

peculiar dread of death by sacrifice and of the cannibalizing of the corpse.<sup>40</sup> On much they could be innovative. But on the most basic measure of man's worth, the taking alive of prestigious captives, they could not compromise.

That passion for captives meant that the moment when the opponent's nerve broke was helplessly compelling, an enemy in flight an irresistible lure. This pursuit reflex was sometimes exploited by native opponents as a slightly shabby trick. It provided Cortés with a standard tactic for a quick and sure crop of kills. Incurious as to the reason, he nonetheless noted and exploited Mexican unteachability: "Sometimes, as we were thus withdrawing and they pursued us so eagerly, the horsemen would pretend to be fleeing, and then suddenly would turn on them; we always took a dozen or so of the boldest. By these means and by the ambushes which we set for them, they were always much hurt; and certainly it was a remarkable sight for even when they well knew the harm they would receive from us as we withdrew, they still pursued us until we had left the city."<sup>41</sup> That commitment bore heavily on outcomes. Had Indians been as uninhibited as Spaniards in their killing, the small Spanish group, with no secured source of replenishment, would soon have been whittled away. In battle after battle the Spaniards report the deaths of many Indians, with their own men suffering not fatalities but wounds, and fast-healing wounds at that: those flint and obsidian blades sliced clean. It preserved the life of Cortés: time and again the Spanish leader struggled in Indian hands, the prize in a disorderly tug of war, with men dying on each side in the furious struggle for possession, and each time the Spaniards prevailing. Were Cortés in our hands, we would knife him. Mexican warriors could not kill the enemy leader so casually: were he to die, it would be in the temple of Huitzilopochtli, and before his shrine.<sup>42</sup>

If the measurable consequences of that insistence were obvious and damaging, there were others less obvious, but perhaps more significant. We have already noted the Spanish predilection for ambush as part of a wider preference for killing at least risk. Spaniards valued their crossbows and muskets for their capacity to pick off selected enemies well behind the line of engagement: as snipers, as we would say. The psychological demoralization attending those sudden, trivializing deaths of great men painted for war, but not yet engaged in combat, must have been formidable. (Were the victim actively engaged in battle, the matter was different. Then he died nobly; although pierced by a bolt or a ball from a distance, his blood flowed forth to feed the earth as a warrior's should.) But more than Indian deaths and demoralization were effected through these transactions. To inflict such deaths—at a distance, without putting one's own life in play—developed a Mexican reading of the character of the Spanish warrior.<sup>43</sup>

Consider this episode, told by a one-time conquistador. Two Indian champions, stepping out from the mass of warriors, offered their formal challenge before a Spanish force. Cortés responded by ordering two horsemen to charge, their lances poised. One of the warriors, against all odds, contrived to sever a

horse's hooves, and then, as it crashed to the ground, slashed its neck. Cortés, seeing the risk to the unhorsed rider, had a cannon fired so that "all the Indians in the front ranks were killed and the others scattered." The two Spaniards recovered themselves and scuttled back to safety under the covering fire of muskets, crossbows, and the cannon.<sup>44</sup>

For Cortés the individual challenge had been a histrionic preliminary flourish: he then proceeded to the serious work of using firepower to kill warriors, and to control more territory, which was what he took war to be about. Throughout, Spaniards measured success in terms of body counts, territory controlled, and evidence of decay in the morale of the "enemy," which included all warriors, actively engaged in battle or not, and all "civilians" too. Cortés casually informed the king of his dawn raids into sleeping villages and the slaughter of the inhabitants, men, women, and children, as they stumbled into the streets: these were necessary and conventional steps in the progressive control of terrain, and the progressive demoralization of opposition. To an Indian warrior, Cortés's riposte to the Indian champions' challenge was shameful, with only the horses, putting themselves within reach of the opponents' weapons, emerging with any credit. Cortés's descents on villages are reported in tones of breathless incredulity.<sup>45</sup>

There is in the *Florentine Codex* an exquisitely painful, detailed description of the Spaniards' attack on the unarmed warrior dancers at the temple festival, the slaughter that triggered the Mexican "uprising" of May 1520. The first victim was a drummer: his hands were severed, then his neck. The account continues: "Of some they slashed open their backs: then their entrails gushed out. Of some they cut their heads to pieces. . . . Some they struck on the shoulder; they split openings. They broke openings in their bodies."<sup>46</sup> And so it goes on. How ought we interpret this? It was not, I think, recorded as a horror story, or only as a horror story. The account is sufficiently careful as to precise detail and sequence to suggest its construction close after the event, in an attempt to identify the pattern, and so to discover the sense, in the Spaniards' cuttings and slashings. (This was the first view the Mexicans had of Spanish swords at work.) The Mexicans had very precise rules about violent assaults on the body, as the range of their sacrificial rituals makes clear, but the notion of a "preemptive massacre" of warriors was not in their vocabulary.

Such baffling actions, much more than any deliberately riddling policy, worked to keep Indians off balance. To return to an early celebrated moment of mystification by Cortés, the display of the cannon to impress the Mexican envoys on the coast with the killing power of Spanish weapons: the men who carried the tale back reported the thunderous sound, the smoke, the fire, the foul smell—and that the shot had "dissolved" a mountain, and "pulverised" a tree.<sup>47</sup> It is highly doubtful that the native watchers took the intended point of the display, that this was a weapon of war for use against human flesh. It was not a conceivable

weapon for warriors. So it must have appeared (as it is in fact reported) as a gratuitous assault upon nature: a scrambled lesson indeed. Mexican warriors learned, with experience, not to leap and shout and display when faced with cannon fire and crossbows, but to weave and duck, as the shield canoes learned to zigzag to avoid the cannon shot from the brigantines, so that with time the carnage was less.<sup>48</sup> But they also learned contempt for men who were prepared to kill indiscriminately, combatants and noncombatants alike, and at a secure distance, without putting their own lives in play.

What of Spanish horses, that other key element in Cortés's mystification program? We have early evidence of swift and effective warrior response to these exotics, and of a fine experimental attitude to verifying their nature. A small group of Tlaxcalan warriors having their first sight of horses and horsemen managed to kill two horses and to wound three others before the Spaniards got the upper hand.<sup>49</sup> In the next engagement a squad of Indians made a concerted and clearly deliberate attack on a horse, allowing the rider, although badly wounded, to escape, while they killed his mount and carted the body from the field. Bernal Díaz later recorded that the carcass was cut into pieces and distributed through the towns of Tlaxcala, presumably to demonstrate the horse's carnal nature. (They reserved the horseshoes, as he sourly recalled, to offer to their idols, along with "the Flemish hat, and the two letters we had sent them offering peace.")<sup>50</sup>

The distribution of the pieces of the horse's flesh possibly held further implications. Indians were in no doubt that horses were animals. But that did not reduce them, as it did for Spaniards, to brute beasts, unwitting, unthinking servants of the lords of creation. Indians had a different understanding of how animals signified. It was no vague aesthetic inclination that led the greatest warrior orders to mimic the eagle and the jaguar in their dress and conduct: those were creatures of power, exemplary of the purest warrior spirit. The eagle, slowly turning close to the sun; then the scream, the stoop, the strike; the jaguar, announcing its presence with the coughing rumble of thunder, erupting from the dappled darkness to make its kill: these provided unmatched models for human emulation. That horses should appear ready to kill men was unremarkable. The ferocity and courage of these creatures, who raced into the close zone of combat, facing the clubs and swords; who plunged and screamed, whose eyes rolled, whose saliva flew (for the Mexicans saliva signified anger) marked them as agents in the battle action, as had the charge of the two horses against their Indian challengers. In the Mexican lexicon of battle, the horses excelled their masters. They were not equal in value as offerings—captured Spanish swords lashed to long poles were typically used against horses to disembowel or hamstring them, but not against their riders, judged too valuable to damage so deeply—but their valor was recognized. When the besieged Mexicans won a major victory over Cortés's men on the Tacuba causeway, they displayed the heads of the sacrificed

Spaniards on the skull rack in the usual way, and below them they skewered the heads of the four horses taken in the same melee.<sup>51</sup>

There is one small moment in which we see these contrary understandings held in counterpoise. During a skirmish in the city some Spanish horsemen emerging from an unsprung ambush collided, a Spaniard falling from his mare. Panicky, the riderless horse "rushed straight at the enemy, who shot at and wounded her with arrows; whereupon, seeing how badly she was being treated, she returned to us," Cortés reported, but "so badly wounded that she died that night." He continued: "Although we were much grieved by her loss, for our lives were dependent on the horses, we were pleased she had not perished at the hands of the enemy, for their joy at having captured her would have exceeded the grief caused by the death of their companions."<sup>52</sup>

For Cortés the mare was an animal, responding as an animal: disoriented, then fleeing from pain. Her fate had symbolic importance only through her association with the Spaniards. For the Indians the mare breaking out from the knot of Spaniards, rushing directly and alone toward enemy warriors—white-eyed, ferocity incarnate—was accorded the warrior's reception of a flight of arrows. Her reversal, her flight back to her friends probably signaled a small Indian victory, as her capture and death among enemies would have signaled to the Spaniards, at a more remote level, a small Spanish defeat. That doomed mare wheeling and turning in the desperate margin between different armies and different systems of understanding provides a sufficiently poignant metaphor for the themes I have been pursuing.

Spanish "difference" found its clearest expression in their final strategy for the reduction of the imperial city. Cortés had hoped to intimidate the Mexicans sufficiently by his steady reduction of the towns around the lake, by his histrionic acts of violence, and by the exemplary cruelty with which resistance was punished, to bring them to treat.<sup>53</sup> Example-at-a-distance in that mosaic of rival cities could have no relevance for the Mexicans—if all others quailed, they would not—so the Spaniards resorted, as Díaz put it, to "a new kind of warfare." Siege was the quintessential European strategy: an economical design to exert maximum pressure on whole populations without active engagement, delivering control over people and place at least cost. If Cortés's own precarious position led him to increase that pressure by military sorties, his crucial weapon was want.

For the Mexicans, siege was the antithesis of war. They knew of encircling cities to persuade unwilling warriors to come out, and of destroying them too, when insult required it. They had sought to burn the Spaniards out of their quarters in Tenochtitlan, to force them to fight after their massacre of the warrior dancers.<sup>54</sup> But the deliberate and systematic weakening of opposition before engagement, and the deliberate implication of noncombatants in the contest, had no part in their experience.

As the siege continued the signs of Mexican contempt multiplied. Mexican warriors continued to seek face-to-face combat with these most unsatisfactory opponents, who skulked and refused battle, who clung together in tight bands behind their cannon, who fled without shame. When elite warriors, swept in by canoe, at last had the chance to engage the Spaniards closely, the Spaniards "turned their backs, they fled," with the Mexicans in pursuit. They abandoned a cannon in one of their pell-mell flights, positioned with unconscious irony on the gladiatorial stone on which the greatest enemy warriors had given their final display of fighting prowess; the Mexicans worried and dragged it along to the canal and dropped it into the water.<sup>55</sup> Indian warriors were careful, when they had to kill rather than capture Spaniards in battle, to deny them an honorable warrior's death, dispatching them by beating in the back of their heads, the death reserved for criminals in Tenochtitlan.<sup>56</sup> And the Spaniards captured after the debacle on the Tacuba causeway were stripped of all their battle equipment, their armor, their clothing: only then, when they were naked, and reduced to "slaves," did the Mexicans kill them.<sup>57</sup>

What does it matter, in the long run, that Mexican warriors admired Spanish horses and despised Spanish warriors? To discover how it bore on events we need to look briefly at Indian notions of "fate" and time. We can compare the structure of the Indian and Spanish accounts of the final battles, to discover the explanatory strategies implied in that structuring. The Spanish versions present the struggles along the causeways, the narrow victories, the coups, the strokes of luck, the acts of daring on each side. Through the tracing of an intricate sequence of action we follow the movement of the advantage, first one way, then the other. God is at the Spaniards' shoulders, but only to lend power to their strong arms, or to tip an already tilting balance. Through selection and sequence of significant events we have the familiar, powerful, cumulative explanation through the narrative form.

The Indian accounts look superficially similar. There are episodes, and they are offered serially: descriptions of group or individual feats, of contemptible Spanish actions. But these are discrete events, moments to be memorialized, with time no more than the thread on which they are strung: there is no cumulative effect, no significance in sequence. Nor is there any implication that the human actions described bore on outcomes. The fact that defeat was suffered declares it to have been inevitable.

The Mexicans, like Mesoamericans generally, conceptualized time as multi-dimensional and eternally recurrent, and men attempted to comprehend its complex movement through the use of intermeshing time counts, which completed their complex permutations over fifty-two years, a *Xiumolpilli* or "Bundle of Years." (Note how that word *bundle* denies any significance to mere adjacency.) Under such a system, each "day" was not the outcome of the days preceding it: it had its own character, indicated by its complex name derived from the time counts, and was unique within its Bundle of Years. It also was more closely

connected with the similarly named days that had occurred in every preceding Bundle of Years than with those clustered about it in its own bundle. Thus the particular contingent event was to be understood as unfolding in a dynamic process modeled by some past situation. But just as those anomalous events presumably noted before the Spanish advent could be categorized as "omens" and their portent identified only retrospectively, the identification of the recurrent in the apparently contingent was very much an after-the-event diagnosis, not an anterior paralyzing certitude. The essential character of the controlling time manifested itself in subtle ways, largely masked from human eyes. Events remained problematical in their experiencing, with innovation and desperate effort neither precluded nor inhibited. In human experience outcomes remained contingent until manifested.<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, some few events were accorded special status, being recognized as signs of the foretold. At a place called Otumba the Spaniards, limping away from Tenochtitlan after the expulsion of the Noche Triste, were confronted by a sea of Mexican warriors: a sea that evaporated when Cortés and his horsemen drove through to strike down the battle leader, and to seize his fallen banner. The "battle of Otumba" mattered, being the best chance from our perspective for the Mexicans to finish off the Spaniards at their most vulnerable. The Spanish accounts identify the striking down of the commander as decisive, but while the fall of a leader was ominous (and an attack on a leader not actively engaged in combat disreputable) it was the taking of the banner that signified. Our initial temptation is to elide this with the familiar emotional attachment of a body of fighting men to its colors: to recall the desperate struggles over shreds of silk at Waterloo; the dour passion of a Roman legion in pursuit of its lost Eagle and honor.<sup>59</sup> There might have been some of this in the Indian case. But the taking of a banner was to Indians less a blow to collective pride than a statement: a sign that the battle was to go, indeed had gone, against them.

Cortés reported his determined attack on "the great cue," the pyramid of Huitzilopochtli, during the first struggle in Tenochtitlan, claiming that after three hours of struggle he cleared the temple of Indians and put it to the torch. He also noted that the capture of the pyramid "so much damaged their confidence that they began to weaken greatly on all sides": the sign noted.<sup>60</sup> Had the capture been as decisive as Cortés claims, we could expect more than "weakening," but just how complete it was remains problematical: in Díaz's account the Spaniards, having fired the shrine, were then tumbled back down the steps. The event clearly mattered to the Indians, Díaz remarking how often he had seen that particular battle pictured in later Indian accounts. He thought this was because the Indians took the Spanish assault as a very heroic thing, as they were represented as "much wounded and running with blood with many dead in the pictures they made of the setting afire of the temple, with the many warriors guarding it."<sup>61</sup> My thought is that what the representations sought to make clear was that despite the firing

of the shrine the Spaniards had not achieved the uncontested mastery which would indeed have constituted and marked "victory." The vigor of the attack must have made even more urgent the putting of the temple to rights after the Spaniards' expulsion—that period when we, with our notions of strategy, wait in vain for the Mexicans to pursue the weakened Spaniards and finish them off, while they prepared instead for the set-piece battle at Otumba, "read" the message of the taking of the banner, and yielded the day.

Deep into the second phase of the conquest, Spanish banner carriers remained special targets, being subjected to such ferocious attack that "a new one was needed every day."<sup>62</sup> But the Mexicans had come to pay less heed to signs, because they had discovered that Spaniards ignored them. In the course of the causeway victory a major Spanish banner had actually been taken: "The warriors from Tlatelolco captured it in the place known today as San Martín." But while the warrior who had seized the banner was carefully memorialized, "They were scornful of their prize and considered it of little importance." Sahagún's informants flatly record that the Spaniards "just kept on fighting."<sup>63</sup> Ignoring signs of defeat, the Spaniards were equally careless of signs of victory. When a Spanish contingent penetrated the marketplace of Tlatelolco, where the Mexicans had taken their last refuge, they managed to fight their way to the top of the main pyramid, to set the shrines on fire and plant their banners before they were forced to withdraw. ("The common people began to wail, expecting the looting to begin," but the warriors, seasoned in Spanish ways, had no such expectation. They knew the fighting would go on: these enemies were as blind to signs as they were deaf to decency.) Next day from his own encampment Cortés was puzzled to see the fires still burning unquenched, the banners still in place. The Mexicans would respect the signs and leave them to stand, even if the barbarians did not, even if the signs had lost efficacy, even if the rules of war were in abeyance.

John Keegan has characterized battle as "essentially a moral conflict [requiring] a mutual and sustained act of will between two contending parties, and, if it is to result in a decision, the moral collapse of one of them."<sup>64</sup> Paradoxically, that mutuality is most essential at the point of disengagement. To "surrender," to acquiesce in defeat and concede victory, is a complex business, at once a redefinition of self and one's range of effective action, and a redefinition of one's relationship with the erstwhile enemy. Those redefinitions have somehow to be acknowledged by the opponent. Where the indicators that mark defeat and so allow "moral collapse" to occur are not acknowledged, neither victory nor defeat is possible, and we approach a sinister zone in which there can be no resolution save death.<sup>65</sup>

That, I think, came to be the case in Mexico. "Signs" are equivocal things, especially when they point not to a temporary submission of uncertain duration, but to the end of a people's imperial domination. The precarious edifice of "empire" had not survived the introduction of the wild card of the Spaniards—

men without a city, and so outside the central plays of power and punishment. Its collapse had been proclaimed by Quauhtemoc, "He Who Falls Like an Eagle," who had replaced the dead Cuitlahuac as Great Speaker, when he offered a general "remission" of tribute for a year in return for aid against the Spaniards: tribute is a product of the power to exact it. In the final battles the Mexicans were fighting for the integrity of their city, as so many others had fought before. They knew the settled hatred of the Tlaxcalans and the envy of other peoples. Perhaps even against indigenous enemies they might have fought on, in face of the signs of defeat. Against the Spaniards, cowardly opportunists impossible to trust, who disdained the signs of victory and defeat, they lacked any alternative.<sup>66</sup> The Mexicans continued to resist.

The chronicles record the stories of heroic deeds: of warriors scattering the Spaniards before them, of the great victory over Cortés's troop, with terrified Spaniards reeling "like drunken men," and fifty-three taken for sacrifice.<sup>67</sup> Spanish accounts tell us that the victory that had given so many captives to the Mexican war god was taken at the time to indicate the likelihood of a final Mexican victory, hopefully prophesied by the priests as coming within eight days. (The Indian records do not waste time on false inferences, misunderstood omens.) Cortés's allies, respectful of signs, accordingly removed themselves for the duration. But the days passed, the decisive victory did not come, and the macabre dance continued.<sup>68</sup>

And all the while, as individual warriors found their individual glory, the city was dying: starving, thirsting, choking on its own dead. This slow strangling is referred to as if quite separate from the battle, as in the Mexican mind it presumably was. Another brief glory occurred, when Eagle and Ocelot warriors, men from the two highest military orders, were silently poled in disguised canoes to where they could leap among looting native allies, spreading lethal panic among them. But still the remorseless pressure went on: "They indeed wound all around us, they were wrapped around us, no one could go anywhere. . . . Indeed many died in the press."<sup>69</sup>

The Mexicans made their endgame play. Here the augury component, always present in combat, is manifest. Quauhtemoc and his leading advisers selected a great warrior, clad him in the array of Quetzal Owl, the combat regalia of the great Ahuitzotl, who had ruled before the despised Moctezoma, and armed him with the flint-tipped darts of Huitzilopochtli; thus he became, as they said, "one of the number of the Mexicans' rulers." He was sent forth to cast his darts against the enemy: should the darts twice strike their mark, the Mexicans would prevail. Magnificent in his spreading quetzal plumes, with his four attendants, Quetzal Owl entered the battle. For a time they could follow his movements among the enemy: reclaiming stolen gold and quetzal plumes, taking three captives, or so they thought. Then he dropped from a terrace, and out of sight. The Spaniards record nothing of this exemplary combat.



After that ambiguous sign another day passed with no action: the Spaniards, disreputable to the end, “only lay still; they lay looking at the common folk.”<sup>70</sup> On the next evening a great “bloodstone,” a blazing coal of light, flared through the heavens, to whirl around the devastated city, then to vanish in the middle of the lake. No Spaniard saw the comet of fire that marked the end of imperial Tenochtitlan. Perhaps no Indian saw it either. But they knew great events must be attended by signs, and that there must have been a sign. In the morning Quauhtemoc, having taken counsel with his lords, abandoned the city. He was captured in the course of his escape, to be brought before Cortés. Only then did his people leave their ruined city.<sup>71</sup>

So the Mexicans submitted to their fate, when that fate was manifest. A certain arrangement of things had been declared terminated: the period of Mexican domination and the primacy of Tenochtitlan was over.

A particular section of the *Anales de Tlatelolco* is often cited to demonstrate the completeness of the obliteration of a way of life and a way of thought. It runs:

Broken spears lie in the roads;  
we have torn our hair in our grief.  
The houses are roofless now, and their walls  
are red with blood.

Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas,  
and the walls are splattered with gore.  
The water has turned red, as if it were dyed,  
and when we drink it,  
it has the taste of brine.

We have pounded our hands in despair  
against the adobe walls,  
for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead.  
The shields of our warriors were its defense,  
but they could not save it.<sup>72</sup>

And so it continues. But what is notable here (apart from the poetic power) is that the “lament” was a traditional form, maintaining itself after the defeat, and so locating that defeat and rendering it intelligible by assaying it in the traditional mode. If the Mexican vision of empire was finished, the people, and their sense of distinctiveness as a people, were not. The great idols in the temples had been smuggled out of the city by their traditional custodians before its fall, and sent toward Tula, a retracing of their earlier migration route. A cyclical view of time has its comforts. And if the “Quetzalcoatl returned” story as presented in the *Florentine Codex* is a post-Conquest imposition, as is likely, and if indeed it does move away from traditional native ways of accounting for human action in the world, with Moctezoma’s conduct described not merely to memorialize his shame but in order to explain the outcome of defeat, as I believe it does—then its fab-

rication points to a concern for the construction of a viable and satisfying public history for the conquered, an emollient myth, generated in part from within the European epistemological system to encompass the catastrophe of Mexican defeat.

### III

Now, at last, for the consequences.

There is something appealing to our sense of irony in the notion that the Spaniards' heroic deeds, as they saw them, were judged shameful by the Mexican warriors. But attitudes of losers have little historical resonance. Attitudes of victors do. Here I want to pursue an impression. Anyone who has worked on the history of Mexico—I suspect the case is the same for much of Latin America, but I cannot speak for that—is painfully impressed by the apparent incorrigibility of the division between the aboriginal inhabitants and the incomers, despite the domestic proximity of their lives, and by the chronic durability, whatever the form of government, whatever its public rhetoric, of systemic social injustice grounded in that division. In Mexico I am persuaded the terms of the relationship between the incoming and the indigenous peoples were set very early. A line of reforming sixteenth-century missionaries and upright judges were baffled as much as outraged by what they saw as the wantonness of Spanish maltreatment of Indians: cruelties indulged in the face of self-interest. Spaniards had been notoriously brutal in the Caribbean islands, where the indigenes were at too simple a level of social organization to survive Spanish endeavors to exploit them. Yet in their first encounters with the peoples of Mexico the Spaniards had declared themselves profoundly impressed. Cortés's co-venture with the Tlaxcalans seems to have involved genuine cooperation, a reasonably developed notion of mutuality, and (not to be sentimental) some affection between individuals.<sup>73</sup>

Then something happened, a crucial break of sympathy. It is always difficult to argue that things could have been other than they turn out to be, especially in the political maelstrom of post-Conquest Mexico.<sup>74</sup> But despite the continuing deftness of his political maneuverings in the aftermath of the Conquest, I have a sense of Cortés relinquishing both his control over the shaping of Spanish-Indian relations and his naturally conservationist policies—a conservationism based in pragmatism rather than humanity, but effective for all that—earlier and more easily than his previous conduct would have us expect. His removal to Honduras in October 1524 was an extraordinary abdication of the official authority he had sought so long and had worn only for a year, and marked the end of his effective role in "New Spain." We tend to like our heroes, whether villains or saints or Machiavels, to be all of a piece: unchanging, untinged emblems of whatever qualities we assign them, impervious to experience. But there are indicators in

his writings as in his actions that Cortés was changed by his experience in Mexico, and that the change had to do with the obstinate, and to Spanish eyes profoundly “irrational,” refusal or incapacity of the Mexicans to submit.

Cortés was sensitive to the physical beauty and social complexity of the great city of Tenochtitlan. It was the dream of the city that had fired his ambition, and provided the focus for all his actions. We must remember that Tenochtitlan was a marvel, eclipsing all other cities in Mesoamerica (and Europe) in size, elegance, order, and magnificence of spectacle. Cortés had contrived the complex, difficult strategy of the blockade, and pursued the mammoth task of implementing it, in order to preserve the city by demonstrating the futility of resistance. Then he watched the slow struggle back and forth along the causeways, as the defenders, careless of their own lives, took back by night what had been so painfully won by day. He moved his men onto the causeways, into physical misery and constant danger, and then was forced to undertake the systematic destruction of the structures along the causeways to secure the yards won, a perilous prolongation of a task already long enough.

So, with patience, access to the city was gained, and the noose of famine tightened. From that point victory was in Spanish (and our) terms inevitable. Yet still the resistance continued, taking advantage of every corner and rooftop. So the work of demolition went on. At last, from the top of a great pyramid Cortés could see that the Spaniards had won seven-eighths of what had once been the city, with the remaining people crammed into a corner where the houses were built out over the water. Starvation was so extreme that even roots and bark had been gnawed, with the survivors tottering shadows, but shadows who still resisted.<sup>75</sup>

Cortés’s frustration in being forced to destroy the city he had so much wanted to capture intact is manifest, as is his bewilderment at the tenacity of so futile a resistance: “As we had entered the city from our camp two or three days in succession, besides the three or four previous attacks, and had always been victorious, killing with crossbow, arquebus and field gun an infinite number of the enemy, we each day expected them to sue for peace, which we desired as much as our own salvation; but nothing we could do could induce them to it.” After another largely unresisted thrust into the city, “We could not but be saddened by their determination to die.”<sup>76</sup>

He had no stomach to attack again. Instead he made a final resort to terror. Not to the terror of mass killings: that weapon had long lost its efficacy. He constructed a war-engine, an intimidatory piece of European technology that had the advantage of not requiring gunpowder: the marvelous catapult. It was a matter of some labor over three or four days, of lime and stone and wood, then the great cords, and the stones big as demijohns. It was aimed, as a native account bleakly recorded, to “stone the common folk.” It failed to work, the stone dribbling feebly from the sling, so still the labor of forcing surrender remained.<sup>77</sup>

Four days patient waiting, four days further into starvation, and the Span-

iards entered the city again. Again they encountered ghostly figures, of women and gaunt children, and saw the warriors still stationed on the rooftops, but silent now, and unarmed, close-wrapped in their cloaks. And still the fruitless pretense at negotiation, the dumb, obdurate resistance.

Cortés attacked, killing “more than twelve thousand,” as he estimated. Another meeting with some of the lords, and again they refused any terms save a swift death. Cortés exhausted his famous eloquence: “I said many things to persuade them to surrender but all to no avail, although we showed them more signs of peace than have ever been shown to a vanquished people for we, by the grace of our Lord, were now the victors.”<sup>78</sup> He released a captured noble, charging him to urge surrender: the only response was a sudden, desperate attack, and more Indians dead. He had a platform set up in the market square of Tlatelolco, ready for the ceremony of submission, with food prepared for the feast that should mark such a moment: still he clung to the European fiction of two rulers meeting in shared understanding for the transference of an empire. There was no response.

Two days more, and Cortés unleashed the allies. There followed a massacre, of men who no longer had arrows, javelins, or stones; of women and children stumbling and falling on the bodies of their own dead. Cortés thought forty thousand might have died or been taken on that day. The next day he had three heavy guns taken into the city. As he explained to his distant king, the enemy, being now “so massed together that they had no room to turn around, might crush us as we attacked, without actually fighting. I wished, therefore, to do them some harm with the guns, and so induce them to come out to meet us.”<sup>79</sup> He had also posted the brigantines to penetrate between the houses to the interior lake where the last of the Mexican canoes were clustered. With the firing of the guns the final action began. The city was now a stinking desolation of heaped and rotting bodies, of starving men, women, and children crawling among them or struggling in the water. Quauhtemoc was taken in his canoe, and at last brought before Cortés, to make his request for death, and the survivors began to file out, these once immaculate people “so thin, sallow, dirty and stinking that it was pitiful to see them.”<sup>80</sup>

Cortés had invoked one pragmatic reason for holding his hand in the taking of Tenochtitlan: if the Spaniards attempted to storm the city the Mexicans would throw all their riches into the water, or would be plundered by the allies, so some of the profit would be lost. His perturbation went, I think, very much deeper. His earlier battle narratives exemplify those splendid Caesarian simplicities identified by John Keegan: disjunctive movement, uniformity of behavior, simplified characterization, and simplified motivation.<sup>81</sup> That style of high control, of magisterial grasp, falters when he must justify his own defeat on the causeway, which cost so many Spanish lives. It then recovers itself briefly, to fracture, finally and permanently, for the last stages of his account of the battle for Tenochtitlan. The sol-

dierly narrative loses its fine onward drive as he deploys more and more detail to demonstrate the purposefulness of his own action, and frets more and more over native mood and intentions.<sup>82</sup>

Cortés's strategy in the world had been to treat all men, Indians and Spaniards alike, as manipulable. That sturdy denial of the problem of otherness, usually so profitable, had here been proved bankrupt. He had also been forced into parodying his earlier and once successful strategies. His use of European equipment to terrify had produced the elaborate threat of the catapult, then its farcical failure. "Standard" battle procedures—terror-raiding of villages, exemplary massacres—took on an unfamiliar aspect when the end those means were designed to effect proved phantasmal, when killing did not lead to panic and pleas for terms, but a silent pressing on to death. Even the matter of firing a cannon must have taken on a new significance: to use cannon to clear a contended street or causeway or to disperse massed warriors was one thing: to use cannon to break up a huddled mass of exhausted human misery was very much another. It is possible that as he ran through his degraded routine of stratagems in those last days Cortés was brought to glimpse something of the Indian view of the nature and quality of the Spanish warrior.

His privilege as victor was to survey the surreal devastation of the city that had been the glittering prize and magnificent justification for his insubordination, and for the desperate struggles and sufferings over two long years, now reduced by perverse, obdurate resistance to befouled rubble, its once magnificent lords, its whole splendid hierarchy, to undifferentiated human wreckage. That resistance had been at once "irrational," yet chillingly deliberate.

He had seen, too, the phobic cruelty of the "allies," most especially the Tlaxcalans. He had known that cruelty before, and had used and profited from it. But on that last day of killing they had killed and killed amid a wailing of women and children so terrible "that there was not one man amongst us whose heart did not bleed at the sound."<sup>83</sup>

Those luxurious killings are at odds with what I have claimed to be the protocols of Indian combat. Tlaxcalan warrior-to-warrior performance had been conventional enough: we glimpse them exchanging insults and dueling with Mexican warriors; quarreling over the place of danger while escorting the brigantines over the mountains. It is possible that they came to judge the inadequacies of Spanish battle performance with the leniency of increased knowledge, or (more plausibly) that they thought Spanish delicts none of their concern. During the conquest process they performed as co-venturers with the Spaniards, associates in no way subordinate and, given their greater investment, probably defining themselves as the senior partners in the association.<sup>84</sup> It is in their attitude to Tenochtitlan and its inhabitants that their behavior appears anomalous. Cortés recalled that when he took the decision to raze the buildings of the city, a dauntingly laborious project, the Tlaxcalans were jubilant. All non-Mexicans would

have longed to plunder Tenochtitlan, had they dared, and all had scores to settle against Mexican arrogance. No victor would have left the city intact, built as it was as the testament of the Mexican right to rule. Nonetheless the Tlaxcalan taste for destruction was extravagant. Only the Tlaxcalans were relentless in their hatred of the Mexicans: other cities waited and watched through the long struggle for the causeways, “reading the signs” in the ebb and flow of what we would call the fortunes of battle, moving, deft as dancers, in and out of alliance. Only the Tlaxcalans sought neither loot nor captives as they surged into Tenochtitlan, but to kill. Where is the exemption of nonwarriors, the passion for personal captures, for the limited aims of tribute exaction, in those killings? Is this a liberation into ecstatic violence after a painfully protracted and frustrating struggle?

Licensed massacres are unhappily unremarkable, but there are more particular explanations. The Tlaxcalans had signaled their peculiar hatred of the Mexicans early: on the Spaniards’ first departure for the Mexican city the Tlaxcalans, warning of chronic Mexican treachery, offered chillingly explicit advice: “In fighting the Mexicans, they said, we should kill all we could, leaving no one alive: neither the young, lest they should bear arms again, nor the old, lest they give counsel.”<sup>85</sup> Their long-term exclusion from the play of Mexican alliance politics, coupled with the massive power of the Mexicans, liberated them as underdogs from “normal” constraints. While other formidable Nahuatl-speaking cities and provinces were recruited into the empire, the Tlaxcalans were kept out. I have come to see their exclusion, their role as outsiders, not as an unfortunate quirk but a structural requirement, a necessary corollary, of the kind of empire it was. Asked whether he could defeat the Tlaxcalans if he so chose, Moctezuma was said to have replied that he could, but preferred to have an enemy against whom to test his warriors and to secure high-quality victims. I believe him.<sup>86</sup> How else, with campaigns increasingly fought far afield, to make real the rhetoric, the high glamor, the authenticity of risk of warriorhood? The overriding metaphor of Mexican life was contest, and the political fantasy of destined dominance required a plausible antagonist/victim. That essential role had devolved onto the Tlaxcalans. They made absolutely no obeisance to the Mexican view of themselves, and they were proximate enemies, penned like gamecocks in a coop—until the Spaniards came. Those wandering men without a city could not be pursued, subdued, or incorporated: they could only be destroyed, and that Cortés’s conservationist talents and the Mexican cultural predilection for capturing significant enemies alive combined to preclude. The house of cards structure of the wider empire had been rendered unstable by their mere presence. Then they challenged the mutuality of interest bonding the valley city states, so opening Tenochtitlan to assault, and the Tlaxcalans took their chance to destroy people and city together.<sup>87</sup>

Writing later of that day of killing, and what he saw his Indian “friends” do there, Cortés was brought to make one of his very rare general statements: “No

race, however savage, has ever practiced such fierce and unnatural cruelty as the natives of these parts.”<sup>88</sup> “Unnatural” cruelty. Against nature. A heavily freighted term in early sixteenth-century Spain. He had described Moctezoma as a “barbarian lord” in his earlier letter, but he had done so in the course of an elaborate description of the Mexican city and its complex workings that demonstrated the Mexican ruler was a “barbarian” of a most rare and civilized kind. I think his view was changed by the experience of the siege. There he saw “fierce and unnatural cruelty,” an unnatural indifference to suffering, an unnatural indifference to death: a terrifying, terminal demonstration of “otherness,” and of its practical and cognitive unmanageability. Todorov has called Cortés a master in human communication. Here the master had found his limits.<sup>89</sup>

In the aftermath of the fall of the city the Spaniards expressed their own cruelties. There was a phobic edge in some of the things done, especially against those men most obviously the custodians of the indigenous culture. There was a special death for priests like the Keeper of the Black House in Tenochtitlan, and other wise men who came from Texcoco of their own free will, bearing their painted books. They were torn apart by dogs.<sup>90</sup>

I do not suggest that any special explanation is required for Spanish or any other conquerors’ brutalities. All I would claim at the end is that in the long and terrible conversation of war, despite the apparent mutual intelligibility of move and counter-move, as in the trap and ambush game built around the brigantines, that final nontranslatability of the vocabulary of battle and its modes of termination divided Spaniard from Indian in new and decisive ways. If for Indian warriors the lesson that their opponents were barbarians was learned early, for Spaniards, and for Cortés, that lesson was learned most deeply only in the final stages, where the Mexicans revealed themselves as unamenable to “natural” reason, and so unamenable to the routines of management of one’s fellow men. Once that sense of unassuageable otherness has been established, the outlook is bleak indeed.

## Notes

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An earlier version of this paper, “Cortés, Signs and the Conquest of Mexico,” has been published in Anthony Grafton, ed., *Culture and Communication in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 1990). It was first presented before the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Research, Princeton University.

1. Anthony Padgen notes several editions of Hernando Cortés’s letters to his emperor in five languages between 1522 and 1525; *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, 1982), 58.
2. *Ibid.*, 117, referring to Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda’s “Democrates secundus sive de justis causis belli apud Indos.”

3. S. L. Cline, "Revisionist Conquest History: Sahagún's Revised Book XII," in J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, eds., *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún, Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico* (Albany, N.Y., 1988). The claim as to the providential, indeed miraculous character of the Spanish achievement was not novel, having been made earlier by Fray Toribio de Motolinía in his *History of the Indians of New Spain* (1541), trans. Elizabeth Andros Foster (New York, 1950). It infuses Franciscan attitudes as described by John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, 1970).
4. W. H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico and the History of the Conquest of Peru* (New York, n.d.).
5. For Prescott see the fine study by David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (Harbinger, N.Y., 1963); and more succinctly in his "History as Romantic Art: Structure, Characterization, and Style in *The Conquest of Mexico*," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (February 1959): 20–45.
6. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1984), part 2, passim but esp. 63–67, 80–81, 86–89. For Todorov's rather metaphysical notion of the defeat enclosed within the Spanish victory, see p. 97.
7. Veyne continues: "Other than the techniques of handling and checking documents, there is no more a method of history than one of ethnography or of the art of travelling," which might just possibly be true if the notion of "checking" is sufficiently expanded; Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Middletown, Conn., 1984), 12.
8. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, introduction and notes by Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas (Mexico City, 1966), 40, 45. For information on Spanish and native Conquest-related materials, see Robert Wauchope, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, (Austin, Tex., 1964–76), vols. 12–15, *Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources*, ed. Howard F. Cline.
9. *Hernán Cortés: Letters from Mexico*, trans. and ed. Anthony Pagden, with an introduction by J. H. Elliott (New Haven, 1986), "Second Letter," 88. See also J. H. Elliott, "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 17 (1967): 41–58.
10. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1950–82); hereafter cited as *Florentine Codex*, with book, chapter, and page. Quetzalcoatl-Topiltzin, ruler of the mythic "Tollan," or Tula, the previous great imperial power in the valley, before he withdrew to the east in some shadowy former time, was ambiguously associated with Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl, the Wind God. For the confusions clustering around the stories to do with the self-exiled Quetzalcoatl-Topiltzin, legendary ruler of Tollan, see H. B. Nicholson, "Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan: A Problem in Mesoamerican Ethnohistory" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1957).
11. *Florentine Codex*, 12.16.17–18, 45, 48–49.
12. "This I saw in a painting that belonged to an ancient chieftain from the province of Texcoco. Moctezoma was depicted in irons, wrapped in a mantle and carried on the shoulders of his chieftains"; Fray Diego Durán, *Historia de las indias de Nueva España y islas de Tierra Firme*, ed. José F. Ramírez, 2 vols. plus atlas (Mexico City, 1967), chap. 74, pp. 541–42.
13. Cortés, "Second Letter," 50.



14. Cortés's own confusion deepens our confidence in our reading, as he aggressively seeks to collect what he called "vassals" along the way, with no demur from Moctezoma. For example, the lord "Pánuco" sent gifts, and freely offered to supply certain Spaniards in his region whom he took to be members of Cortés's party with food; "Second Letter," 54. See also the reception offered by "Sienchimalen," *ibid.* These were almost certainly not gestures of political subordination but the normal courtesies—the provision of supplies, and if necessary fuel and shelter—extended to official travelers within the more effectively subdued Mexican territories. Where Cortés made the condition of "vassal" more explicit by requesting not food or carriers but gold, the request was denied.
15. The lodging of the Spaniards in a royal palace is not especially remarkable, visiting rulers and ranking ambassadors being routinely luxuriously housed and feted, in the not unfamiliar determination to impress potentially troublesome visitors while keeping an eye on them; Durán, *Historia*, chap. 43; *Florentine Codex*, 12.15.41. Despite the intense traditional hostility between Tlaxcala and the Mexicans, a Mexican embassy numbering more than two hundred people sought out Cortés during his first stay in Tlaxcala, its members being permitted to come and go without hindrance; "Second Letter," 69. The phrasing of the *Florentine Codex* on the Spanish assault on the warrior dancers affords a dizzying perspective on Spanish-Mexican relations, the Spaniards being described as "friends" to that point, and then as having "risen up against us [the Mexicans]" to become "enemies"; 12.29.81.
16. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 39.
17. Cortés, "Third Letter," 188.
18. Unsurprisingly few commentators are prepared to be so austere. For an attractive display of indulgence, see R. C. Padden, *The Hummingbird and the Hawk* (Columbus, Ohio), 1967.
19. Possible, but difficult: e.g., for art historians' divisions on the meanings of a pleasantly substantial and certainly pre-contact artifact, the "Hamburg Box," a superb lidded greenstone box carved on both inner and outer surfaces, compare Esther Pasztor, *Aztec Art* (New York, 1983), 255–56; and her "El arte Mexica y la Conquista Española," *Estudios de cultura Nahuatl* 17 (1983): 101–24; with H. B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber, *The Art of Ancient Mexico: Treasures of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, D.C., 1983), 64–66.
20. Cortés, "Third Letter," 184.
21. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 52. For a discussion see Richard C. Trexler, "Aztec Priests for Christian Altars: The Theory and Practice of Reverence in New Spain," in Paola Zambelli, ed., *Scienze credenze occulte livelli di cultura* (Florence, 1982), 175–96.
22. Díaz, *Historia*, chaps. 51, 52.      23. *Ibid.*, chap. 107.
24. In the ordinances he proclaimed in Tlaxcala in December 1520, preparatory to the great campaign against the lake cities, Cortés emphasized the necessary disciplines of war (no private booty, no gambling of weapons, no breakaway attacks, no insults or brawling in the ranks). But he prefaced it with the declaration that justified all: that the Spaniards' principal motive was to destroy idolatry and to bring the natives to the knowledge of God and of the Holy Catholic Faith. Without that primary justification, the war to come would be unjust, and everything taken in it liable to restitution; "Ordenanzas militares dadas por Hernando Cortés in Tlaxcallan," in Mario Hernández Sánchez Barba, ed., *Hernán Cortés: Cartas y documentos* (Mexico City, 1963), 336–41.
25. Cortés, "Second Letter," 60–62.

26. Díaz, *Historia*, chaps. 46, 47, 51.      27. *Ibid.*, chap. 95.
28. As John Elliott puts it: "It would be hard to think of a crazier strategy": J. H. Elliott, *New York Review of Books*, 19 July 1984.
29. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 126.
30. Sahagún's informants emphasize physical contact far beyond Spanish reports, "recalling" Moctezoma as being prodded and pawed by any and all of the newcomers, with the disgrace of the unabashed glance marked equally keenly: "They caressed Moctezoma with their hands"; they "looked at him; they each looked at him thoroughly. They were continually active on their feet; they continually dismounted in order to look at him"; *Florentine Codex*, 12.16.43-46; Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 88.
31. See note 30 above.
32. "Recorded" is putting it rather too high: here we have to take the "captain's speech" for the literary convention it is. But it is, at best, close to what Cortés claims he said: at worst, the gist of what Díaz thought a man like Cortés ought to have said on such an occasion; Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 61, e.g., "Now and from henceforth, through God, the history books will make much more of this than of anything done in the past. . . . The most famous Roman captain has not achieved such great things as we have." Cf. "Second Letter," 63.
33. For a contrary view of the whole conquest phenomenon as very much more pragmatic and routinized, see James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca* (Austin, Tex., 1972). On the importance of the model of the Mexican Conquest for later conquerors: "[The Conquest of] Mexico had no major impact on Peru merely by virtue of some years' precedence. . . . Pizarro was certainly not thinking of Cortés and Moctezoma when he seized Atahualpa; he had been capturing *caciques* [chiefs] in Tierra Firme long before Mexico was heard of"; James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America* (Cambridge, 1983), 84.
34. Skin afflictions were commonly understood as coming from Tezcatlipoca, the Mexican interventionist deity, but we do not know if the Mexicans identified smallpox pustules with more familiar lesions. As always, they noted the month of the epidemic's coming and of its diminishing (a span of sixty day signs), but smallpox does not appear in the *Florentine Codex* list of Spanish-related events (12.27-29.81-83).
35. Wars of conquest waged against distant "barbarians" were a rather different matter. For an exhaustive description from a steadfastly pragmatic perspective, see Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman, Okla., 1988). Dr. Hassig is persuaded that "in fact, Aztec [warrior] practices were shaped by political realities and practical necessities" (10). The question is to discover what the Aztec/Mexican understood those "realities and practical necessities" to be.
36. Durán, *Historia*, chap. 34.
37. Cf. the deliberate humiliation of the Tlatelolcan warriors, discovered hiding in the rushes after the Mexican victory, and ordered to quack. "Even today," Durán noted, decades after the debacle, "the Tlatelolca are called 'quackers' and imitators of water fowl. They are much offended by this name and when they fight the name is always recalled"; *Historia*, chap. 34, p. 264.
38. Contrast the fate of Spaniards when faced with the arrows projected from the short powerful bows of the Chichimeca, the Indians of the northern steppes whose territory lay athwart the road to the silver mines; Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver* (Tempe, Ariz., 1975).
39. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 153; Durán, *Historia*, chap. 77.
40. Indian cannibalism is a vexed question. In very brief, insult displays pivoted on the

threat of eating and being eaten. While the eating of the flesh of a warrior's sacrificed captive was hedged by ritual, more casual references suggest its debasing function, and it is possible that battlefield behavior was more relaxed. For ritual cannibalism, see *Florentine Codex*, 2.25.49–54; and Inga Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society," *Past and Present* 107 (May 1985): 44–89, esp. 56–60 and 69; for the debasing function, see Durán, *Historia*, chap. 9.

41. Cortés, "Third Letter," 230.
42. E.g., the attack on Cortés in the Xochimilco battle, and the desperate rescue, Cortés sustaining a "bad wound in the head"; Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 145.
43. Spaniards valued muskets equally with crossbows, a musketeer being allocated the same share of the spoils as a crossbowman, yet oddly muskets are mentioned infrequently in Indian accounts, perhaps because the ball could not be followed in flight, while crossbow bolts whirred and sang as they came; *Florentine Codex*, 12.22.62. For a succinct and accessible account of sixteenth-century cannon, in their enormous variety, see Pagden, *Cortés*, 507–8. Most of the small guns used in America could fire a ball of twenty pounds over some four hundred meters (*ibid.*, n. 59). For a more extended account, see Alberto Mario Salas, *Las armas de la Conquista* (Buenos Aires, 1950).
44. Durán, *Historia*, chap. 72, pp. 529–30.
45. E.g., on the Spanish retreat from Tenochtitlan they "quickly slew the people of Calacoaya . . . [they] did not provoke them; without notice were they slain. [The Spaniards] vented their wrath upon them, they took their pleasure with them"; *Florentine Codex*, 12:25:73.
46. *Florentine Codex*, 2.20.55. It appears from the funerary rites accorded the fragmented corpses of the warrior dancers that the Mexicans somehow decided that the victims had found death in a mode appropriate to warriors.
47. *Ibid.*, 12.7.19.      48. *Ibid.*, 12.30.86.
49. Cortés, "Second Letter," 58.
50. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 63.
51. Note also the offering of the entire skins of five horses, "sewn up and as well tanned as anywhere in the world," in Texcoco. These captives had been taken in a situation where they were riderless at the time of engagement. Cortés, "Third Letter," 184.
52. *Ibid.*, 252.      53. *Ibid.*, 192.
54. Díaz recalls them yelling, whistling, and calling the Spaniards "rogues and cowards who did not dare to meet them through a day's battle, and retreated before them"; *Historia*, chap. 126.
55. *Florentine Codex*, 12.31.89. For an account of those exemplary battles, see Clendinnen, "Cost of Courage."
56. E.g., *Florentine Codex*, 12.35.87.
57. *Ibid.*, 12.33.96; 12.34.99 (*tlacotli*, a secular slave performing lowly tasks, not *tlaahtilli*, those selected captives ritually purified to be especially acceptable to the gods).
58. Rather too much has been made of the Mexican concern for "day signs," the determining authority of the auguries associated with one's day of birth over the individual's *tonalli*, or destiny. It is true that in some passages of the *Florentine Codex*—the only source with the kind of "spread" to make this sort of concept mapping viable—the individual is presented as quite mastered by his or her "fate." That clarity blurs on broader acquaintance, emerging as part of the characteristic stylistic movement of much of the codex between firm statements of the ideal and the tempering qualifications necessary to catch the messiness of actuality. Day signs had about as much deter-

- mining power as horoscopes hold today for the moderate believer. They mattered, but more as intimations or as post-hoc diagnoses (and even then, one suspects, most readily invoked by others, not the individuals concerned) than as iron determinants of fate. Cf. Todorov: "To know someone's birthday is to know his fate"; *Conquest of America*, 64.
59. John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York, 1977), 184–86.
  60. Cortés, "Second Letter," 134–35.
  61. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 126. 62. *Ibid.*, chap. 151.
  63. Miguel Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears* (Boston, 1962), 107. The captor was the *Tlapanecatl* Hecatzin—see *Florentine Codex*, 12.35.103, n. 2. For an earlier exploit of the Otomí warrior, see *Florentine Codex*, 101.
  64. Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 296.
  65. As in the interspecies mayhem described by Konrad Z. Lorenz, where signs of submission are not "understood" in the battle between the turkey and the peacock; *King Solomon's Ring* (London, 1961), 194–95.
  66. Cortés was desperate to treat with Quauhtemoc in the last days of the siege, but Díaz reports that the ruler would not show himself, despite all reassurances, because he feared he would be killed by guns or crossbows, Cortés having behaved too dishonorably to be trusted; *Historia*, chap. 155.
  67. *Florentine Codex*, 12.35.104.
  68. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 153; Cortés, "Third Letter," 242. Cortés for his part deletes any reference to the withdrawal of his Indian "vassals," the admission of such a withdrawal casting altogether too much light on the nature of their commitment to the Spanish cause.
  69. *Florentine Codex*, 12.38.117. 70. *Ibid.*, 12.38.118. 71. *Ibid.*, 12.40.123.
  72. I offer Miguel Leon-Portilla's translation as the version most likely to be familiar; *Broken Spears*, 137–38. Cf. Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* (Norman, Okla., 1969), 150–51; and Gordon Brotherston and Ed Dorn, *Image of the New World* (London, 1979), 34–35. For other songs in traditional form to do with the Conquest, see John Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos* (Stanford, Calif., 1985), esp. no. 13, pp. 151–53; no. 60, p. 279 (obscurely); no. 66, pp. 319–23; no. 68, for its early stanzas, pp. 327–41; no. 91, pp. 419–25.
  73. For example, Cortés approvingly noted the courage of the chief Chichimecatecle, who "having always gone with his warriors in the vanguard," took it as an affront when put to the rear in the transport for the brigantines: "When he finally agreed to this, he asked that no Spaniards should remain accompanying him, for he is a most valiant man and wished to keep all the glory for himself"; "Third Letter," 185.
  74. For the multiple demands on Cortés in this period see J. H. Elliott, "The Spanish Conquest and the Settlement of America," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1984), 149–206.
  75. Cortés, "Third Letter," 256. 76. *Ibid.*, 232–33.
  77. *Ibid.*, 257; Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 155; *Florentine Codex*, 12.38.113.
  78. Cortés, "Third Letter," 258. 79. *Ibid.*, 262.
  80. Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 156.
  81. Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 65–66. This is not to claim any direct classical influence; see Pagden, *Cortés*, xlvii; and Elliott, "Mental World of Cortés," for Cortés's slight acquaintance with classical authors. Caesar's *Commentaries* had been published in Spanish by 1498, and it is possible that Cortés had read them, although perhaps unlikely.
  82. For the control: "While the alguacil-mayor was at Matalcingo, the people of [Tenoch-

titlan] decided to attack Alvarado's camp by night, and struck shortly before dawn. When the sentries on foot and on horseback heard them they shouted, 'to arms!' Those who were in that place flung themselves upon the enemy, who leapt into the water as soon as they saw the horsemen. . . . Fearing our men might be defeated I ordered my own company to arm themselves and march into the city to weaken the offensive against Alvarado"—and so on; Cortés, "Third Letter," 247. For the dislocation:

When we came within sight of the enemy we did not attack but marched through the city thinking that at any moment they would come out to meet us [to surrender]. And to induce it I galloped up to a very strong barricade which they had set up and called out to certain chieftains who were behind and whom I knew, that as they saw how lost they were and knew that if I so desired within an hour not one of them would remain alive why did not Guatimucin [Quauhtemoc], their lord, come and speak with me. . . . I then used other arguments which moved them to tears, and weeping they replied they well knew their error and their fate, and would go and speak to their lord. . . . They went, and returned after a while and told me their lord had not come because it was late, but that he would come on the following day at noon to the marketplace; and so we returned to our camp. . . . On the following day we went to the city and I warned my men to be on the alert lest the enemy betray us and we be taken unawares.

And so to more worried guesses and second guesses; *ibid.*, 259–60.

83. *Ibid.*, 261.
84. The Tlaxcalans refused to participate in any expedition (like the sortie against Narváez) not in their direct interest; they withdrew at will, taking their loot with them; they required payment for aid given the Spaniards after the expulsion from Tenochtitlan, having considered the utility of killing them; Díaz, *Historia*, chap. 98. Their self-representation as faithful friends and willing servants to the Spaniards, as pictured in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala, came a generation or more after the Conquest as part of a campaign for privileges.
85. *Ibid.*, chap. 79.
86. Andrés de Tápia, "Relación hecha por el señor Andrés de Tápia sobre la Conquista de México," in Joaquín García Icazbalceta, ed., *Colección de documentos para la historia de México*, 2 vols. (Mexico City, 1858–66), 2:343–438.
87. It was possibly in the decimation of native leaders who had learned how to deal with each other that the smallpox epidemic had its most immediate political effect.
88. Cortés, "Third Letter," 262.
89. Those limits were to be drawn more narrowly through the shaking experience of the Honduran expedition. The Cortés who early in the Mexican campaign could dismiss "omens" in the confidence that "God is more powerful than Nature" learned in Honduras how helpless men are when Nature, not men, opposes them, and where God seems far away. There he discovered that God is bound by no contract, and that he, like all men, must wait upon His will. The "Fifth Letter" reads like a mournful antiphon to the sanguine assurance of Cortés's early Conquest accounts.
90. *Anales de Tlatelolco: Unos anales históricos de la Nación Mexicana*, prepared by Heinrich Berlin (Mexico City, 1948), 371–89, 74–76.