

## El mito azteca'

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*S*egún la leyenda, Coatlicue, "Madre de los Dioses," is sweeping on top of the mountain, Coatepec, when she discovers two beautiful feathers. Thinking that later she will place them on her altar, she stuffs them into her apron and continues sweeping. But without her noticing, the feathers begin to gestate there next to her womb and Coatlicue, already advanced in age, soon discovers that she is pregnant.

When her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, learns that her mother is about to give birth to Huitzilopochtli, God of War, she is incensed. And, along with her siblings, the Four Hundred Stars, she conspires to kill Coatlicue rather than submit to a world where War would become God.

Huitzilopochtli is warned of this by a hummingbird and vows to defend his mother. At the moment of birth, he murders Coyolxauhqui, cutting off her head and completely dismembering her body.

Breast splits from chest splits from hip splits from thigh from knee from arm and foot. Coyolxauhqui is banished to the darkness and becomes the moon, la diosa de la luna.

In my own art, I am writing that wound. That moment when brother is born and sister mutilated by his envy. He possesses the mother, holds her captive, because she cannot refuse any of her children, even her enemy son. Here, mother and daughter are pitted against each other and daughter must kill male-defined motherhood in order to save the culture from misogyny, war, and greed. But el hijo comes to the defense of patriarchal motherhood,

<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Mexican performance artist Guadalupe García, who first introduced this myth to me.

kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising light of the Sun/Son. This machista myth is enacted every day of our lives, every day that the sun (Huitzilopochtli) rises up from the horizon and the moon (Coyolxauhqui) is obliterated by his light.

Huitzilopochtli is not my god. And although I revere his mother, Coatlicue, Diosa de La Muerte y La Vida, I do not pray to her. I pray to the daughter, La Hija Rebelde. She who has been banished, the mutilated sister who transforms herself into the moon. She is la fuerza femenina, our attempt to pick up the fragments of our dismembered womanhood and reconstitute ourselves. She is the Chicana writer's words, the Chicana painter's canvas, the Chicana dancer's step. She is motherhood reclaimed and sisterhood honored. She is the female god we seek in our work, la Mechicana before the "fall."

*And Huitzilopochtli raises his sword from the mouth of his mother's womb and cuts off his sister's head, her bleeding down the belly of the serpent-mountain. Coyolxauhqui, moon-faced goddess, enters the darkness, y la Raza, la época de guerra.*

*Pero de vez en cuando la luna gets her revenge.*

Just a week ago, I returned from a two-month stay in Mexico, the last day of which found me on top of a pyramid in Tepotzlán, an hour outside of Mexico City. At 1:26 pm the sky fell to complete darkness as the moon eclipsed the sun. "Tonatiuh cualo," el sol fue comido por la fuerza femenina. And el Conchero<sup>2</sup> who led the ceremonia in full Aztec regalia de pluma y piel believed it an ominous sign, this momentary and sudden loss of light, this deep silent feminine darkness. The quieting of the pájaros, the retreat of the ground animals into their caves of night. And he prayed to the gods to return the light. And I prayed with him, brother that he is, brother who never recognizes his sister in prayer, brother who

<sup>2</sup>A "conchero" is a ceremonial leader who sounds the conch shell and leads the people in their prayers and offerings.

fears her power, as mother and daughter and wife and lover, as he fears the darkening of the light.

But we women were not afraid, accustomed as we are to the darkness. In public, we mouthed the shapes of his words that mourned the loss of light, and in secret we sang praise to She Who Went Unacknowledged, She Who Remains in Shadow, She Who Has the Power to Put Out the Sun's Light. Coyolxauhqui, the moon, reduced in newspapers to the image of a seductress, flirtatious coquette, merging in coitus with the sun. Later, we women, lesbianas from all parts of América Latina, would offer sacrifice, burn copal, call out her name. We, her sisters, would pay tribute to la luna, keep the flame burning, keep destruction at bay.

In those six minutes of darkness, something was born. In the darkness of that womb of silence, that female quietude, a life stirred. I understood for the first time the depth and wonder of the feminine, although I confess I have been awed by it before, as my own female face gazes upon its glory and I press my lips to that apex in the women I love.

Like the others, I welcomed the light upon its return. El Canto de Gallo. Probably that was the most amazing of all, el segundo amanecer. The female passed on y dió luz a un sol nuevo. As the light took the shape of the sky again, el Conchero stood on top of the pyramid mountain and announced the end of El Quinto Sol, the end of a 500-year historia sangrienta that saw to the near destruction of the Indigenous peoples of Las Américas. And from the ashes of destruction, a new era is born: El Sexto Sol: La Época de La Conciencia Humana.

The day after the eclipse, I called my mother from San Francisco to tell her I had arrived home safely. And without planning to, when describing the eclipse I told her, "Ahora conozco a Dios, Mamá." And I knew she understood my reverence in the face of a power utterly beyond my control. She is a deeply religious woman, who calls her faith "catholic." I use another name or no name, but she understood that humility, that surrender, before a sudden glimpsed god. Little did she know god was a woman.

I am not the church-goer that my mother is, but the same faith-

fulness drives me to write: the search for Coyolxauhqui amid all the disfigured female characters and the broken men that surround them in my plays and poems. I search for a whole woman I can shape with my own Chicana tongue and hand. A free citizen of Aztlán and the world.