

Thirteen Ways to Capture Our Quetzal in Good Faith

GARY D. KELLER

I

In the beginning Xochiquetzal
and Quetzalcóatl coupled
and brought forth the wind,
war and ire, the florid war
poetry and our banished godpoet
looking back from his raft of seaserpents

II

The quetzal is our go-between
a god, a goddess, a guardian
It is our conserver's cause,
it is our uncaused causer

III

When the quetzal draws down from heaven
his erect tailfeather marks our spot
When it crosses our country
a wavy tailfeather mimicks acqua and life

Gary D. Keller is Professor and Director of the Hispanic Research Center at Arizona State University.

IV

At first our quetzal was as pure green
as blue mountain water
Then Tecún Umán fell to the Spanish scourge
The godbird lit upon our warrior's wound
and his breast became crimson

V

O visionary poets of Aztlan
Why do you conjure Firebird and Phoenix?
Our twin-gendered quetzal beckons you
return to amatl and sculpted stone.

VI

A man and a woman
Are one
A man, a woman, a plumed serpent
Are one

VII

Tres quetzales roost apart in an aguacatillo tree
She chooses one and sets the other free
¡Let it be me! ¡Let it be me!

VIII

I was of three minds
like the corona of a tree

in which are perched two machos
and our hembra arbiter

IX

I do not know which to prefer,
the majesty of direction
or the beauty of indirection
The resplendent male plunging from on high
or our feathered flower goddess proving fertility

X

In the swaying misty cloudforest
the only still solidary life
is our carefully concealed quetzal

XI

The macho is in our nest
Parenting the brood
his outsized virile tailfeather
turned upon itself

XII

It was drizzling in the forest
It was going to drizzle
The quetzal eyed me warily
the tiniest lizard firmly in beak
He set forth to a higher nest
to nourish our young

XIII

There is no thirteenth way
The sin of bad faith
is that it is faith
There is no caging our quetzal
He knows there is no justice
except poetic justice