

The Flight of Quetzalcoatl

Aztec

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Then the time came for Quetzalcoatl too, when he felt the darkness twist in him like a

river, as though it meant to weigh him down, & he thought to go then, to leave the city as he had found it & to go, forgetting there ever was a Tula

Which was what he later did, as people tell it who still speak about the Fire: how he first

ignited the gold & silver houses, their walls speckled with red shells, & the other Toltec arts, the creations of man's hands & the imagination of his heart

& hid the best of them in secret places, deep in the earth, in mountains or down gullies,

buried them, took the cacao trees & changed them into thorned acacias

& the birds he'd brought there years before, that had the richly colored feathers & whose

breasts were like a living fire, he sent ahead of him to trace the highway he would follow toward the seacoast

When that was over he started down the road

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A whole day's journey, reached

THE JUNCTURE OF THE TREE

(so-called)

fat prominence of bark

sky branches

I sat beneath it

saw my face/cracked

mirror

An old man

& named it

TREE OF OLD AGE

thus to name

it to raise stones

to wound the bark

with stones

to batter it with

stones the stones to

cut the bark to fester

in the bark

TREE OF OLD AGE

stone patterns: starting
from the roots they
reach the highest leaves

*

The next day gone with walking
Flutes were sounding in his ears

Companions' voices

He squatted on a rock to rest
he leaned his hands against the rock

Tula shining in the distance

: which he saw he
saw it & began to cry
he cried the cold sobs cut his throat

A double thread of tears, a hailstorm
beating down his face, the drops
burn through the rock
The drops of sorrow fall against the stone
& pierce its heart

& where his hands had rested
shadows lingered on the rock: as if
his hands had pressed soft clay
As if the rock were clay

The mark too of his buttocks in the rock,
embedded there forever

A place named TEMACPALCO

*

To Stone Bridge next

water swirling in the riverbed
a spreading turbulence of water

: where he dug a stone up
made a bridge across

& crossed it

*

: who kept moving until he reached the Lake of Serpents, the elders waiting
for him

there, to tell him he would have to turn around, he would have to leave
their country & go home

: who heard them ask where he was bound for, cut off from all a man remembers, his

city's rites long fallen into disregard

: who said it was too late to turn around, his need still driving him, & when they asked

again where he was bound, spoke about a country of red daylight & finding wisdom, who had been called there, whom the sun was calling

: who waited then until they told him he could go, could leave his Toltec things & go (&

so he left those arts behind, the creations of man's hands & the imagination of his heart; the crafts of gold & silver, of working precious stones, of carpentry & sculpture & mural painting & book illumination & featherweaving)

: who, delivering that knowledge, threw his jeweled necklace in the lake, which vanished

in those depths, & from then on that place was called the Lake of Jewels

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Another stop along the line

This time

THE CITY OF THE SLEEPERS

And runs into a shaman

Says, you bound for somewhere honey

Says, the country of Red Daylight know it? expect to land there probe a little
wisdom

maybe

Says, no fooling try a bit of pulque brewed it just for you

Says, most kind but awfully sorry scarcely touch a drop you know

Says, perhaps you've got no choice perhaps I might not let you go now you
didn't drink

perhaps I'm forcing you against your will might even get you drunk
come on honey drink it up

Drinks it with a straw

So drunk he falls down fainting
on the road & dreams &
snores his snoring echoes very far

& when he wakes finds silence

& an empty town, his face

reflected & the hair shaved off

Then calls it

CITY OF THE SLEEPERS

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There is a peak between Old Smokey
& The White Woman

Snow is falling
& fell upon him in those days

& on his companions
who were with him, on
his dwarfs, his clowns
his gimps

It fell

till they were frozen
lost among the dead

The weight oppressed him
& he wept for them

He sang

The tears are endless
& the long sighs
issue from my chest

Further out

THE HILL OF MANY COLORS

which he sought

Portents everywhere, those

dark reminders

of the road he walks

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It ended on the beach

It ended with a hulk of serpents formed into a boat

& when he'd made it, sat in it & sailed away

A Boat that glided on those burning waters, no one knowing when he

reached the country

of Red Daylight

It ended on the rim of some great sea

It ended with his face reflected in the mirror of its waves

The beauty of his face returned to him

& he was dressed in garments like the sun

It ended with a bonfire on the beach where he would hurl himself

& burn, his ashes rising & the cries of birds

It ended with the linnet, with the birds of turquoise color, birds the color of

wild

sunflowers, red & blue birds

It ended with the birds of yellow feathers in a riot of bright gold

Circling till the fire had died out

Circling while his heart rose through the sky

It ended with his heart transformed into a star

It ended with the morning star with dawn & evening

It ended with his journey to Death's Kingdom with seven days of darkness

With his body changed to light

A star that burns forever in that sky

JR's working after Spanish prose translation by Angel María Garibay K.
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