



An Anthology of Chicano Literature

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Historical Perspectives of pre-Hispanic America

The problem of research in the area of pre-Hispanic cultures is largely one of perspective. While it is common to detect errors made by researchers caused by a language problem (*Náhuatl*-Spanish), it is moreover a problem of recognizing sources replete with distortions. When the Spaniards invaded the Americas, the majority were brutal and illiterate, with the exception of the clergy. However, the problem with the clergy was one of a religious myopia which pervaded the church and state. Moreover, Spain in the 16th Century was feudalistic and backward, utilizing further the Inquisition in the name of God.

In addition to the problem of ignorant Spaniards censoring and distorting documents after 1521, there is the question of modern researchers utilizing questionable sources which portray a European interpretation of pre-Hispanic reality.

The problem becomes even more complex as we focus on pre-history. Western man has tried to neatly categorize civilizations by the use of material objects utilized which would subsequently correspond to their age. Rather, focus should be concentrated not from a physical measure which is narrow and confining, but to the natural social progression and evolution of cultures or civilizations.

According to the oral history of the *Aztlékatl* people it begins with *Ixacilan*, which translated meant immensity. This continent was not a new land, it was of the same age as the remaining continents. There was an absolute uniformity in terms of social and spiritual development. It begins with the age in which man shares with nature, adapting according to climate or vegetation. This is the pre-historic age of *Ohtonki* which is part of the *Quinto Sol* and should not be confused with other *Soles* or evolutionary creations on this earth.

In retrospect, in the first creation (*Nahui ocellotl* or Jaguar-4) ¹ beings are made of ashes and are devoured by the cosmic cataclysm; all are to perish and the sun is to disappear. The second creation (*Nahui ehecatl* or Wind-4) beings are swept by wind and become a type of simian being. Notwithstanding, wind sweeps all, including houses, trees, and the sun.

Nahui quiyahuatl or Rain-4 is the third creation in which beings finally disappear due to a rain of fire. These were small beings, aviary in nature. During the fourth creation, *Nahui Atl* or Water-4, it rains for a 52-year indigenous century and all mountains and land masses disappear. These beings destroy themselves and become aquatic beings.

It should be understood that the idea of creation is not one of an egocentric view of man made in the image of God. Therefore, the question of

the creation is not necessarily limited to *Homo sapiens*, as we understand it. The creation of earth beings must be considered from an indigenous perspective which recognizes spirits in all things which have equal importance as well.

It seems that in the last stages of the fourth evolution there appears a new creation; that of giant beings as seen in the Codex Vaticano-Rios. These giants were not to last because of their inability to adapt to the environment and cataclysmic changes.

It is interesting to note that prior to the *Quinto Sol*, or the current evolutionary creation on earth, there is recorded the existence of simian man known as *Tlacaozotzin*.² In terms of the main staple, we see man using first acorns of the evergreen oak, a diluted type of maize, the *cincocopi*, the prototype of maize, and finally the genuine maize reputedly discovered by *Quetzalkoatl*.

In the final and fifth evolutionary creation known as *Nahui Ollin* or Movement-4, we see the earth characterized by land movements and hunger; it is an age represented by *Teotihuacán* and *Piedra del Sol*, a human impulse and desire to exist, consist and transcend.³

Let us return again to the second age following *Ohtonki*. This is the age of *Chikomoztok* often confused in translation as a place of the seven caves which the Spaniards in their greed took for the Seven Cities of Gold. Rather, it means the Age of the Caves in which man from *Ixacilan* perfected his languages, invented pictographic and symbolic writing and invented fire. In their refuge, these groups acquired great unity and ideas to be transmitted through their accounts; one sees further the perpetuation of life through history.

After *Chikomoztok* is the age of *Telli* or mounds characterized by the textiles, ceramics, agriculture and religion. This is the age of the first architectural constructions in the Americas. The age of *Tecancin* follows with the perfecting of all home artifacts, the great development of industrial art, common familial norms, and social organizations. Groups created by social unities in small populations develop the idea of social and spiritual unity.

Petl, or fortress, is the age which gives rise to the necessity of defense against aggressive tribes. This is followed by *Altepetl*, which is a more important socio-geographic institution representing the transition between the pre-historic and proto-historic epochs. It is the epoch in which Indigenous man has a marked social and cultural development. Books, libraries, astronomy, and medicine reach great heights and philosophical ideas penetrate throughout the continent.⁴

More contemporarily, we have had a tendency to consider single migratory patterns of Indigenous man based on archeological finds. One of the fundamental errors is the acceptance of the idea that most *Indios* came

through the Bering Strait and that migrations have always been southward in the history of the American Indian. The oral history of both *Aztekahs* and North American Indians agree on the exact opposite—migrations were common northward, from Nicaragua to New York and Canada.

Another misconception dominant in Western history is the assumption that America and its Indians were discovered by civilizations of the West. Quite to the contrary is the case according to oral history. It is known that many excursions were made to distant lands across the ocean, e.g. the straits of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean area, the coasts of Egypt. Much linguistic research proves the influence of *Nauahs* from *Ixachilan* to Egyptian civilization. The word Atlantis used by the Egyptians borrowed from Plato is one of hundreds of *Aztekah* words found in the Egyptian language.⁵ Thus we find that it was not the *Nauahs* that were discovered, but Europe, Asia and Africa.

The controversy of *Chikomoztok* and *Áztlan* is another problem for historians and anthropologists. Too often, because of a lack of knowledge of the autochthonous language or philosophy, distorted concepts are created. *Áztlan* is known as the place of origin of the *Aztekahs*. The usual etymological derivation given to the word *Áztlan* is the syncopation of *Aztátlan*, i.e. the combination of *Aztatl*, meaning crane, and *Tlan*, meaning abundance or, place of the abundant cranes. It is too easy to confuse *Aztátlan* with *Áztlan*; to do so would be to assume that the environs of Madison, Wisconsin were the birthland of the *Aztekahs* in view of the old Indian grounds called *Aztalan*. More appropriately, *Áztlan* is the historical place which was characterized by a people who were inventors of useful instruments and possessors of flying instruments. This is etymologically exemplified by the roots *Az* and *Áztli* which signify instrument and wings. Ergo, *Áztlan* was the motherland of the *Áztin* or the people of *Az*. Thus we can see that *Aztékatl* or the race of people speaking *Aztekah* or *Náhuatl*, derives from the same roots, i.e. *Az*, *Áztli* and *Tékatl*, meaning the people of winged instruments who have remaining in their ritualistic fashion their representation in the *Voladores* near Veracruz, Mexico.

Chicomoztoc has also received misinterpretation. It is usually conceived as the seven places or caves which various groups left to settle in Central Mexico. One version states that these tribes traveled southward in a series of seven stages or towns which the Spaniards later corrupted to mean Seven Cities of Gold. Although *Aztátlan* (place of the cranes—probably in the State of *Nayarit* by the Pacific) was one of the stages, *Chicomoztoc* as seen in the Codex Vaticano-Rios is not so much a place but a point in time of the evolutionary process of earth prior to the Glaciation period, i.e. the Age of the Caves.

Of particular significance is the interpretation of pre-Hispanic man as

barbaric, primitive, sanguinary, and superstitious. ⁶ I cannot think of more appropriate words to describe European man circa 1492. Cortés was a cut-throat fugitive wanted for armed robbery, contraband piracy, and homicide. Western man is still so uncivilized he believes that people and nations can be invaded and exploited with material justification as an end. European man was egocentric enough to believe he was chosen, guided and protected by God and consequently was justified in the genocide of foreign peoples. It is the dogma of St. Augustine which is still being followed, i.e. if it was not within the Church, it was the work of the Devil. Most important was the total inability of the Spaniards to comprehend the complex mentality of the *Metzicas*. What is even more ironic is the total inability of the current historians and anthropologists to perceive the distorted view left by the early clerics. Rather, we find that the identical myths created by superstitious clerics are being repeated by historians and anthropologists today. One notes that it is the post-Hispanic Codices that were censored by the church in the *Colegio de Tlatelolco* which presents *Aztekahs* in human sacrifice, ignorant and cruel, justifying the mission of the Spaniards. It is highly coincidental in view that the King of Spain suggested in a letter to the Spaniards that if they could come up with acts of Indian sacrifice, their own atrocities could be justified. ⁷

To understand *Náhuatl* philosophy one must comprehend *Teotl* or *Ome Tekuhtzintli*. The philosophic and cosmogonic principles of the *Nauahs* were based on conformity to the laws of nature and the universe. The origin of the Cosmos and of man was the result of natural or scientific phenomena. The interpretation of existence therefore was not religious. Truth was in nature from nothingness to human beings. *Teotl*, or creation, is based on this evolutionary process. Furthermore, it is eternal; it has no beginning and no end. It is a natural evolving process venerated by the Indigenous sages. Within these realities there are two elements within creation (*Ome Tekuhtzintli*) the masculine and feminine, the positive and negative. Creative energy was the essence of *Teotl*; thus, the people had a creative function of perfecting the self, not solely for the production of a more perfect human entity, but for the transmission of characteristics therein which are to be known in the future. Their view of Death was distinct from Western Man. Death was a natural phenomenon. It was not a time for sadness or fear of the unknown or Hell and damnation. It was natural because it was in accord with the evolutionary laws that ranged from *Omeyokan*, or the stage of perpetual activity, to *Mictlan*, the stage of total inactivity, creative energy, the liberation of the vital energies, and the unification of new and more perfect organisms by effect of *Teotl*. Death perfected the Race in its due course. It was received with joy, chants, music and dance. Heroic death aided in the perfecting of the race, whereas provoked death was not per-

mitted because it went against the concept of *Teotl*. Death had no relationship to divine sources; it did not reward or punish beings, ergo, the Mexican's indifferent attitude toward death. To pre-Hispanic man, there is no hell after death. If anything was hell it was man's existence on earth. A man who lived by the scientific laws of nature and the universe to his old age, was respected and his death was considered propitious for mankind. Death by suicide or homicide was not permitted for it curtailed the creative function of perfecting the self for the production of a more perfect human entity and the transmission of characteristics therein which are to be known in future generations. To sacrifice human beings, therefore, is against all the laws of *Teotl* and the cosmic philosophy of the *Nauahs*.

In order to christianize the Indians, other distortions in religion and history were committed. Even the serpent being devoured by the eagle is a creation of the Spaniards. The serpent devoured by the eagle is not found in authentic pre-Hispanic sources. It was created by the Spaniards to symbolize the downfall and termination of the philosophy and entity of *Quetzalkoatl*, generally known as the plumed serpent. The creation by the Spaniards of the Virgin of Guadalupe was timed to replace *Tonantzin* (our mother spirit that sustains us). That is why today in the marketplace *Indios-Mestizos*, when asked who *Tonantzin* is, will reply "La Virgen de Guadalupe."

Too often Indigenous man is seen worshipping many Gods. According to oral history, there is only one great spirit, one God. *Quetzalkoatl*, *Tonantzin*, *Koatlíkue*, *Tezkatlipoka*, *Uitzilipochitli* have all been confused as gods of one form or another. It should be pointed out that beyond the cognizance of the five senses of man, pre-Hispanic man stressed the three important elements of memory, intelligence, and will for cultivation, to be represented further by *Tezkalipoka*, *Quetzalkoatl*, and *Uitzilipochitl*, respectively. Thus, Western man confused esoteric scientific symbols for religious deities.

Moctekuzoma Xokoyotzin, it is said, was stoned to death by his people. It is also believed that he thought of Cortés as a God and, therefore, the subsequent conquest of Mexico. It should be pointed out that according to the principles and philosophy of the *Nauahs*, aggression, militaristic imperialism, private property, perfidy, treason, robbery, intoxication, and adultery were virtually unknown since this was not in accord to the laws of *Tloke-Nauake*, a sophisticated philosophical and communal structure within society. In addition to developing representative and democratic government on the local, regional, and federal level, the *Aztekahs* had developed international law that received leaders of governments from distant lands. Under the law, a representative of a foreign government was given the diplomatic privilege of entering the country as an ambassador and allowed

to share, as a visiting diplomat, ruling privileges for a period of one year. Cortés was considered just another ruler from another country and was given all the courtesies expected of a foreign diplomat. He was received by the Supreme Council and government and offered the guest quarters in the palace of *Axayakatl*. However, Cortés betrayed their international law by committing an act of perfidy and treason contrary to the societal mores of the *Metzicas*. When Cortés was attacked by the *Metzicas*, his cutthroat solution was to assassinate *Moctekuzoma Xokoyotzin* in an effort to bring disorganization and fear to the people. What Cortés was not aware of was the strategy meeting of the Council prior to the assassination. Here a lesser member of the Council was sent as a leader in guise of quelling the outraged people for the purpose of the attack.

Cortés was subsequently defeated. Fleeing *Tenochtitlan* at night, he was attacked by the guard and barely escaped with a few warriors. He was carrying gold and silver objects stolen from the temple. This night is known as the Night of Victory by the *Aztekahs* rather than the "sad night" as it is known in history. Cortés then took refuge with an aggressive tribe called *Tlaxkaltekah*. The *Tlaxkaltekah* welcomed Cortés because they had something in common: both were aggressive and wanted the destruction of the Confederation of *Anauak*. A year later Cortés and his men numbering no more than 180 with the help of 150,000 *Tlaxkaltekahs* attacked small villages and recruited forcibly for war Indians from *Topoyanco* (12,000), *Cholula* (12,000), *Tetzaco* (200,000), *Itzacocan* (50,000), *Tepoyacac*, *Cuauhnahuac* (50,000), *Otompan*, *Tollantzinco*, *Xilotepec* (50,000).⁸

Metzico-Tenochtitlan on the other hand, had 12,000 warriors to defend the island. A simple count reveals that excluding 180 Spaniards, 524,000 Indians attacked the island of *Metzico-Tenochtitlan* which had its food and water supply cut off at *Chapultépec* and other major points. After an admirable defense of some 70 days by *Kuauhtemok*, the strength of the men became debilitated because of the food and water shortage. On August 12, 1521, *Kuauhtemok* convened the *Ueyi Tlahtohkan* or Supreme Council for the purpose of drawing up some important resolutions. Among the most important included a safeguard for cultural, linguistic and racial preservation for the benefit of future generations. Cortés agreed, but as soon as control was given to him, he began one of history's bloodiest genocides of defenseless people which included old men, women, and children. Indians became sacrificed by the Spaniards as they were burned to death at the stake. Women were raped by soldiers, the wise men and priests were assassinated. Shortly afterwards, in the patio of First Archbishop of Mexico Juan de Zumárraga orders hundreds of priceless scientific documents to be burned. To the clergy and the Spanish mentality these were the works of the devil. In the name of the Holy Inquisition, people were killed if they did not

agree to become Christians. The young that remained slaves of the Spaniards were branded on the forehead with a hot iron depicting a cross.

Those that escaped vowed to keep the old traditions alive via the oral tradition and in conformity with the resolutions of the broken Treaty of 1521.

This concludes one of the most civilized and sophisticated societies of the world during this time. Its advances or knowledge of eclipses, plastic surgery, solar energy, psychic phenomena, evolutionary theory, higher mathematics, measurement of time and space, and possibly the neutralizing of gravity, demonstrate a super-civilized nation which fell prey to aggressive and barbaric people who for centuries to come will serve as a model for future exploitation in both North and South America. The *Indígena* becomes the minority in Mexico after a period of enslavement. Some will tear away from the bonds of colonization, rebel or flee north from Mexico where even though they are to suffer minority exploitation, they are to rise like their ancestors in defense of sacred and human principles of mankind.

Notes

1. *Leyenda de los Soles* is part of the Codix Chimalpopoca. It is an anonymous manuscript found in 1558.
2. *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*. Author unknown. Appears in Nueva Colección de Documentos para la Historia de México III, México, 1891, pp. 228-263.
3. *Análes de Cuauntítlan* is of unknown authorship written in Náhuatl. It is one of three documents found in the Codix Chimalpopoca.
4. Cárdenas, Juan Luna, *Pre-historia de América* (México, D.F., 1947), p. 15.
5. Dr. Atl—(Gerardo Murillo), *Un hombre más allá del universo México*.
6. Soustelle, Jacques, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* (New York, 1968).
7. Reference made by Dr. Luna Cárdenas, letter is in the Vatican Library.
8. Gurría-Lacroix, Jorge, *La Caída de Tenochtitlan* (Colección Popular, 1974), p. 90.