

English version by Jerome Rothenberg after Spanish prose version in Angel María Garibay's Epica Nahuatl--going back to Nahuatl sources delivered soon after the Conquest. Huitzilopochtli himself was not only the war-god, but god of the Fifth Sun--of the era, that is, into which this world was moving, itself represented by the (hieroglyphic) sign movement; more specifically, according to Laurette Séjourné (Burning Water, 1956), by a movement towards liberation from contradiction & duality. "Huitzilopochtli, image of this sun, disguised as a (humming)bird & with fire as his sign, represented the soul of a combatant in the holy war."

(Aztec)

THE BIRTH OF THE WAR GOD

1.
 old Coatlicue snake woman
 's sweeping up
 a feather falleth on her
 more like a ball of feathers 'twas
 'twas fluff
 that moment she did pick it up
 deposited it betwixt her legs
 then ended
 sweeping would want to take it out
 from legs but nothing's
 there that instant
 she's grown pregnant
 the 400 Brothers saw
 their mother
 pregnant
 a great anger
 fills them
 "who hath made thee pregnant
 "made thee into mother
 "shame
 "it lays on us
 "it shames us
 (says their sister Coyolxauhqui)

"brothers
 "who has laid it
 "on us has made
"what grows betwixt her legs
 Old Mother knows it now's
 so scared a great weight
lies on her the child
 between her legs brings
 comfort (sez)
"I know now what I have to do"
 Snake Woman hears her boy's
 word
was a great comfort
 calmed her heart
 was blowing full of
little blisses

2.
 thus joined.
400 Brothers would agree
in turn
 those southerners did then
 determine
how they would take their mother's
 life
 for shaming them
so fierce 400 Brothers were
 were full of
 wrath as if their hearts were
leaving them for anger
 sweet sister Coyolxauhqui
 's working up & cooling
anger of her brothers
 will go & kill
 old mother
they prepare for
 war
 are dressed for it
400 Brothers
 strut like generals
 spinning & tangling
of hair

entanglement of headhairs
was among them one
brother Cuahuitlicac
but couldn't keep his
word
what 400 Brothers said
he told to Huitzilopochtli
(answers)
"careful
"little uncle
"thou should be always standing guard
"I got
"some planning of my own

3.
so had made up their minds to
kill her
be finished with old mother
had started marching
'twas little sister guided them
so fancy
so like a bunch of dudes
dressed up for war
had passed out
paper costumes
for adornment
(sez)
"thrust forward
"strut in files
"be like a perfect squadron
"little sister
"guide thy way

4.
but Cuahuitlicac has made it
to peak of mountain
there he would speak with
Huitzilopochtli (sez)
"they're coming"
(Huitzilopochtli sez) "fix
"your sights on them
"which way they
"coming" (sez)

"now 'mongst the linnets"
(sez) "now which way"
(sez) "Snake Sands"
(sez) "now which"
(sez) "Hanging Terraces"
(sez) "now"
(sez) "Mountain Slope"
(then sez) "& now"
(sez) "at the peak now
"now 400 Brothers
"come sweet sister
"guiding

5.

was born that moment
Huitzilopochtli
lined up his gear
his shield of eagle feathers
arrowheads blue
spearheads ("turquoise-
darts" so-called) & paints
his face with
colors like the "painted child"
puts on his head a bonnet
of rare feathers
fits in earplugs (but also had
one skinny foot wore
feathered sandle on the left painted
his thighs & arms
in blue) then one
called Tochancalqui set fire to
the turquoise spears
went to give Huitzilopochtli
orders with his dart
the newborn wounds their sister
Coyolxauhqui cuts
her throat the head
's abandoned on Snake Mountain while
body goes rolling down the slope
smashes to smithereens
here & there
go hands
go feet
goes torso

6.

now was Huitzilopochtli
swollen now was going in pursuit of
brothers
now was stalking them
would make them shimmy down would make
400 Southerners
climb the summit of
Snake Mountain (& when
he sees them all before him
when he spots them
on the slope that instant
he pursues them
stalks them like rabbits
around the mountain
four times Huitzilopochtli made them
go around it four times
pace off the circuit of Snake Mountain
would vainly try to freak him
with din of timbrels
vainly would tumble towards him
to sound of bells on ankles
& banged their shields)
they could make nothing
happen nothing
worked out now
now nothing for defense
they had were stalked by
Huitzilopochtli
drove them off
demolished them
destroyed them
wiped them out
did nothing so much as chase them
hard did stalk them
harder
& they would plead with him
they'd say
"enough's enough
"already

7.
but Huitzilopochtli couldn't stop
with greater fire
would burn his anger at them
& pursued them
only a few escaped his presence
squirmed from his hands they headed
south (would afterwards be called
the Southerners
400 brothers gone
that one direction)
those who had fled his hand like those
he killed on whom
he gorged his anger
Huitzilopochtli
did strip their clothes from
decorations
weapons
he took possession of & joined
unto his office
made them the marks of what
he would become