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Of the Manners of Speaking That the Old Ones Had

The Metaphors of Andrés de Olmos In the TULAL Manuscript

Arte para Aprender la Lengua Mexicana
1547

by
Judith M. Maxwell
Craig A. Hanson

with Nahuatl/English, English/Nahuatl Concordances

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The Metaphors: Literary Interpretations

I

INVOCATION

Before the idol bundle, before the coffer
he intones it.

He scatters, he sprinkles
the turquoise, the precious stones.

They fall shining, they fall smoking.

They do not fall in vain.

God is realized with him there,
god comes to him alone.

II

AUTHORITY AS PROTECTOR

A mother, a father is as
a foundation, and a covering
like the silk cotton tree, the cypress tree.

They afford shadow, shade, shading
as a cool bower, as a spindle.

III

AUTHORITY AS BEARER

Carrying cloth, carrying frame
he spreads the cloth, he straightens it.
He is wise, he is centered.
He carries the load, he bears the burden.
Deftly he cradles it
as the back he bears, as shoulders he
supports great burdens.
He sows, he rules, he governs

IV

AUTHORITY AS MODEL

A lord is as priceless as:
turquoise, precious stones
jewels, rich plumage.
He embodies the town.
He is the mat, the throne.
He is as brilliant as:
torchlight, mirrors
pine torches, firebrands.
He embodies knowledge, he serves as a model.
He appears as a sign, he is a standard of measure.
He over-arches, he is all-encompassing.
He fosters the growth, the greening.
He is iridescent in plumage.
The quill pens, the ink, the dye he
arranges and lays out.
He protects, he governs.

V

LABORER

A laborer is:
an eagle, a jaguar, a peasant.
He is the droppings, the leaves.
He is a woodcutter, a tiller of the soil.

VI

LINEAGE HEAD

For the family tree, for the line of descent
the lineage head sustains the vital essence,
the progenitor establishes the line
from his myriad offspring to his ancestor.

VII

LINEAGE

One's relatives are as myriad as:
thorns, bristles
feathers, potsherds
blood, paints
hair, splinters, pores.
They sprout as:
early maize, tender corn, corn tassles.
They are as inalienable as:
fingernails, eyebrows, beards
buttocks, toes.
One's relatives are one's earthenware.
They are one's companions, one's mates
one's ghosts, one's family.
They inhere as:
the liver, the intestines.
All born from one's womb, one's birth canal.

VIII

NEWBORN

The child is precious metal:
 smelted, engraved, polished,
 an ornament was smelted, engraved, and polished.
 He was yearned for as a divine jewel.

IX

GROWTH OF REASON

The child grows as corn tassels, as tender maize
 he sprouts, he leafs out.
 His heart learns prudence.
 His face, his heart, his character
 blossom, germinate.
 They bloom, they flower.
 He exhibits, he demonstrates his character
 his face, his heart, his senses.

X

PRECIOUS CHILD

The beloved child is as precious as the plumes of
 flamingos, the quetzal,
 the egret, the heron.

XI

WAKE

There is crying, there is distress, there are tears.
 He is mercy in affliction
 one cloud house
 he holds the sweet offering.
 He applies white earth, the feather

the black ink, the dye, the ocher.
He makes him up, he anoints him
thus he alleviates, he cures.
He whitewashes him, he poultices him, he reddens him.
He lowers the man into the grave
so he is shrouded, so he adorns him.

XII

SERVANT AS UTENSIL

A servant:
acts as hands,
serves as a bearer, lends his shoulders.
He is used as utensils, as earth, as wood.

XIII

CORRECTION

Punishment is:
a scorpion, a nettle, a thorn.
With a bone and cold water,
with stone and staff,
I cause someone to be good at last
with stone and staff.
The slave is a tumpline,
he acts as shoulders.
I give instructions to someone
I make him follow them
I cause him to be good
thus I publicly command him.

XIV

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The stone was green, the wood was green
 After the act, the ruler casts him down, hurls him away.
 Finally the ruler rips him asunder.
 It had already happened that he was caught by
 the snareline, the pit, the rope.
 Hence god and surely the ruler
 cast him in the river, fling him from on high.

XV

DESECRATION

Up on the high place, the exalted place
 he emerges, he stands forth.
 He dishonors the mat, the throne of god
 the jaguar, the wings, the tail of the eagle.
 Before the multitudes, the great stone and wood image curves
 heaven resounds, the earth quakes.

XVI

DEPENDENCE

Still I carry myself, I shelter myself.
 I consume my face, my heart, my spirit.
 You honored ones appear, you see my plight.
 My midnight sustenance, my morning sustenance
 appear not, are not seen.
 Inside another's house, in another's corner
 still I breathe in shame and longing.

XVII

CLEANSING

He cracks it, he splits it
He throws it in the river, he hurls it from a height.
With blood, with tears
one's mother, one's father
one's lord, one's ruler
washes one's face, causes one's cleansing sweat
with hardness, with cold.
He, as a child, falls out, emerges
from the womb, the birth canal.

XVIII

COUNSEL

It is my face, it is my heart, it is my spirit
which from my father, from my mother
I create.
With my blood, my ink
I bleed, I paint.
I ask someone to counsel me
for I have become as broken pots.

XIX

CARNAL LICENSE

Rather than be mothering, rather than be fathering
instead at the crossroads
I scatter ash, I scatter seed.
Heedlessly I father children, I mother children.
I do not care to know
the faces, the hearts,
the visages, the bodies.

XX

SOVEREIGN POWER

He is in the public eye, he lives on high.
 He holds others down, he tramples others.
 Thus he alone stands above others,
 he alone sits above others
 on the mat, on the throne.
 He entraps enemies, he destroys them.
 He covers himself with awe, he makes himself a public image.
 He knows there is no one above him,
 he experiences nothing over him.
 He alone goes before, he alone is in front.
 This fiery lord goes out,
 this awesome spirit goes boldly forth.
 He vanquishes others' mats, their thrones.
 Therefore nothing is to be seen above him.

XXI

ALTERED STATES

Among the people, amid the people I wander.
 I cause the dust, the trash, the ashes to float in a whorl.
 Thus I create a vision for them.
 From the emetic there is nausea, there is bitterness.
 Since I give them pulque to drink,
 since I give them mushrooms to eat,
 it manifests, I show it to them, I guide them.
 I sharpen their awareness, I fill their vision
 through the mutual sharing and the communal ingestion.
 On both sides I have mouths, on both sides I have eyes.
 I cleft the image.
 As the busy bracelet-snake I go offering maguey drink,
 as the active goldfinch I go creating myself.
 I give them blood to drink, hearts to eat.
 Thus I intoxicate them.

XXII

BAD GOVERNMENT

He causes the dust to puff up, to billow above, to rise up.
At a distance he makes someone watch, he shows them.
The ruler alone demolishes it, disperses it,
he cracks it, he splits it,
he throws it in the river, he hurls it from on high.
He endangers them, he muddies them,
he vanquishes them, he scatters them.
He alone casts down his father, throws down his mother.
He alone becomes foolish.
Erect he bears his enemy's god.
He alone acts shamefully,
he abandons the mat, the throne,
the public arena, the high place
where he had displayed his lordship, recounted his nobility.
Thus he is exiled to the grasses and the woods.

XXIII

SLAVE

He is:
malleable metal, a tumpline
earth, mud
stone, wood
feathers, vine-weavings.
He stands, he lives in
the place of urination, the place of excrement.

XXIV

LAZINESS

He wastes time in the dirt,
he wastes time with potsherds.

He collects trash, he gathers mud.
He continually wastes time.
He lazes around there, he goes around foolishly.
He wants to do nothing, he wants not to work
to be footless, handless.
He is clever with people,
it is in their houses that
he takes his night meal, his morning meal.

XXV

ESTEEMING RELIGION

The idol bundle, the holy coffer
are not to be obtained, not to be grasped,
not to be seized.
They are not human toys.
Rather their power wells up, it emerges from the inner places.
Such virtue, such venerability is not to be thrown aside.

XXVI

SELF-SACRIFICE

As the butterfly becomes the flame,
he lovingly metamorphoses into a rib cage,
into a skull.
Before the people, above the people he awaits,
publicly he whipped himself, he flogged himself.
Then he falls inward
there to suffer the stone repeatedly
Heedlessly as the moth
he ascends, he falls inward.

XXVII

BRAVERY

He is manly, he is valiant.
He is fiery faced, his face inspires fear.
His face is bronzed, his lips are of gold.
The great mountain lion, the mighty wolf are brought forth,
The great eagle, the mighty ocelot darken him.

XXVIII

FERAL

At first he perspires, he agonizes, he is fevered.
Not yet has his spirit come out from the place of emergence,
not yet has it crossed the threshold,
not yet does it become breath.
The deer and the rabbit follow him,
with difficulty he follows the deer and the rabbit
in the grassland, in the wasteland his animality manifests.
He wanders as a rabbit, he roams as a deer.
He goes about insensately, he strays heedlessly.
His hands perish, his feet perish.
He is nonsentient, he is immobile.
He became drugged, he became mushroomed,
he stiffened, he became deerhooved.
As a mere child
he saw the rabbit road, the deer road.
He became perturbed,
he became senseless,
he became dazed.

XXIX

INSTRUCTION

With a gentle staff, at his head, at the top of his head
I repeatedly stand him up.

Standing before him, at his knees
 with the stone and the rod
 I teach him to walk, I support him.
 His toes, his elbows, his knees
 I raise up.

XXX

PRATTLING

His lips are rotten wood.
 His lips are dye-stained.
 He deadens lips, he is a wooden-lipped dullard.
 His lips are twisted, his heart is false.
 Wherever he is not observed, he speaks,
 he is heard when he is so masked.
 Thus it is that he lives recklessly re-mouthing words,
 he facilely insinuates himself,
 heedlessly he babbles.

XXXI

GODLY CALM

Awe suffuses, spring spreads and calms
 from within his flower house.
 God spreads warmth, strews flowers.
 he scatters with abandon, happily, peacefully.

XXXII

REPRIMAND

I bow your head, I bow your topknot.
 As for sacrifice adorned:
 with whitewash, with feathers.
 I blame you, I strongly warn you.
 This one time here at the mat place, the throne place

I bury you in the earth, I implant you in the stem.

I extract you.

This once I will lie for you

so that you may not be lacerated with thorns,
may not taste bile.

Next time I will not even feed you corncobs,
rather you will taste the thorns, taste the bile.

XXXIII

MARRIAGE

He becomes one with motherhood, with fatherhood.

Thereafter nobility, and lordship

will bloom, they will blossom, they will flower.

Thus the blood, the heart are made one.

XXXIV

RITE OF MARRIAGE

He weds her before the idol bundle,

before the woven coffer.

He has put on the jewels, the quetzal plumes,

on his wrists, around his throat.

So he covers the pot, the vessel.

XXXV

TROUSSEAU

Next I unfold the skirt, the blouse,

and then in her hands I place the weaver's reed,

the spindle, the evener,

on her I hang the cotton, the spindle.

And so they will lie on the mat, on the throne.

XXXVI

SERVANT AS IMPLEMENT

He was born amid the pottery, the metates, the whetstones,
in the censer, in the bag.

He is fated, he is destined
to be as malleable metal, as a tumpline
to serve with the carrying frame, with the hoe.
He is fated to urine and excrement.

XXXVII

ACCESSION

He had revealed himself on the mat, there on the throne.
He makes himself head of the town,
he blazes, he shines over the water, the hill, the town.

XXXVIII

WALLOWER

He covers someone with trash, with dust,
he smears someone with ash,
he daubs someone with excrement.
With mud, with potsherds, he kneads clay,
like a pig he mixes excrement and ash.

XXXIX

POOR SPEECH

He but embeds his words in wood,
he but extracts his words from wood.
Elsewhere he speaks out emotionally,
here and there he meddles,

elsewhere he prattles.
He but woodenly jumbles his words.

XL

EVIL EYE

From the side of the eye, toward the ear
I look at someone, I look askance.
I mesmerize, I fascinate someone.

XLI

SUCCESSION

He sprouted, he rooted himself.
His sustenance is the silk cotton tree, the cypress.
He completed himself, he germinated himself.
Already they are man-eaters, already they are awesome.
Already they invested themselves with glory,
they are iridescent.

XLII

HUMILIATION

At the snake place he was slobbered on,
he was scattered, he was obsidian-splintered.
Once he left the mat, left the throne,
the mat and the throne were laid to waste.
No longer will he be honored,
No longer is he deft,
no longer does he progress,
he has backslid.
Our sovereign has left his head place, his crown place.
He once lived in the public eye, lived on high.

XLIII

GOOD RULERSHIP

He serves the town as water, he serves the town as a hill,
 he exalts things, he makes things public.
 His acts, his grace are renowned, are held in awe.

XLIV

DESTRUCTION

He throws mud on them, he stirs anger in them.
 He destroys them, he erodes them.
 On the mat, on the throne
 he sprinkles, he strews dirt.
 Thus he dirties them, he defames them.
 He exhausts the town.
 Thus he is spoken of, his deeds are made known,
 he shames them.

XLV

PUBLIC REPROOF

I begin vying with someone,
 I begin baiting someone,
 I scold someone.
 I despise him as I would sand,
 I publicly beat him.
 He is as urine, as excrement.

XLVI

CHOICE

It is only by my hand, by my face, my heart, my spirit
that either I will wither, or I will bloom,
I will become as green land, as tilled earth,
I will germinate, I will sprout.

XLVII

RELIGIOUS JOY

I center the offering,
I but place it within the coffer,
I but place it before the bundle.
It is of wood, of stone,
it is wholly good.
But I know it to be turquoise,
I know it to be precious green stone.
In its wholeness it goes before me,
it emerges before me,
it goes seeking there.
There I adore it, I experience it with joy.

XLVIII

SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOR

I cause someone to lose heart,
I cause someone to lose face,
I cause someone to lose his spirit,
I cause someone to suffer inwardly.
I spatter someone with sparks, with embers,
I infuse someone with sparks, with embers.
I kill someone with bitterness,
I strangle him.

I afflict someone's heart, I torture him,
I oppress him, I make him sick at heart.

XLIX

PEACE OF CONVERSION

In god's house he anoints, he smears, he salves.
The completeness, the goodness
there is wholly arrayed, scattered, strewn.
He knows one's heart, he reached one's heart.
There exists mercy for sorrow.
May he expel savagery, may he tame the eagle
There he implants ecstasy, emplaces harmony in one's heart.
Thus one is enriched.

L

IRATE SPEECH

He completely boils over, he froths.
He gesticulates sharply, with words he bitterly tramples.
The wooden-lipped speaker yawns, he speaks woodenly.
His crude speech embitters, his words are never fluent.
In company he oppresses like a stone.

LI

THIEF

He is malicious of hand, he is clever of hand,
he is conceited of hand, he is quick-handed.
Recklessly he grabs things.
He is not a true person.
He pants, he is foolish, he is shallow-hearted.

LII

DISCORD

They barked at each other, they bit each other,
they grimaced at each other, they reviled each other,
they glowered at each other.