

**Mimetic rivalry, sacrifice, and the monstrous double in Rudolfo Anaya's
*Quetzalcóatl, Lord of the Dawn***

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Introduction

Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn is a literary adaptation of the Mesoamerican Quetzalcóatl myth. At the center of Rudolfo Anaya's narrative is the conflict between Quetzalcóatl and the Toltec heir Huémac that results in a persecution of Quetzalcóatl. Anaya designs his protagonist Quetzalcóatl as redeemer on a mission who is supposed to put the Toltecs back on the straight and narrow in teaching them the Ancient Word. Quetzalcóatl is the first spiritual leader in Toltec empire opposing the practice of human sacrifice to honor the gods. According to the historical and mythological sources Quetzalcóatl represents duality since he is a combination of god and cultural hero. The human part of the dual figure is Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl who is a so called Hombre-Dios, a religious personality who communicates with the major deity. The divine part of the dual figure is Quetzalcóatl, the deity of light. Rudolfo Anaya departs from the original pattern, as in his literary adaptation of the myth Quetzalcóatl the god becomes a human being. Several characteristics of the fictional Quetzalcóatl have been considered as an attempt of the author to construct parallels to Christ.

I want to explore Anaya's literary adaptation of the Quetzalcóatl myth under the perspective of René Girard's theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism. René Girard's concept of mimetic rivalry not only elucidates the conflict between Lord Huémac and Quetzalcóatl, it can also be applied to the competition that unfolds in the background of the earthly struggle since the earthly conflict mirrors a competition on the divine level between the deity of darkness, Tezcatlipoca, and the deity of light, Quetzalcóatl. According to Mesoamerican mythology Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcóatl are brothers. In terms of René Girard the conflict of the deities is the conflict of competing brothers. As it has been mentioned before the conflict between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl results in a persecution of

Quetzalpetlatl, leaves Tollán and dies shortly after his departure. Huémac's supposed triumph over his rival is short lived because as soon as the Toltecs find out about Huémac's involvement in Quetzalcóatl's fall the tyrant is stoned by the furious mob. Anaya represents the generation of collective violence and describes the transformation of a crowd into a mob on a rampage. Huémac faces an "all against one" situation since his former allies let him down as well. His sorcerer Tlachahuepan betrays his former master, confessing to the furious crowd Huémac's involvement in Quetzalcóatl's persecution. Afterwards the sorcerer joins the mob and participates in the stoning of the Toltec heir.

After the death of both antagonists Anaya makes a strong claim for reconciliation, as Quetzalcóatl and Huémac meet in the Land of the Dead and Quetzalcóatl recognizes in Huémac his double. At first, Quetzalcóatl's observation seems to be rather strange because throughout the novel both antagonists have been represented as "studies in contrast". But Quetzalcóatl's claim can be explained with René Girard's concept of the monstrous double. Girard's hypothesis that the escalation of a conflict is always accompanied by a process of undifferentiation between the rivals partly applies to this case. At the same time Quetzalcóatl's discovery is a claim for a balance between the forces, as they are interdependent and have to coexist like two sides of a coin. Moreover the dialogue between Quetzalcóatl and Huémac is the first step towards a reconciliation. Quetzalcóatl shows compassion for Huémac and is ready to forgive his persecutor. He rescues his former enemy's corpse, buries him and mourns his death before he continues his journey in the Land of the Dead. After having spent four days in the Land of the Dead, Quetzalcóatl and his attendants bury and conceal all the things he had created in Tollán, and he leaves Tollán with the promise of return. Then he starts his journey to the eastern waters, where "a great fire consumed him and the Lord Quetzalcóatl surrendered himself to the fire of rebirth."¹

1. 1. Quetzalcóatl in the literary works of Rudolfo Anaya

Quetzalcóatl has been a prominent figure in the work of Rudolfo Anaya since the 1970s. A decade before he wrote the literary adaptation of the myth², he picked it up for his novel *Heart of Aztlán*.³ Anaya considers the Quetzalcóatl myth as "the most basic one to the mythology of Mesoamerica,"⁴ because it weds the highest aspirations of man with the earth.

¹ Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987, 147.

² Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

³ Rudolfo Anaya, *Heart of Aztlán*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976.

⁴ David Johnson and David Anodaca "Myth and the Writer: A Conversation with Rudolfo Anaya" In

In an interview with David Apodaca and David Johnson, Anaya has stressed the importance and relevance of Quetzalcóatl not only to the Chicanas and Chicanos, but also to Anglo-Americans because in his point of view the Quetzalcóatl myth is a universal myth.

It is Christ the man also being Christ the God, the plumed serpent. It's having all the powers of godhead and yet being composed of the clay of earth, of the dust... The power of Quetzalcóatl is the power of the blending or merging of the dichotomies. These polarities of God and earth, of spirit and flesh, cooled off, cooled and congealed into rocks.⁵

In the introduction to Anaya's novel *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn* David Johnson describes Quetzalcóatl as the Mexican or Chicano archetype of "soul taking wings to heaven, and matter descending to earth."⁶ Paul Beekman Taylor has wrote an article on the literary trope of flight in the fiction of Rudolfo Anaya and in his inquiry he stresses the central role of Quetzalcóatl. Beekman Taylor sharply criticizes the influence of the hermeneutics of Western literary tradition on Native American and Chicano literature which

are standard in the Eurocentric bias of American culture, and 'Native American' and Chicano writers, whose indigenous lore has its own figure of flight, cannot tell their story to an 'Anglo' audience without altering received Eurocentric hermeneutic conventions that would read 'native' texts in European ideological contexts.⁷

Beekman Taylor claims that "Rudolfo Anaya both resists and appropriates the European literary trope of flight in forging a particularly Chicano political and moral polemic against the despiritualizing effects of Anglo cultural imperialism."⁸ By imperialism he means "no more than an unnegotiated promotion of one group's or person's will over the collective will of another group or person."⁹ In Beekman Taylor's point of view Anaya's artistic development of the Quetzalcóatl figure is aimed at challenging Christ. He states that Anaya "is conjoining Native American mythic claims with the Old World's claim for Christ as mediator of man's spiritual quest, and at the same time countering Christianity's spiritual exclusivity."¹⁰ Beekman Taylor doesn't mention though that Anaya uses allusions to European literature as humoristic elements that accompany the struggle of the different heritages. There is no doubt that Anaya criticizes the efforts and attempts of Anglo-American society to replace Mesoamerican spirituality with Christian spirituality. Moreover it is visible in Anaya's characters that Mesoamerican mythology is essential for the spiritual life of the

⁵ David Johnson and David Apodaca. "Myth and the Writer: A Conversation with Rudolfo Anaya." In: *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya*. Ed. Bruce Dick and Silivo Sinias, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998,4.

⁶Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, Introduction by David Johnson, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987,17.

⁷ Paul Beekman Taylor, "The Writer with wings: flight as Chicano survival in the fiction of Rudolfo A. Anaya", in: *The Bilingual Review/ La Revista Bilingüe*, Vol XXI, May – August 1996, No. 2, 130.

⁸ Paul Beekman Taylor, "The Writer with wings: flight as Chicano survival in the fiction of Rudolfo A. Anaya", in: *The Bilingual Review/ La Revista Bilingüe*, Vol XXI, May – August 1996, No. 2, 130.

Chicanos in the Southwest, as the elements of Mesoamerican mythology provide them with a more primordial expression of faith than Catholicism. In *Bless me, Ultima* the protagonist Antonio Márez “takes First Communion, a rite that fails to satisfy his need for a more primordial expression of faith, and he is introduced to certain ancient Indian beliefs which provide a more fulfilling complement to Ultima’s teaching.”¹¹ Despite Anaya’s polemics against the spiritual colonization of the Chicanas and Chicanos, he considers himself as translator and mediator of two different spiritual and cultural heritages. Especially in his later works the author inserts allusions to European literature as comic relief. In *Zia Summer* the protagonist Sonny Baca compares himself with Polonius in *Hamlet*, hiding behind a woven tapestry in order to watch the enemy. He adds “Hope I don’t get stabbed.” In *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn* the conflict among Huémac’s courtiers resembles the struggle of Shakespearean courtiers.

Apart from his disregard of Anaya’s humorous use of European literature, Beekman Taylor provides a variety of important aspects in his analysis of the different cultural elements in Anaya’s fiction. I will return to Beekman Taylor’s study at the end of this chapter when the problematic of a comparison between Anaya’s Quetzalcóatl and Christ will be discussed.

1. 2. Quetzalcóatl and Huémac: competition and mimetic rivalry

Rudolfo Anaya’s protagonist is subject to artistic changes. Unlike the mythological narrative that separates divine and human Quetzalcóatl, Anaya’s protagonist is god who becomes man. The mythological Quetzalcóatl’s past as warrior and conqueror is only briefly mentioned and it does not affect Quetzalcóatl’s conduct in Tollán. Rather he is introduced as a young priest who opposes the worldly and religious conduct of Huémac. Anaya stresses the anti-sacrificial teachings of Quetzalcóatl because they represent a rupture in the sacrificial ideology that is promoted by Tollán’s tyrant Huémac and his allies. At the core of Quetzalcóatl’s message is the claim that the gods do not demand human sacrifice. As Quetzalcóatl gains many followers and enjoys increasing popularity among the Toltecs, the basis for conflict with Huémac is set.

At first Huémac’s and Quetzalcóatl’s relationship can be characterized as intense rivalry. As soon as the tyrant fails to enter into an alliance with the priest, his rivalry turns into enmity and obsessive hatred. The conflict passes through various stages, or, to express it in terms of René Girard, it develops as crisis of degree. Moreover it is important to notice that rivalries and competitions are present on various levels: on the divine level the deity of light

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(Quetzalcóatl) and the deities of darkness (Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli) compete over the religious paradigm in Tollán. On level of worldly or human leadership, Huémac and Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl compete over the political and spiritual influence on the Toltecs. On the level of the servants, the courtiers Tlachahuepan and the Captain of the Jaguar cult compete about the influence on Huémac. Tlachahuepan is involved in a second rivalry because the sorcerer would like to be chief priest of Tollán, but in order to acquire this position he has to push Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl out of his way. All aforementioned conflicts develop into intense rivalries that end in violent encounters.

The first chapter of the novel describes an empire caught in a major crisis, at the brink of collapse. Civil wars have left their traces of destruction on Tollán and its population. Lord Huémac's kingship is founded on violence because the tyrant acquired his political leadership in a civil war. On his way to power Huémac made numerous enemies within his territory and created dissension among the population of Tollán. His kingship is besmirched with the blood of his own people from the very first day of his reign. The frame for a conflict between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl is set from the beginning because Quetzalcóatl stands for the opposite values.

At the core of the conflict are Huémac's and Quetzalcóatl's opposite positions on the matter of human sacrifice and warfare. Quetzalcóatl's teachings against warfare and human sacrifice raise the inner conflict of Tollán to another level because he encourages the suffering population to turn against Huémac's politics. Quetzalcóatl's demand "to return to art and wisdom and the path of the Ancient Word" not only complicates Huémac's acquisition of new warriors, he also deprives Huémac of his ideological justification for his expansionist wars, claiming that the gods do not ask for human sacrifice. Since Huémac has come into power he has justified his wars with two claims. First, he is concerned to secure his political position and considers every non-Toltec as potential enemy of his empire. He reasons that all neighbors of Tollán are envious about Tollán's achievements and therefore they have to be subdued. Secondly, human victims are needed for religious rituals and those victims have to be acquired through warfare. As René Girard has pointed out in *The Scapegoat* captured warriors are preferred victims for sacrifices because there is no risk of violent reprisals within the own population. The captured warriors are not protected by family members who would avenge their sacrifice. Quetzalcóatl rejects the religious ritual of human sacrifice and suggests anti-sacrificial ways to honor the gods.

Anaya designs Huémac as a warrior rather than a political leader who tries to rule an empire the same way he leads his army into a war. Huémac consults his most important military partner, the Captain of the Jaguar cult, in order to detect his enemies within his own empire. It doesn't take long until the warriors have traced the enemies, as both agree that they are to be found among the philosophers and priests of the empire. Huémac is in a state of fury and curses philosophers and priests because they present a serious challenge to his politics.¹² Both groups are perceived as threat because Huémac can't follow their reasoning. The tyrant needs the reassurance of his Captain that no other person than himself is responsible for the political conduct. Huémac's exclamations "I am in charge of Toltec greatness!" and "I make the laws, not the priests!" reveal that he has entered into rivalry with Quetzalcóatl.

Apart from a first indication of the main conflict that is about to unfold Huémac's first appearance sets the stage for the conflict among his courtiers. His meeting with the Captain of the Jaguar Cult is succeeded by a meeting with the sorcerer Tlacahuepan because the tyrant doesn't want to rely on the opinion of a warrior in spiritual matters. The subsequent encounter gives an insight to the rivalries among the courtiers. Both the Captain and the sorcerer compete about the closest place to the sphere of power. Anaya developed the competition among the courtiers in the style of a Shakespearean court scenario. Though the Captain and the sorcerer have different levels of authority they both share the same status as courtiers. This fact is not present to the Captain, as he sees himself higher up in the courtly hierarchy than anybody else. Both competitors have the same aim in mind, each of them wants to take influence on Huémac's decision how to proceed with Quetzalcóatl. In the terminology of Girard's *triangular desire* the Captain and Tlacahuepan are both obstacles to each other on their way to reach out for their desired aim. Both would like to see the tyrant follow their individual strategy. They are caught in a triangular relationship. Both courtiers would like to determine Huémac's politics on the matter of Quetzalcóatl.

The Captain and the sorcerer have different reasons for their common desire to get Quetzalcóatl out of the way. Usually, a common enemy unites people. But in this case the matter is different because Huémac hurts his Captain's pride not relying on his opinion and seeking a second opinion. This decision is incomprehensible to the Captain because if Huémac hadn't had the support of the Captain and his Jaguar Cult warriors Huémac would not have been the political leader of the Toltecs. Therefore the Captain holds for himself to be the most important confidant of the tyrant. In contrast to the Captain Tlacahuepan has not yet been politically useful for his worldly master. Huémac's decision, not to rely on the Captain's

opinion on spiritual matters and rather seek Tlachuepan's opinion disturbs the courtly equilibrium. Suddenly the opinion of the successful warrior does not count as much as the opinion of a sorcerer. Huémac's decision provokes the jealousy of the Captain who receives a lesson on the subject of self-assessment. The Captain who considered himself to be the most important and unchallenged *confidant* of the tyrant has to give way for the sorcerer. Huémac does not hesitate to hurt the pride of one of his most important allies because he is absorbed by his own power and singularly concerned to maintain his position as the most powerful man in Tollán. The narrative starts at a point when the emperor has already lost his ability of judgment, the sensitivity for the courtly world around him; therefore he incites jealousy, rivalry, and envy in his Captain.¹³

Huémac's decision to consult with Tlachuepan brings the divine powers into play because the sorcerer is not simply a courtier of Huémac, he is also a disciple of the deities of darkness. Tlachuepan is the earthly representative of the deities of darkness and his gathering with Huémac is the first indication of the rivalry between the divine forces of the deity of light (Quetzalcóatl) and the deities of darkness (Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli). Tlachuepan would like to convince the Toltec heir about the effectiveness of a conspiracy against Quetzalcóatl because this would serve the sorcerer's purpose and the goal of his divine masters. As courtier of Huémac, Tlachuepan is familiar with the weaknesses of his worldly master. His strategy is to incite envy and jealousy in the tyrant. For Huémac insists to be the one and only heir of Tollán, and he does not accept any rival who could represent a challenge to him. The sorcerer follows the same strategy Cassius pursued to incite Brutus' jealousy in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Tlachuepan gives a report on Quetzalcóatl's achievements and popularity among the Toltecs "for the purpose of stirring up mimetic rivalry in a man obsessed by a successful rival."¹⁴ At first, the sorcerer's plan seems to be successful. When he mentions the admiration Quetzalcóatl receives from the Toltecs, Huémac is immediately overwhelmed by jealousy and envy. "There is only one prince of Tollán! Me! This man is an imposter! I will cut his heart out and feed it to the dogs at the marketplace!"¹⁵ The enraged Toltec heir not only holds out the prospect of a physical destruction, he also plans on the moral defeat of Quetzalcóatl. Driven by his rage Huémac takes into account the ultimate humiliation that can possibly happen to a religious personality in a society that maintains human sacrifice as religious ritual to establish the connection between human beings and the gods. Feeding Quetzalcóatl's heart to the dogs would be the ultimate disgrace

¹³ Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1987, 26.

for the god who became man. It would symbolize that he is not even worth to be a sacrifice for the gods. On a symbolic level Quetzalcóatl's murder matches with the execution of a criminal.

But Tlacahuepan fails with his strategy because he misses the right time. Hoping to incite more rivalry in Huémac the sorcerer continues to illustrate Quetzalcóatl's personal charisma and the influence he has on the Toltecs. The sorcerer achieves the opposite result of what he originally had in mind. As soon as he starts talking about the peace-loving, non-violent Quetzalcóatl, Huémac changes his plan. Instead of spending his energy on a conspiracy against the holy man and risking more dissension among the Toltecs, Huémac envisions a pact with Quetzalcóatl because the tyrant does not feel challenged on his proper territory of warfare. Tlacahuepan's description of Quetzalcóatl evokes the impression in Huémac that Quetzalcóatl is a dreamer rather than a rival. Huémac's new perspective on the Quetzalcóatl problem changes the feelings of rivalries and enmities. Whereas in the beginning of the encounter the Toltec emperor showed signs of envy and jealousy, it is now Tlacahuepan's turn to feel envy and jealousy. Tlacahuepan has become victim of his own strategy. His glamorous illustration of Quetzalcóatl's popularity opened new perspectives for Huémac's politics. An alliance with the priest of light seems to open new possibilities of expansion. The Toltec heir regards the absence of violence in Quetzalcóatl's behavior as weakness, therefore Quetzalcóatl is not perceived as dangerous rival (at least, for a short period of time). Tlacahuepan's mission achieved the contrary of what the sorcerer had planned on. Instead of inciting feelings of mimetic rivalry and envy on the part of Huémac, Tlacahuepan himself becomes victim of mimetic rivalry, fearing that a pact between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl will destroy his aim to become chief priest of Tollán. Moreover the cooperation would push him out of the immediate sphere of power because Quetzalcóatl would replace him. Neither the Captain, nor Tlacahuepan have come closer to their aim.

The subsequent encounters between Huémac and his courtiers are an illustration of René Girard's theory of mimetic rivalry. The triangular configuration of subject, object, and mediator is present in both encounters.

Huémac's impression that Quetzalcóatl might not be the threat he expected him to be only persists until his first meeting with Quetzalcóatl. Contrary to Huémac's expectations, Quetzalcóatl is not intimidated in the presence of the Toltec emperor. Whereas the Captain and Tlacahuepan both demonstrated strict obedience to the word of the tyrant, Quetzalcóatl signals that he is ready to challenge the tyrant.

So, Huémac thought, the young priest did not quake in the presence of Huémac, perhaps that was just as well. Huémac was tired of the sycophants who daily come to grovel at his feet, sputtering titles to please him.¹⁶

Huémac does not understand the implications of his first encounter with Quetzalcóatl: It is Quetzalcóatl's announcement to engage in a competition with the forces of darkness about the religious faith of the Toltecs. While Quetzalcóatl explains the purposes and aims of his mission, Huémac is preoccupied with his fantasies of the expansion of power. "Huémac was not listening. He was only hearing his own internal voice which spoke of his personal greatness."¹⁷ The Toltec shows characteristics of an absolute monarch who is absorbed by self-admiration. Huémac's idea of a pact with Quetzalcóatl is aimed to result in a submission of the priest. The prospect of material wealth is supposed to seduce Quetzalcóatl because it is unthinkable for the tyrant that his strive for material values might not be shared by others. Huémac is not prepared to meet someone entirely disinterested in his material offerings and therefore finds himself immediately in the defense.

Seen from the outside, Quetzalcóatl's refusal to agree on a pact with the tyrant is the foreseeable result of the encounter, only Huémac doesn't understand the signs. Huémac is caught in surprise a second time, as Quetzalcóatl refuses to drink a cup of pulque he is offered by Huémac. Quetzalcóatl offends his host because the Ancient Word strictly prohibits the consummation of pulque and the rules of the Ancient Word have first priority to him. His refusal shows the dedication to his mission and his obedience to Ometéotl, the Giver of Life. When Quetzalcóatl unveils his identity as human incarnation of the god Quetzalcóatl, the Toltec heir considers the revelation of his identity as a joke. Huémac holds on to his plan and offers his guest a share in power. After all, Huémac still has not understood that his aims are irreconcilable with Quetzalcóatl's mission. Whereas Huémac dreams of being the unquestioned ruler of a great Toltec Empire, Quetzalcóatl is concerned about the future of the Toltecs who have left the right path. "I cannot make such a pact with any earthly ruler,"¹⁸ is Quetzalcóatl's answer to Huémac's offer. With the remarks "I have come to teach the way of light," and "mine is not the way of war,"¹⁹ Quetzalcóatl expresses his strict disapproval of Huémac's values and his politics.

The failure of Huémac's strategy is not surprising, as both characters are a study in contrasts. The Toltec tyrant could be seen as the representative of a despiritualized world in which the desires of the people are singularly focused on earthly pleasures and the fulfillment

¹⁶ Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, 36, 37.

¹⁷ Rudolfo Anaya *Quetzalcóatl* 44

of personal aims. Huémac stands for ruse, betrayal, violence, retribution, dissent, and disrespect of others. Throughout the entire story, no positive attributes are visible in the character of Huémac. He impersonates the fallen world in all its diversity. In his position as political leader he abuses his leadership for his individual purposes. As lawgiver of Tollán he releases the rules, but at the same time he takes advantage of the fact that no independent institution is left that can judge him and punish him for his transgressions whenever he breaks the laws he himself has released. As private personality he mistreats and betrays his family. His daughter falls victim to Huémac's power politics. Huémac does not hesitate to use her as for his political purposes.

Quetzalcóatl impersonates all attributes of a religious personality. He stands for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation of a world divided by dissent. The god of light who became man does not care for worldly pleasures. "As Huémac was a man of the flesh, of the earth, a reflection of the material world, so Quetzalcóatl was a reflection of the light of the spirit."²⁰ Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl strictly obeys to the Ancient Word and resists every worldly temptation in order not to risk his mission. Huémac is the image of manipulation and dishonesty in the behavior towards his family as well as in the conduct with his subjects and allies, whereas Quetzalcóatl is an image of honesty. The differences between the priest of light and the tyrant are also present on the level of language. Quetzalcóatl speaks the language of a poet and priest. He addresses his audience with an elaborate language using metaphors, images, analogies and comparisons in his teachings of the Ancient Word. Language is Quetzalcóatl's instrument to challenge the material values promoted by Huémac and his followers, and to bring people back on the right pass. Quetzalcóatl possesses the ability to get people's attention without the use of force and violence. In contrast to the poetical language of Quetzalcóatl, Huémac has a very limited way to express himself. His language is restricted to a vocabulary of violence because he uses this measure of communication equivalent to a weapon. Most of the times his language intimidates, hurts other people, betrays, or it is used to impose his will on other individuals. There aren't any metaphors or images in his language that would express positive emotions. If he ever uses images or metaphors they will refer to acts of violence, reaching from warfare to human sacrifice. The different use of language by the rivals also expresses the different perceptions of the world. Huémac has a very limited perception of the world because he divides the world into the two categories of friends and enemies. Every individual who does not share his attitudes is his proclaimed enemy. The tyrant perceives the world in binary oppositions and he hates everybody who stands for values

opposed to his own. "Huémac hated Quetzalcóatl because they were opposites, and that which was ignorant and savage in Huémac's nature drove him to destroy that which was wise and noble in Quetzalcóatl."²¹

Huémac's religious belief is deeply rooted in cosmic order and the tradition of blood sacrifice. The creation myths of the Suns have a paradigmatic impact on the Toltecs because the gods demand human sacrifice to keep the sun moving. Huémac justifies and defends the tradition of human sacrifice for two reasons. First, he himself believes that it is necessary to appease the gods with human blood. But he also understands to use the religious ritual for his own purposes, as the bloody ritual of human sacrifice offers him a possibility to persecute his enemies under the pretext of religious practice. Thus the tyrant evokes the impression in the Toltecs that he is an obedient servant of the gods who performs sacrifice to establish a connection between the humans and the gods in order to get close to the Sacred. Sacrifice is also practiced as entertainment for the masses and to intimidate the enemies of Tollán. The traditional footraces of Toltec warriors against recent captive warriors satisfy the blood thirst of the crowd, as every captive who loses against a Toltec is immediately sacrificed, whereas a winning captive gains his freedom.²² The footraces show affinities to the games in the Roman Empire.

Huémac's belief in the power of sacrifice provides him with the idea for his subsequent attempt to "buy" Quetzalcóatl. His reasoning seems to be, if the gods can be appeased by the donation of sacrificial offerings, why should this not work with Quetzalcóatl as well. If he is only prepared to make a sacrifice on his part, it will certainly pay out for him. He suggests the marriage of his daughter Precious Gem and Quetzalcóatl. From Huémac's point of view his suggestion is a personal sacrifice because he considers his daughter to be the most precious offer he can possibly make. Huémac's suggestion is another example for his selfishness and ruthlessness. Seen from the point of view of his daughter, Huémac's decision is outrageous because she is exploited for her father's ambitions. Precious Gem shares the destiny with every other individual of Tollán because she is as much subject to her father's limitless ambitions as the Toltecs in general are, on whom he imposes high taxes and spills their blood in his numerous wars.

The crisis of degree has so far proceeded through the following stages: At a first stage Huémac is jealous about the priest's success. Then he gains confidence due to the strategic mistakes of Tlachauopan and reckons that a cooperation between him and Quetzalcóatl would

help him in his politics of expansion. Quetzalcóatl's rejection of Huémac's offer in a share of power provokes the tyrant's anger, but Huémac is still confident that the priest won't be able to reject a marriage with Precious Gem because she is the most desired young woman in Toltec empire. And there is a good chance that Huémac's strategy might have worked, if Quetzalcóatl had been an ordinary human being. Precious Gem is the most desired woman in the empire and a marriage would increase every man's prestige. Apart from being married to the most beautiful woman in Tollán, the groom would be the son-in-law of the most powerful man of the Toltec empire. His social prestige and status within Toltec society would be tremendous. But Quetzalcóatl is no simple human being, he is god who became man in order to redeem his people. He is the mediator between human beings and the deity of light, and the teachings of the Ancient Word also intend to provide the Toltecs with other models of imitation. The Ancient Word suggests to strive for spiritual accomplishment rather than striving for the satisfaction of carnal desires which is promoted by Huémac. In terms of Girard's theory, one could say that Quetzalcóatl has a different model of imitation. In contrast to the Toltecs who direct their desires according to the example of Huémac and strive for earthly pleasures, Quetzalcóatl desires according to the teachings of the Ancient Word and strives for spiritual accomplishment. Regarded from the point of view of a human being, Quetzalcóatl's renunciation from a marriage with Precious Gem is anti-mimetic in the sense of Girard's definition of mimetic behavior.

Quetzalcóatl's refusal to marry Precious Gem provokes Huémac's blind hatred. From now on Huémac gets obsessed with the idea that Quetzalcóatl should pay with his life for his renunciation. It is a turning point in the development of a subsequent crisis because Huémac's actions get out of control. René Girard has pointed out that violence is contagious. This also applies to the situation in Tollán because after the tyrant's fury and violence has been unleashed it affects the macrocosm of an entire empire and its neighbors of Tollán. Blind with fury Huémac's politics of conquest transforms into a politics of retribution and substitution. Precious Gem protects Quetzalcóatl against Huémac on the rampage, and the tyrant is unable to punish Quetzalcóatl directly. As Huémac cannot get hold of Quetzalcóatl he punishes his subjects in place of Quetzalcóatl, in imposing high taxes on them and recruiting all young men available to extend his warfare to all neighbors. Huémac becomes obsessed by fantasies of violent retribution and a third party has to stand in. Together with the Toltecs all neighbor states are the innocent victims upon whom Huémac's violence unleashes. They represent the third party that is drawn in to a conflict without having anything to do with it in the first place.

René Girard's pattern of the scapegoat mechanism becomes obvious. The original conflict arises in the confrontation between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl. But due to Huémac's failure to kill Quetzalcóatl right away the tyrant's anger turns away from the original object to a third party. But it is within the nature of Huémac that the warfare against a third party does not entirely satisfy his desire for revenge. "Now the stage for conflict between Huémac, the earthly ruler, and Quetzalcóatl, the priest of the Sun, was set."²³

The conflict between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl divides the population of Tollán in two parties. Those who seek spiritual understanding follow the teachings of Quetzalcóatl, those who are drawn to the material world follow Huémac. There is also one individual who profits of the dissent between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl and this is Tlacahuepan. The sorcerer knows about Huémac's ambitions. There is no way the tyrant can live with Quetzalcóatl's rejection. Along with Huémac's decision to destroy Quetzalcóatl, the tyrant prepares his own downfall without being aware of it. His alliance with the deity of darkness transforms him into a puppet of the deity of darkness. The powerful Toltec heir becomes a marionette of the god Tezcatlipoca, who seeks to defeat his brother Quetzalcóatl. As soon as Huémac agrees to collaborate with the deity of darkness the conflict between the deity of light and the deity of darkness becomes visible. The conflict is a conflict among brothers: Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca.

1. 3. The antagonistic brothers

In the Chapter entitled "The Crimes of the Gods"²⁴ René Girard discusses the topic of the antagonistic brothers. This topic is present in *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn* in the divine conflict between the deity of light and the deity of darkness. According to the *Pinturas* Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca are brothers. Both deities compete over the spiritual reign of the kingdom of Tollán. Tezcatlipoca has an earthly mediator, the sorcerer Tlacahuepan, who represents the interests of his divine ruler at the court of Lord Huémac. Tlacahuepan is supposed to create an alliance with Huémac support, for an alliance would support Tezcatlipoca in his divine combat with Quetzalcóatl.

René Girard's concept of imitated desire partly defines the character of Tlacahuepan's desire. The sorcerer identifies with the aims of Tezcatlipoca and makes Tezcatlipoca's ends his ends. Tezcatlipoca's desire, the desire of an envious brother, also determines Tlacahuepan's desire to destroy Quetzalcóatl. Destroying Quetzalcóatl is originally the idea of

Tezcatlipoca. Then it is taken up by Tlacahuepan because the perspective to become chief priest of Tollán opens up for him. Tlacahuepan has to overcome several stages of crisis until Huémac is willing to sell his soul to Tezcatlipoca and participate in a conspiracy against Quetzalcóatl. The first attempt to talk Huémac into a conspiracy against Quetzalcóatl not only fails, it inspires Huémac to follow the opposite strategy the sorcerer had planned. Later on, after Huémac has turned into Quetzalcóatl's most intense enemy, the tyrant is far from acknowledging the sorcerer's cooperation. Rather Huémac hurts his vanity in accusing him of not having been able to limit Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl's influence. Tlacahuepan is incapable of hiding his feelings of envy and jealousy of Quetzalcóatl and Huémac becomes aware of the jealousies. "It was clear from the informants that Tlacahuepan and the other high priests of Tezcatlipoca were jealous of Quetzalcóatl."²⁵ Tlacahuepan is the most outspoken enemy of a marriage between Quetzalcóatl and Precious Gem because he fears to lose his influence on the tyrant if Quetzalcóatl becomes the son-in-law of Huémac.

Tlacahuepan frowned. Curse Huémac, and curse his daughter, and curse this union, he thought, and he prayed for chaos and disruption. He prayed to Tezcatlipoca, the god of the darkness, to come and interfere with the proposed union.²⁶

The new cycle of violence, triggered off by Quetzalcóatl's refusal to marry Precious Gem, enables the return of the forces of darkness, as Huémac's wrath turns into unlimited aggression. "Lord Huémac saw what Quetzalcóatl built and his jealousy and hatred grew. It had begun with the refusal of his daughter by the priest, but other things fed Huémac's hate."²⁷ Tlacahuepan functions as mediator between the tyrant and the deity of darkness because he convinces Huémac to sell his soul to Tezcatlipoca. Huémac's prayer at the temple of Tezcatlipoca to the deity of darkness doesn't only initiate Quetzalcóatl's downfall, but his own downfall as well. "...and even as he was praying Tezcatlipoca plotted against Quetzalcóatl and against Huémac also, for he called no man master."²⁸ Huémac's decision once again affects his daughter because in selling his soul to the deity of darkness he has also sold his daughter to Tezcatlipoca. Of course, he is not yet aware of it.

Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcóatl are in a divine competition about the religious paradigm in Tollán. The earthly dimension of their struggle involves a third party. For the second time Precious Gem is the captive in a power struggle, this time between Tezcatlipoca and her father. Tezcatlipoca follows the pattern of mimetic imitation and copies Huémac's tactics. Once again, Precious Gem is used in the deity of darkness's plan in a similar way she has

²⁵ Rudolfo Anya, *Lord of the Dawn*, 47.

²⁶ Rudolfo Anya, *Lord of the Dawn*, 65

been used by her father. Huémac suggested a marriage of his daughter to Quetzalcóatl in order to gain power and influence over him, now Tezcatlipoca puts a spell on Precious Gem in order to subdue Huémac and force him to agree on a marriage between the god in disguise and the tyrant's daughter. Tezcatlipoca acts in disguise and pretends to be a Huastecan, a fact that creates the utmost disgrace for Huémac because the Huastecans are the enemies of the Toltecs. Tezcatlipoca turns Huémac into the laughingstock of Tollán. Being forced to marry his daughter to an alleged Huastecan, Huémac receives his first punishment for his decision to sell his soul to the deity of darkness. But the real victim of Huémac's decision is Precious Gem because she has to pay for the decision of her father.

Huémac's pact with the deity of darkness has another effect on Tollán. Since Tezcatlipoca has entered the scene the belief in the effect of human sacrifice has become more forceful than ever. Tollán becomes the stage for orgies of blood because the weaker Quetzalcóatl's anti-sacrificial influence gets, the more intense becomes the influence of the deity of darkness. Tezcatlipoca promotes the idea that the cosmic order can only be maintained through the human sacrifices. Plagued by cosmic paranoia and frightened of divine reprisals Huémac orders the sacrifice of numerous captives to the war god Huitzilopochtli. Huémac offers blood sacrifice to ensure divine support in his battle against his antagonist. The Toltec empire celebrates orgies of blood "In the temples human blood splashed on the once clean altars where before only butterflies and lizards had been offered to the gods...All sang and danced while the terrible odor of human sacrifice filled the streets of Tollán."²⁹

Quetzalcóatl's weakness and the idea how to initiate his downfall is detected and brought forth by Tlacahuepan. The sorcerer's idea to take advantage of Quetzalcóatl's vanity and shame him in front of his followers comes to his mind because the sorcerer is a vain creature himself and desires to receive the same recognition as Quetzalcóatl. Due to the fact that Quetzalcóatl has become a human being, he is not completely immune to human weaknesses. "...even the priest Quetzalcóatl needed assurance and soothing of his vanity, this desire to be more than one's self... Quetzalcóatl as man is vain."³⁰ It hasn't escaped Tlacahuepan's attention that Quetzalcóatl grew old over the battles with Huémac and he notices that the priest hides away because he cannot accept his physical decay. Tlacahuepan's plan to shame Quetzalcóatl works out because Quetzalcóatl's "desire to be full of new energy

had clouded his judgment.”³¹ Most of Quetzalcóatl’s admirers turn away from him after the priest shows up in a gaudy attire. This is only the first stage of his downfall.

The circumstances of Quetzalcóatl’s abdication bring to light the negative characteristics of Quetzalcóatl which have not been visible yet. After all the mythological Quetzalcóatl represents duality. It is part of Quetzalcóatl’s mission to trespass like a common man. Only the experience of earthly temptations give Quetzalcóatl insights, why people have left the path of the Ancient Word. “But to understand the heart of man, I had to take on the body of man. To redeem mankind, I had to fall.”³² Quetzalcóatl’s mission has a circular structure. He arrives in Tollán at a time of crisis and opens new perspectives to a population which has been subject to a tyrannical regime. While he gets involved in an intense conflict with Huémac, he is still capable to contribute to the cultural development of Tollán. But in order to accomplish his mission he has to fall like a common man, to be driven out of town like a Greek *pharmakos*, and to die as a scapegoat.

I do not drink because you offer it. I drink to lose my senses as the Lord of the Dawn, I drink so I can fall to the ground like a man. As I fall, I renew myself, as I am reborn so are my people. My destiny has come full cycle. I am ready to accept it.³³

It was not that Huémac had won the struggle of many years, it was that the time had come for Quetzalcóatl’s destiny and life to enter a new stage. It was time for Quetzalcóatl to return to the House Made of Dawn, the realm of the gods. But before he left, he had to take the sins of mankind into his soul.³⁴

Quetzalcóatl’s crime has to surmount all other transgressions Toltecs have ever committed because only this way he can function as the redeemer of the Toltecs, die for his people, and take their sins and trespasses against the Ancient Word away from Tollán into the Land of the Dead. Quetzalcóatl had to commit incest, or at least everybody had to believe he did it. His expulsion and death can only be effective, if the Toltecs unanimously believe in his guilt since the Toltec belief is deeply rooted in the magical powers of the scapegoat. Once expelled from the community the scapegoat unfolds positive powers which unite the community. Thus the scapegoat functions as ordering force. “Desire caused my death, as it is the death of man. I now know how man is led to sin, and so when I return I will know how to redeem his virtue.”³⁵

But Quetzalcóatl’s expulsion does not function as reconciling force because immediately after his expulsion the conspiracy against him comes to light. Huémac is betrayed by Tlacahuepan who admits the tyrants involvement in Quetzalcóatl’s fall. The

³¹ Ibid., 93.

³² Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, 139.

³³ Rudolfo Anaya, *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn*, 127.

deceived crowd transforms into a mob on a rampage and the tyrant becomes victim of an unanimous lynching.

1. 4. Quetzalcóatl and Huémac as monstrous doubles

René Girard's concept of the monstrous double is present in Chapter Nine of Anaya's novel. At this time both antagonists have been killed and their ways cross again in the Land of the Dead. When Quetzalcóatl faces Huémac he recognizes in the tyrant his monstrous double. The redeemer of the Toltecs states that he and his rival are more alike in their nature than the surprised Huémac guesses. At first, Quetzalcóatl's ascertainment puzzles the observer because if one compares his conduct with the behavior of Huémac, one cannot easily detect any similarities in the nature of the antagonists. Within the course of the story the behavior and the individual conduct of the rivals seem to be diametrically opposed. Especially the first four chapters give a very detailed description of the rivals' contradictory features. Contrary to René Girard's assertion that rivalry occurs due to too many similarities, the insurmountable differences between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl seem to create the conflict rather than the striking similarities. Especially if one considers the following statement of the narrator: "Sitting across from each other they were a study in contrasts."³⁶

Quetzalcóatl paused and looked at the body of the worldly ruler, and wept, for in Huémac he saw his earthly image.

"Why do you weep?" Huémac asked.

"I weep because in you I see myself," Quetzalcóatl answered.

"We are not alike," Huémac said. "I chose the way of war and conquest. I was convinced that to make the Toltecs great I needed more land, wealth, and slaves. Now I see what I did on earth as a fitful nightmare. I thought I had to destroy you and everything you stood for, and for that I sold my soul to the gods of darkness. No, we are not alike."

"We are more alike than you think," Quetzalcóatl said. "You did not understand that all men have in their hearts the power to be great, the power of the quetzal bird to commune with the heavens. Each man is also rooted to the earth with feet of clay, and he is drawn to the wishes and desires of his blood. Each person is like the serpent who presses its body to Mother Earth, allied with that old memory of darkness. I am like this, my name also bears the name of serpent, *coatl*, the power related to the energies of the earth, to the instincts of reproduction and growth and death."

...

"We are like two sides of a coin," Quetzalcóatl said. "I saw that when we met. Our nature was one, but it was in conflict, it reflected the dual spirit of the universe. I could not conquer you, and you could not understand me. When you set out to destroy me, you were destroying yourself."³⁷

³⁵ Rudolfo Anaya *Quetzalcóatl: Lord of the Dawn* 132.

Quetzalcóatl and Huémac are differentiated or opposed like two sides of a coin. Sandor Goodhart uses an image close to this one to describe the behavior of Richard and Henry in Shakespeare's drama *Richard II*. He uses the image of the Möbius strip, characterizing Richard and Henry as "differentiated or opposed as the two apparent "sides" of a Möbius strip."³⁸ Goodhart points out that Richard and Henry "are genuinely distinguishable at every given point when viewed, so to speak, "side by side", but that turn out, within a larger twisting logic or economy, to be extensions of the same "side". They are for each other the future or the past of the same consistent dramatic figure."³⁹ This applies to Huémac and Quetzalcóatl as well. Both characters are interdependent. As Quetzalcóatl has noticed, his and Huémac's nature was one, but it was in conflict. The violent nature of Huémac represents the hidden side of Quetzalcóatl, the secret desires of a god that became man. Until the sorcerers provoked Quetzalcóatl's fall, only the positive sides of Quetzalcóatl had been visible. But one always has to bear in mind that the mythological figure represents duality, and therefore less admirable features also have to be in his character in addition to those which have been visible so far. Chapter Five of *Lord of the Dawn* raises the problematic of the duality of forces. A gathering between the wise men of Tollán takes into question, if the reconciliation of the forces has been achieved by Quetzalcóatl.

Had Quetzalcóatl, who was the Plumed Serpent, reconciled in his soul these two great forces, the wise men asked. And what of Huémac the materialist, the man of war, the warrior who believed only in force? Would he ever reconcile his earthly nature to the nature of spirit?⁴⁰

The reconciliation of earthly nature and the nature of spirit has not been achieved in the lifetime of the antagonists. But in the Land of the Dead a reconciliation is envisioned because both antagonists critically inquire their personal weaknesses and their misconducts. As René Girard has pointed out in *Violence and the Sacred*: "The monstrous double is also to be found wherever we encounter an "I" and an "Other" caught up in a constant interchange of differences."⁴¹ Even though Huémac and Quetzalcóatl are a study in contrast during their lifetime they have one weakness in common and this is vanity. Huémac's vanity is visible from the very beginning, whereas Quetzalcóatl's vanity remains hidden until Tlacahuepan brings it to light shortly before Quetzalcóatl's fall.

Detecting Huémac's vanity is not very difficult. As soon as he gets aware of the fact that his subjects address Quetzalcóatl as "our dear Prince" his envy and jealousy is aroused, and at the same time his vanity is brought to light. The Toltec heir is not really interested in

³⁸ Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrificing Commentary*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 1996, 48.

³⁹ Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrificing Commentary*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 1996, 48.

spiritual matters, but as soon as he realizes how much the spiritual leadership increases the prestige of an individual, he desires to acquire the spiritual leadership of the Toltecs. Vanity is also important in the escalation of the conflict between Quetzalcóatl and Huémac. The priest's refusal to marry Precious Gem is foremost painful for Huémac because Quetzalcóatl hurt his vanity. His decision to suggest a marriage between his daughter and the priest has to be seen as a veritable sacrifice on the part of the tyrant. He has offered the priest the most precious "object" he was able to offer, but even the utmost possible sacrifice on his part cannot prompt the priest to swerve from his ambition. Quetzalcóatl's decision to refrain from a marriage with Precious Gem is the final renunciation of Huémac's plan and an attempt on Huémac's vanity. Huémac ends up as a puppet of the deity of darkness because he is caught up in the ideology of retribution. His anger transforms into a veritable obsession to kill Quetzalcóatl because only the death of his antagonist is considered as satisfactory response to Quetzalcóatl's refusal. Every means is considered to serve the purpose for accomplishing the envisioned aim. Once Huémac has sold his soul to the deity of darkness he becomes part of a deadly spiral he finally falls victim to. It is not only the result of a successful tactics on the part of Tlacahuepan that persuaded Huémac to collaborate with the forces of darkness, rather it is Huémac's desire to reestablish his image as the most powerful person within Toltec empire. The tyrant's vanity drives him to get reassurance in his position as number one in Tollán.

Vanity is a decisive force in the downfall of both antagonists. Not only the Toltec heir falls victim to the seduction of the deity of darkness, his antagonist's aging process makes him vulnerable too for the temptations of the deity of darkness. Quetzalcóatl as young man never made any spectacular appearances because he didn't care what people thought about his physical appearance, he was concerned to convince them of the teachings of the Ancient Word. The dedication to his mission, his love of the deity of light, and the positive response of his followers were enough reassurance to his self-esteem and vanity. But the aging process takes away Quetzalcóatl's self-confidence and his belief in the power and success of his teachings. While Quetzalcóatl spends time in seclusion he becomes aware of the physical ageing process. His vanity turns him into a victim of deceit generated by the deity of darkness and his desire to revive bygone times prompts him to give in to the temptation of the sorcerers and dress up in a gaudy attire. Quetzalcóatl's look in the mirror and his subsequent reaction shows to what extent he has changed. Whereas in earlier times he would have been appalled by his image in the mirror, he now adores himself in his new outfit. An undifferentiation in his perception has taken place, as he confuses the success of his teachings with his physical

appearance. He has arrived at a stage where he seems to believe that a flashy outfit contributes to a larger extent to a successful return rather than the content of his teachings. His reasoning represents the contrast of his attitude as young man. At this stage there is an approximation between the antagonists, as Quetzalcóatl has started to pay attention to values of the material world which haven't been of interest to him so far.

A further approximation of the antagonists is achieved after Quetzalcóatl has intoxicated his body with pulque. As soon as the priest has lost the control over his senses he becomes an image of Huémac. Intoxicated with pulque Quetzalcóatl and his remaining followers they party in the streets of Tollán. At this time they are a copy of Huémac and his followers. A process of undifferentiation has taken place due to the escalation of the crisis. Quetzalcóatl's approach to the material world has not only influenced his behavior and also has an impact on his followers. Quetzalcóatl's actions seem to be guided by the forces of the deity of darkness. After the consumption of pulque the priest responds to an exterior influence, the deity of darkness is acting through him. The priest gave way to the deity of darkness who invests his body. Quetzalcóatl has become a marionette of the deity of darkness.

In *Violence and the Sacred* René Girard described this process as follows:

It is hardly surprising that possession should often take the form of a hysterical mimesis. The subject seems to be responding to some outside influence; he has the jerky movements of a marionette. Some presence seems to be acting *through* him- a god, a monster, or whatever creature is in the process of investing his body. He is caught in the double bind of the model-obstacle that condemns both partners to a continual heightening of violence. The monstrous double now takes the place of those objects that held the attention of the antagonists at a less advanced stage of the crisis, replacing those things that each had sought to assimilate and destroy, to incarnate and expel. Possession, then, is an extreme form of alienation in which the subject totally absorbs the desires of another.⁴²

The deity of darkness represents the model-obstacle for Quetzalcóatl's mission. In accepting the dress and drinking the pulque Quetzalcóatl breaks with his principles and approximates to the habits of Huémac. Tezcatlipoca and Huémac are both obstacles in the accomplishment of Quetzalcóatl's task to bring the Toltecs back on the right path. Vanity transformed the priest of light into a shadow of himself. After the consumption of pulque, Quetzalcóatl loses his goals out of sight and starts to be concerned about his desires as human being.

The complete undifferentiation between the adversaries is achieved when the priest commits incest with his sister. Now he remains under the moral level of his enemy Huémac. At the same time this event marks the point when Quetzalcóatl takes on his function as scapegoat, as all transgressions that have ever been committed by the Toltecs are transferred

to Quetzalcóatl: "Now the sins and transgressions of the people of Tollán were on the shoulders of Quetzalcóatl."⁴³ Quetzalcóatl can now be singled out as scapegoat.

1. 5. Quetzalcóatl as challenger of Christ: the difficulties of a comparison

In this part of the chapter I will return to the problematic Paul Beekman Taylor brought up with regard to a comparability of Quetzalcóatl and Christ. As it has been mentioned in Chapter 6.1. Anaya considers the Quetzalcóatl myth to be a universal myth. "...this particular myth is universal. It's Christ the man also being Christ the God, the plumed serpent. It's having all the powers of godhead and yet being composed of the clay of the earth, of the dust."⁴⁴ One of the characteristics of Anaya's work is the merging of elements from European and Mesoamerican cultural, literary as well as religious tradition. Anaya's Quetzalcóatl figure bears some characteristics showing similarities to the features of Christ. He designed his protagonist as messianic figure whose characteristics allude to Christian elements. For example Anaya's fictional Quetzalcóatl is introduced as god who becomes man in order to go on an earthly mission and redeem the Toltecs. God who becomes man is clearly an analogy to the Biblical event because the historical accounts of the Quetzalcóatl mythology separate the personalities of Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl, the priest or Hombre-Dios, and Quetzalcóatl, the deity. The teachings of the fictional Quetzalcóatl and Christ's teachings are aimed to unveil the circular mechanism of violence and retribution. Christ interrupted the circular mechanism of violence and transformed it. He radically surrendered to the violence of the people, carried by his trust in the god of non-violent and unbounded love of his enemies. Not only did he abstain from passing on the violence he endured, he even demanded God to forgive his persecutors for they didn't know what they were doing.⁴⁵ Even the murder of his son did not provoke an act of retribution on the part of God.⁴⁶ In contrast to the Gospel Passion, Quetzalcóatl's murder causes an act of retribution on the part of the Toltecs. His expulsion and subsequent death results in the gathering of a furious mob who stones Huémac. Though the ruse and violence on the part of the forces of darkness are unveiled, Quetzalcóatl's death does not discontinue the circular mechanism of violence.

The attempt of a comparative study of Quetzalcóatl and Christ has been made by Paul Beekman Taylor. Beekman Taylor detects an underlying moral polemics in the entire oeuvre

⁴³ Rudolfo Anaya, *Lord of the Dawn*, 96.

⁴⁴ Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya, ed. David Johnson and David Apodaca, University of New Mexico Press, 1979, 41.

⁴⁵ Jozef Niewiadomski. "Das Drama Jesu" *Vom Fluch und Segen der Sündenböcke*. 41

of Anaya directed against the negative, despiritualizing impact of Anglo culture on the life of Chicanos. Furthermore he considers Anaya's Quetzalcóatl figure as polemics against Christianity's spiritual exclusivity.

When Anaya speaks of the flying god Quetzalcóatl the ancient cultural guide and poet of the Aztecs, as the Mexican or Chicano archetype of "soul taking wings to heaven, and matter descending to earth" (1987, 17), he is conjoining Native American mythic claims with the Old World's claim for Christ as mediator of man's spiritual quest, and at the same time countering Christianity's spiritual exclusivity.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, Beekman Taylor's comparison of Christian and Mesoamerican spirituality develops into a competitive study in which the author seems to play Mesoamerican spirituality off against Christian spirituality. This happens because Beekman Taylor does not consistently distinguish between historical and spiritual level. Bearing the Christian conquest of the Americas in mind and its social and religious impact on the people, Beekman Taylor unfolds a competition between Mesoamerican / Native American mythology and what he calls the "Christian lore".

In Christian lore, Christ travels through the worlds of hell, earth, and Heaven on a mission to redeem fallen man. On the Mesoamerican mythological terrain, Quetzalcóatl and his brother guide the Aztecs on their migration wanderings to the founding of Tenochtitlán.⁴⁸

Beekman Taylor detects similarities in the Mesoamerican and Christian iconography of flight. In Mesoamerican iconography Quetzalcóatl is represented as plumed serpent, in the Christian iconography of the Annunciation the doves are interpreted as incarnations of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁹ There remains a theological problem because the plumed serpent represents duality, whereas the doves are part of the Holy Trinity. In the development of the fictional Quetzalcóatl figure, Anaya obviously had both models in mind, Mesoamerican Duality as well as the Christian Trinity.

Beekman Taylor mentions a further similarity between Christ and Quetzalcóatl, claiming they are both "inextricably associated with the sun". According to Beekman Taylor the most decisive distinction between Christ and Quetzalcóatl is in their different roles. "The difference between the European's Christ and the Chicano's Quetzalcóatl is, of course, the practical earthly role of the latter, rather than his spiritual example."⁵⁰

There is a major difference between the destiny of the fictional Quetzalcóatl and the Christian revelation. Until his crucifixion Christ remained without sin. In contrast to Christ, a prerequisite for Anaya's Quetzalcóatl was to fall like a common man in order to take away the

⁴⁷ Paul Beekman Taylor, 134.

⁴⁸ Paul Beekman Taylor, 134

transgressions from his people and redeem them. His expulsion and subsequent death comes closer to the *pharmakos* ritual in Ancient Greece than the Passion of Christ. Through the sacrificial death of the *pharmakos* the unbalanced order was reestablished because the sacrificial offering reconciled the deities with the human beings.⁵¹

Quetzalcóatl's expulsion has more resemblances with the *pharmakos* ritual than the crucifixion because his expulsion and subsequent death was the result of Quetzalcóatl's violation of the incest taboo. Before Quetzalcóatl fell victim to the conspirators deceit the Toltecs still protected him and refused to obey to Huémac's demand and sacrifice Quetzalcóatl. The matter of sacrifice represents another problematic in a comparative encounter between Quetzalcóatl and Christ because in contrast to Mesoamerican deities the Hebrew God already displayed an immunity to the claims of sacrificial exchange.⁵² The Old Testament describes events of ritual violence as what they are: as acts of (collective) violence against single individuals. In contrast to mythological encounters violence in the Old Testament is never subject to mythological transfigurations. Girard has underlined the fact that Jesus was the first one to state that the victims in myths and rites were innocent. Girard stressed the fact that the Gospel Passion brought the effectiveness of the scapegoat mechanism to an end because the persecution of Jesus was represented in all its violence and hypocrisy. The teachings and the Passion of Christ accomplish the disclosure of the position of the victim. Christ is unable to reconcile the community, but in his death he reveals the basic pattern of every single myth construction. The sacrificial resolution of a conflict becomes ineffective because Christ's crucifixion unveils the mechanism behind it.

1. 6. The narrative as revelation of the scapegoat mechanism

René Girard suggests a distinction between the motif of the scapegoat mechanism and the scapegoat mechanism as structuring principle of a text. In Anaya's novel the scapegoat mechanism is a motif. Anaya unfolds the conflict between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl along the line of mimetic rivalry. The conflict originates in two diametrically opposed attitudes on sacrifice. Whereas Huémac feels obliged to repeat the foundational murder in order to communicate with the gods, Quetzalcóatl rejects the practice of human sacrifice as religious ritual to honor the gods. This basic disagreement on the matter of sacrifice is the point of

⁵¹ Georg Baudler, *Das Kreuz. Geschichte und Bedeutung*, Patmos, Düsseldorf: 1997, 167. Baudler gives a very detailed description of the *pharmakos* ritual. According to some sources convicted perpetrators were also chosen for this rituals. The execution as *pharmakos* was regarded as disgraceful. Moreover the expression *pharmakos*, which has the connotation of remedy or cure, was a swearword if it referred to the scapegoat that was supposed

departure for the conflict between Huémac and Quetzalcóatl. Huémac's repeatedly failed attempts to make a pact with Quetzalcóatl stands for the irreconcilable positions of the involved parties. Moreover the dissent mirrors the conflict between the competing deities of light and darkness.

As Tollán is under the impression of the healing power of sacrifice that also implies the transformation of evil forces into good forces, Quetzalcóatl had to fall and die like a *pharmakos* in order to accomplish his mission. The paradigm of the reconciling forces of a sacrificial victim persists. Anaya illustrates Quetzalcóatl's persecution in its entire hypocrisy. Violence occupies a central place in Anaya's novel. Religious violence, political violence, individual violence, and finally collective violence are represented as destructive forces. Anaya describes the circular mechanism of violence and its contagiousness as detailed as Girard did in his works. Anaya dismisses the reconciliation of a community on the expense of a single victim as much as Girard does.

Moreover Anaya has a critical look on the behavior of the crowd. Anaya illustrates the transformation of a crowd into a raging mob. Approval and admiration transforms into disapproval and rejection. Quetzalcóatl's followers know about the treacherous Huémac, nevertheless they fall victim to the tyrant's ruse and finally agree to abandon Quetzalcóatl. Though Huémac and his allies "announced" the planned conspiracy against Quetzalcóatl the Toltecs are not able to decipher the "announcement". Visible to the Toltecs is the intoxicated Quetzalcóatl, dressed in a gaudy attire, who makes a fool of himself in the streets of Tollán and finally commits incest. Quetzalcóatl's transgression causes disappointment and grief among the Toltecs who feel betrayed by their once beloved and admired religious leader. But disappointment changes into fury as soon as the ruse becomes visible. Tlacahuepan's "confession" about Huémac's part in Quetzalcóatl's downfall turns the crowd into a violent mob and the sorcerer joins the Toltecs in the persecution of his worldly master. People who once approved the anti-sacrificial and non-violent teachings of Quetzalcóatl are now obsessed with the idea of violent retribution. Quetzalcóatl's former supporters are now behaving as their former antagonists, Huémac's followers. The crisis has transformed them into copies of their enemies. Huémac's persecution and killing closes a circle. Chapter One of the novel mentions the circular structure of the Toltec destiny. "The people wept as they remembered the ancient prophesy which foretold that the sins and transgressions of an unprincipled ruler would bring ruin on their sacred city of Tollán."⁵³

Huémac's atrocities in his battle against Quetzalcóatl find their equivalent in the actions of the tyrant's allies. After having accomplished the common goal Tlacahuepan and Tezcatlipoca turn their violence and hypocrisy in their plot against Huémac. In the same manner as his rival, the Toltec heir falls victim to deceitfulness of his former allies. Tezcatlipoca used Huémac for his purposes to win the battle against the deity of light. After Huémac has served his purpose Tezcatlipoca and Tlacahuepan leave the tyrant to the raging mob. Now Huémac finds himself in the position of the scapegoat, as Tlacahuepan accuses him to be the sole responsible for Quetzalcóatl's downfall. Tlacahuepan does not only leave him to the rage of the mob he participates in the lynching.

Huémac attempted to present Quetzalcóatl's expulsion and death as *good* violence, because in his point of view sacrifice heals, unites, and reconciles the humans with the gods. In his chapter on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* Girard pointed out that "the difference between good and bad violence is perishable." Huémac's intended sacrifice fails and the *good* violence "reverts to the bad violence of the crisis from which it came in the first place." Girard claims that the violence which is unleashed after a failed sacrifice is worse than it was prior to the attempted sacrifice. Anaya dismisses the lynching of Huémac as much as Quetzalcóatl's persecution because it continues the tradition of violent retribution.

The meeting of the enemies in the Land of the Dead is the first step towards a reconciliation, as both antagonists admit their personal weaknesses and misconducts. Quetzalcóatl shows compassion for his adversary and he is prepared to forgive him. "Even for this man who plotted his destruction, Quetzalcóatl had love. He had placed the dead body in the urn and wept for Huémac."⁵⁴ Only after having come to terms with his former adversary, Quetzalcóatl continues his journey in the Land of the Dead. Quetzalcóatl's death follows a mythological transfiguration because the place where Quetzalcóatl was consumed by a great fire became known to the people as "the place where Quetzalcóatl became the shining light of the heavens."⁵⁵ The great fire was considered to be the fire of rebirth, as Quetzalcóatl gave his promise to the Toltecs to return to Tollán.

Anaya seems to share several assumptions of René Girard concerning the generation of violence. Like Girard Anaya considers violence as contagious and he shows in his novel that it does not remain restricted to the parties originally involved in the conflict. Moreover the author represents the circular mechanism of violence. The circle can only be interrupted, if one of the involved parties is ready to refrain from a further act of retribution. In this case it is Quetzalcóatl who interrupts the circle as he shows compassion for his former enemy. He is

ready to forgive his enemy, though Huémac inflicted tremendous atrocities on him, because he seeks reconciliation. Anaya's novel can be seen as a strong claim for a reconciliation between religions and cultures.