferences, so they must be discussed.

The Cantares, for all their wealth, are a restricted body of material with very little context (imagine that we knew under two hundred European poems, no direct discussion of them, and very little closely related prose). Their syntax is unusual, masked further by a near-total lack of punctuation, and their vocabulary is obscure, much of it not in existing dictionaries. Translation of any of the more complex passages is something of a guess in the best of cases. But these general difficulties are only the beginning. The texts are shot through with vocabularies or nonsense syllables, sometimes in strings, sometimes in isolated syllables; sometimes between words, sometimes within words. They bear no special indicator, and the translator must decide what is a vocable and what is not. Many look a great deal like words or morphemes. *A*, *an*, and *aya* occur constantly; they can always be interpreted as *a(h)*, "not," and *aya*, "not yet." The result is that in large stretches of the text it is impossible to be sure which statements are positive and which are being negated. The recurring vocable *yehuaya* can be construed to contain *ehua*, "he rises or departs" (for an example, see pp. 228-29, verse 4). Elision of the vowel of the ubiquitous particle *in* leads to excess *n*'s everywhere. *Can* can mean "where" or represent *ca in*, a nearly meaningless particle combination, or be a frequent error for *can*, "just" or "but."

Nahuatl in general distinguishes clearly between direct address and third person forms, but in the Cantares such distinctions seem to be widely ignored. Especially, many nouns that one would expect to be in the vocative are not. A translator has little to go on and may easily fall into the multiplication of direct address, creating nonexistent repartee. In written Nahuatl of all kinds it is hard to identify the subjects and objects of verbs, and in the conditions of the Cantares it is often quite impossible (for examples of errors see the four-verse sample reproduced below). Essentially, I contend that given the present state of the art of translating older Nahuatl in general and the Cantares in particular, no interpretation is likely to prove valid which depends on a chain of subtle inferences abstracted from a given translation without considering the many alternate translation possibilities.

Perhaps I can give some sense of how easy it is to get apparently simple and basic things very wrong by giving some examples, shown on the table on the following page:

Nahuatl	Bierhorst's translation	A more correct translation
mahmana tlatzihui (pp. 228-29, verse 4)	the Enduring One, grow weary	get upset, grow weary
macac omeya yollo (236-37, 10)	let no one's heart flow out	let no one doubt
tlā xonahua huehue- titlan xonniquani 248-49, 18)	be pleased then beside the drum—and move beyond	enjoy yourself, move over next to the drum
onean xamanque yn pipiltzintli (256-57, 13)	the princes (lie) broken	the little children were shattered
ma ixquich tlacatl ma quimohamiquili inic topampa tonehualoc (274-75, 9)	Let every man recall Him. For you arose on our behalf.	let everyone remember how he was tormented on our behalf.
atoc tomatian in monamiccan mochi- huatluh chalchuh- elotl (308-09, 38)	maybe our time is up, and the green-corn ears, these jades, are to pass away—that they might be created.	perhaps we will no longer be alive when the emerald-colored new ears of corn (planted) last year mature
intecuitlatlapal ica (314-15, 5)	gold-colored	with its golden wings
otonnexeque (320-21, 1)	We've cut off our hair.	They have Otomi-style haircuts.
onnemacoc (330-31, 20)	they who were swallowed	everyone surrendered
tonocoque ye nican (338-39, 97)	we've been required right here	we've arrived here
tlapia (340-41, 106)	is paying honor	is in charge
onixtlahua in Mexicayotl (346-47, 17)	surrendered, then, is the Mexican nation	the Mexican nation comes into its own, receives its due
itotoliniao tle tlotocpazque (384-85, 42)	how can we return if we're poor?	we are poor (afflicted). What is to become of us (what are we to turn into)?
ymixpampa hualehua (392-93, 5)	they're rising up against them	they're fleeing from them
chicopa (392-93, gloss)	on one side	seven times
oc no chicopa (394-95, gloss)	on the other side	seven more times

Bierhorst's versions, of course, are put to the service of ghost-song exegesis. In the passage here from p. 256, for example, he identifies his broken princes (actually small children) with the Magi, who are then said on no further evidence to have been killed and risen to heaven in a ghost-song exchange.

Nahuatl comes in a Spanish wrapping. The original grammars and dictionaries, and much else, are in that language, and one must approach Nahuatl through it. Ranc is the Nahuatl scholar who did not learn Spanish first. With his North American experience, Bierhorst is different, and at the time when he did the bulk of the work for the present edition (things may already have changed, for he is good at languages) he did not know Spanish very well. This circumstance may actually have contributed to his originality, but it causes some problems in the dictionary and the translations. Bierhorst did not realize that the gloss *antiaño* in Molina means "last year," causing part of the difficulty in the passage from p. 308 given just above. He did not understand the plain Spanish of either Molina or Carochi to the effect that *can tequilil* with a verb means "to do nothing but what that verb designates," hence translates it (pp. 218-19, song 43, v. 7) as "oh but scarcely." He says (dictionary-concordance, p. 168) that *inehua* means "to strike a blow without aiming, hence to strike an ill blow," referring to Molina, who nevertheless plainly says that the meaning is "for a shot to miss what is aimed at."

Not only does Bierhorst immediately interpret whatever results he explicates from this thicket of difficulties in terms of ghost song notions, but he has consciously or unconsciously carried out extensive manipulations of the translation so that it will lend itself more readily to his interpretation. In the Cantares it is clear that mentions of flowers, songs, and birds often have additional reference to people, in Bierhorst's eyes usually "revenants." He extends such usage at will to almost any noun, and in this practice he is greatly abetted by his idea that the instrumental word *-ca*, often suffixed to nouns in the form of *-tica*, can be translated "as," as in *xochimaquitzica netoilo* (pp. 182-83, v. 2), which Bierhorst renders "all are dancing as flower bracelets" rather than the expected "with flower bracelets." No grammarian has ever noticed such use of *-ca* before, nor have I in extensive reading of various kinds of texts, nor do I find any evidence of it in the Cantares themselves. (For another example of the bad results of the "as" rendering of *-ca*, see the extended passage translated below.) Along the same lines, Bierhorst standardly translates *-yol* and *-yollo*, "heart," as "hearts," meaning a multitude of people, normally "revenants." To take one of a thousand instances, on p. 408-09, v. 43, Bierhorst renders *yc no yohuaye noyol* as "O

my hearts!" I would respace this *ycnoyohua ye noyol* and translate it "my heart is troubled or desolate." "Heart" is not an ordinary noun in Nahuatl but is used to categorize a large set of idioms having to do with emotional states and the will. To find it constantly personified, and in the plural to boot, is shocking. Especially the *-yollo* form exhibits what is often called the sign of inalienable possession, meaning that the thing signified is an organic and inseparable part of the possessing entity itself. Even in the unlikely event that the word were to appear referring to persons in the plural, it would not fail to exhibit the plural possessive suffix, which it never does.²

Much the same effect is achieved in Bierhorst's translation by taking abstract nouns to refer to groups of people. In the Cantares, which strike me if not Bierhorst as one of the greatest tributes to noble companionship ever written down, words like *icniuhyotl*, "friendship," *coayotl*, "comradeship," *tepillotl*, "nobility," and *teucyotl*, "lordship," abound. Bierhorst nearly always translates these words as "friends," "comrades," "nobles," and "lords," the persons referred to of course usually being construed to be that many more "revenants." Forms in *-yotl* can in fact be collectives and I have no doubt that in the Cantares they often are, but Bierhorst makes virtually no allowance for the strong praise of the abstract qualities that so impresses me, nor for the possibility that any persons referred to are primarily the present company, the audience of the song. A particularly egregious case of this sort of thing is on pp. 228-29, v. 1, where *xochimiquiztli*, "flower death," is translated as "flower mortals"; nothing justifies such treatment of an active deverbal abstract noun.

Bierhorst also resorts to translations which facilitate the great amount of ascending, descending, appearing, and disappearing called for by his interpretation. The reflexive *quetza*, meaning simply "to stand up," is usually translated "to appear" (e.g., pp. 234-35, v. 1). "Down" is often seen in the translation with no basis in the text whatever, as on pp. 352-53, v. 10, "bringing down" for *quihualaxitla*, a verb form which says nothing about up or down. On pp. 351-52, v. 1, *onmani* is translated "fall" (from heaven), although its meaning is "to spread horizontally, extend, etc." On pp. 362-63, v. 16, one of several such instances, the string *a y tzin* is translated without adequate reason as "down below"; elsewhere in the book it is rendered as a term of endearment.

God and the other world proliferate in the translation through a few simple devices. *Oncan* and *ompa*, both meaning "there," are usually rendered as "beyond." Sometimes this seems to be the true intention of the text, but for Bierhorst such a reading becomes automatic, even in cases when "there"

merely anticipates or reiterates a specified location (as on pp 328-29, v. 3). With the slightest justification and in my opinion often without any at all, Bierhorst takes an unspecified subject or object (of which there are myriad) to be God, writing "He" and "Him" as on pp. 204-05, song 35, v. 1 (where I think that in fact some of the verbs already have specified subjects). Unidentified or unrecognized names of a descriptive nature are often taken to refer to the sun and hence to the deity. On pp. 236-37, v. 8, *quauhle huanitl* is rendered "Ascending Eagle," which the commentary tells us means the sun, but this in fact was the name of a king of Amaquemecan, the place to which these verses refer. A similar interpretation is given on pp. 318-19, v. 8, obscuring the fact that the Nahuatl clearly names Quauhtemoc, king of Tenochtitlan during the Spanish siege.

Bierhorst's central image is that of "revenants" being "whirled" down from heaven. A whole series of Nahuatl verbs frequent in the texts—*malina*, *ilacatzoa*, *ihcuia*—are uniformly translated "whirl" even though their primary meaning is "to twist elongated matter." In the Cantares, flowers are the most usual objects of these verbs, followed by songs, and the senses that leap to the eye are "to entwine garlands of flowers," secondarily "to string together the verses of a song," and thirdly "to entwine and bring together the present happy company." In dictionaries and in usage generally, rarely do these verbs refer to free revolution (*ihcuia*, "to gather up, collect, wind up" not at all to my knowledge); the only one of the set that often does mean to spin like a top is *malacachoa*, quite rare in the Cantares, and even it is a term coming out of weaving. So determined is Bierhorst to have whirling that on pp. 318-19, v. 5, he translates the verb *cuecuayahua*, not found in the dictionaries, as "whirl," though from its etymological affinities and its few known attestations elsewhere I think it probably means "to shine." To give an example or two, on p. 329, verses 15-16, I would say "twisting his garlands," not "whirling" them as Bierhorst does, and on pp. 196-97, song 29, v. 1, for *anquimalinaco anquilacatoay in tecpillotl* I would say "you have come to entwine nobility, to twist it together (i.e., to bring together the fellowship of nobles)," not with Bierhorst "you've come to spin, to whirl, these nobles," the latter taken to be "warrior revenants."

Another need in the ghost song interpretation is for great amounts of creating, specifically of "revenants." Three devices of Bierhorst's go far toward supplying the need. First, innocently or not he consistently misconstrues the reflexive form of the verb *chihua*, "to make, do, engender, create." He is right that reflexives often have passive meaning even with personal subjects, but this is not equally true of all verbs. The reflexive of *chihua* is so much used in Nahuatl in the meanings "happen, become,

grow," and others that it virtually never serves as a substitute for the passive in the sense of "make, create" (except perhaps in the special meaning "appoint, constitute"). Bierhorst speaks of creation nearly every time *mo-chihua* appears, never in my opinion correctly. Thus where on pp. 352-53, v. 5, he translates *tiquetzalototl timochiuhtuitz, spilito xanto* as "you come created, O Quetzal, O Espíritu Santo," I would say "Holy Spirit, you come transformed into a quetzal bird." The second device is the word *tlacoli* or *tlayocalli*, almost always possessed, which appears frequently in the Cantares. Sometimes it indubitably means "sadness, pity, mercy" and is translated accordingly by Bierhorst, but far more often he renders it as "creation," deriving it from the verb *yocoya*, "to create, invent, fabricate." This derivation is entirely of his own devising; the patientive deverbal nouns from *yocoya* to be found both in the dictionaries and in actual texts are *tlayocoyalli* and *tlayocoxtli*. In my opinion, *tlacocalli* means "sadness" or "mercy" throughout the Cantares. The third device is that at will Bierhorst construes the verb *ihtoa*, "to speak (and related meanings)" as signifying "to create" ("revenants"), indicating the meaning by the translation "to utter." The objects of the verb are often invented out of the vaguenesses of the Nahuatl third person. On pp. 230-31, v. 9, Bierhorst translates *nolilayocola noconayaihoa* as "He is my creation. I utter him." I would translate the passage as "I speak my sorrow."

A revitalization movement normally directs its hostility at an invading power, which it aims to destroy root and branch. Here the ghost-song explanation of the Cantares encounters a difficulty. The main enmity apparently shown in the texts is toward the traditional rivals of the Mexica, namely the other indigenous states of the region. Direct mention of Spanish lay personnel is not prominent, and no tirades against them occur; the Christian God, the Holy Trinity, and the Virgin Mary are well represented, along with some ecclesiastics, but the attitude shown toward them is at least superficially one of reverence. Bierhorst does some of his greatest stretching in the attempt to get the Cantares to produce statements radically hostile to Spaniards and Christian religion. Here is verse 33 on pp. 292-93, with Bierhorst's translation of it.

Yn çan no iuh ye quichuuh Nozcacauhizin oo apa hualhuetz ye tenochtitlani ymatiya ye yehua Malques
My father's done it just for fun, and—with His knowledge—into the water at Tenochtitlan he's toppled, he the Marquis!

The Marquis is Hernando Cortés, and Bierhorst claims in the accompanying commentary that Cortés was produced as a "revenant" in order to be destroyed, then carried to heaven as a sacrificial victim. I think verse 33

Samples of Transcription, Translation, and Commentary from the Bierhorst edition

The Nahuatl passage:³

1. Ye quilhua yn ichuauhtzin in Acapenatzin ahua Pille netle Mano cana, mano cana, achitzin xitechompehui toconizque, ye ma yhuio ye ma yhuio notecuuyo oquichpillitzin
2. Ohuallaque in Pipilin ye huexotzinco y Ton Xihuan y nelpiloni ye tlen conizque in Pipilitin mano cana Etā
3. Ye ca onihualah ca onicuitēyah ye ma xonmodlapalo ye cihuatzimtle tla xiqualcuiya tla xictemacaya yn man copatica in man tacatica ya ma ya onihualo in teteuctin ayyo Etā
4. In notzimitzcanhuicoltzin ye ço huel quatzin tlapalhuacalxochitl y ma ycaya onilacatzihuhuitz Notecotzin tla xiqualcui tla xictemamaca-ya Etā

Bierhorst's translation:

1. His woman says, "Down here, Reed Picker! Come, prince! Hail! Here! Here! Conquer a little something that we can drink! Let it be done, let it be done! My lord! O man-child! Down here!"
2. The princes have come. Huexotzinco's Don Juan Nelpiloni is the one these princes are to drink. "Here! Here! Conquer a little something that we can drink! Let it be done, let it be done! My lord! O man-child! Down here!"⁴
3. Oh yes, I've come; and I've set off to get him. Hail, woman! "Please do come get him. Please offer him up. Let him be dispatched as a white man's cup, as a white man's dagger. O lords!"
4. "Would that crimson basket flowers might come whirling on account of this delicious trogon cup of mine. Come get this lord, this man of mine. Please offer him up! Let him be dispatched as a white man's cup, as a white man's dagger. O lords!"

My own translation, which I am confident those who know Nahuatl will find more nearly correct:

1. Acapenatzin says to his wife, "Lady, listen, please somewhere, please somewhere scare us up a little something to drink." "Let it be so, let it be so, my lord, manly noble."
2. "The nobles have come, among them don Juan Nelpiloni of Huexotzinco. What are the nobles to drink? Please somewhere, (please somewhere scare us up a little something to drink." "Let it be so, let it be so, my lord, manly noble.")
3. "I have come back; I went to get it (the drink)." "Step forward, dear woman, do bring it here and give it to people, whether in a (European) goblet or in a (European) cup. Let all the lords drink."
4. "My trogon jar is very pretty; let my tecomate (jar, pot) come being wrapped around with red basket flowers." "Do bring it here and distribute it to people, (whether in a goblet or in a cup. Let all the lords drink.)"

Bierhorst's commentary (pp. 510-11):

1. The singer informs us that a Huexotzincan woman is attempting to summon a Huexotzincan ghost, whom she addresses as Reed Picker (i.e., one who slaughters "reeds," or warriors). She wants him to come make conquests so that the Huexotzincans will have a little blood to drink.
2. The ghosts arrive, but they are Mexicans, not Huexotzincans; and their intended victim is Don Juan Nelpiloni (an Indian lord of Huexotzinco).
3. The leader of the Mexicans greets the woman and announces his intention to take Huexotzincan captives. The woman welcomes the Mexicans enthusiastically (as though she has no choice or as though she has mixed feelings about Huexotzinco's having collaborated with Cortés). She tells the Mexicans to go ahead and kill the Huexotzincan men, here called "daggers" (warriors) and "cups" (because their blood is to be drunk)—but the white man's words *copa* and *daga* are used.
4. The woman says she is glad to have her man killed, because in exchange she will receive a shower of Huexotzincan "basket flowers" (revenants).

plainly means something very different. Keeping in mind that in verse 32 someone is said to have drowned, I would translate the Nahuatl just above as follows:

My father did the same; he fell into the water (canal) at Tenochtitlan in the time of the Marqués.

On pp. 308-09, verses 45-46, and pp. 312-13, v. 61, Bierhorst attempts to establish that certain passages through ambiguity and innuendo imply that Cortés is being hanged. But the reflexive verb form *pilola* being used merely designates certain kinds of motion and suspension, as opposed to the passive, which is used for hanging as a punishment, a distinction that Bierhorst ignores. Secondly, the fact that the protagonist of the song, the Chalcan ruler don Hernando de Guzmán, is here called just "don Hernando" sets up no ambiguous wording as Bierhorst claims, for it would not have occurred to anyone in his right mind in the New Spain of the second half of the sixteenth century that "don Hernando" could be an allusion to the Marqués del Valle, universally referred to either by his title (as in the Cantares themselves) or by his full name including surname.⁵

On pp. 382-83, v. 31, *Jesu Christo in maoc toconcuicatin* is translated "Jesus Christ...Don't sing for Him!" In fact, the form *toconcuicati(n)* is ungrammatical and as such meaningless. If one presumes that a *ti* was left out toward the end, the construction could in itself be either in the purposive-motion imperative, "let's go sing for Him," the more natural reading, or in the vetitive, as Bierhorst translates it. Bierhorst gives the reader no indication that there is any doubt whatever about the meaning. I think that both the context and certain grammatical considerations point to the alternative Bierhorst did not choose, the purposive-motion construction; the particle *oc* is associated with positive commands, and the verbal prefix *on-* frequently occurs together with the purposive. It is equally likely that *ca*, not *ti*, was omitted, which would make the form imperative and yield a translation "let's sing for Him." (I exclude the possibility of the second-person singular vetitive not only because of *oc* and the final *n* but because in the whole section the singer addresses a plural audience.)

Without all the kinds of legerdemain I have been describing, the translation would give a considerably different overall impression, and it would be much less amenable to the ghost-song interpretation. I hope that my piecemeal approach has managed to convey the message that because of unavoidable uncertainties, possibly avoidable errors, and systematic distortions, an interpretation that can reasonably be made of Bierhorst's translation is not necessarily (or even probably) a valid interpretation of the

original text. Nothing can make the point as well, however, as a full sample of the apparatus. On two pages just above (152-53) I have therefore presented the following: the Nahuatl of a section of song 89 (pp. 410-11 of the edition), consisting of four verses; Bierhorst's translation; my own translation; and Bierhorst's commentary. I earnestly invite the reader to peruse these materials carefully.

It will be seen that Bierhorst's commentary is utter nonsense. In translating the four verses, he has misconstrued a good portion of the words of the original, gets the speaker wrong most of the time, and has not arrived at a version that makes sense; yet in a spirit of total irresponsibility, on this flimsy foundation he has built an imposing ghost-song fantasy, not a single word of which has any validity whatsoever. If all the translations in the edition were demonstrably as bad as this sample, the whole work would be a travesty. I repeat that I consider the work in general to be of inestimable value, but travesty is exactly the right word for the entire commentary section. Even if certain things in it should eventually turn out to be in some sense not too far off the mark, at the present juncture we have no reason to take any of it seriously except for the small portion dealing with factual background. The same applies to the sections of ghost-song exegesis in the introduction.

In my opinion, the best way to understand the songs is to operate on the presumption that the historical figures mentioned in them are mainly imagined to be speaking in their own time, not in the song-present (even if the song does in some sense conjure them up), and that the events referred to are the real original ones. Not only would this interpretation be consonant with the statements of several observers at the time (on whom Bierhorst heaps scorn) that the primary purpose of the songs was to remember past glories, but it makes the songs both more credible and more moving in translation. On pp. 318-19, v. 2, we find the following:

Hualtzatzia in tachcauh in quahtencoztli çan conilhua in capitani ya o tonan ye malintzin y xacallicoz acachinanco otacico

Chief Yellow-Beak Eagle comes shouting. And Captain, or Mother Marina, says, "Yellow Beak, my lookout! You've arrived in Acachinanco!"

Bierhorst has his chief leaping down from heaven as a "revenant." I think, on the contrary, that this personage, who by Bierhorst's data was alive at the time, is arriving from his homeland to take part in the siege of Tenochtitlan. I would translate as follows:⁶

The leader Quahtencoztli comes shouting, but the captain, or doña Marina, says to him, "temporary quarters (*xahcalli*, huts) are to be

set up at Acachinanco (where the siege of Tenochtitlan is thought to have begun). You have arrived."

On pp. 249-41, v. 36, in the original and in the translation some Chalcanes are said to have become Mexicans, Acolhuans, and Tepanecs. Bierhorst claims this means that Chalcan "revenants" were transformed into enemy "revenants." I think the reference is to the actual dispersal and loss of territorial units that took place in the Chalcan wars, the general topic of this song.

The ghost-song interpretation in Bierhorst's hands suffers from a serious logical and esthetic flaw. The Cantares are filled with the theme of impermanence, which Bierhorst refers virtually entirely to the brevity of the time the ghost "revenants" are supposed to have here on earth. Yet again and again throughout the songs, in a multitude of variants, one finds lamentations that we have only one time on earth, as on pp. 394-95, v. 2, *ayoppan italticpac*, which Bierhorst correctly translates "there's no second time on earth." But Bierhorst claims precisely that the figures have come to earth for a second time, and that the bewailing of transience has reference to that second time. Not only is this notion illogical, it trivializes a rich vein of lyricism in the songs. Consider passages like those on pp. 184-85, 350-51, or 372-73, which movingly speak of the impermanence of flowers, kingdoms, and human life, weigh the uncertainties of our future, and call for a moment of fellowship, dancing and song while we may. Such statements far transcend the ghost-song baggage.

Nevertheless, I do not categorically deny any possible validity of the ghost-song explanation with certain songs. For one thing, at present our understanding of the Cantares is too preliminary to deny anything categorically. After someone has done a second-generation complete translation, carefully assessing and annotating all discoverable translation alternatives instead of twisting everything in one direction, I will be fully prepared to reconsider the matter. For another thing, any composition mentioning some flowers and a person from the past can theoretically be interpreted as a ghost song in Bierhorst's sense if one is sufficiently uninhibited. For yet another, there are a very few passages in the Cantares (see pp. 326-27, verses 18-22, and 352-53, verses 7 and 8) where Bierhorst's exegesis actually corresponds closely to explicit, intelligible statements in the texts themselves. For still another, I think the Cantares are too varied to be subsumed under a single genre in any aspect except possibly structure, and that different interpretations probably apply in different cases.

Several aspects of the ghost-song apparatus can be appreciated and utilized by accepting them in a somewhat different sense. Having ghosts

raining down bears a close affinity to reviving the memory of ancestors through song. I can readily see the importance of the figure Bierhorst calls the "muse." In his scheme, the "muse" produces "revenants"; I would say that a protagonist serves as the central figure around whom a world of memories comes flooding back. I agree that a great many Cantares passages speaking of birds and flowers have direct reference to noble warriors of the past, even if not "ghosts." I do not accept Bierhorst's doctrine of "payment," in which living persons are sacrificed in return for "revenants," but the term *-paitiuh*, "price, value of something," does exist in the texts (e.g., pp. 314-15, v. 13) in a meaning as yet unclear to me, and its further elucidation is greatly to be desired.

The dictionary-concordance accompanying the translation deserves a longer discussion than I can give it. Anyone reading or translating Nahuatl song will find the work most useful; in its capacity as a concordance it will be indispensable. Yet it is treacherous, primarily because it incorporates Bierhorst's entire set of speculations on ghost-song vocabulary. Let the reader be aware that any gloss for which a specific reference is not given is, by his own statement, Bierhorst's invention out of experience with the Cantares. By no means all such glosses are distorted; I accept many that do not have to do with ghost-song terminology. In the long run, advance in the study of Nahuatl song calls not only for a concordance of words but for a complete concordance of the stock phrases of which the songs are made; Bierhorst's compilation is at least an important step in that direction.

As to the brief grammatical notes, which could as well be termed simply "translator's notes," they concern primarily orthographic variants and questions of usage. Their organization is chaotic, and Bierhorst seems unable to distinguish orthographic from phonological variation or to understand the principles of the latter at all, but as with most of his productions, the expert would do well to read this section carefully. Among forgettable material manifesting a considerable amount of error and caprice, one will find some acute remarks and original insights. For example, I agree entirely with Bierhorst that a main function of the purposive-motion forms is to indicate the carrying of an act to its completion or destination (dictionary concordance, p. 710).

The Bierhorst edition of the Cantares leaves me grateful and impressed, but also in many respects unconvinced and exasperated. Although the book is a great boon to Nahuatl scholars, I fear that in the hands of the uninformed, who will constitute the majority of its readership, it may do more harm than good, mislead more than instruct.

¹⁹See note 13.

²⁰AGN, Tierras 1501, exp. 3, Santa María de la Asunción in the Calimaya district, 1772.

²¹See NMY, p. 26.

²²See note 13.

²³The latter phrase seems to need *lo que*; a standard Spanish rendering might be something like *lo que más se ofrece, eso también lo da*.

²⁴See note 13.

²⁵AGN, Tierras 2541, exp. 9, f. 8, San Lucas Tepemaxalco.

²⁶Preserved in AGN, Tierras 2541, exp. 11, f. 5.

²⁷At the root of the awkward and incomplete phrase *este pedaso que le yso el difunto vn bien y buena obra* is the Nahuatl verb *itlaocolia* "to give someone something as a favor." *Vn pedasito solar*, without *de*, follows a Nahuatl phrase type; another *de* is somewhat similarly missing between *costara* and *Resibo*. *Yo escriui* lacks a *lo* which is always present in standard Spanish texts; the reason is that in the corresponding Nahuatl one uses an indefinite object prefix *-ila-* (*onitlacuilo*, from *icuiloa*, "to write"), which in effect becomes part of the stem so that the entire construct has the feeling of an intransitive verb, accurately conveyed into Spanish as *yo escribí*.

The spelling *poxeccion* probably reflects the status of the word as an older loan into Nahuatl, from the time when Spanish *s* was a retroflex [ʃ] usually becoming [ʃ] (written *x*) in Nahuatl loans; (see Karttunen and Lockhart 1976, p. 5). The spelling *tepihque* is neither the standard Spanish *tepiisque* nor the standard Nahuatl *tepixqui*. Perhaps the *h* is for *ch*, as often occurs in eighteenth-century Nahuatl texts; in Text 1, *ch* occurs frequently where *x* is expected. *Onde* instead of *donde* is standard provincial Mexican Spanish of the time, and while *agia* instead of *haya* is not quite, one does see (*h*)*aiga*, (*h*)*ia*, and other variants of a form which seems to have been in flux in the everyday speech of ordinary people.

²⁸See note 16.

9. Cantares Mexicanos

¹Though the terminology is changed, Bierhorst's analysis in every respect follows that first put forth in Karttunen and Lockhart 1980. Bierhorst does us a serious disservice (p. 121) by including that article in a list of items which according to him do not attempt to challenge the basic assumptions of Angel María Garibay. Much of our view of Nahuatl song has also been incorporated into León-Portilla 1983, a major statement to which Bierhorst does not refer, probably it appeared after the Bierhorst edition was already in production.

Despite describing the structure of the songs adequately, I do not think Bierhorst gives structure enough importance. Even granting the tenets of his ghost-song interpretation (and as will be seen below, I do not), his commentary on the individual songs is far too linear to be consonant with their true nature. Nor does he at all take into consideration the fact that a pair of verses is most often a topical as well as a formal unit.

²The Cantares do have an unusual form *-yolyol*, which Bierhorst eagerly takes to be a plural. I do not know what it is; it is neither a normal distributive nor a normal plural. Formally it looks like the noun bound to itself, "one's heart-heart," conceivably "one's heart of hearts." In the texts it seems to function the same as *-yol*, as the subject of verbs indicating emotional state, as on pp. 248-49, v. 2.

³I have done the following respacing: changed *ichihuah tzin* in verse 1 to *ichihuahzin*; *ma nocana* to *mano cana* (three times, once in verse 2); and *oquichpilli tzin* to *oquichpillizin*. In verse 1, I take it that *ahua Pille* in an earlier version was *chhuapille*; the confusion of *a* and *ci* is a common error in sixteenth-century texts. However that may be, the vocative ending on *Pille* tells us unambiguously that a man is speaking at that point. On the other hand, the lack of the *-e* vocative at the end of the verse tells us that a woman is speaking. In verse 3, Bierhorst misreads *taca* as Spanish *daga*, "dagger," rather than as *taca*, "cup," forgetting his own admonition that the *cedilla* is often omitted. He apparently takes *onihualo* as the passive of *ihua*, "to send," rather than as an impersonal of *oni*, "to drink," which would be defensible except for the context; to my knowledge, however, the verb lacks the connotation "to dispatch, kill" that he gives it. In verse 4, Bierhorst misreads *notecotzin* as related to *teuctli*, "lord," when in fact it is the possessed form of *tecomatl*, "tecomate," with an *n* missing. In the same verse, Bierhorst and I agree that *quatzin* is the original's mistake for *quatzin*.

⁴Bierhorst uses italics to indicate (1) material understood to be repeated but not actually written out in the original, and (2) editorial supplements in the translation. Let me add that the crude North American term and concept "white man" is entirely out of place in a sixteenth-century Mexican context.

⁵High-ranking personages in the Spanish world were in general often referred to, with no disrespect, simply by "don" and their Christian name, as one might call don Antonio de Mendoza, first viceroy of New Spain, "don Antonio." But the great conquerors who went through life without the "don" and received it only along with high titles after the conquest were never so addressed; Pizarro and Cortés were both known afterwards mainly as "Marqués," and never as "don Francisco" or "don Hernando," although they might be referred to on occasion with "don" plus the whole name including Christian name and surname.

⁶I have some uncertainties concerning the translation of *xacatecoz*, but I am sure Bierhorst's reading is not right. As Bierhorst is aware, the captain is Cortés and doña Marina (whose title, however, Bierhorst did not recognize) is his interpreter.

10. Gibson and Ethnohistory

¹Gibson 1952 and 1964. I regret not being equipped at present to list and comment on Gibson's other relevant writings, for they would reward the attention.

²For bibliography see Cook and Borah 1971-79.

³The book to be singled out is, of course, Hanke 1949.