

## Poem

Tamryn Bennett

### Marrow

the long grass sings again  
tasting fistfuls of hair and teeth

a path of cochineal footprints  
where boys scratch shallow graves

burying shadows between maize  
warriors of flower and chant

coiled into ossuaries  
of clicking roots

chicatanas and psychopomps  
carry the dead crumb by crumb

back to Mictlán  
bones becoming seeds

bats hanging mangled  
constellations in broken jaws

hushed shrines of ossien and moss  
wait for the snaking wind

grains of prayer  
in a feathered coat

worming music into shells

breath into marrow

to surface with sketches

the jade of our making

## **Tuétano**

la hierba larga canta de nuevo

probando puñados de cabello y dientes

un sendero de huellas de cochinilla

donde niños aruñan tumbas poco profundas

enterrando sombras entre el maíz

guerreros de flor y canto

enrollados en osarios

de raíces haciendo chasqueando

chicatanas y psicopompos

cargan los muertos migaja por migaja

de regreso a Mictlán

huesos hechos semillas

murciélagos colgando

constelaciones mutiladas en mandíbulas rotas

altares callados de osien y musgo

esperan al viento serpenteante

granos de oración  
en una capa emplumada

gusanos haciendo música en conchas

respiran la médula

emergiendo con bocetos  
el jade de nuestro hacer

### Commentary

Tree roots split the streets of Mexico City. They hint at myths below the earthquaked surface and a deep reverence for trees. These crevices invite exploration of the intrinsic link between plants and poetry in Mesoamerican mythology. From the chants of in xóchitl, in cuicatl (the flower, the song), to the four cardinal trees that bridge earth, sky and underworld, flora has always held a sacred place in pre-Columbian belief (Farias, 2013). Too complex for cursory analysis, instead a sharing of some ecological symbols in Mesoamerican creation mythologies as they relate to the poem 'Marrow'.

Branches of the 'World Tree' connect and sustain cultures across the globe. In Mayan mythology, the axis mundi is often seen as a ceiba tree, studded with thorns and souls represented by birds traveling between the underworld and heavens. Since colonisation, this cosmic channel has been variously overlaid with Christian symbols of the cross and Virgin Mary (Granziera, 2012, p.43). In addition to the central ceiba, four supporting trees that represent the cardinal points and elements are also depicted in the Dresden and Borgia codices. In Mexica mythology, the four sons of Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl, known as the Tezcatlipocas, have also been ascribed to these trees and cardinal points. The Tezcatlipoca of the West is Quetzalcoatl. Taking the form of a feathered serpent, he is often associated with wind, light, justice, learning, maize, mercy and resurrection. The worship of a rainbow serpent creator is also echoed in mythologies of Australia's First Nations communities.

Myths of Quetzacoatl are webbed and multiple but comparable versions link the feathered serpent to humanity's current incarnation. According to the *Legend of the Suns* (1558), Quetzalcoatl navigated the nine levels of Mictlan (the windy emerald underworld) to find the bones of humanity held by 'the Lord and Lady of the Dead Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl so that he may start a new race of humans' (Shushan, p.130). After various tests involving a conch shell, bees and worms, Quetzalcoatl fools Mictlantecuhtli and is allowed to leave with the bones but not before they are broken. With blood sacrifice, Quetzacoatl rebirths humanity from these broken pieces. Having been resurrected from the underworld, the Mesoamerican reverence for the World Tree as an umbilical cord between lower and higher realms becomes clearer.

While too superficial to even begin to understand the intricacies of pre-Columbian mythology, 'Marrow' hints at the shared histories our bones hold, the sacred role of insects and plants, and how trees provide spiritual passage through time and space.

## References

Farias, Arnold, 'In Xochitl, In Cuicatl (The Flower, The Song): Analysis of Colonial Cultural-Social Transformations Through Nahuatl Metaphor' University of Texas, Austin, 2013.

Granziera, Patrizia 'The Worship of Mary in Mexico: Sacred Trees, Christian Crosses, and the Body of the Goddess', *Toronto Journal of Theology*, University of Toronto Press. Volume 28, Number 1, 2012, pp. 43.

Shushan, Gregory, *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-Death Experience*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2009.