

On Three Aesop Fables in Colonial Mexico

En torno a tres fábulas de Esopo en México colonial

Alejandro Viveros Espinosa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5788-8974>

Instituto de Estudios Humanísticos "Juan Ignacio Molina"

Universidad de Talca

CHILE

paideiaor@gmail.com

[*Hipogrifo*, (issn: 2328-1308), 10.2, 2022, pp. 981-993]

Recibido: 01-08-2022 / Aceptado: 12-09-2022

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13035/H.2022.10.02.58>

Abstract. This essay seeks to reflect on Aesop's fables translated into Nahuatl during colonial Mexico. To this purpose, and following an approach grounded on cultural translation, I will identify the main contents of three selected fables in order to underline the scope of their teachings throughout the relations among the contexts and the meanings of certain concepts translated into Nahuatl.

Keywords. Aesop; Fables; Colonial Mexico; Cultural Translation; Nahuatl.

Resumen. Este ensayo busca reflexionar en torno a las fábulas de Esopo traducidas al náhuatl en México colonial. Para ello, siguiendo un enfoque basado en la traducción cultural, identificaremos los principales contenidos de tres fábulas seleccionadas, procurando subrayar el alcance de sus enseñanzas a través de las relaciones entre los contextos y los significados de algunos conceptos traducidos al náhuatl.

Palabras clave. Esopo; fábulas; México colonial; traducción cultural; náhuatl.

A fable, somewhat like a short story, is often written in prose, sometimes in verse, and aims to teach a certain form of truth. Fables seek to articulate a precept through a simple story line illustrating a particular case that concludes emphatical-

Resultado del proyecto FONDECYT Regular Núm. 1200059 «Códices, crónicas y palimpsestos. Reflexiones filosófico políticas en las traducciones culturales de indios letrados en el mundo cultural novohispano (1552-1692)».

ly with a lesson to be learned. The lesson that emerges in each fable is formulated inductively, i.e. the moral of the story (or *mythos*), which is staged through fiction. It offers moral instruction under the guise of an allegory, sometimes related to humans and other times to non-human, living beings (along with their attributes and defects). In sum, fables (both ancient and modern) are primarily fictional stories or tales with allegorical characters that contain moral action or behaviour meant to be exhibited and evaluated. Fables constitute a literary genre in which oral tradition and scriptural technology converge in order to teach a lesson¹. We will focus on the facet of Aesop that posits his fables as a model or methodology that, through the simplicity of the story, bring analogies to bear as a rhetorical resource imbued with effective ideas, notions, and concepts. In short, one can consider Aesop as a node or a nexus, in which it is also possible to connect the oral and written with the imaginary of the wise (or *sófos*) and the practical (or *práxis*).

Most likely Aesop's fables and teachings in the New World were used similarly to the way they were employed in the Old World. In the context of the transfer and circulation of knowledge and communication technologies such as alphabetic writing, Aesop is crucial because his works combine the learning of a language such as Latin or Greek and the consequent exercise of cultural translation. In this sense, I will deploy an approach to this issue in terms of manipulation (re-creation)² and the new orientations of the cultural turn applied to literary translation³.

In colonial Mexico, certain educational institutions such as the Colegio de Tezozotlan, San José de los Naturales, but mainly, the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco⁴ –among others– were platforms for the advancement of evangelization during the first phase of colonization in the 16th century. Current research on the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco emphasizes the methods used to teach European languages and the categorization and composition of *Vocabularios y Artes de la Lengua* (vocabularies, grammars and styles in Nahuatl language). Evangelization (and colonization) took shape through teaching exercises that included linguistic and cultural exchanges –traces of which still remain in several written and pictographic productions carried out in Tlatelolco⁵. In these spaces, Aesop's fables were part of creative and educational processes that saw translations made into students' native language.

The translation of Aesop into Nahuatl can be found in three primary sources containing forty-seven fables in very similar versions. The first source is *Cantares Mexicanos*⁶, which includes, from folios 179r to 191v, a section integrating the

1. Hausrath and Hunger, 1959.

2. Lefevere, 1992, pp. 41-110.

3. Bachmann-Medick, 2006, pp. 58-237.

4. Hernández and Máyne, 2016, pp. 10-63.

5. Hernández and Máyne, 2016, pp. 150-262.

6. The *Cantares Mexicanos* are a collection of songs and poems extracted from the Nahua oral tradition in the 16th century. A remarkable English translation was made by John Bierhorst (1985), which contains several songs referred to folios 1-83. Bierhorst has also translated twenty fables related to the figure of the coyote in a beautiful book for children entitled: *Doctor Coyote* (1987).

forty-seven fables written in Nahuatl. It is important to note that this source underwent a palaeography by Antonio Peñafiel in 1895 and a Spanish translation by Hugo Leicht in 1935. There was also a palaeographic transcription and Spanish translation by Salvador Díaz Cíntora in 1996, as well as a more recent translation into Spanish by Rafael Tena in 2019. The second source is the Mexican «Manuscript 287» dated 1898, housed in the Mexican Manuscripts Collection at the National Library of France. This manuscript contains only thirty-three fables in Nahuatl and Latin, and is a copy attributed to the compilation work of clergyman (Abbe) José Antonio Pichardo during the 18th century. Importantly, an edition of this source was carried out by Eustaquio Celestino Solís and Sergio Ramírez Fuentes⁷. The third source is «Manuscript M-M 464» at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, USA. This will be the source used in the analysis in the following section, particularly because of the detailed editing and work of Gerdt Kutscher, as well as her translations into German and English⁸.

In terms of the literature related to these Nahuatl translations, the work of Heréndira Téllez is quite significant. She offers a detailed study of the Nahuatl used in the translation of Aesop, insofar as it fell within the parameters of the «Latin textual tradition» present in the educational projects of the Franciscan friars in New Spain starting in 1524. Téllez posits the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco as a multiethnic and multilingual institution in which Latin, Spanish and Nahuatl would serve as the axes of a cultural convergence between two worlds (old and new). In her study she establishes the influence of the Renaissance and Humanism in the reception of other well-known works at the *Colegio*, such as Nebrija's *Vocabulario* and Kempis' *Contempus mundi* of, which was as integral part of the context of production of Aesop's translations into Nahuatl⁹. In another study, examines a version of the Mexican «Manuscript 287», identifying —through a comparison of the Latin texts— Aldus Manutius' 1505 edition of Aesop as the source or «original» from which they were copied. She also points out that the unknown translators could very well have been Bernardino de Sahagún and the indigenous poet Francisco Plácido. Regarding Plácido and his relationship with Sahagún, she states that some of these coincidences in style and literary formulas led us to believe that the translator was not just a student of friar Bernardino, or that he copied the style of his master, or simply helped him with the translations. Because of these rhetorical coincidences it is plausible that he was either co-translator or translator of Aesop's fables, under the direction of Sahagún himself¹⁰.

It is also important to mention Victoria Ríos' broader analysis in which she takes up the question of translation in order to study the Nahuatl *corpus*. Ríos puts forth a hypothesis that students and teachers (friars) at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco made these versions of Aesop as a way of teaching Latin. Through her analysis of the Bancroft Library texts, Ríos lays bare the hybrid nature of the Nahuatl

7. Amoxcalli, 2009.

8. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987.

9. Téllez, 2013, pp. 715-716.

10. Téllez, 2014.

versions in which indigenous rhetoric (or style), is brought together with Medieval and Renaissance models. In so doing, she demonstrates that, due to their practical purposes and moral function, the objective was for the fables to serve as effective stories or *exempla* in the evangelization (i.e., Christian conversion) of other *indios*. Ríos' contributions reside mainly in her explication of the cultural backdrop operating in the translations carried out by the 'trilingual' Indians at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, which opened up space for semantic translations with links and imbrications between European and Nahuatl cultural horizons. In particular, there is one fable with non-human living beings as the main characters, in which one can see analogies that refer back to a pre-Hispanic cultural backdrop. Ríos frames Aesop's teachings—which are the end goal of the Nahuatl versions—within the cultural world of the Nahuatl language, in terms of a creative process that surrounds and intersects these translations. Concerning the authorship of the translations, Ríos indicates that they were probably carried out by the Spanish friars Andrés de Olmos and Bernardino de Sahagún¹¹, thus avoiding the question of possible Indigenous authorship.

In a similar fashion, Víctor Sanchis analyzes the Nahuatl fables from the *Cantares Mexicanos*, focusing on their context of the production and their relationship to rhetorical exercises; specifically, to the extent that they were rewritten at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in the 16th century. Sanchis uses the category of *passeurs* to determine the anonymous authorship of these cultural texts. Through the notion of *passeurs* Sanchis is referring to the way in which these texts transport the mythologies of Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance cultures. His analysis places particular importance on the fables' teachings, as well as their 'political content, which alludes to the tension between the post-Conquest indigenous world and the colonial order¹². In a later text, Sanchis furthers his analysis by focusing on Humanism, the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, and Bernardino de Sahagún, suggesting that the translations were not only rhetorical or pedagogical exercises, but also an example of cultural translation. Sanchis posits the Colegio de San José de los Naturales, founded by Pedro de Gante in 1526 in Mexico City, as a precursor in the circulation of Aesop and, by extension, as an antecedent of Tlatelolco's project. With the figure of the coyote as a case in point, he shows how translation and cultural transfer shape these fables in an extraordinary way. Sanchis states that these translations went beyond the traditional binary of fidelity to the original, or to the translation, in the aim of unpacking a process of wider cultural transfer in Tlatelolco, akin to what transpired with Greek cultural at the height of Ancient Rome¹³. The significance of this approach is that it functions as clear evidence of a non-binary cultural translation, and that it takes into account certain characteristics and particularities stemming from Mesoamerican deities (i.e., the indigenous

11. Ríos, 2015, pp. 259-260.

12. Sanchis, 2018, pp. 82-88.

13. Sanchis, 2019, p. 57.

imaginary). He suggests that there is a relationship between Mesoamerican mythology and the teachings of Aesop that converge into a civilizational project –one that Sanchis acknowledges as «mestizo» in character¹⁴.

In a particular way, the work of Andrew Laird has carried out a quite interesting research centered on the Nahuatl translations in which he has developed alternative results. He states that Aesop's fables were of less interest for their status as classical literature than for their utility as «an elementary text for students of Latin, and their didacticism was deemed beneficial»¹⁵. Following an outstanding analysis on the forty-seven fables, Laird states that the Nahuatl translation in all three manuscripts was «made from Joachim Camerarius' *Fabellae Aesopicae plures quodringentis* (More than four hundred Aesopic Fables') published in Tübingen in 1538»¹⁶. This conclusion is related to the circulation of Camerarius' version as a popular textbook in Europe and New Spain during the second half of the sixteenth century. Along with a comparative analysis on the Latin sources, from which these Nahuatl translations were made, he problematizes the purpose or the idea of the translations. In these terms, Laird states: «the structure and character of the collection as a whole is distinctive, and unique enough to yield some insights on its overall conception. Rather oddly, scholars have never yet scrutinised or even given thought to this»¹⁷.

In this context, Laird says that there was a clear selection or selective action with the *Corpus Aesopicarum* in order to build these manuscripts as unique translations, in which it is possible to highlight how they displayed not just an extraordinary linguistic proficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to think of other ways or senses in which this exercise in cultural translation can be read or scrutinized. Laird's ideas aim to underscore the meaning of the Nahuatl translations as part of a particular endeavour that gathers historical, political, and educational (instructional) dimensions. Concerning the authorship of the translations, he has an explanation that takes into account the work of a remarkable *indio* of New Spain: Antonio Valeriano¹⁸. Laird states that there were few possible authors for these types of translations, pointing out that indigenous informants who studied in Tlatelolco and collaborate actively with the friars were probably who wrote the manuscripts. Among them, the name of Antonio Valeriano represents the success of the construction process of a new indigenous elite, lettered and humanist, aware of the European traditions and languages; also, Valeriano represents the way in which an elite of *indios* took control of political spaces in order to negotiate their power and political rights with the Spanish colonial order.

However, the question remains as to what were the motivations for translating Aesop's fables into Nahuatl. To answer this question one must study the content of these fables, and the ways in which they preserved relevant aspects of pre-Hispanic culture in order to carry out the evangelization of the indigenous

14. Sanchis, 2019, p. 60.

15. Laird, 2017, p. 135.

16. Laird, 2017, p. 137.

17. Laird, 2017, p. 148.

18. Laird, 2017, pp. 155-158.

population. To problematize the motivations and goals of these translations this study uses Tena's hypothesis as a starting point, which considers that this exercise of cultural translation most likely constituted an instructional practice in the Nahuatl language. Let us remember that, at that time, Aesop's fables were used to learn classical language¹⁹. Therefore, the aim is to approach this exercise of cultural translation as more than mere evidence of the transfer and circulation of knowledge and communication technologies, but fundamentally as part of a broader civilizational process due to the active participation of indigenous people in a complex reconstruction process of their own cultural identities.

THREE AESOP'S FABLES IN NAHUATL

I have chosen three fables of the available forty-seven, following the edited versions of the Bancroft Manuscript and their English translations. Specifically, the three fables are entitled: «Coyotl yuan tequani miztli» or «The Coyote and the Jaguar», «Azcatl ihuan huilotl» or «The Ant and the Dove», and «Cahcatzactli» or «The Moor». Therefore, I will analyze these fables by deploying a theoretical approach grounded on the adaptation, manipulation, and re-creation²⁰ of their allegories, moral values, and cultural contents into Nahuatl language.

1. Coyotl yuan tequani miztli

Centetl coyotl ayccan oquittaca yn tequani miztli. Auh in ceppa amo ynemachpa oquinamic yn tequani miztli; cenca omomauhti yn coyotl vel çotlahuac. auh yn ic oppa quinamic, macihuim momauhti aocmo cenca yxquich. auh yn ic expan oquinamic yequene mochicauh, vel itlan onmiquani, yuan oquinotz.

Yni çaçaniltontli techmachtia ca yn ixquich tenonotzaliztlatolli mauizttic, yyancuican ticcaqui cencá ticouicamati; auh intla miecpa ticcaquini, çà yhuian itech titomachtizq ynic vel ticcaquizque²¹.

The Coyote and the Jaguar

A certain coyote has never seen a jaguar anywhere. But when one day quite by chance he ran into one, he was very frightened, and fainted away. When he met him for the second time, he was still afraid but not quite so much. But when he met him for the third time he finally picked up courage; he approached him and spoke to him.

This little fable teaches us that every dread story we hear for the first time seems quite difficult. But if we hear it several times, we gradually make it our own, so that we are able to understand it²².

Concerning the first fable, entitled «the Coyote and the Jaguar» often entitled «The Coyote and the Lion» in English translations made directly from the Greek, we should draw our attention to the way in which it deal with otherness and the

19. Tena, 2019, p. 570.

20. Lefevere, 1992; Bachmann-Medick, 2006.

21. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, p. 62.

22. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, p. 63.

unknown, in terms of lack of experience and, therefore, cause for fear. The dialogical or communicative relationship to otherness (the coyote «approached to speak») is particularly interesting. From this perspective it is feasible to consider the terms «coyotl» and «tequiani miztli» as equivalents of «fox» and «lion». The translation of the Manuscript 287 indicates: «coyote and tequiani miztli», and the Latin version says: «*vulpes et leo*»²³. The, by the Spanish friar Alonso de Molina, translates tequani as wild beast, poisonous, or bad and cruel person» or «bestia fiera, o ponzoñosa, o persona brana y cruel»²⁴ and miztli as «lion» or «león»²⁵. Siméon translates tequani as «savage animal, poisonous» or «animal salvaje, venenoso»²⁶ and miztli as «american lion, puma, jaguar» or «león americano, puma, jaguar»²⁷. In terms of cultural translation it is important to point out, for example, the relationship with pre-Hispanic divinity Huehucoyotl (Old coyote). In this sense, the translation of *Vulpes* for Coyote establishes a link to the attributes of Huehucoyotl —such as sagacity, cleverness, intelligence, deceptiveness, and roguery, among others— with which the Nahuatl versions engages and addresses by adapting and converging the Nahua cultural codes with a very recurrent character in Aesop's fables²⁸.

2. Azcatl ihuan huilotl

Yn azcatl ie amiqui çecni ameialco ontemoc, auh yn iquac ie atlizne / fol. 434 r. / quia atlan onhuetz. auh ie quihuica acueiutl ie quipolactiz nequi centetl huilotl oncan quauhticpac catca. in uquitac ie polaquiznequi azcatl oquipoztec ce quanmaitl, oqui hualaz atla auh iin uquittac azcatl niman itech mocototztali in quamaitl iuh omaquiz. auh çan achitonca oquiçaco ce totoanqui, in oquitac quauhticpaca huilotl. niman ie quichichihua iacauh inic caciz huilotl. Auh inn axcatl in oquitac ie axihuaz huilotl niman oquicualli icxi i totoanqui auh in totoanqui omocuitihuetz niman oquimacauh in iacauh; auh in huilotl in oquicac acatl xamantihuetz omocuitihuetz niman oiehuac omomaquixti.

Yni çaçanilli techmachtia in queni titocnelilmatizque ihuicpa in toteicnelicahuan ihuan tic cuepcaiotizque in teicnelilli in itechpa ticcelia²⁹.

The Ant and the Dove

An ant who was dying of thirst, climbed down to a spring. But when she wanted to drink the water, she fell in. The ripples carried her away and she was about to drown. A dove was sitting there on a tree. Seeing that the ant was about to drown, she broke off a twig and threw it on to the water, the moment she saw it, the ant climbed on to it. That's how she escaped her doom. A little later a birdcatcher appeared. When he saw the dove on the tree, he got his blowpipe ready, to catch the dove. But when the ant saw that the dove was about to be caught, she stung

23. Amoxcalli, 2009.

24. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 105.

25. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 57.

26. Siméon, 1997, p. 508.

27. Siméon, 1997, p. 281.

28. Sanchis, 2019, p. 60.

29. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, pp. 142-144.

the birdcatcher's foot. The birdcatcher was startled. So he let his blowpipe fall out of his hand. When the dove heard the blowpipe as it fell splintering, she took fright. And rising she escaped ruin.

This fable teaches us how we should be grateful for kind deeds and to our benefactors; we should always return the kindness to the one from whom we have received it³⁰.

The second fable could be approached from the translations of the words *azcatl* and *huilotl*, «ant» and «dove», respectively. The translation of «Manuscript 287» indicates in Nahuatl «*azcatl* and *huilotl*»; whereas the Latin text refers to *formica et columba*. Again we can see the equivalences and affinities with non-human living beings, insofar as they fit into a specific landscape, a spring, as the scenario in which the ant, dove, and bird-catcher or *totoanqui* (the human figure of this tale) come together. The noun *totoanqui* refers to *tototl* or bird. This reference to a bird-catcher is quite exceptional, in that it may well be related to the well-known Mesoamerican feather craftwork and the *amantecas*, or artisans, who crafted them³¹. In this fable, the ant is the main character; the ant signifies a living being that is known for the virtue of effort and determination in both cultural horizons (indigenous and European). Moreover, *azcatl* is a fairly common noun in landscape and toponymy (regarding places, mountains and towns). *Columba* is translated into Nahuatl with the noun *huilotl*, «dove, tortoise». *Huilotl*, in Spanish «*huilota*» is a bird native to the Americas (From Canada to Panama, including the Antilles). Both terms, *azcatl* and *huilotl*, are semantic translations that function in both cultures, in that they convey a sense of empathy, reciprocity, and solidarity – moral values that this fable seeks to impart.

3. Cahcatzactli

Ce tlatcatl quimocohui cahcatzactli mumatia ca çan tlixicahuali inic opochehuac ca aic omatl in ompa achto otetlaiecolti iehica quipahualti in cahalti quipapaca momoztlaie cenca quimamateloa quitequixacualoa in inacayo auh in cacatzactli ayc huel oquicauh in icatzahuaca in ipochehuaca çan ilhuiçe ic peuh ie mococohua Mic

Yni çaçanilli techmactia ca in quenami çeçeiac a ieliz in o ipan tlatcat aiac huel ocçentlamantli ipan quicuepiliz³².

The Moor

A man bought himself a moor. He thought it was only neglect that had made him so smoke gray that he had never bathed where he had served before. Therefore he began to bathe him. Day after day he washed him. He rubbed him hard with his hands; he scraped his body firmly. But the moor never lost his dirt, his smoky colour. He became more and more ill, through his treatment. He died.

The fable teaches us: whatever nature a person is born with, nobody can change it into another³³.

30. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, pp. 143-145.

31. Castelló, 1993; Magaloni, 2004.

32. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, p. 202.

33. Brotherston and Vollmer, 1987, p. 203.

The third fable, «Cahcatzactli» is quite evocative in terms of its content. The Nahuatl translations include this version of «Aethiops», which is «Aphthonius' Aesopic fable about the 'Ethiopian'»³⁴. The Nahuatl translation uses the word cahcatzactli, which means «the dirty one». Cahcatzactli comes from the noun catzactic: «dirty thing» or «cosa sucia»³⁵. Both terms are connected to the verb catzactilia: «to make something dirty» or «ensuciar algo»³⁶, and to the abstract noun catzactiliztli, meaning «dirtiness» or «suciedad»³⁷. Furthermore, Karttunen's dictionary defines the verb catzahua as, «to get oneself dirty; to get someone dirty, ensuciarse, ensuciar a otro» and the noun catzahuac as «something dirty, cosa sucia»³⁸. There is also a quite remarkable equivalent towards the end: Mic, which was an addition made by the Nahuatl translators³⁹. This term is referred to the Micqui, which means «deceased, or defunct», «muerto, o difunto»⁴⁰ or «dead person or animal»⁴¹. Micqui stems from the verb micquia, which means «to die» or «to suffer»⁴². One can also see the commonality with the verb mictia: «matar a sí mismo,» «get oneself killed»⁴³ or «to commit suicide, to mistreat oneself, to kill or injure someone»⁴⁴. This fable's content draws on Western notions of ethnicity by situating African inhabitants and the meaning of their skin-pigmentation in such a manner. By addressing the problem of race and ethnicity from within the Nahua cultural imaginary, cahcatzactli or «the dirty one» works as a rhetorical figure to problematize the skin-pigmentation and its hierarchical-racialized boundaries.

However, there are certain key aspects of the fables' characters that bring its elemental character to light; primarily the way in which the animals are imbued with more than mere moral values. For example, the first fable discusses the fear of the unknown, and solved it with the coyote's familiarization and communication, imparting an evident truth about conviviality among different living beings. Likewise, the empathy between the ant and the dove is crucial to understanding the ethical sense of the second fable. Empathy engenders reciprocity and solidarity between two distinct living beings in danger. The life-threatening situation metaphorically placed the figures at the natural spring and the bird-catcher in a context that demanded cooperation for survival (unconsciously, when the bird helped the ant by accident, consciously, when the ant bit the bird-catcher's foot). The third fable brings us to the problem of otherness, albeit in a particular form. Although it is quite clear that the association between skin pigmentation and cultural identity existed during the colonization of the New World, there is plenty of evidence to suggest

34. Laird, 2016, p. 61.

35. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 13.

36. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 13.

37. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 13.

38. Karttunen, 1992, p. 25.

39. Laird, 2017, p. 152.

40. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 56.

41. Karttunen, 1992, p. 146.

42. Karttunen, 1992, p. 145.

43. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 56.

44. Karttunen, 1992, p. 146.

that pre-Hispanic cultures did not define themselves (and their identities) by any hierarchical colour scale. Here we have a cultural translation in which the colour black, in Nahuatl tliltic, does not work as a synonym for the notion of «Aethiops» or «Moor» —even when the translation of tliltic could more accurately be rendered as: «cosa negra de Etiopía» or «black thing from Ethiopia»⁴⁵. As well, it is possible to remark that Tena's Spanish translation of cahcatzactli indicates the word: «negro»⁴⁶, following an interpretation that uses the colour «black» to explain the otherness of these sort of human beings. *Contrario sensu*, the Nahuatl understanding of skin colour re-shapes the meaning of the fable's character by translating it at a semantic and interpretative level. Beyond «black» as a colour, there is a hidden and significant proposal, in which the Western moral prejudice around Africans is bifurcated and re-explained. The term cahcatzactli, or «the dirty one» posits the problem of pigmentation by explaining (in translation) the cultural boundaries of Western categories of race from Nahuatl cultural points of reference. By doing so, this fable acknowledges the problem of otherness on a broader scale and underscores the value of self-recognition (in terms of identity) as something inherent and essential, as well as particular and differential.

Finally, we should unpack the meaning of «Yn çaçanilli techmachtia» or «this fable teaches us». First and foremost, the verb techmachtia or temachtia is derived from the verb «machtia». The *Vocabulario* translates machtia as «to teach» or «enseñar»⁴⁷, and defines the noun «temachtia» as «teacher, preacher, master» or «enseñador, predicador, maestro»⁴⁸. *The Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* accounts for the verb machtia as «to learn, to study; to teach someone, aprender o estudiar, enseñar o predicar»⁴⁹. The dyad of learning/teaching points to the logic of this translation especially when considering another key term: çaçanilli or zazanilli. This combination: «Yn çaçanilli techmachtia» is part of each one of the forty-seven fables in Nahuatl. Çaçanilli means «tales to laugh» or «consejuelas para reír»⁵⁰, «bromas» or «jokes»⁵¹, «tale, fable; conversation»⁵². Çaçanilli comes from the adverb çaçan o zazan, which means «there wherever you want» or «ay adonde quiera»⁵³, or «any which way, without coherence or sense»⁵⁴. Çaçanilli is also related to the verb çaçanilhuaia: «say tales to spend time» or «decir consejuelas para pasar tiempo»⁵⁵. For instance, there are «çaçanilli mitoa çaçan tleino or "riddles," literally, "solace tales called: what is that?"»⁵⁶. In this sense, one can draw parallels to the riddles or

45. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 148.

46. Tena, 2019, pp. 628-629.

47. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 55.

48. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 97.

49. Karttunen, 1992, p. 128.

50. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 14.

51. Siméon, 1997, p. 55.

52. Karttunen, 1992, p. 346.

53. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 14.

54. Karttunen, 1992, p. 347.

55. Molina, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*, p. 14.

56. López Austin, 2017, p. 260.

«zazaniles» that friar Bernardino de Sahagún collected in the *Florentine Codex*⁵⁷ and in his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*⁵⁸, as clear examples of their colloquial and pedagogical function for the indigenous cultural world. Therefore, it is possible to deduce that the word *çaçanilli* functions as a form of entertainment. As such, the refrain «Yn *çaçanilli* techmachtia» as a translation for «this fable teaches us» suggests an interesting exercise of cultural exchange that transpires in these fables; on the one hand, there is the oral tradition, and on the other, the pursuit (and usefulness) of joy and entertainment

CONCLUSION

The particular analysis of the three fables has pointed out some specific dimensions and perspectives, on one hand, related to the cultural contents of certain animals and, on the other, to the imaginary of the otherness in human beings. In that sense, I have underlined some elements of Nahuatl language, which were used to explain senses, to translate worlds than mere words. At last, across the three fables, there is cultural translation working as a propositive appropriation, in which Aesop's teachings and ideas were integrated and vectorized as part of the reconstruction process of their own cultural identities. Aesop fables translated into Nahuatl show us how the cultural values and practical knowledge from Ancient and Medieval times were transformed and re-shaped during the first step of New Spain colonization, and how they were functionalized as a vehicle or instrument to develop a civilizational project. This project transferred a cultural horizon that, consequently, was coined (and translated) by lettered Indians due to their fundamental role in-between this complex process. Throughout the forty-seven fables works a co-relational and creative movement, for in fable after fable modifications are made, on a greater or lesser scale, which can be ascribed both to the scope and utility of Aesop and to the conventions of the indigenous cultural and literary tradition offered by Nahuatl language. Following the forty-seven fables, it is possible to reflect on the exercise of cultural translation, i.e. adaptation, manipulation, and interpretation, carried out by the seraphic friars and, in particular, by those lettered Indians, students, and informants at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in order to re-create the boundaries and the blends of two languages and worldviews, re-crafting and re-writing a new Aesop by their own.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amoxcalli, *Manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional de Francia*, Mexico City, CIESAS-BNF, 2009. CD.

Bachmann-Medick, Doris, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Berlin, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006.

57. Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain*, Book VI, pp. 237-260.

58. Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, pp. 397-398.

- Bierhorst, John, *Cantares Mexicanos. Song of the Aztecs*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1985.
- Bierhorst, John, *Doctor Coyote*, New York, Macmillan, 1987.
- Brotherston, Gordon, and Günther Vollmer (eds.), *Aesop in Mexico*, Berlin, Mann, 1987.
- Castelló, Teresa, «La plumaria en la tradición indígena», en *El arte plumaria en México*, ed. Teresa Castelló, Mexico City, Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1993, pp. 143-215.
- Díaz Cíntora, Salvador, *Las fábulas de Esopo*, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996.
- Hausrath, August, and Herbert Hunger (eds.), *Corpus fabularum Aesopicarum*, Hamburg, Teubner, 1959.
- Hernández, Esther, and Pilar Máynez (eds.), *El Colegio de Tlatelolco. Síntesis de historias, lenguas y culturas*, Mexico City, Destiempos, 2016.
- Karttunen, Frances, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl*, Norman, Oklahoma University Press, 1992.
- Laird, Andrew, «Nahua Humanism and Ethnohistory: Antonio Valeriano and a Letter from the Rulers of Azcapotzalco to Philip II, 1561», *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 52, 2016, pp. 23-74.
- Laird, Andrew, «A Mirror for Mexican Princes: Reconsidering the Context and Latin Source for the Nahuatl Translation of Aesop's Fables», en *Brief Forms in Medieval And Renaissance Hispanic Literature*, ed. Barry Taylor and Alejandro Coroleu, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017, pp. 132-167.
- Leicht, Hugo, «Fábulas de Esopo en mexicano. Texto, traducción literal al español, vocabulario y gramática», *Investigaciones Lingüísticas*, 3.5-6, 1935, pp. 405-420.
- Lefevere, André, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London / New York, Routledge, 1992.
- López Austin, Alfredo, *Los mitos del tlacuache*, Mexico City, Era, 2017.
- Magaloni, Diana, «Real and Illusory Feathers: Pigments, Painting Techniques, and the Use of Color in Ancient Mesoamerica», *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, 2004, unpubl., online, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/1462>.
- Molina, Alonso, *Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana* [1571], Mexico City, Porrúa, 2013.
- Peñafiel, Antonio, *Fábulas de Esopo en lengua mexicana*, Mexico City, Secretaría de Fomento, 1895.
- Ríos, Victoria, «The Translation of Aesop's Fables in Colonial Mexico», *Trans*, 19.2, 2015, pp. 243-246.

- Sahagún, Bernardino, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* [1585], Mexico City, Porrúa, 2004.
- Sahagún, Bernardino, *General History of the Things of New Spain by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: The Florentine Codex* [1577], Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 1969.
- Sanchis, Víctor, «"Y era nuestra herencia una fábula de Esopo": lecturas de libertad en las fábulas en lengua náhuatl del Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco», *Revista de Letras*, 58.1, 2018, pp. 77-91.
- Sanchis, Víctor, «Los coyotes de Esopo: pedagogía, humanismo y traducción cultural en el colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco en las Fábulas en lengua náhuatl», *Pangeas. Revista Interdisciplinaria de Ecocrítica*, 1.1, 2019, pp. 51-62.
- Siméon, Rémi, *Diccionario de la lengua náhuatl o mexicana* [1855], Mexico City, Siglo Veintiuno, 1977.
- Tena, Rafael, «Nican ompehua y çaçanillatolli yn quitlali ce tlamatini ytoca Esopo, yc techmachtia yn nehmatcanemiliztli Fábulas de Esopo», en *Cantares Mexicanos. Vol. III*, ed. Miguel León Portilla, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019, pp. 579-630.
- Téllez, Heréndira, *La versión novohispana de las Fábulas de Esopo en latín y náhuatl. Ms. 287 de la Biblioteca Nacional de Francia*, 2013, online, <http://web.uaemex.mx/iesu/PNovohispano/Encuentros/2013%20XXVI%20EPN/Siglo%20XVII/Herendira%20Tellez%20Nieto.pdf>.
- Téllez, Heréndira, «La tradición textual latina de las Fábulas de Esopo en lengua náhuatl», *Latomus Revue d'Études Latines*, 74.3, 2014, pp. 715-734.