

The Power of the Paradigm: Continuity in Yucatec Maya Narrative

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Continuity in Yucatec Maya Narrative

I would like to begin my discussion of continuity in Yucatec Maya narrative by presenting my translation of a story written in Yucatec by José Joaquín Balam Che'. Joaquín is a scholar of Yucatec Maya who teaches at the Casa de la Cultura in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. In addition to having composed a grammar textbook for use in his classes, Joaquín writes various kinds of stories, from animal tales to ethnographic descriptions of traditional ceremonies. However, he emphasizes the importance of historical accounts, of which the following story is an example. He hopes to compile a history of the Caste War while the old people who remember it are still alive to tell their stories. My analysis of Joaquín's narrative will place it in the contexts of Maya history and Maya literature, tracing paradigms that structured earlier texts and that continue to shape contemporary narrative.

The Maya language has a long written history, with literature dating back over two millennia, but today authors in Yucatec Maya are few. In their essay titled "Yucatecan Mayan Literature" written in 1985, Munro Edmonson and Victoria Bricker state, "there is neither a demand nor a vehicle for Mayan literary expression today" (1985:58). While this is not entirely true of the present, nevertheless, contemporary written texts are scarce. Most studies of modern Yucatec literature analyze transcriptions of recorded narratives, part of the vital oral tradition of the Maya region, a tradition which sustains and informs Maya writing. However, Joaquín's story offers us a unique opportunity to experience Maya narrative as it is written today by a native speaker. Valuable as literature in its own right, Joaquín's writing also reveals patterns of conceptualization and language use which may be traced back through generations of Maya narrative.

Joaquín titles the following account *U Tsikbalil le Noj K'ak'o*, which I translate as "The Story of the Smallpox Epidemic." The term *tsikbal* means "conversation" in Yucatec, because for the Maya storytelling typically involves co-narration. As Allan Burns discovered when he first tried to record stories in Yucatan, storytelling requires both a "person who knows the stories" and a "person who knows how to answer the speech" (Burns 1983: 22-23). The tradition of co-narration extends to written literature as well. Burns states, "Mayan literature, both oral and written takes care to include more than one speaker. . . Indeed one of the problems scholars have had in understanding Mayan oral literature is the tremendous difference between European literary traditions and Mayan conversational traditions. The core concept of European thought and literature is the singular word, the legitimate and sole author" (Burns 1991: 36).

When Joaquín first showed me "The Story of the Smallpox Epidemic," he described it as a story his grandmother had told him. Joaquín's grandmother was the only survivor of a smallpox epidemic which erased the town of Chun-on in the wake of the Caste War. You will hear Joaquín's grandmother's voice in the telling. You will encounter a style of narration that allows not only for more than one voice, but for more than one emphasis or point of view.

My goal in translation is to present a reading as close as possible to the original Maya, easily followed and easily critiqued by anyone who knows the language. The challenge is to create a readable text in English without obscuring the meaning or form of

the Maya. To this end, I have chosen to rearrange Joaquín's text into lines based on the connections between ideas as they are reflected in Yucatec grammar. I have also numbered the sections within Joaquín's text to facilitate my discussion of it.

The Story of the Smallpox Epidemic

(1)

It happened back then in the year 15,
back before I had been born here on earth;
my grandparents lived in that other time:
their names were Apolinaria Cach and Antonio Che'.

They lived with great sadness and also in suffering,
because of those sicknesses back then,
caused by that battle with the foreigners
who came to seize that town.

(2)

Because those foreigners, it's theirs, the evil of smallpox,
because only they brought it, this death to the town,
because it's their sickness that infected us:
known as smallpox,
bitterly suffered in those years.

(3)

Before the arrival of the foreigners to the land of the Maya,
there was for all their generations,
a good life and happiness;
when they arrived, other men with different thinking,
they distorted our thinking;
as for why it happened,
they exploited us, along with our family members.
Thus they gave discord to our thought;
they harmed our body.

(4)

Because as for us, so was our thinking
on the arrival of other, strange men here in our town:
we thought them not like us;
because of thinking we see men
different from our lineages
therefore, we saw ourselves in those first days,
given fear and loss of heart.
Because of that, those men will lord over us.

(5)

The ancient name of this town was Chun-on,
where, at dawn one day,
it was made known among its leaders,
that it is arriving, this evil sickness,
that will bring an end to the life of this town
because it will make an end to all its leaders.

(6a)

Only by the compassion of Lord God
was continuing the life of one young girl;
she was named Apolinaria Cach;
she was ten years old.
She told those things that happened back then
because she didn't suffer the sickness;
only one pock broke out on the sole of her foot.
Since she didn't succumb to it,
she wanted to lend her life, to fulfill her desire
to help her fellow people,
who suffer bitterly with the pain of that sickness.

As for her in her childhood,
no one was her guardian,
neither her parents nor her older brothers,
because all have died on account of that smallpox.
Therefore, she really experienced that entire sickness
in her own flesh, that painful life,
that entire town completely stilled.

Because by night and also by day
are heard the shouts and delirium
of those poor sick people.
On account of the continuous pain that has seized their bodies,
because thus they are protected, those sick people,
they are made to lie down on very soft banana leaves,
because thus they are protected, those sick people,
so not to lacerate the wounds on their bodies
because they are rubbed by sticking to the hammock like this;
it stops really wounding their bodies
and really scraping their skins
so that it becomes possible to suffer its pain
because always they must die from this sickness.

(6b)

As for what she also tells:
from those small houses where she passes,

she hears their shouts, those sick people,
they are asking for water.
Only when she takes it to them,
she brings it close to the mouths of those sick people,
they can't drink it because they have become too sick.
All that water,
it all flows down their bodies.

No days passed without deaths
there in all those houses,
so she saw herself, with so many things,
unable to do anything just by herself,
on behalf of those dead
because of all the leaders of that town.

So every day all the leaders of that town,
are just completely devoured by dogs
inside their town and even inside their houses
in that other time
only in sorrow and in compassion
in the middle of the forest of the Maya.

Under their hammocks
is seen dripping their water
because their bodies have really rotted
on account of that sickness.
Since there is no where for them to recover
they have become reddened flesh, those bodies of theirs.
In the middle of the town,
there they battle each other, those dogs,
over the intestines of those men.

(7)

It turned, then, their town
thus to a grave,
today.
We have known this town thus:
Chun-on Quintana Roo

Historical Context

Joaquín's story is his grandmother's story. It is also the story of a people, the Cruzob Maya, who continued their resistance to domination by outsiders through the early decades of this century. For the Cruzob Maya, the Caste War did not end with the occupation of their capital by Mexican forces in 1901. Threatened with invasion and the

capture of the miraculous Cross which hallowed their struggle, Maya leaders chose to abandon the town of Chan Santa Cruz (now known as Felipe Carrillo Puerto), carrying their sacred symbol with them. They regrouped in towns like Chun-on, hidden "in the middle of the forest of the Maya," where they maintained their political and religious institutions during the years that their capital, Chan Santa Cruz, was held by General Ignacio Bravo's army. When the Mexican soldiers withdrew, the Maya re-entered Chan Santa Cruz and systematically destroyed the "improvements" wrought by outsiders, tearing out rail lines and telegraph wires, dynamiting the new reservoir and burning the barracks (Reed 1964: 250). At this critical juncture in Cruzob history, "back then in the year 15," the smallpox epidemic struck. According to some accounts, God sent the epidemic to punish the Maya for failing to protect the sacred city.

Joaquín's story does not stress the theme of divine retribution, focusing rather on the role of foreigners as bearers of sickness. In Maya this attribution of blame is even stronger than in English translation; Joaquín employs a stative construction in which the foreigners are literally equated with the evil of smallpox. Joaquín suggests the secondary theme of sickness as punishment by using the word *yum* to refer to the victims of smallpox. *Yum* may mean father, lord or leader. Here it cites the decision-makers for the community, the leaders who decided to withdraw from Chan Santa Cruz. In Joaquín's story, the most explicit passage linking the failure of leadership to the destruction of the town of Chun-on states, "The ancient name of this town was Chun-on,/ where, at dawn one day,/ it was made known among its leaders,/ that it is arriving, this evil sickness,/ that will bring an end to the life of this town/ because it will make an end to all its leaders." Joaquín stresses one theme but subtly introduces a second theme that could be developed by a co-narrator if the story were performed as *tsikbal*, conversation. His narrative allows for more than one voice and more than one point of view.

Another recounting of the epidemic of 1915 appears in Alfonso Villa Rojas' ethnography of the Cruzob Maya titled *Los Elegidos de Dios*. In his chapter on the pacification of Cruzob territory after the Caste War, Villa Rojas includes the following text which he presents as the written statement of Mauricio Baas, a neighbor from Chuncunche' who was fifteen years old at the time of the epidemic. What follows is my translation from the Spanish:

I was already clearing in the milpa when the smallpox [began]. Then we were living in Yaaxkax. I remember the sickness began in Chuncunche'. Then the sickness was so strong that quickly everyone began to die. Those from Yaaxkax had to go out every day to bury those from Chuncunche'.

Nevertheless, this didn't last long since soon those from Yaaxkax began to die also. When the sickness entered a house, almost always it killed everyone. First the old people died; finally the children. In many cases the only ones remaining alive were children a few months old. When the disease spread, many died of thirst from having no one to give them water. Just as little was there any one to bury them; the dogs entered the houses to devour them. There were sick people who, unable to endure the sight of these scenes in their own family, went insane and fled to the forest from which they never returned.

Some attained health bathing themselves with the juice of *x-mehen-nal* (new corn). The bath is prepared by diluting in water the *masa* of raw *x-mehen-*

nal. It was also good to take a drink of squash seed ground and dissolved in water. When they had someone to attend them, the sick were laid down on *cogollo de platano* (shoots of banana); only thus could they avoid having the clothing stick in the sores. Just in Yaaxkax died some 50. Many say that this sickness was sent by God, in punishment for not having pursued the war against the Mexicans who took control of Chan Santa Cruz. Since this was the fault of the old men, so it was that the sickness took them first. [1978:123]

Mauricio Baas includes many of the same details as Joaquín: the need for water, the dogs entering the houses to devour the corpses, and the use of soft banana leaves to cushion the lacerated skin of the victims. However, unlike Joaquín, he explicitly states the belief that God used the epidemic to punish Maya leaders for their failures. There exists a third piece of literature that addresses the same theme. According to Nikolai Grube, among the sacred papers preserved in the shrine city of Tixcacal Guardia, is a letter written by the scribe of the Cross which refers to *Santo Noj K'ak'*, the holy smallpox, as God's way of chastising the Cruzob for failure in battle (recorded lecture 1996).

Joaquín's story, *U Tsikbalil le Noj K'ak'o*, relates family history and Caste War history. However, it also represents "the plague story," a genre of Maya narrative dating back at least to the sixteenth century. Colonial Maya texts like the *Chilam Balam* books and *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* include extant records of foreign incursion and pestilence. However, Sanchez de Aguilar attests to earlier accounts of epidemics in hieroglyphic books still in existence seventy years after the conquest, saying, "in these they painted in colors the count of their years, the wars, epidemics, hurricanes, inundations, famines and other events"(quoted in Roys 1933: 5). Both the *Chilam Balam* texts I quote here and *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* are separated by centuries from Joaquín's account. *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, written in the highlands of Guatemala, is separated geographically and by language difference as well. As Allan Burns notes, "Maya studies have developed under the historic myth that highland and lowland people share very little other than a remote heritage and a protolanguage" (1994: 6). However, passages from these texts show marked similarities to Joaquín's story, suggesting a commonality of world view and of narrative convention that extends widely across both time and space in the Maya world.

Two passages in Joaquín's plague story particularly echo lines in the *Chilam Balam*. One passage describes the golden age of health and happiness that existed for the Maya before the arrival of foreigners. The other recounts the total breakdown of order caused by widespread disease, represented by animals devouring corpses within the community's boundaries. Joaquín writes, "Before the arrival of the foreigners to the land of the Maya,/ there was for all their generations,/ a good life and happiness." While he speaks here of the soldiers of General Bravo, he does so in a manner that allows reference to the Spanish conquest and to the repeating pattern of invasions and subsequent pestilence suffered by the Maya people. The *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* includes a fuller exposition of the same theme. Here I quote Ralph Roys' translation:

They did not wish to join with the foreigners; they did not desire Christianity. They did not wish to pay tribute, did those whose emblems were the bird, the precious stone and the jaguar, those with the three magic emblems. Four four-

hundreds of years and fifteen score years was the end of their lives; then came the end of their lives, because they knew the measure of their days. Complete was the month; complete, the year; complete, the day; complete, the night; complete the breath of life as it passed also; complete, the blood, when they arrived at their mats, their thrones. In due measure did they recite the good prayers; in due measure they sought the lucky days, until they saw the good stars enter into their reign; then they kept watch while their reign of the good stars began. Then everything was good.

Then they adhered to the dictates of their reason. There was no sin; in the holy faith their lives were passed. There was then no sickness; they had then no aching bones; they had then no fever; they had then no smallpox; they had then no burning chest; they had then no abdominal pains; they had then no consumption; they had then no headache. At that time the course of humanity was orderly.

The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here. They brought shameful things when they came.

[1933:83]

A few lines later the text continues, "No lucky days were then displayed to us. This was the origin of the two-day throne, of the two-day reign; this was the cause of our sickness also." Joaquín presents an abbreviated account of "a good life and happiness" and focuses on a single sickness, smallpox. Both accounts posit a Maya epoch without discord or disease. Both blame foreigners for its end and link inappropriate leadership with subsequent suffering to the community. (The word that Roys translates here as sickness is in fact *cimil*, death). Both seem to speak simultaneously of more than one invasion. According to Roys, the *Chumayel* passage refers to both the bearers of Christianity and to the Itza. The narrator sums up the situation: "Three times it was, they say, that the foreigners arrived" (Roys 1933: 84). In this characteristically Maya telling of history, at least as important as recording specific events is the discernment of what Inga Clendinnen has termed, "the pattern of recurrence behind occurrence" (Clendinnen 1987: 135).

Many entries in the *Chilam Balam* books condense narratives, merely listing the main events of the twenty year periods called *katuns*. Each katun ends on a numbered day bearing the name Ahau, which labels the katun as a whole. According to traditional Maya belief, the repetition of a given katun after 260 *tuns*, ritual years (or approximately 256 solar years) brings a repetition of similar events. The Maya have written their history to highlight these cycles, which provide information about the future as well as the past.

In *The Maya Chronicles*, Daniel Brinton quotes an account of the arrival of the Spaniards as it is recorded in katun history: "The eleventh ahau: the mighty men came from the east, they brought the sickness; they arrived for the first time in this country we Maya men say in the year 1513" (1969 [1882]:162). Another excerpt from the *Chilam Balam of Tizimin* recounts an epidemic. In Maya, the text reads: "*Can ahau; uchci maya cimlal ocnakuchil ich paa*" (1969 [1882]:142). Brinton translates this, "The fourth ahau; the pestilence, the general death, took place in the fortress" (1969 [1882]:148). In a note, Brinton elaborates on the meaning of *ocnakuchil*, which he has translated as "the general death": "The derivation of this word is stated to be from *ocol*, to enter, *na*, the houses,

kuch, the crow or buzzard, the number of the dead being so great that the carrion birds entered the dwellings to prey upon the bodies" (1969 [1882]:151).

When Joaquín writes, "So every day all the leaders of that town are just completely devoured by dogs, inside their town and even inside their houses," he echoes this traditional lament, substituting dogs for the carrion birds mentioned in the earlier account. The entrance inside the boundaries of community and home by scavengers represents a terrible violation of order in the human world as the Maya understand it. To appreciate its significance in Maya discourse, requires some awareness of the importance of boundaries in Maya thought. Laying out the borders creates order in both the spiritual and the mundane realms. The shaman defines ritual space by establishing its four corners and center, as William Hanks describes in an article titled "Sanctification, Structure, and Experience in a Yucatec Ritual Event" (1984:135-8). In a similar way, "The milpa, homestead, and town are all embodied with guardian spirits at the canonical points which protect the space from evil" (1984:136). Even the initial Creation of the world described in the *Popol Vuh* follows the same pattern, with the Creator replicating the actions of laying out a cornfield or houseplot:

The fourfold siding, fourfold cornering,
measuring, fourfold staking
halving the cord, stretching the cord
in the sky, on the earth,
the four sides, the four corners. . . . [Tedlock1985:7]

Dogs or vultures running rampant within the walls implies a complete violation of established order, synonymous with general death and catastrophe. This charged image persists through time to represent the recurring disaster of plague.

The *Chilam Balam* books outline epidemics, chart their frequency, and attribute blame to foreigners for their occurrence. None of the published texts from these books includes detailed, eyewitness plague stories like Joaquín's story, *U Tsikbalil le Noj K'ak'o*. However, the following passages from *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* reveal the plague story as a fully developed narrative type as early as the sixteenth century.

It happened that during the twenty-fifth year the plague began, oh, my sons! First they became ill of a cough, they suffered from nosebleeds and illness of the bladder. It was truly terrible the number of dead there were in that period. . . . Little by little heavy shadows and black night enveloped our fathers and grandfathers and us also, oh, my sons! when the plague raged. . . . On the day 5 Ah [March 12, 1521] our grandfathers started a war against Pantacat [the present city of Escuintla], when the plague began to spread. It was in truth terrible, the number of dead among the people. The people could not in any way control the sickness.

Forty days after the epidemic began, our father and grandfather died; on the day 12 Camey [April 14, 1521] the king Hunyug, your great-grandfather, died.

Two days later died also our father, the Ahpop Achi Balam, your grandfather, oh, my sons! Our grandfathers and fathers died together.

Great was the stench of the dead. After our fathers and grandfathers succumbed, half of the people fled to the fields. The dogs and vultures devoured the bodies. The mortality was terrible. Your grandfathers died, and with them died the son of the king and his brothers and kinsmen. So it was that we became orphans, oh, my sons! So we became when we were young. All of us were thus. We were born to die!

[Goetz 1953:115-6]

Like Joaquín's story, this account tells a family story as the story of a people. Both narratives record graphic details, including the mutilation of bodies by animals, here both dogs and vultures. Both use coupleting and repetition to emphasize the tone of lament. The Cakchiquel chronicle emphasizes time and lineage, elements less developed in *U Tsikbalil le Noj K'ak'o*. Joaquín sets the time as "back then in the year 15." The Cakchiquel narrator begins similarly, "It happened that during the twenty-fifth year," but then specifies the exact days on which events occurred. Joaquín names his maternal grandparents but does not otherwise trace his lineage. However, because the Cakchiquel narrator comes from the ruling family, the issue of lineage looms large in his account. In Daniel Brinton's translation of *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, the passage quoted above ends: "Thus did we become poor, O my children, and thus did we survive, being but a little child--and we were all that remained. Hence the putting aside of our claims" (1969 [1885]:171).

In *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, the specific details of family history and the issue of claims supercede the concern with patterns of recurrence which frequently creates ambiguity in the telling of Maya history. Narratives which telescope time to conflate invasions separated by centuries, which seem to speak simultaneously of the Spaniards and the Itza, or of the Mexican army and the conquistadors, can prove disconcerting to non-Maya readers who expect a linear recounting of history. Judging Maya historical writing from a non-Maya perspective, Munro Edmonson concludes, "Throughout the *Annals[of the Cakchiquels]* there is a preoccupation with precise recording of events and their chronological sequence which makes them the best historical writing in Middle America's Indian literature" (Edmonson 1967: 360). However, the *Chilam Balam* books represent another philosophy of history: "*Oxlahun kal hab, ca zutnac lae tucaten layili*: Thirteen score years and then it will always return again" (Roys 1933: 52). In her exploration of the "historical substrate of Maya myth," *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, Victoria Bricker concludes, "The temporal distortion which treats sequential events as structurally equivalent and interchangeable is a logical consequence of the Maya

concept of time" (1981:181). As far as I know, no one keeps the *katun* count in Yucatan nowadays. However, the pattern for telling history continues into the present. As Bricker states, "Because history repeats itself, all ethnic conflicts can be reduced to a common structure which serves as an epistemological paradigm for understanding new ethnic conflicts when they arise. It constitutes the Maya's theory of knowledge, their metahistorical model for interpreting recurrent events" (1981:181).

Literary Context

Important as an example of the Maya way of telling history, Joaquín's story also reveals patterns of poetic structuring which may be traced back to the Classic era. Writing of Native American ethnopoetics, Dell Hymes states, "If we do not deal with the means, we cannot possess the meaning." He elaborates:

If we refuse to consider and interpret the surprising fact of device, design and performance inherent in the words of the texts, the Indians who made the texts, and those who preserved what they made, will have worked in vain. We will be telling the texts not to speak. [1981:5]

Allan Burns stresses the same theme in an article titled "Yucatec Maya Ethnopoetics: the Translation of a Narrative View of Life" where he states, "Understanding these conventions can provide access to Yucatec Mayan oral literature and Yucatec Maya thought. Ethnopoetics is a means by which the oral literature can be translated and made available to an audience beyond speakers of Yucatec Mayan" (1980:3). While I hope that the following discussion will enhance understanding of Joaquín's story, I encourage learning the language to appreciate the literature.

In approaching a Maya text like Joaquín's, keeping two precepts in mind will prove helpful. First, Maya writing has a long history and canons of its own. Second, Maya writing bears a close relation to the spoken word.

In a workshop at the 1996 Philadelphia Maya meetings titled "Poetry in Ritual Inscriptions," Nicholas Hopkins analyzed the poetic structure of ancient texts to establish their relation to Maya language use today. According to Hopkins, the canons of Classic literature include a formal opening and closing, sections within the text dealing with different topics using different syntax, the use of a "backstep in time" to increase dramatic tension, and the use of metonyms, paired words which evoke a larger image. Maya writing tends toward coupleting. The more formal the genre and the more important the event within a text, the more sentences appear parallel in meaning or structure. Chiasmic or nested couplet form represents the most complete elaboration of Maya literary style.

However, Maya writing always implied performance rather than the silent reading with which we are more familiar. Sanchez de Aguilar describes assemblies in which the sixteenth century Maya sang and chanted to drumbeats the contents of hieroglyphic books (Roys 1933:5). In an interesting article titled "Pure Language and Lapidary Prose," Clemency Chase Coggins "reads" the inscription on the south side of Stela A at Copan as it might have been performed by ritual specialists. Coggins explains that, "The written text supplied the necessary (if skeletal) structure while the priest or ruler who read it aloud would have transformed it into couplets, triplets, and repetitions that were constrained

only by his personal heat - his authentic religious correctness and inspiration" (1992:102). Even today, two scribes perform the sacred books once a year in the shrine villages of the Cruzob Maya, improvising on lines considered the words of God (Burns 1983: 22-23). For texts that are written to be performed, sound is as important as structure. In a sense, Joaquín's story is a written record of an oration. He has chosen words for the effects created by sounds as well as for their meanings. He has improvised, using formulaic expressions, traditional themes, Classic structure, and poetic devices.

Joaquín's story starts with a formal opening, placing it in time. The first line begins: *Uchilak ti' jo' lajun jaabe', ka'ach ma' sijken way yok'ol kabe'*. The word *uchilak* is a variant of the same word used as a focus marker in ancient texts to draw attention to key information; among glyphers it is called the anterior event indicator. In the second clause, the word *ka'ach* emphasizes that the story is set in the past, the time before Joaquín's birth. Next Joaquín introduces his grandmother, Apolinaria Cach, the survivor who told him the story, and her husband Antonio Che'. Thus he places himself within his lineage on his mother's side. The themes of the story, the battle with the foreigners and the suffering caused by foreign disease, complete the opening passage. Within it, Joaquín has employed the set phrase *way yok'ol kabe'*, here on earth, which appears frequently in sacred writings like the *Chilam Balam* books. He has also begun to display his virtuosity in the use of reduplication to intensify the meaning of a word by repeating one of its syllables. Here he pairs *jach yaya olal*, "really great sadness," with *mu'yaj olal*. "suffering," both based on *yaj*, "pain," to set the tone of the story.

In section 2, Joaquín takes the theme of foreign disease and emphasizes it in a passage which is both vehement and highly structured. The first statement is a stative construction literally equating the foreigners with the evil of smallpox. There is no way to translate its full force into English. This statement is one of three powerful iterations of the same point each beginning with *tumen*, "because," in Maya: "Because those foreigners, it's theirs, the evil of smallpox,/ Because only they brought it, this death to the town,/ because it's their sickness that infected us." This triplet is followed by a syntactic couplet to complete the indictment. Given the Maya approach to history, there may be more than one answer to who is to blame for the epidemic, but certainly one answer lies here.

Joaquín uses the "backstep in time" to introduce section 3. He speaks of the time before the arrival of foreigners to the land of the Maya as a golden age. *Yan ti' tulakal lu ch'ibaloob utsil kuxtal yeetel ki'mak olal*: "There was for all their generations a good life and happiness," echoing the *Chilam Balam* text. Here he sets up an opposition between the Maya lineages and "other, strange men" who have come to dominate them. The word *tulakal*, "all," appears for the first time; later in the text its repetition will become a key device. The paired expression *utsil kuxtal yeetel ki'mak olal*, "good life and happiness," has the ring of a set phrase. The section ends with the paired ideas "they gave discord to our thought; they harmed our bodies."

Section 4 elaborates on the opposition between the Maya lineages and the foreigners. The Cruzob Maya consider themselves God's chosen people. How did it happen, then, that they were overpowered by outsiders? This passage suggests an answer structured around the words *tumen*, "because," and *le betke'*, "therefore." Back in those "first days," the Maya were given "fear and loss of heart." By using the first person plural throughout this passage, Joaquín emphasizes his identification with his ancestors and

brings the past into the present. In the final line he creates a verb from the noun *yum* which means "lord" or "leader," to say "Because of that, those men will lord over us." This verb foreshadows the issue of leadership presented in the following section.

Only now in section 5 does Joaquín bring the story to a specific place, the town whose "ancient name" was Chun-on. Here he pairs the coming of light at dawn with the dawning awareness among the leaders that an "evil sickness" will destroy the town. (It is interesting to note that many Classic inscriptions use a "sun-at-horizon", or "daybreak glyph" to place events in time.) The use of the future tense here suggests foreknowledge. The final line: *tumen xuulsbil ken u meet tulaklu yumil* is stronger in Maya than English translation allows. It reads, literally, "because to be ended will it make every leader of it," perhaps with the implication that their lives should be terminated because of their faults.

Finally in section 6 Joaquín begins to tell the story of his grandmother's experience of the epidemic. In the preceding passage he uses *yum* twice to refer to human leaders. Here he uses it to speak of God. If he implied that the town's leaders died by God's punishment, he states explicitly that his grandmother survived because of God's compassion. Not only is she chosen by God to survive, but she represents an ideal of behavior in her desire to help her neighbors, even as a young girl with "neither her parents nor her older brothers" to protect her. She is an ancestor who merits memorialization. Through her eyes Joaquín presents a graphic account of the devastation wrought by smallpox.

This part of the story begins in a straightforward manner, stating Apolinaria's name and age and situation. However, it rapidly becomes "heated," to borrow the terminology Gary Gossen uses for "inspired language" among the Chamula. Reflecting heightened emotion on the part of the speaker, heated language involves stylistic redundancy in a continuum from repetition of words and phrases to culmination in parallel couplets (1974:48). As Joaquín describes the horrors of the epidemic, he insistently repeats the words *jach*, "really," *tumen* and its alternate form *men*, "because," and *tulakal* and its alternate *laj*, "all, every." Paired words "by night and also by day" and "shouts and delirium" contribute to the intensity. Joaquín also employs reduplication and onomatopoeia so that sound reinforces meaning. An example is the word used to describe the scratching of the sick people's bodies by their hammocks. You don't have to speak Maya to recognize the scratchiness of *jach ja'ja'atchaja* (with the j pronounced as h). The most important piece of information in this passage, the only remedy available to alleviate the pain of the dying, is bracketed between identical statements for emphasis: "because thus they are protected, those sick people,/they are made to lie down on very soft banana leaves,/because thus they are protected, those sick people." Here we have an example of chiasmus, the nested couplet form which is the culmination of Maya literary style.

The first half of Apolinaria's story (6a) introduces the theme of water which Joaquín develops in the second half (6b). As with the theme of leadership in section 5, the water theme first appears as a verb made from a noun. Here the verb is *ch'en ch'enki* from the noun *ch'en* meaning "well or any body of still water." I translate the clause as "that entire town completely stilled" in an effort to preserve the imagery of the Maya. Later in the passage, Joaquín repeats the same verb without reduplication to express the stilling of pain through the use of banana leaves. After the two instances of the "still water" verb come the shouts of the sick asking for water. Water is often scarce in Yucatan and

therefore held in reverence by the Maya. The offering of water, the inability of the sick to drink it, its loss as it flows down their bodies, and the loss of their bodily fluids which drip under their hammocks are powerful images.

Joaquín heightens the sense of loss by using a series of negations, including some clauses with double negatives, permissible in Maya but difficult to translate into English. *Mun man k'inoob wa ma' yan kimenoob* I translate as "no days passed without deaths" which captures the basic meaning but obscures not only the double negative but the alliteration in the original. In a section marked by a distinct pattern of syntax use, seven lines include five negations, culminating in the passage in which the bodies of the leaders are devoured by dogs "inside their town and even inside their houses."

As a final device, in addition to the repetition of words, the water imagery, the series of negations, and the wide use of alliteration, Joaquín creates a counterpoint with locations in space. His most dramatic move is from "in the middle of the forest of the Maya" to "under their hammocks" in the next line. Much has been written of the importance of time and space to the Maya. Gary Gossen subtitles his holistic, contextual study of the verbal behavior of a community "Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition." Here Joaquín begins his story by placing it in time; as he approaches the end, he presents details placing events in space.

The final lines, the formal closing, are as stark and simple as a grave marker. A story which begins in the past, before Joaquín's birth, ends with a passage hinging on the word *bejlae'*: today.

In a story which represents both the historical consciousness of the Maya and Maya literary style, Joaquín has memorialized his family and his community, a time and a place. Writing of the first wave of post-conquest epidemics which erased between seventy-five and ninety percent of the Maya population, Inga Clendinnen comments, "It is difficult to begin to grasp the human experience distilled in those figures" (1987:36). Joaquín's story makes this human experience vivid for his readers. His writing confronts readers not only with a Maya version of events, but with a Maya way of presenting them.

APPENDIX: THE TEXT IN YUCATEC MAYA

Joaquin seldom marks for tone when writing in Maya, nor does he consistently mark glottalized vowels. I have decided to preserve the text as he wrote it, rather than modifying it to fit the rules I learned in the intensive course in Yucatec Maya at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This may make the text more difficult for beginning students, but represents more faithfully Joaquin's orthographic choices.

Joaquin divided his text into sections which I have numbered to facilitate reference to parts of the story. Within the sections, however, he did not divide the lines as I have. My line divisions are an attempt to clarify the poetic structure of the text for an outside audience.

U TSIKBALIL LE NOJ K'AK'O THE STORY OF THE SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC

(1)

Uchilak ti' jo'lajun jaabe,

It happened back then in the year 15,

ka'ach ma' sijken way yok'olkabe'

back before I had been born here on earth;

in nojoch tatao'obe kuxlajo'ob e k'in jeelo:

my grandparents lived in that other time:

u k'abaobe Apolinaria cach yeetel Antonio che'

their names were Apolinaria Cach and Antonio Che'.

Kuxlajo'ob yeetel jach yayolal bey xan ti' mu'yaj olal

They lived with great sadness and also in suffering,

tumen e k'oja'aniloob ucho'

because of those sicknesses back then,

tu yo'olal le ba'atel uch yeetel ts'uulo'obo'

caused by that battle with the foreigners

ka' tal u macho'obe kajo'

who came to seize that town.

(2)

Tumen e Ts'uulo'obo' letioob u k'asil le noj k'ak'o

Because those foreigners, it's theirs, the evil of smallpox,

tumen chen tu taso'ob e kimil te' kaja',
because only they brought it, this death to the town,

tumen u k'oja'aniloobe ts'aay to'ono:
because it's their sickness that infected us:

K'aj ota'an bey noj k'ak'e',
known as smallpox,

pajmuk' ta'an te' jaaboob je'elo.
bitterly suffered in those years.

(3)

Ka'ach ma' tak e ts'uuloob tu lu'umil mayase,
Before the arrival of the foreigners to the land of the Maya,

yan ti' tulakal lu ch'ibaloob,
there was for all their generations,

utsil kuxtal yeetel ki'imak olal
a good life and happiness;

ka' k'uch ula' makoob yeetel yanal tukule'
when they arrived, other men with different thinking,

tu k'exoob k-tukul,
they distorted our thinking;

ba'axtun uche
as for why it happened,

tu no'olche'to'on yeetel k-etlak'oon
they exploited us, along with our family members.

tu ts'aooob beyo' junp'el k'exool ti' k-tukul
Thus they gave discord to our thought;

tu yaj kunsoob k-winklil.
they harmed our body.

(4)

Tumen to'one ka' yanchaj k-tukul
Because as for us, so was our thinking

ti' u talba ula' makoob jela'antako'ob uay t-kaje'
on the arrival of other, strange men here in our town:

t-tukle ma' je'bixo'one
we thought them not like us;

tumen tukulta k-ilik makoob
because of thinking we see men

jela'antak ti' k-ch'ibalo'on
different from our lineages

lebetke ka' t-ilba te' yaxk'inoob,
therefore, we saw ourselves in those first days,

síjto'on e sajkilo' yeetel le sa'sa'at olo'
given fear and loss of heart.

yo'osal le makoob kun yumin t-ko'ono'.
Because of that, those men will lord over us.

(5)

U yuchben k'aba' e kaja' chun-on,
The ancient name of this town was Chun-on,

ti' u sastal junp'el k'ine'
where at dawn one day,

ojeta'ab ichil u yumilo'obe
it was made known among its leaders

tun káanal le k'aak'as k'oja'anil
that it is arriving, this evil sickness,

kun tasik u ts'ook u kuxtal le kaja'
that will bring an end to the life of this town

tumen xu'ulsbi ken u meet tu laklu yumil.
because it will make an end to all its leaders.

(6a)

Chen tumen u ch'a otsilil yum k'uje
Only by the grace of Lord God

yanchaj u kuxtal juntúul chan xch'upal
was continuing the life of one young girl

ku k'abatik Apolinaria cach,
she was named Apolinaria Cach;

yan lajun jaab ti'
she was ten years old.

u tsikbat e ba'aloob ucho'
she told those things that happened back then

tumen ma' yajchaj e k'oja'ani ti'o'o
because she didn't suffer the sickness;

chen junp'el le noj k'aak' jo' tu tan yoko'
only one pock broke out on the sole of her foot.

ti'o'le je'el ma' lu'ub yo'o ti'
Since she didn't succumb to it,

u majant ku kuxtal ti' u chukpajyo'ol
she wanted to lend her life, to fulfill her desire

ti' u yant u yéet uinki
to help her fellow people

ku pajmuk' o'o yetu k'inan e k'oja'anilo'.
who suffer bitterly with the pain of that sickness.

Letie' tu chan palile
As for her in her childhood,

mina'an u kananil
no one was her guardian

u tataoob mix u suku'unoob
neither her parents nor her older brothers,

tumen tulakal ts'u kimlo'o yo'ose noj k'ak'o
because all have died on account of that smallpox.

le betke jach tu yilaj tu lakle k'oja'anilo je'elo
Therefore, she really experienced that entire sickness

tumen tu bak' ete yayal kuxtalo',
in her own flesh, that painful life,

tulakle kajo' jach ch'en ch'enki.
that entire town completely stilled.

Tumen ti' ak'ab Beyxan ti' K'inile
Because by night and also by day

ku yu'baa u yauti yetu t'ant'anjo'ol
are heard the shouts and delirium

le otsil k'oja'ano'obo.
of those poor sick people.

Yo'ose k'inan u laj machmu winklilo'obo'
On account of the continuous pain that has seized their bodies,

tumen bey u kananta'al le k'oja'ano'obo'
because thus they are protected, those sick people,

ku chikunsa'alo'ob tu le' ja'as e jach o'olkilo'obo',
they are made to lie down on very soft banana leaves,

tumen bey u kananta'al le k'oja'ano'obo'
because thus they are protected, those sick people,

ti' u mu' k'ilil u yajil u winklilo'obo'
so not to lacerate the wounds on their bodies

men chaja'an tumen u nak'a te' k'ano beya'
because they are rubbed by sticking to the hammock like this;

ku ch'en lu jach k'ili u winkliloob
it stops really wounding their bodies

yetu jach ja'ja'atchaja lu yo'ot'elooob
and really scraping their skins

ti' u beytal u mu'yajtikoob u k'inan
so that it becomes possible to suffer its pain

tumen yanili' u kimlo'ob yo'se k'oja'anila'.
because always they must die from this sickness.

(6b)

Ku tsikbatik xane'

As for what she also tells:

e mejen nayo'ob tu'ux ku mano'

from those small houses where she passes,

ku yuub ku yaute k'oja'ano'obo

she hears their shouts, those sick people,

tun k'atko'ob ja'

they are asking for water.

chen u bis tio'obe

only when she takes it to them,

ku noxik tu chi' e k'oja'ano'

she brings it close to the mouths of those sick people,

mun bey tu yu'ik tumen yajchaja'an

they can't drink it because they have become too sick.

tu lakle ja'o

All that water,

ku laj yala tu winklilo'ob.

it all flows down their bodies.

mun man k'inoob wa ma' yan kimenoob

No days passed without deaths

ti' tu lakle najo'obo'

there in all those houses,

ka' tu yiluba leti' te' yayaba'aloobo'

so she saw herself, with so many things,

ma' beychaj u metik mix ba'a chen tu jun,

unable to do anything just by herself,

yo'se kimenoobo'

on behalf of those dead

tumen tu laklu yu'umil le kajo'.

because of all the leaders of that town.

ka' laj k'in tu laklu yu'umil le kajo'
So every day all the leaders of that town,

chen lajantbi lu meta'alo'ob men pek'
are just completely devoured by dogs

ichu kajil beyxan ichu nayo'ob
inside their town and even inside their houses

te' k'in jeelo
in that other time

chen ti' yaj olil yeetel ti' ch'a otsilil
only in sorrow and in compassion

tu chumukil lu k'aaxil mayoob.
in the middle of the forest of the Maya.

yanal u k'ano'obe
Under their hammocks

k-yila'a lu chochjanki lu ja'iloob
is seen dripping their water

tumen u winkliloobe ts'u jach ts'uku
because their bodies have really rotted

yo'osal e k'oja'anilo
on account of that sickness.

lebetke mina'an tu'ux u yutstaloob
Since there is no where for them to recover

tumen ts'u chakts'ameenta lu winkliloobo'
so they have become reddened flesh, those bodies of theirs.

tu chumuk kajile'
In the middle of the town,

ti' ku ba'ate'et ku be pek'obo'
there they battle each other, those dogs,

yo'osal u choche le mako'obo'
over the intestines of those men.

(7)

sunaj tun u kajil

It turned, then, their town

bey junp'el muknale'

thus to a grave,

bejlae'

today.

k-k'ajolme kaja' bey

we have known this town thus:

chun-on Q.Roo.

Chun-on Quintana Roo.

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