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**NEZAHUALCÓYOTL'S
'LAMENTACIONES' AND THEIR
NAHUATL ORIGINS: THE
WESTERNIZATION OF
EPHEMERALITY**

The bibliographical history of the Spanish prose poems known as Nezahualcōyotl's 'Lamentaciones' has a kind of Borgesian fascination, though this does not perhaps quite make up for the mass of details needed just to identify them. But clearly they have to be identified before they can be at all related and compared with possible Náhuatl sources in the *Cantares mexicanos* and the *Romances de los señores de la Nueva España*. When editing the manuscripts, Ángel María Garibay made the promise to do this work one day, but did not live to keep it.¹

Among his *Documents pour servir à l'histoire du Mexique*,² Eugène Boban lists no less than three copies of a manuscript entitled 'Cantares del Emperador Nezahualcōyotl', though more undoubtedly exist or have existed. The minor variants between them are noted, where appropriate, below. A statement on the first of Boban's copies (item 232) confirms that the manuscript in question is the same as the one listed by Boturini in the catalogue appended to his *Idea de una nueva historia general de la América*³ (V, 2) and said to contain 'cantares del emperador Nezahualcōyotl, traducidos de lengua Náhuatl en la Castellana'. Another note on the third copy (item 295) records Father Pichardo's (unexceptionable) arguments for believing that the original 'antiquísimo manuscrito' was of the late 16th century, and that the Spanish versions of at least the first 'cantar', in its artlessness, was the work of an Indian or mestizo less familiar with literary Spanish than Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, who has

¹ *Historia de la literatura náhuatl*, México, II, 1954, p. 381; for his initial exploration see I, 1953, p. 253-6.

² Paris, 1891, II, p. 412, 413, & 448.

³ Madrid, 1746; see also his *Historia general de la América septentrional*, ed. M. Ballesteros Gaibrois, Madrid, 1948 (Documentos inéditos para la historia de España, VI), p. 226, and for possible earlier ownership, E. J. Burnes, 'Clavijero and the lost Sigüenza y Góngora manuscripts', *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, I, p. 59-90.

often been assumed to be its original translator and transcriber. In the manuscript copies and the several printings from them (C. M. de Bustamante's being the first in 1826),⁴ this first 'cantar' has been accompanied, a long with other material, by one, sometimes two metrical pieces, said variously to be 'by' Nezahualcóyotl and 'glosses on works by' him. And editors have used a number of collective titles, speaking respectively of 'lamentaciones', 'cantares', 'odas', and 'elegías' authored by the Tezcocan king. Among modern scholars, Alfonso Méndez Plancarte has attributed these metrical pieces to Ixtlilxóchitl, on good evidence.⁵ In any case, to say they are not Nezahualcóyotl's would seem fair if only because they are metrical and firmly embedded in Golden Age prosody. As for the first 'cantar', it stands here as the First Version, that is, a Spanish prose poem ostensibly originating in Nezahualcóyotl's Nahuatl and otherwise anonymous.

This Version falls into seven periods or stanzas, which may be grouped as follows. Two periods of invocation, with vestiges of dialogue, beginning respectively:

Oídme con atención las lamentaciones que yo el rey
Nezahualcóyotl hago sobre el imperio⁶

and:

Oh rey bullicioso y poco estable, cuando llegue aquel
tiempo después de tu muerte serán destruidos y deshechos
tus vasallos

Then, three substantial stanzas in which 'el viejo rey Tezozómoc', the willow-king once mighty and now torn up by death, is made exemplary of life's ephemerality and the utter end that death means. The two closing stanzas, longer or shorter according to the particular manuscript copy, open with a fresh invocation of the audience, 'Vos, hijos de los reyes y grandes señores', and urge those present to

⁴ *Tezcoco en los últimos tiempos de sus antiguos reyes, o sea relación tomada de los manuscritos inéditos de Boturini, redactados por el Lic. D. Mariano Veytia*, México, p. 254; from a (late) copy in the 'Antigua Secretaría del Virreinato'.

⁵ *Poetas Novohispanos*, México, I, 1942, p. 142 ss; the pieces in question begin 'Un rato cantar quiero' and 'Tiene el florido Verano'.

⁶ Quotations are based on Kingsborough's printing (see note 12) and the spelling has been modernized.

forget poignancy and sorrow in immediate enjoyment, in flowers passed from and to hand and in the abundance of the house of Spring.

Another version of Nezahualcóyotl's poetry more than once confused with this one⁷ comes in Ixtlilxóchitl's *Historia chichimeca* (written before 1608),⁸ a work which of course offers the fullest general account of Nezahualcóyotl as poet and author, among other pieces, of the 'sesenta y tantos cantos' sung in honour of his Unknown God. In chapter 47 of the History, devoted to praise of his forefather's poetic gifts, Ixtlilxóchitl dwells on a poem he calls 'Xopancuicatl, que significa Canto de la Primavera'. He reproduces it in full and gives the Nahuatl opening as 'Tla xocon caquican ha ni Nezahualcoyotl'; in his Spanish it begins: 'Oíd lo que dice el rey Nezahualcoyotzin, con sus lamentaciones. . .'. Confusion of this piece with the First Version has stemmed from the fact that their first two stanzas are very close, in sense and even lexically. Given that 'bullicioso y poco estable' is a pious or simply inadequate rendering of 'Yoyontzin', this quotation of the opening of the 2nd stanza gives a fair idea of the similarity:

Ido que seas de esta presente vida a la otra, oh
Yoyonzin! vendrá tiempo que serán deshechos y
destrozados tus vasallos

The remaining two stanzas of Ixtlilxóchitl's piece diverge considerably however. Instead of extended reference to Tezozómoc's vanished glory and invitation to present delight (proper to the 'xopancuical' as a mode) we find redoubled insistence on the fate of Nezahualcóyotl heirs and those of his friends, and renowned lament that they should know ignominy and pass into the service of strangers, 'en su misma patria, Acolhuacan'. Only in the concluding stanza is this fate said to be the result of the all too general instability of life, a borrowed thing. Even so, this is done summarily, and only a hint of the pleasure ceremonies which inform the First Version comes in the highly condensed final phrase 'estos breves gustos'. This piece, then, differs enough to be called a Second Version.

⁷ Unmistakably so by R. Campos, *La producción literaria de los aztecas*, México, 1936, p. 201.

⁸ Ed. A. Chavero, México, 1892; present quotations take note of Garibay's emendations (*loc. cit.*, note 1).

Ixtlilxóchitl says this poem was one of several recited by Nezahualcóyotl at the 'fiestas y convites' which marked the opening of his pleasure palaces in Tezcoco in the 1430s, the king's power being by then assured after an earlier life of danger and upheaval. The mood of the poem was, then in strong contrast to that of its supposed context a fact used by Ixtlilxóchitl for his own ends. Shortly after the *Historia chichimeca* was written, the story of the fiestas in the 1430s was repeated in Torquemada's *Monarquía indiana*,⁹ the nice detail being added that Nezahualcóyotl's guests were so moved by one of his recitals that they had to leave their food. Torquemada doesn't offer a full translation of the poem in question, but does give a paraphrase which resembles Ixtlilxóchitl's Version in so far as it also dwells on the future downfall of the house of Tezcoco, and the irremediable passing of wealth and power into the hands of others. The opening differs however. He gives the first words in Nahuatl as 'Xochitl mamani in huehuetitlan', claiming they mean 'Entre las coposas sabinas, haya frescas y olorosas flores'. As it turns out, the inaccuracy of this translation is such (see below) as to cast doubt on the whole of the opening. And we are left with a paraphrase in a historical context altogether similar to Ixtlilxóchitl's.¹⁰ For his part, Boturini, on finding his manuscript, did not hesitate to put the First Version into the same context as well, in a commentary later shamelessly plagiarized by Clavijero.¹¹ Indeed, Boturini found excitement generated in the poem by the notion of Nezahualcóyotl's inviting his guests not to exult in but to lament their power in the Triple Alliance and their final victory over Azcapuzalco. In other words he took the 'old Tezozómoc' to be the tyrant who had persecuted Nezahualcóyotl and murdered his father. The historical identity of this character is in fact impossible to establish with certainty, as for that matter is that of many other 'Tezozómocs' in the *Cantares* and *Romances*. For the moment it is enough to say that Boturini was no necessarily altogether wrong, though he gave no reasons for locating and interpreting the First Version as he did.

⁹ Madrid, 1615, Lib. 2, cap. XLV (I, p. 170-1).

¹⁰ These two pieces were specifically identified with each other by C. F. Ortega in his appendix to M. Veytia, *Historia antigua de Méjico*, Madrid, 1836, III, p. 247.

¹¹ F. J. Clavijero, *Historia antigua de México* (1780), México, 1958, p. 296 (Lib. 4 § 15); Boturini's original commentary is in his *Idea...* p. 90 ss.

After Bustamante's initial printing in 1826, the First Version appeared in several documentary publications of Nezahualcóyotl's laments, those by Ternaux-Compans (1838 and 1840), Kingsborough (1848), P. Mascaró (1878), D. Brinton (1890 in English translation), and Peñafiel (1903) being the most important.¹² However, all these editors included under one title not just the prose poem, and Ixtlil-xóchitl's metrical glosses, but a further piece claimed to be Nezahualcóyotl's by the Mexican cleric and antiquarian Granados y Gálvez, in his *Tardes americanas* (1778). This is the notorious poem beginning 'Son las caducas pompas del mundo como los verdes sauces'. Kingsborough and Brinton went so far as to identify it exactly with the one paraphrased in the *Monarquía indiana*, though neither of them offered to explain what relation Torquemada's reported Náhuatl opening bore to the full-length Otomi 'original' supplied by Granados. Indeed, the Mexican cleric's discovery enjoyed huge success in the nineteenth century, not least because of Prescott's enthused commentary and English translation in his best-seller *The Conquest of Mexico*.¹³ But Granados made the mistake of not mislaying his original (as McPherson had mislaid Ossian's Celtic), doubtless being emboldened to publish it by the world's ignorance of the Otomi tongue. His confidence proved justified in so far as one and a half centuries passed before anyone authoritatively stated that the Indian text was Spanish-tainted and eighteenth-century at the earliest.¹⁴

The Spanish prose poem in *Tardes americanas* acquired notoriety just because of the indictment of this fraud. And under no circumstances can the Otomi text, as it now stands, be attributed to Nezahualcóyotl, that much is plain. But the evident fraudulence of Granado's Otomi does not necessarily disqualify his Spanish, which on linguistic grounds could be argued to be prior to it. In any case, there are many echoes of the first two Versions in the Spanish text, in terms of motif, speaker, and general 'theme'. In other respects of course it is quite remote from them, and may well have had intermediary Spanish rather than pure Náhuatl origins. But just because its differences are instructive, because it is in prose and otherwise anonymous, it stands here as a Third Version.

¹² See respectively: *Voyages, relations et mémoires originaux*, Paris, 8, Append. viii & 12, Append. 1; *Antiquities of Mexico*, London, viii, p. 109-115; *El emperador Nezahualcóyotl considerado como poeta elegíaco*, Madrid; *Ancient Nahuatl Poetry*, Philadelphia, pp. 37-47; *Colección de documentos para la historia mexicana*, México, vi, pp. 32-47.

¹³ See the London 1850 edition, i, pp. 15, 147-166 & iii, Append.

¹⁴ Jacques Soustelle, *La Famille Otomi-Pame*, Paris, 1937, p. 217.

There can be no doubt that the shady reputation earned by this last Version rubbed itself off on to the other two through an obvious process of association. While the Versions, once extolled and pre-eminent, anyway lost status as a means of knowing Nezahualcōyotl's poetry with the discovery of the *Cantares* and *Romances* manuscripts at the end of the nineteenth century, they were subsequently thrust deeper into insignificance, even disreput, by that whiff of dubity. It is almost as if they had collectively to be sacrificed in atonement for past gullibility, to the god of total authenticity. Put another way: the discovery of undeniably 'genuine' poetry by Nezahualcōyotl in Nahuatl has not encouraged anyone to compare it with the Versions, even though the connection between them is intimate, quite beyond the fact of ostensible authorship. Even if given passages in the *Cantares* and *Romances* manuscripts are not actually those ghostly originals apparently known to Boturini and Bustamante and vainly searched for by Alexander von Humboldt,¹⁵ at least the correspondences between these manuscripts and the Versions are incessant and unmistakable. The fact this is so affords a fine opportunity for seeing the distance between two poetic worlds and for observing the Westernization of American Indian literature with precision.¹⁶ As translations, and as practically the only 'samples' of Nahuatl lyric poetry known about for over three centuries, the Versions may indeed have been unfaithful. But they could hardly have been otherwise given the jealous demands of the poetic idiom of Tezcoco's palaces and for that matter of orthodox Castilian. To think otherwise is to fall into the epistemological trap that swallowed Pierre Menard, to invoke Borges a second time. For, to have been truly authentic the Versions should of course have been restricted to the language and diction of 15h-century Tezcoco, should have remained nothing more or less than the Nahuatl poems Nezahualcōyotl himself is thought to have composed.

¹⁵ M. Veytia made Boturini's note on the language of the 'cantares' seem ambiguous (see Brinton, *Ancient Nahuatl Poetry*, p. 33), and in his commentary Boturini does refer to the 'huehue Tezozomocitli'; see also Bustamante, *Mañanas de la Alameda de México*, México, II, 1836, p. 95 and Humboldt, *Voyage*, Paris, 1810, p. 319.

¹⁶ In J.-C. Lambert's words: 'Nezahualcoyotl a été l'une des premières, et des plus insignes, victimes de l'occidentalisation du passé mexicain' (*Les Poésies mexicaines*, Paris, 1961, p. 97); this however did not discourage him in his anthology from attributing to the king a French translation of I. Nicholson's English translation of part of Ixtlilxóchitl's gloss on a Spanish translation 'Tiene el florido Verano'.

Discovering in turn what might constitute a Nahuatl poem by Nezahualcóyotl is in fact not always easy, first of all because 'poems' as such are often ill-defined in the *Cantares* and *Romances* manuscripts. This much has been admitted by all those who have edited them seriously (Brinton, Schultze Jena, Garibay, León-Portilla).¹⁷ While in some cases the length of a poem is fixed unexceptionably by the first copyist, sometimes it can be detected, if at all, only through invocational and codaic formulas, and the technical illustration of rhythmic changes.¹⁸ Other times a new singer is presented by name, or an ending made palpable by the accumulation of purely phonetic phrases ('oyaya', 'ohuaya', etc.), which it is easy enough to find parallels for in song anywhere. Even so, several 'poems' still run compulsively into one another (compare for example Schultze Jena's division of ff. 16-26 of the *Cantares* (=CM), his *große Triologie*, with Garibay's and with León-Portilla's). Moreover, lines and whole stanzas are echoed and even repeated verbatim in various parts of the same or the other manuscript: this happens with the passage Nezahualcóyotl reportedly sang to cheer the ailing Moctezuma (CM, f. 63 v^o & 66 v^o). In these circumstances then, it is hardly surprising to find that the Nahuatl 'first lines' offered by historians and transcribers of the Versions do not lead to given sequences in the manuscripts which correspond to the Spanish in their whole length. Torquemada's singular and helpful-looking 'sabinas' are really of course the ceremonial drum around which the Brotherhood (icniuyotl), presided among others by Nezahualcóyotl, performed their poetry: 'xochitl mamani in huehuetitlan' is then the commonest of openings. So too, Ixtlilxóchitl's 'tla xocon...', echoed also in the First Version. Indeed, taken together, with their separation at the third stanza, the first two Versions well exemplify a situation commonplace in the Nahuatl; while the weaving end refrains of the First Version are formally very reminiscent of the manuscripts. In this respect, only the Third Version with its interdependent stanzas and con-sequential development is alien to its supposed origins.

¹⁷ See respectively: *Ancient Nahuatl Poetry; Alt-aztekische Gesänge*, Stuttgart, 1957; *Poesía Náhuatl*, México, I-III, 1964-8; *Trece poetas del mundo azteca*, México, 1967. None of these editions is complete; transcription and readings here based chiefly on León-Portilla and Garibay.

¹⁸ Cf. K. A. Nowotny, 'Die Notation des "tono" in den aztekischen Cantares', *Baessler Archiv*, N. F., IV, p. 185-9, and V. T. Mendoza, 'El ritmo de los cantares mexicanos recolectados por Sahagún', *Miscellanea...* Paul Rivet, México, 1958, II, p. 777-785.

Identifying an integral poem *by* Nezahualcōyotl in the Nahuatl is also made hard by the imprint of the conditions under which the Brotherhood's poetry was performed. They were such as to render individual authorship an uncertain and unstable thing. And the Versions should surely be sooner related to what is known of this background than to the kind of Westernized banquet imagined by Torquemada. As Garibay has shown, many poems attributable to Nezahualcōyotl may well be less his work than other apparently anonymous ones. The distinction between singer-composer (*cuicani*) and singer-performer (*cuicaito*) existed it is true, but not so thoroughly that we can always know who is responsible for lines later recorded on the page in Roman letters. Divorced from their context, the words 'ni Nezahualcōyotl' could equally well mean 'I Nezahualcōyotl composed this poem' or 'I am the one now acting the part of Nezahualcōyotl who may or may not have composed the poem I am now about to sing'. This is notably the case with the poem or group of poems entitled 'Icuic Nezahualcoyotzin' (*CM*, f. 28 v^o), which were performed after the king's death, and which Garibay found fascinating as nascent theatre.¹⁹ Unlike the Third Version, an unrelieved monologue (better, soliloquy), here again the first two both bear marks of immediate Nahuatl origins in having vestigial dialogue between speakers or singers, in which 'yo', 'tú' and 'él' merge as individual 'persons'. Two names are distinguishable, Nezahualcōyotl, and Yoyontzin, addressed as 'tú' in the 2nd stanza, but in context it is not clear who the other was, or if he was only a (scabrous) epithet for the king himself. Such interchanges are commonplace in the *Cantares* (as are formally analogous ones in the Sacred Hymns themselves), but not all are easily 'castable', including the Nezahualcōyotl-Yoyontzin passage beginning 'ni hualacic ye nican' (*CM*, f. 18 v^o). In the First Version the sense of performance is heightened by the reinvocation of the noble audience in stanza 6 ('Vos, hijos de reyes...'), which exactly catches the 'in antepilhuan' recurrently uttered by the Nahuatl poets.

Poems by given individuals can be detected in the *Cantares* and *Romances*, as Miguel León-Portilla has shown in his *Trece poetas del mundo azteca*. More often they cannot, however, and to search doggedly for integral textual originals of the Versions is pointless. This does not mean attempts at comparison should be abandoned. One poet's work can so seldom be distinguished from another's just

¹⁹ *Historia...*, 1, p. 96.

because Nahuatl lyricism was governed by conventions other than those of private ownership of alphabetized text which were quite as specific and informing. Indeed, it is the very restrictiveness of these conventions which has led to a certain war with monotony and that exquisiteness so often found characteristic of Nahuatl lyrics. And within this body of poetry, especially in that from Tezcoco and the Triple Alliance area, Nezahualcóyotl can safely be said to have been a major shaping presence with preoccupations that ring through with marked intensity in given parts of the *Cantares* and *Romances* manuscripts.

Garibay's description of the three modes into which Nahuatl lyric poetry falls remains hard to improve on. He distinguishes as 'species' the 'Cuauhcuicatl' (Teuc- or Yaocuicatl, which affirms the holiness of battle and of the warrior's death), the Xopanquicatl (or Xochicuicatl), and the Icnocuicatl.²⁰ It is into the last two modes that most poetry associated with Nezahualcóyotl falls. Indeed, passages like the following have been considered typical of the xopanquicatl mode, with its poignant immersion in sensory delight and the will to make Spring or flower beauty unending.²¹

ah tlamiz noxochiuh ah tlamiz nocuic
in nocoyayehua zan nicuicanitl (CM, f. 16v^o)

Equally, the icnocuicatl, the expression of orphaned ephemerality and cosmic exposure, is often found with the king's name:

nitlayocoya nicnotlamatiya zan nitepiltzin nezahualcoyotl xochica
ye ihuan cuicatica niqumilnamiqui tepilhuan ayn oyaque yehua
tezozomocztin o yehua cuahcuahtzin (CM, f. 25r^o)

Garibay in fact mentioned this latter passage when discussing the Second Version, saying it was characteristic of the icnocuicatl and, as such, one of several possible sources for the Spanish.²² What he did not do was relate this to the fact that Ixtlilxóchitl's piece was reportedly a xopanquicatl. Nor did he hint at the huge atmospheric gulf between either mode and the Second Version. For Nahuatl lyrics of both modes derive their effect, as Ixtlilxóchitl's Spanish does

²⁰ *Historia...*, I, p. 85 ss.

²¹ For the development of Nahuatl poetics as such, see M. León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl*, México, 1959 (2nd ed), p. 140-145, and D. Miliani, 'Notas para una poética entre los nahuas', *Estudios de cultura náhuatl*, IV, p. 263-280.

²² *Historia...*, I, p. 254.

not, from the tense opposition between present delight and surrounding desolation, between precious tactile splendour and emptiness, the mode growing out of emphasis with this tension. This is as true of the passage Lehmann called 'Ein Tolteken-Klagegesang'²³ (*CM*, f. 26-7), with its vivid images of the magnificence of Tula, as of Nezahualcōyotl's famous lines beginning 'tiyazque yehuaya...' (*CM*, f. 17r^o). To the degree that the Second Version shifts from the xopan-cuicatl, and from the icnocuicatl, to a 'lamentación', or a less acute kind of 'elegy' or 'lament', it loses a force essential to both the Nahuatl modes: the brief phrase 'estos breves gustos', appended almost as an afterthought, is not enough to restore the tension. Tactile beauty and the cutting sense of ephemerality vanish into the 'timeless melancholy' of the following:

porque en esto vienen a parar los mandos, imperios y
señoríos, que duran poco y son de poca estabilidad

There are good reasons why Ixtlilxóchitl made his xopan-cuicatl do this; for the moment the point is, the First Version in this respect retains far more affinity with the Nahuatl. As the emblem of ephemerality, Tezozómoc himself, 'florido y poderoso', is the upright force thriving on 'la humedad de la ambición', like the flowers erect in rain (in toxochiuh icac quiapan, *CM*, f. 27v^o). He is the budding tree, 'que se levantó y enseñoreó sobre todos', as 'quetzalcoyolin ahuia cueponia topan moteca' (*CM*, f. 75v^o). He stands 'semejante al saúz' to the end; compare:

itzmolinin quetzalhuexotl in ayatlami in itlalol in tezozomocli
(*CM*, f. 33r^o)

His power gone, his 'imperio', his 'casa y corte', are left 'marchito y seco', as in Tula itself: 'quen ya mamaniz mochan moquiapan' (*CM*, f. 27r^o). Against such desolation the only solace is here in present company, where garlands pass from hand to hand in gestures of unity, 'puesto que la abundancia de las ricas y variadas recreaciones son como ramilletes de flores que pasan de mano en mano'. In Nezahualcōyotl's speech:

maxochitl o yehcoc ye nican ayyahue
zan tlaahuixochitla moyahua aya
motzetzelo a an ca zo yehuatl nepapan xochitl

²³ *Festschrift Eduard Seler*, Stuttgart, 1922, p. 281-319.

And the exhortation comes to live that beauty which is here and now, poignant and ephemeral as this experience is:

Gocen por ahora la abundancia y belleza del florido Verano con la melodía de sus voces las parleras aves y liben las mariposas el néctar de las fragantes flores

The strange syntax and implicit identification with butterflies and birds in the last phrase take us to the heart of Nahuatl poetic ceremonies, with their elaborate dress and mime:

Ililincohui ilihuacan o tle on quitoa in
quechol ihui tzilini ilihuacan o ye on
tlachichina ma yahuia ye iyol cueponi ya
xochitl ah

zan ye huitz in papalotl huiya ye om patlantihuitz yemozozouhtihuitz xochiticpac nemia ye on... (etc.) (CM, f. 17v^o)

Absolutely none of this survives in the Third Version. Here hall sense of Nahuatl context and mode has gone. Just as Nezahualcóyotl becomes a soliloquist, so the atmosphere his words presuppose becomes rarified and vacant. The opening comes out of nowhere and the 'you' addressed is wholly hypothetical (Si yo os introdujera a los oscuros senos de esos panteones y os preguntara...); the urgency of the Nahuatl interrogative, its nervousness (cuix...?), is drawn out into ponderous subjunction. The speaker is indeed not communicating with another poet of the Brotherhood, in a charged atmosphere, but with a reader whose view of Tezcoco is as remote, and as firmly post-Conquest as his own. It is not that the proper nouns used are in any way inappropriate (though the reference to smoking Popocatépetl rings false).²⁴ The vanished heroes passed in review in stanza 6 are all authentic, from Toltzin (Quetzalcóatl) the last of the Toltecs, through Xólotl, Quetzalcóatl's dog twin and the first of the Tezcocans, to Ixtlilxóchitl, Nezahualcóyotl's own murdered father. But that is just the point: they are passed in re-view, put in a historicist perspective nowhere to be found in Nahuatl poetry.

The 'theme' of the Third Version may be similar to that of the other two, but in terms more relevant to Nahuatl lyrics (mode, inner tension, atmosphere) it has gone much further into Western tradi-

²⁴ M. León-Portilla however pertinently notes the total impossibility of phrases like 'la redondez de la tierra es un sepulcro' (*Trece poetas...*, p. 41).

tions. It is in this last Version, too, that the grammatical violence done by Spanish to Nahuatl surface brilliance is most apparent. Shifting noun-verb sheens and interchangeable facets are replaced by structured sequences in which Latinate grammatical categories not only recover but exult in their identity. For:

xoxopan xihuitl ipan tochiuaca hual cecelia hual itzmolini
 in toyollo xochitl in tonacayo cequi cueponi on
 cuetlahuia (CM, f. 14v^o)

comes this:

En breves periodos cuentan las deleitosas repúblicas de las flores sus reinados; porque las que por la mañana ostentan soberbiamente engreídas la vanidad y el poder, por la tarde lloran la triste cadencia de su trono, y los repetidos parasismos que las impelen al desmayo, la aridez, la muerte y el sepulcro.

All the Versions suffer from this kind of structuring to some extent, it is true, for that was a problem their authors faced. The valencies of words in lyrical Nahuatl, especially focal terms like 'xochitl', are so different from those available in Indo-European grammatical patterns as to make translation a hatchet affair still now. Given this huge linguistic disjunction, and having no recourse to the standard props of metre and rhyme, these early translators all had to find something to hold their Spanish together with. And working at the time they did, they found a certain kind of Latinate atavism came most easily to hand. But while Granados's copyist over-compensated grotesquely, the First Version responded to foreign shape, the undecided syntax of some of the manuscript copies being a mark of guarantee. Admittedly, some Nahuatl delicacies are still swallowed by Golden Age idiom: both the extended willow-king 'metaphor' as such, and the Calderonian descants on the world being all 'burlas y engaño' (echoed in the Second Version and a rough equivalent to Nahuatl thoughts on insubstantiality) are cases in point. But still the First Version retains many of the virtues of the *Cantares*; and up to the end of the 19th century it was certainly unsurpassed as a Western insight into pre-Conquest Nahuatl lyricism, and unequalled as a translated xopanucatl.

As for Ixtlilxóchitl, he is insidious as his own 'copyist' because his diction is also apparently so little Westernized, and because it was his particular distortion (with some help from Granados) which wrought so powerful an effect on subsequent generations of 'trans-

lators', paraphrasts, imitators and critics of Nezahualcóyotl's poetry. For on top of (in part) inevitable infidelity and insensitivity have come wilfulness and personal obsession. Over time, the xopanucatl from Tezcoco grew into a message from the most unlikely quarers. The first serious interference of this kind comes in the 3rd stanza:

Y esto digo: entonces serán las aflicciones, las miserias y persecuciones que padecerán tus hijos y nietos, y llorosos se acordarán de ti, viendo que los dejaste huérfanos en servicio de otros extraños, en su misma patria, Acolihuacan.

Now the notion of being abandoned or orphaned was essential enough to the *icnucuatl* mode to give it its name. Fleeing Tezozómoc, Nezahualcóyotl cries 'niconcahualoc' and his words are echoed throughout the *Cantares*. 'Tech icnocauhque in tlatipac' (*CM*, f. 14r^o) in one passage, and as a refrain in the 'Toltec Elegy': 'tic ya icnocauhqui nican Tollan Nonohualco' (*CM*, f. 27r^o).²⁵ Indeed, the cry goes back to the Sacred Hymns where the gods themselves leave poor mortals exposed and helpless on earth; hence the chant to Chicome Coatl: 'ti tech icnocauazqui'.²⁶ What Ixtlilxóchitl does is channel this common sentiment into a quite local preoccupation with the future of the royal house of Tezcoco, of which he of course felt himself to be a displaced member. Nezahualcóyotl's descendants will be not just orphans but the servants of strangers in their own fatherland, and the object of calamity and persecution. The king seems to be saying that he knows a whole given society, a distinct way of life, is faced with imminent extinction by an alien power. Ixtlilxóchitl's operation (still more apparent in his metrical glosses) is then to make Nezahualcóyotl obsessed with the very future he himself has come to know, and to give a Nahuatl trope an unprecedented historicist and personal flavour. The ephemerality of life already becomes thereby the 'mutability of life', to use Prescott's phrase. And it is principally this which robs his Version of that dominant poignancy still sensible in the First Version. Nezahualcóyotl was shown asking about the future of his house in Nahuatl, it is true:

quen on maniz tllali in acolihuacan huiya
cuix oc quenman o ticonoyahuaz in momacehual (*CM*, f. 28v^o)

²⁵ For Garibay's neutralizing of Seler's reading of 'Nonohualco' see *Veinte himnos sacros de los nahuas*, México, 1958, p. 120.

²⁶ *Veinte himnos...*, p. 186.

But here his wondering is mainly about his own present: he asks what will become of us here and now, of our nobility in this place, of our Brotherhood before the unknown. And above all there are no signs in the *Cantares* of the prophecies Ixtlilxóchitl makes so much of. Ixtlilxóchitl's prophetic forefather derives in fact far less from any Nahuatl source than from his own persistent desire to make of him an Old Testament hero, and someone the Spaniards would recognize and accept. Of course this desire was complicated at moments by vestigial loyalty (analogous to El Inca Garcilaso's) to a golden Indian past glimpsed when he shifted his eyes from Cortés. But most of the time he did his best to make Nezahualcóyotl the Psalm King, the Mexican David complete with Uriah and Bethsheba and a good singing voice, whose very laments for the vanity of earthly things, whose predictions of Mexican catastrophe and whose intuitions of the one (as yet) Unknown God, become a surreptitious invitation to the Spaniards to come to America and bring their bible with them.

This is very much the Nezahualcóyotl that Prescott inherited from the *Historia chichimeca*, though the 'songs of much solemnity and pathos' intoned by the loser in the *Conquest of Mexico* slip that much further from Nahuatl origins. The most authentic parts of the Versions are bundled together in paraphrase or ignored, while Granados's piece is given pride of place in almost full English translation; and here a palpably proto-Christian twist is administered to the obscure last stanza, as the king 'turn for consolation to the world beyond the grave'. In addition, a certain Ossianic influence helped to make Nezahualcóyotl appear as the forlorn hero of a vanished race; from being the prophet of his own downfall he further becomes the 'natural' victim of historical advance. This eminently nineteenth-century figure became the subject of many other 'translations' and imitations of the period. To list them all would be too much, would lead too far into the definitive graveyards of literary history. But it should perhaps be said that several writers were helped to focus at all on Nezahualcóyotl by that literary Moloch Chateaubriand. Under his spell Nezahualcóyotl's words became that much more unspoilt and 'simple' in their sadness. Roa Bárcena talks of the king's good heart,²⁷ and in Villalón's xopanucatl (the Third Version put into jingling rhyme) he appears almost ingenuous.²⁸ More remarkable

²⁷ 'Casamiento de Nezahualcóyotl', *Leyendas mexicanas*, México, 1862, p. 142.

²⁸ His 'traducción libre' of Nezahualcóyotl's banquet poem (1872) is published by Mascaró, *El emperador Nezahualcóyotl*.

are the 'lamentaciones' in J. J. Pesado's *Las aztecas. Poesías tomadas de los antiguos cantares mexicanos*,²⁹ though not for any re-discovery of that source. Pesado's idiom remains firmly Western and Biblical despite the advice he took, when 'translating', from Faustino Chimalpopoca (or perhaps just because of it, given Chimalpopoca's career at Maximilian's court³⁰ and his enthusiasm for the Guadalupe cult). The xopancuicatl in this book is remarkable because in it, the 'pure' and 'simple' king uses his prophetic gifts acutely enough actually to be able to convert to Christianity ahead of time: 'mi corazón, oh Dios! a ti convierto'.

Apart from confirming the reactionary presence of *Les Martyrs*, this utterance marks the climax of an interpretation which began with Ixtlilxóchitl and those sixteenth-century transcribers of the *Cantares* and the *Romances* who so crudely forced the words 'Dios' and 'Santa María' on to the Nahuatl page. One of its practical effects was to provoke the 24 books of J. L. Tercero's 'poem' *Nezahualpilli o el catolicismo en México*.³¹ Consecrated new as a Biblical figure, Nezahualcóyotl contrives to convert others to his intuited Christian God, and yet another version of his xopancuicatl recited at another banquet wins over a few; in book 9 he ascends unequivocally to heaven to be embraced by David himself. This last detail would have especially pleased Lord Kingsborough, who of course gave his whole fortune to proving that the Mexicans were the lost tribes of Israel on documentary evidence which included the Versions. There can be few better examples of how utterly a piece of literature can be changed over time by linguistic and ideological pressure, its parts being successively replaced like the planks of the philosopher's ship under the formal continuity of a name.

In recent years Nezahualcóyotl's poetry has been given new life by Garibay's scholarship. The account of this resurrection (in Ernesto Cardenal and many others) is a chapter for itself. But generally it might be said that the qualities for which his poetry is now admired are just those which were obscured in the tradition of 'lamentacio-

²⁹ México, 1854.

³⁰ But see Menéndez y Pelayo's *Historia de la poesía hispanoamericana* (Madrid, 1948), I, p. 139, for a note on his disowning Pesado's 'translations'. Pedro Henríquez Ureña records that Roa Bárcena (also Pesado's biographer) celebrated the emperor's arrival by evoking the shades of Indian kings as his protectors (*Literary Currents in Hispanic America*, ch. v).

³¹ México, 1875. Cf. Concha Meléndez, *La novela indianista en Hispanoamérica*, Puerto Rico, 1961, p. 147-155.

nes'³² that was born in Ixtlilxóchitl's and Granados's Version. To this extent it is less surprising to recall that Boturini based much of his 'modern' criticism of Nahuatl lyrics on the First Version, Nezahualcóyotl being, in his *Scienza nuova*, a poet of the Heroic Age and literarily no more derivative than, say, the ancient Greeks. Indeed, up to this century this Version was altogether remarkable for offering rare insight into that acute Nahuatl expression of ephemerality which can be translated only with such great loss out of its original culture and language.

³² This still finds some resonance however: cf. S. Clissold, *Latin America. A Cultural Outline*, London, 1965, p. 26-7, and Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror (A Portrait of Nezahualcóyotl)*, New Mexico, 1949 p. 147 (an intelligent abbreviation; see also, p. 168). The Version (in Brinton's English, also comes as the finale to A. Grove Day's *The Sky Clears* (New York, 1952) and provokes Yvor Winters to comment in *Forms of Discovery* (Denver, 1967), p. 355.