

From CANTARES MEXICANOS

Translated from the Nahuatl by David Bowles

CŌZOLCUĪCATL

Nican ompehua cōzolcuīcatl itōcā, ye huehcāuh ic coquichih
 tohqueh tepanecah, in Mēxihco tlahtoāni Ahuizotzin
 itlatlalil nextēncō nohnōhuiāntzin cuīcani ihuan pilli catca.

A

A in ompēuh i ye nocuīc
 xōchicalihtec niman
 noconmāma nopillōtzin
 noconāhuiltiz ololotzin
 mahcēhua in conētī Ahuizotōn oo
 mācaoc xichōca
 nopillōtzin in toconihtōtiz i moxōchitzin ihuān
 mocacalatzin ololotzin

Ānāhuatl nichuihhuixohua
 ye nimēxihcatl nichpōtzintli ye
 nochīmalcōzoltzin nicmāmahtih oncān onotih aitzin
 ye noyāōxōchiconētzin.
 A oyohualli cahuāntihuītz i ye nonchōca aitzin
 ye noyāōxōchiconētzin.

Zan ca izquixōchitl nochichihualtzin
 cacaloxōchitl tontomalīnqueh telpōtzintli
 Ahuizotōn in tocochiyān
 xōchipahpāqui noyōllōtzin
 in telpōtzintli ahuizotōn.

Tizatī ihhuītl malīntihuītz chōquixōchitl chīmālli
 xōchitl cuecuepocatihcac tēicōltih tētlanectih
 Ātlīxco tenāmitl īxpan cāhuiltiya.

Ye noyāōxochiuh malīntinemi ye chālcoatlācah ye
 quimamāhtihuih xōchicuahuītl ye huexōtzinco

From SONGS OF MEXICO

A CRADLESONG

By which the Tepanecs in former times praised Ahuizotl, Mexica king.
 A composition of Nohnohuiantzin of Nextenco, singer and nobleman.

I. Child, Boy, Man

A

Ah, my song begins within the flower house,
 And I carry my little one safe in my arms.
 I'll bring such joy to this swaddled babe:
 Baby Ahuizotl deserves to be cuddled.

Oh, don't you cry, my precious child—
 For you will dance and dance,
 Bloom and rattle in your hands,
 My little swaddled babe.

I'm just a young Mexica girl,
 But I rock the Eye of God himself
 In the cradling shield I bear.
 He lies there trembling,
 My future warflower.

Ah, the ankle bells of warriors
 Come ringing down the years,
 And I weep, also trembling,
 My future warflower.

B

My breasts are budding popcorn blooms,
 And like fragrant frangipani
 We lie entwined in this bed,
 My sweet young boy, Ahuizotl.
 My heart thrills to such lovely flowers,

ātlīxco tenāmitl īxpan cahuiltia

B

A ololotzin mahcaoc xichīca in tinoconētzin tzo
nimitzontēcaz mocōzoltzinco
huāllāz ye motah
Ahuitzotōn mitzonhuihuixōz.

Noyōllo quimati nimitznochiuilih in tinoconētzin
huāllāz ye motah.
Nicutzin Ahuitzotōn mācazo cencah xitlahtlayōcoya
oo in tiquilnāmiqiu mopihticātzin
āxāyacatōn.

In zanyoh oncān ontimalihui
tlālticpac in ichpōchyōtl
in Āhuilnemilizzōtl
mācazo cencah xitlayōcoya

Quēnzo timochīhua tiniuctzin
in timochōquilia tiniucticātzin

nezahualpilli xihuālmohuīca
tlā nimitzonmāma tla nimitzahāhuilti
i ximocāuhtzino tiniucticātzin nezahualpilli

Ōhuālahcic cuepōni xōchitl
toconittazqueh in yēctli conētl
Ahuitzotōn ximocāuhtzino

Chīmalli xōchitl īca ninoxauh
nimēxihcacihuātl nichpōchtzintli
tlachinōltica popōcatimani
nonehcuilōltzin quehquelhuia

tonāhuac onoqueh oo
Yāōxōchitl īpan momati
nonehcuilōltzin quehquelhuia

My sweet young boy, Ahuizotl.

C

Death-white chalk and feathers come twisting
With blooms that seem to weep.
Shields and flowers stand blooming—
Desirable, coveted.
Before the ramparts of this city
That spreads across the water,
They bring him joy.

My warflowers go twisting along,
And the men of Chalco bear tribute,
Sturdy flower trees—
Huexotzinco, too.
Before the ramparts of this city
That spreads across the water,
They bring him joy.

II. Wept Back to Life

Ah, swaddled babe, don't you cry,
You are the world's most precious child.
I will lay you down in your cradle
Till your father comes, Ahuizotl,
To rock you back to sleep.

Oh! My heart aches as if I myself
Had given you birth, dear child.
Hush, little brother—
Father is on his way.

Ahuizotl, don't weep your grief
With such loud, unseemly sobs
As you recall your older brother—
Axayacatl, now gone Beyond.

Out there in the fleeting world
Unlike heaven, glory goes

C

zan nontlahtlayōcoxtica aitzin niuctzin
 ticihuātzintli quēnzomach nō tlācatl i nocān
 momiquilih noyecōltzin in Ahuizotl
 Quēmmach in ōquichīuh no'yollotzīn ayoc hueli
 niuctzin ayoc hueli niquīcāhuaz noyecōltzin
 in Ahuizotl

Tlāca a i nicutzin tinicuticātzin tlāca monāhuati
 Ahuizotōn tlā xonquīza aitzin ahtonhuāllah

A iz tlehzo huālāyiz ca zan tlahuēlilōc
 ye zā ahmō niuctzin tlā xonquiza aitzin
 Cencah nelli cencah nelli xōlotzin
 cencah ye nenelli in
 tinēchcalaquīz Ahuizotōn
 tlāca nelli motzīn zan
 titlahuēlilōc cencah nelli itzīn
 A imman nelli itzīn cencah
 ye nelli in tinēchcalaquīz
 Ahuizotōn

D

cocomoca huēhuētl tamoanchān
 ye molīniya chīmalli xōchitl
 oyohualli cahuāntihuītz
 i xōchimilintoc moteponahuāz
 ye milini chīmalli xōchitl.

Noconcac on cuīcatl in ye nichpōtzintli
 nicnomahmāmaltiya
 niuctzin toconittazqueh ahuitzotōn
 zan on ōcūepōnico ixōchicuahuītl
 i xōchimecatl malīntihuītz
 quitohtoma icuīc ahuitzotōn zan

Nimitzilnāmiqui noyecōltzin in tlahtohuini
 Ahuizotōn quēnmach in ōticchīuh

Just to maidenhood and lust—
 There is no need to feel bereft.

Yet how is it that you
 Become my little brother?
 You are wept back to life,
 Dear sibling of mine!

O prince that I long for, come!
 Let me bear you in my arms.
 Let me bring you joy.
 Stay, little brother, beloved prince.

Burgeoning flowers arrive—
 We will see them, saintly child.
 Ahuizotl, stay.

I drape myself with shield flowers—
 A young Mexica girl.
 As symbols of war spread like smoke,
 My painted one laughs.

Around us they drift down
 And settle slow,
 Like warflowers:
 My painted one laughs.

III. Brother or Lover

I'm trembling with grief, little brother.
 "Young girl, how can this be?"
 The prince was also a man,
 And here he died,
 My lover Ahuizotl.

How is it that my dear heart
 Became a valiant man?
 No more is Ahuizotl my little brother—
 No longer does my lover tarry.

ye noyöllōtzin

ī zan nō iuhqui mocuīcatzin
zan nō iuhqui ye motlahtōltzin
ahzoc niquilcāhuaz quēnmach.

E

ololotzin nopil māmaltzin Ahuizotōn
tlā nimitzihtōti ōhuālahcic i xōchiconētztli.

Ca quetzalxīlōxōchitl ye oncuepōntihuītz ōhuālahcic
xōchiconētztli conāhuiltihuītz in nezahualpiltōntli.

Māzāzoc nicān caltetzinco tonyah ca noyecōltzin
tēlpōtzintli Ahuizotōn.

Nimitznohuīquiliz totēcatihuih in tocochiyān
xochitlālpān tamohuanchān
in tinehnmeh
xolōtzin.

Ninihcuiloh aitzin tinocniūhtzin quen nēchittaz
aitzin noyecōltzin in nezahuālpiltōntli
xōchimecatl in momamalintoc in nonehcuilōltzin
O anca izquixōchitl
in momalintoc
i ye nomātzin ye
nichpōtzintli ica nicnāhuatequiz noyecōltzin
in nezahualpiltōntli

For he isn't my little brother,
Is he, my precious thing?
If he doesn't bark the command
"Ahuizotl, come forth, trembling child!"
You just won't emerge.

Here it is, I clearly see
What the naughty one plans to do.
After all, he is not truly my brother.
"Come forth, trembling child!"

It's true, very true, my young lord,
Most certainly so
That you'll slide inside me,
Little Ahuizotl.

Men are always hungry for it
And you are just as naughty...

This is truly the beginning—
It's high time that we got started,
Most certainly the moment
For you to slide inside me,
Little Ahuizotl.

IV. Singer and Song

The drums are pounding in Tamoanchan
The shield flowers spin round and round
Ankle bells approach, with glittering ring
Your timpani shimmers like blazing blooms
And shield flowers erupt in showers of sparks

Just a young girl, I hear this song
I take my brother up in my arms.
We will see dear Ahuizotl
Where the May pole stands
Festooned with bright blooms.
Garlands come twisting together
As Ahuizotl king unravels his song.

“A CRADLESONG” AND SONGS OF MEXICO

The present poem comes from a codex known as *Cantares Mexicanos*, the largest collection of Mesoamerican verse extant. It consists of 85 folios on which 91 songs were compiled in Nahuatl somewhere around 1585, probably by native Mexican nobles under the guidance of Catholic monks. These *cuicatl* or songs range widely in genre, from ecstatic hymns celebrating humanity’s reciprocal relationship with heaven to historical ballads, bawdy satire, and philosophical musings. Glosses abound in a different hand, often trying to spin the mention a native deity into a reference to the Christian god. Though many poems are attributed to specific philosopher-kings and singers of pre-Conquest times, there is essentially no outside support to claims of authorship. *Nohnohuiantzin*, the name of the supposed composer of “A Cradlesong,” appears to be a nonce word that means roughly “Mr. Everywhere.” In the long sequence, a young Mexica girl envisions the fallen young king of Tenochtitlan, Ahuizotl, as a baby, youth and man, her musings running from motherly affection to sexual passion. Toward the end, the actual spirit of the leader returns to earth, bringing songs and joy to the girl.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Ahuizotl became ruler of the Aztec Triple Alliance in 1486 after the deaths of his older brothers Axayacatl and Tizoc, both of whom died during their respective reigns. The new young king was widely loved, and in his short sixteen years at the head of the alliance, he doubled the size of its territory. According to Aztec tradition, upon his death in battle Ahuizotl’s soul traveled to Tamoanchan, the Eastern paradise destined for warriors, who would accompany the sun up the sky each morning and return to earth every four years to bring joy and valor to the living.

I remember you, my lover, the singer.
How did you manage this change, my dear?
You are just like a song!
You’ve become those sweet words!
But perhaps one day you will fade from my mind.

V. Remembered Prince

Swaddled babe, my boy,
Cradled little Ahuizotl
Let me dance with you—
The flower child has arrived!

Gorgeous maize tassel
Comes flowering close—
The flower child has arrived!
The babe we long for
Comes bringing joy!

If you would just stop here
At this home, my love,
Noble youth, dear Ahuizotl,
I would take you by the hand,
And we would spread our bed
In that land of blooms—
To Tamoanchan, to paradise
We would travel, young lord.

I have made up my face
Trembling, my friend.
I wonder what you will think,
Timid lover, babe that I long for—
O my painted warrior!

As garlands that twine together
Or popcorn blooms whirling as one,
With these girlish arms
I will embrace my love—
The prince for whom I will always pine.