

Castaneda's Mesoamerican Inspiration: The Tonal/Nagual, the Cardinal Points and the Birth of Contemporary Toltec Spirituality

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In the past few decades, contemporary “Toltec” spirituality has become a worldwide, globalised phenomenon that long ago surpassed the confines of the actual historical Toltec culture. Specifically with Miguel Ruiz and his famous *The Four Agreements*, the phenomenon spread from the United States both to Latin America and Europe, creating Toltec (and native Mesoamerican) spirituality enthusiasts everywhere, from self-styled native spiritual teachers and shamans to seekers following the warrior’s path and avid students of “ancient Toltec” wisdom. The term itself acquired new meanings – “Toltec” now tends to be translated as “shaman”, “wise man”, “sorcerer”, “sage”, etc. At the same time, the link to the actual Toltec archaeological culture that flourished a thousand years ago in Central Mexico gradually weakened. Toltec spirituality thus became a fully post-modern, contemporary phenomenon; its original Mesoamerican core (if there ever was one) was interpreted and re-interpreted to suit the needs of humankind in the present, with its exhausting lifestyle and constant search for awe-inspiring spiritual experience. Considering how important Toltec spirituality has become in the landscape of contemporary alternative spirituality, it is surprising how little has been written on the source of this current – that is, on Carlos Castaneda’s image of the Toltec.¹

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1 Carlos Castaneda started his career as a famous anthropologist and the author of various bestselling non-fiction books. The first of them, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, took the 1960s by storm, generating both the highest scholarly praise and the admiration of the general public. About a decade later, Castaneda was exposed as a fraud and his research was put in doubt, generating major disillusion and bitterness both in anthropology and neighboring disciplines. However, by that time, the genre of his books was already switching from academic to popular/spiritual, creating an unswerving following among alternative spirituality enthusiasts of the late 20th century. In other words, while the social sciences were still loudly criticizing Castaneda’s counterfeit research in the 1980s-1990s, the man himself had already abandoned academia to become a spiritual teacher and the charismatic leader of a new religious movement. It is therefore surprising that while there is a great amount of literature on Castaneda-Anthropologist

It is true Castaneda was not the first to introduce the Toltec to the Western spiritual and esoteric landscape. This primacy belongs to the Theosophical Society, namely to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who included the Toltec among the core main sub-races of the fourth root race that once ruled the ancient continent of Atlantis.² On the other hand, while the setting of Atlantis is somehow flavored with Native American (that is, Mesoamerican) terminology and imagery, its full context reaches far beyond, uniting motifs from such diverse cultures as pre-Columbian Central Mexico, ancient Greece, and ancient Egypt. Drawing both on existing sources and her own imagination, Blavatsky created the version of the Atlantis myth we know today – an image of a highly superior culture, technically and spiritually advanced, whose elites abused their power and, as a result, brought horrible cataclysms and destruction on themselves. According to Blavatsky, present Native Americans are one of the groups descended from the fleeing remnants of Atlantis' population. In other words, their origin lies in the fourth root race – and as such they are naturally inferior to the fifth root race; that is, the white Aryans that populated the Earth after the heyday of Atlantis was over.

While this myth enjoyed considerable popularity in its day (and its vestiges, albeit stripped of their racist allusions, still circulate in contemporary culture), the Toltec only played a very small role in it and we may ask how deeply it influenced the mainstream culture. Blavatsky's esoteric view of human history certainly did have an impact on some early scholars interested in Mesoamerican history. For example, Augustus Le Plongeon, one of the early Mayanists, was a convinced Theosophist and actively tried to prove Blavatsky's claims in his research.³ On the other hand, it had little or no effect on the appreciation of Native American spirituality, let alone the Toltec. This task was left to Carlos Castaneda – and he performed it impressively.

I have to stress again that the roots of Toltec spirituality have already been identified as stemming from Castaneda;⁴ however, this fact has never been sufficiently analyzed. I suspect the reason for this is that most

and Castaneda-Fraud, very little has been written about Castaneda-Guru. Specifically the late works remain essentially untouched by scholarly interest. However, as the concept of Toltec spirituality attests, Castaneda's importance reaches far beyond the confines of his 1990s group of followers. In this sense, I believe a large re-contextualization is needed – both of Castaneda's life and writings.

2 For an abbreviated version of Blavatsky's root race doctrine, see Arthur E. Powell, *The Solar System*, [n.p.]: Pickle Partners Publishing 2018, 54-55.

3 Zuzana Kostířová, *Náboženství Mayů* (Maya Religion), Praha: Karolinum 2018, 330-331.

4 See e.g. Andrei Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, 191.

analyses of Castaneda's works focus on the early phase of his literary production – that is, the phase in which he created his biggest bestsellers, led naturally by the famous – and infamous – *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968). I have argued elsewhere that Castanedan scholarship has proven to be surprisingly focused on this early period of his creation, both due to the relatively larger influence of the first three books compared to the rest and to the fact that these books claim an academic status.⁵ At the same time, these books make use of the Native American imagery of the Great Plains and the Huichol, which means that the ethnographic material the books draw on is decidedly North American. In this sense, Castaneda is often cast as an author that portrayed (either faithfully or distortedly) native North American spirituality.⁶

Since most scholars tend practically to ignore the transitional and mature period of Castaneda's writings, they also tend to miss completely the shift Castaneda makes as early as in his fourth book, *Tales of Power* (1974). Here, he suddenly abandons the North American (Yaqui/Huichol) setting in favor of a supposed "pan-Indian" tradition that exhibits strong traits of other cultures. In the transitional period, a great deal of Mesoamerican inspiration appears: there are mentions of ruined cities of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the "objects of power" that can be found there; we can find the typical Mesoamerican division of space, together with rich symbolism of cardinal points and winds; don Juan introduces the concept of Tonal and Nagual, which represents a re-interpretation of ancient Mesoamerican concepts of companion animals; and, finally, references to the Toltec start to abound. The Mesoamerican symbolism remains relatively prominent up to *The Eagle's Gift* (1981), which I consider to be the earliest book of the late/mature period, and its last traits appear in *The Fire from Within* (1984). Then it subsides again, leaving the way fully open for a more eclectic approach that integrates elements from philosophy, Western esotericism, Eastern religions, martial arts, and other sources into a fully postmodern spiritual blend. At this point, even the practices of Castaneda's group become closely related to the alternative spiritual scenery, specifically with the spirituality of the seminars in the late 1980s and 1990s. While Native American settings and imagery remain crucially important until Castaneda's death in 1998, the late works never achieved the levels of ethnographic realism found in the writings of the early period.⁷

5 Zuzana Kostíćová, "From Academic Anthropology to Esoteric Religion: The Development of Carlos Castaneda's Writings", under review in *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*.

6 See e.g. Jay Courtney Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism and the Psychedelic Sixties*, Victoria: Millennia Press 1993, 61-86.

7 Z. Kostíćová, "From Academic Anthropology...".

At the same time, other approaches were possible. Taisha Abelar's book sets Castaneda's doctrine in the context of Eastern, specifically Chinese culture, proving that the reader could dispose of the Native American context in its entirety and yet the teachings would still stand.⁸

In this article, I intend to explore the transitional and early mature period – that is, the books *Tales of Power*, *The Second Ring of Power*, and *The Eagle's Gift* – and analyze the Mesoamerican inspiration that clearly appears there. I will be interested in the way Castaneda changes his repertoire of anthropological data, the way he reinterprets the original concepts, and, most importantly, the way he builds the idea of the “Toltec”, which survived him by decades and became one of his most influential creations. Specifically, I will compare Castaneda's concept of the Toltec to the different layers of meaning the word has acquired in the scholarly context. While in Blavatsky's time, Mesoamerican research was in its earliest phase and very little was known about pre-Columbian cultures and their history, when Castaneda wrote the books of the transitional period a hundred years later, many scholarly books and articles on these subjects were available.

The hypothesis of a possible connection between Blavatsky and Castaneda is a tempting one, but there is no mention anywhere of Castaneda's relationship to Theosophy and no books on the subject appear on the lists of his readings (which we were able to reconstruct on the basis of the available mentions both in the writings of Margaret Runyan and Castaneda's disciples). On the other hand, Castaneda studied anthropology at UCLA in the 1960s and early 1970s and all works of contemporary Mesoamerican anthropology were at his disposal in the university library. His very books attest to the notion that his chief sources on Mesoamerica were probably scholarly and not esoteric. As we shall see, “Carlos” (that is, the protagonist of the books) actively cites the predominant academic ideas about what Tonal/Nagual is or who the Toltecs are, only to be laughed at by don Juan (or Pablito in the second case), who insists the academics have no idea what they are talking about. Subsequently, the reader is offered a different (and supposedly more accurate) interpretation of the concepts, which are supposed to survive in the narrow line of “Toltec” sages and sorcerers.

In this context, I suggest the evolution of our academic understanding of Toltec culture is of the utmost importance – it provides the most important context for Castaneda's thought in the transitional period. At the same time, I believe that it is precisely this comparison of the source material

8 Taisha Abelar, *Sorcerer's Crossing*, New York: Viking Arcana 1992, 65-67, and passim.

and the resulting esoteric fiction that clearly shows the depth of Castaneda's creativity and his exceptional abilities as a thinker, writer, and spiritual teacher. His novel and wholly surprising reinterpretations are not based on misunderstanding or undue simplification – far from it. Instead, he creates a completely new setting for the pre-Columbian concepts, which transforms them in a particularly creative way. While this new setting is naturally of little use to those who intend to pursue an understanding of the pre-Columbian religions of Mesoamerica, it became an important tool for postmodern alternative spiritualities. And while the concept of Tonal/Nagual or the symbolism of the cardinal points play only a small role in the spiritual mainstream of today, the concept of the Toltec has proven to be a vibrant one up to the present day.

The evolution of Castaneda's concept of "Nagual"

While the main focus here is Castaneda's concept of "the Toltec", we need to provide the full context for this sudden appearance of the motif – that is, to mention all of the main Mesoamerican elements that appear in the writings of the transitional and early mature period. These are (a) the Tonal-Nagual duality as it appears in *Tales of Power* (1974); (b) the new interpretation of the term "Nagual" that first appears in *The Second Ring of Power* (1977) and remains in Castaneda's teachings until his death; (c) the symbolism of the cardinal points; and (d) the term "Toltec" itself.

While *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), the last book of the early period, remains fully focused on the North Mexican imagery and spirituality of the Huichol/Great Plains, *Tales of Power*, its immediate successor, opens the Castanedan world to a completely different type of cultural reference. Even before we get to the new Mesoamerica-flavored spiritual philosophy, we meet don Juan for the first time in a new setting – in Mexico City near Zócalo, dressed as an "old Mexican gentleman".⁹ This event is in fact a step in a sequence that transfers don Juan from the southern regions of Arizona further south to Mexico. In the *Teachings*, Carlos first meets his future benefactor in a Greyhound station in Arizona and visits him in his house nearby, while later in the book, don Juan is said to have abandoned his home and moved to North Mexico. While he does not move again, the main part of *Tales of Power* describes events that happen in the Mexican capital; the core of these events is don Juan's long philosophical discourse concerning the concepts of Tonal/Nagual. In other words, the change of ethnographic focus is further intensified by a temporary change of scenery. As we will see, in the transitional and early mature period, the references

9 Carlos Castaneda, *Tales of Power*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1974, 106.

to Mesoamerica's cultural geography and history are omnipresent – only to subside fully in the late mature period.

The concept of Tonal/Nagual itself is of Mesoamerican origin. While the terms come from Nahuatl, the tongue spoken by the Postclassic inhabitants of Central Mexico including the Aztecs, the concept itself is typical of the entire region and has been analyzed among Classic as well as Postclassic Maya, contemporary Maya Tzotzil of Chiapas, and others.¹⁰ *Tonalli* (*Chanul* among the Tzotzil) is a type of companion spirit everyone has – it has been associated both with wild animals (as in the Tzotzil case) and the twenty names of days in the sacred calendar (the Aztec *Tonalpohualli*, which we can roughly translate as “the count of Tonals”). *Nahualli* (or *Wahy* in the Epigraphic Mayan), conversely, is a specific type of companion creature; it may be an animal (usually a big predator such as a jaguar, eagle, harpy, or a big snake, etc.), a mythical zoomorphic creature (a plumed serpent, a cloud serpent), a mythical anthropomorphic creature (a horrid skeletal being associated with death and the underworld, a strange humanoid typically depicted on Classic Maya ceramics, etc.), or another phenomenon (such as thunder or lightning). In pre-Columbian times, these creatures served both gods and great men endowed with exceptional powers – that is, kings, aristocrats, elite warriors, priests, shamans, etc. The creatures could be called and bound to serve, but their masters could also transform into them. Iconographic studies, as well as documented cases from early colonial texts point out that these transformations usually happened in battle. For example, known Aztec “military orders” associated with animal symbolism (the famous jaguar and eagle “knights”) attest to the popularity of Nahualism in Postclassic Mesoamerica. After the conquest, and with the advent of Catholicism, the practice of Nahualism was associated with black magic (*brujería*, *hechicería* or even *nigromancia*)¹¹ and cast in a strongly negative light as an evil practice, whose primary goal was to harm others. As such it was condemned and persecuted both by the Church and the authorities.

The belief in companion spirits is naturally not limited to Mesoamerica and its North American equivalent was grasped by Castaneda in his concept of the ally, which appears already in the early writings. While in *The*

10 Z. Kosticová, *Náboženství Mayů...*, 286-288; see also Mercedes de la Garza Camino, “Naguales mayas de ayer y hoy”, *Revista española de antropología americana* 17, 1987, 89-105; Nikolai Grube – Werner Nahm, “A Census of Xibalba: A Complete Inventory of Way Characters of Maya Ceramics”, in: Justin Kerr – Barbara Kerr (eds.), *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographies of Maya Vases*, New York: Kerr Associates 1994, 686-713. In Czech context see also Jan Kapusta, “Platón mezi Mayi: Několik poznámek k vnímání transcendence”, *Kuděj* 2, 2017, 3-17.

11 Mercedes de la Garza Camino, *Sueño y alucinación en el mundo nahuatl y maya*, México: UNAM 1990, 143; ead., “Naguales mayas...”.

Teachings of Don Juan, the ally is presented basically as a spirit of a hallucinogenic plant (both *Datura* and don Juan's *Humito*, a smoking mixture with psychedelic mushrooms as its central ingredient), the concept acquires new meanings as early as in *A Separate Reality* (1971) and *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972): here the ally transforms into a non-specified supernatural being, visually (but not energetically) identical to people. Later, the allies lose even this superficial similarity to people and in *The Second Ring of Power* (1977), we even get to meet the fearsome monstrous allies of don Juan and don Genaro. And, finally, in the mature writings, the allies are identified as inorganic beings that populate the nonhuman world. These changes notwithstanding, Castaneda's concept of ally never shared the core characteristic of the Mesoamerican Nahuatl – that is, the ability of its master to transform into the creature. Castaneda's allies remain fully physically separate from their commander at all times.

Perhaps because of this Nahuatlism-flavored concept of the ally, which was already formed by the time Castaneda started creating Mesoamerican-inspired concepts, the idea of Tonal/Nagual¹² is fully stripped of its original association and cast in a wholly new light. While the terminology remains Mesoamerican (and is explained by don Juan in Mexico City with the aid of the typical properties of a Mexican *taquería's* table), the concept in itself represents the duality of the known-unknown and conceivable-inconceivable, in which Tonal represents the known and knowable world with all its rational, culturally constructed, structured (or structurable) reality. Nagual, on the other hand, becomes everything that is forever locked beyond our rational mind – the strange, unknowable, unimaginable, unexplainable, and alien. Nagual is not simply the unknown, since what is unknown may become known and thus be safely included into the universe of Tonal. Nagual can never be known – it always lies outside our rational understanding. Tonal is referred to as an island, a guardian, a warden; Nagual as an emptiness, a void, an indescribable part of the human soul, the power around the island, the creative side of the universe. The concept is also described by the metaphor of the “right side” / “left side” and “first awareness” (the “normal”, everyday one) and “second awareness” or “heightened awareness”, which is employed only by seers and sorcerers and which, perhaps surprisingly, is strongly associated with the will and the human body (while Tonal is closely related to the rational mind). Later, Castaneda dropped the terms Tonal/Nagual completely and used other la-

12 The version “Nagual” is a hybrid version that arose from the tendency of the Spanish language to convert the native syllable “hua” (*wa*) into “gua”, which feels more natural and easier to pronounce to the Spanish native speaker. *Nahuatl* thus turns into *Nagual*, just as, for example, *ahuacatl* turns into *aguacate* (“avocado”) or the Andean *Huaca* (sacred object or sacred place) turns into *Guaca*.

bels for the duality, mainly right side / left side and first/second awareness. To some extent, the term is closely related to other Castanedan terms such as “power”, “spirit”, or the poetical “active side of infinity”, which is also the title of his last book (published *post mortem* in 1999). In *The Second Ring of Power*, some stress is put on Nagual not just as a universal principle, but also as the “left side” of one’s personality. The concept of the “double”, which appears in the introductory passage of *Tales of Power*, is tentatively identified with Nagual.

Just as we will see in the case of the term “Toltec”, Castaneda fully knew the original context of the terms. In the introduction to the Tonal/Nagual duality in *Tales of Power*, Castaneda openly acknowledged his knowledge of the “anthropological literature on the cultures of central Mexico” and cited the conventional meanings of the terms (“a kind of guardian spirit” for Tonal, and a powerful animal ally for Nagual).¹³ And, just as in the “Toltec” case, Carlos recites the meanings to don Juan and he rejects them as “pure nonsense”.

While the influence of symbolic anthropology and postmodern philosophy on Castaneda remains out of the scope of the present article, we may dare to hypothesize that in his specific concept of Tonal/Nagual, Castaneda may have been influenced by contemporary sources rather than by the pre-Columbian worldview. The milieu was busily exploring altered states of consciousness along with chaotic, intense religious experiences, and the University of California at Los Angeles, where Castaneda studied, was an important center for this type of research.¹⁴ The *zeitgeist* of the incipient counterculture was preceded by a whole squadron of philosophers and scholars who focused on the unstructured, lived, non-rational experiences of the human being and the chaotic, *liminal* character of the sacred – most notably Giles Deleuze and Victor Turner, to name but a few. While Mircea Eliade and the waning phenomenological milieu emphasized the sacred as a holy but vulnerable order that has to be repeatedly and infinitely constructed out of the chaos of the profane, decades later it was the chaos that bore the markings of the sacred. Turner, a prominent protagonist of symbolic anthropology, is the best example of this, as both his concept of structure/antistructure and the inherent chaotic, spontaneous, and experiential character of the *liminal* show.¹⁵ In his reinvention of the Tonal/

13 C. Castaneda, *Tales of Power...*, 121-122.

14 A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive...*, 106, 141, 194-197.

15 Radek Chlup, “Struktura a antistruktura: Pojetí rituálu Victora Turnera I” (Structure and Antistructure: Victor Turner’s Concept of Ritual I), *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 13/1, 2005, 3-28; id., “Struktura a antistruktura: Pojetí rituálu Victora Turnera II”, *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 13/2, 2005, 179-197; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*, London: Routledge 2017, *passim*.

Nagual duality, Castaneda is far closer to Turner and his contemporaries than to the original inhabitants of ancient Mesoamerica.

Castaneda's term "Nagual", however, underwent significant changes. While in *Tales of Power* the term was still reserved exclusively for an impersonal phenomenon, it acquired a new meaning in *The Second Ring of Power*; that of a specific type of teacher.¹⁶ Throughout the first three books, Castaneda mostly used the term "benefactor" for don Juan. In *Tales of Power*, he suddenly insists that don Juan is his "teacher", whose duty it is to teach the disciple to sweep his island of Tonal, while don Genaro is his "benefactor", whose mission it is to show him the workings of Nagual. In the closing scene of the book featuring the jump into the abyss, both teachers whisper to Carlos, one into the left ear and the other into the right, and the disciple is suddenly able to see both worlds at the same time. This leads to a strong ecstatic hallucinatory experience and Carlos' coming of age and final initiation as a mature sorcerer. This is the stage of don Juan's and don Genaro's final demise (as well as the first signs of the new concept of death that would reach its full maturity in Castaneda's late writings).¹⁷

This context for the term "Nagual" is further developed in *The Second Ring of Power*, where, to his great amazement, Carlos discovers a group of other adepts of sorcery that he was completely unaware of before. In the conversations with them, the term "Nagual" is generally not used in its previous sense – here it becomes almost exclusively a denotation for the "benefactor" – that is, for the second teacher that is supposed to frighten and scare their disciples and confront them with the unexplainable in order to introduce them into the liminal world of the Nagual. Since Carlos mostly converses with "the Genaros" – that is, with Nestor, Pablito, and Benigno – Nagual becomes a habitual way to refer to don Juan. At the same time, now that he has passed from this world, Carlos is supposed to be his heir and successor. In other words, the interpretation of the word "Nagual" is already acquiring its future meaning.

Finally, the mature term is fully formulated in *The Eagle's Gift*. Here the distinction between "teacher" and "benefactor" is finally cast aside and "Nagual" becomes the title of the leader of a group of sorcerers. While *The Eagle's Gift* still retains many characteristics of the transitional period writings,¹⁸ its insistence on definitions and the elaborate doctrine that finally answers most of the questions posed in the early writings places it

16 The word Nahual/Nagual may mean the companion animal as well as the *brujo*; in this sense, the term also applies to the person. Nevertheless, the specific context of teaching and leadership, so important in Castaneda's writings, is absent.

17 Zuzana Kostiřová, "Pojetí svobody v díle Carlose Castanedey" (Carlos Castaneda's Concept of Freedom), *Theologická Revue/Theological Review* 88/1, 2017, 105-122.

18 See the discussion in Z. Kostiřová, "From Academic Anthropology..."

rather in the context of the mature works. In the “Rule”, the famous passage in *The Eagle’s Gift* where Castaneda formulates his mature doctrine, the inner structure and hierarchy of the group is described, placing Nagual and Nagual Woman at the top. While the term “Nagual Woman” can already be found in *The Second Ring of Power*, *The Eagle’s Gift* explains and defines the terms with iron-clad authority. Further on, Castaneda would also mention the line of Naguals and don Juan’s predecessors Nagual Julian and Nagual Elías (most of the stories connected to these two appear in *The Power of Silence*). And as Amy Wallace attests, this is also the way the term was actively used in Castaneda’s new religious movement.¹⁹ Here, “Nagual” is simply the synonym for the “Chief (Male) Sorcerer” or “head of the group”. While its former usage may still appear,²⁰ it has largely fallen into disuse. As for the term Tonal, it is mentioned several times in *The Second Ring of Power*, *The Eagle’s Gift* and *The Fire from Within*, always as a direct synonym for “the right side”. After *The Fire from Within*, the term is never used again.

Cardinal points

The term “Nagual” and its hierarchical context is closely connected to the symbolism of cardinal points that appears prominently in *The Second Ring of Power* and *The Eagle’s Gift*. While we may find some references to cardinal points even in the early works, it is the transitional period that really focuses on their symbolism. The female sorcerers (“the little sisters”) of *The Second Ring of Power* are connected with the “four winds” associated with the cardinal points; at the same time, the Mesoamerican connection is clearly made by a reference to Toltec Tula and the so-called “Atlanteans” of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli’s pyramid. Another typical Mesoamerican trait is the number of the cardinal points: aside of the usual European fourfold symbolism, Castaneda also mentions the typical Mesoamerican one – north, south, east, west, and the “the center and binding force of the four corners of the world”. The points are associated not only with the winds, but also with a specific set of symbols (weapon, shield, spirit catcher, and basket).

The Eagle’s Gift starts with an explicit reference to ancient Mesoamerica, this time already in the introductory section of the book; again, we meet the Atlanteans of Toltec Tula and we get to hear Castaneda’s re-interpretation of them. While traditional hypotheses held that the statues represent

19 Amy Wallace, *Sorcerer’s Apprentice: My Life with Carlos Castaneda*, Berkeley: Frog Books 2007, passim.

20 Such as in Carlos Castaneda, *The Power of Silence*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1991, 11.

heavily armed male Toltec warriors (and Castaneda seemed to agree with this in *The Second Ring of Power*), here he insists the stone figures are armed women that support the leader (Nagual, presumably) represented by the pyramid itself and that they are intimately connected with the ancient sorcery of the third awareness. La Gorda also describes her traumatic encounter with the objects of power at the Oaxacan ruins of Monte Albán and Pablito insists that don Juan warned them against the dangers that lurk around them and specifically threaten advanced sorcerers. The context of the warning is tied to the problem of the ancient and new seers (see the discussion below):

“The pyramids are harmful,” Pablito went on. “Especially to unprotected sorcerers like ourselves. They are worse yet to formless warriors like la Gorda. The Nagual said that there is nothing more dangerous than the evil fixation of the second attention. When warriors learn to focus on the weak side of the second attention nothing can stand in their way. They become hunters of men; ghouls. Even if they are no longer alive, they can reach for their prey through time as if they were present here and now ...”²¹

In the “Rule of the Nagual”, the symbolism of the cardinal points and the four sorceresses is developed to its fullest extent:

The first is the east. She is called order. She is optimistic, light-hearted, smooth, and persistent; like a steady breeze. The second is the north. She is called strength. She is resourceful, blunt, direct, and tenacious; like a hard wind. The third is the west. She is called feeling. She is introspective, remorseful, cunning, and sly; like a cold gust of wind. The fourth is the south. She is called growth. She is nurturing, loud, shy, and warm; like a hot wind.²²

Each cardinal point forms specific traits in the energetic body – discolored “blotches” in the case of the east; a reddish glow for the north; a “tenuous film” creating a dark hue for the west; and an intermittent glow for the south. While up to this time, the total number of female warriors was four, here Castaneda expanded it to eight – that is, four stalkers and four dreamers; the warriors of the same cardinal points are a mirror image of each other and live together. Their house is also shared by one of four male warriors who do not belong to the cardinal points and fulfill the function of the scholar, the man of action, the man behind the scenes, and the assistant. If the Nagual wishes to have a bigger group, the total number of members must be equally divisible by four. In the rest of the book, we meet the remainder of don Juan’s group of sorcerers and we learn the

21 Carlos Castaneda, *The Eagle's Gift*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1981, 18.

22 *Ibid.*, 174.

characteristics of each of them. Again, Mesoamerican references appear – most notably in the personality of Silvio Manuel, the mysterious “man behind the scenes” who resembles the stark profiles of the Maya stone carvings. Interestingly, this is the one and only reference Castaneda makes to the Maya culture throughout all his writings.

The great stress on the cardinal points is a very Mesoamerican trait. The proponents of the theory of Mesoamerican *cosmovision* insist that this is one of its strongest characteristics²³ – even, as David Carrasco has it, the most important one.²⁴ The interconnectedness between the cardinal points, successive years, colors, gods (the Tezcatlipocas of the Aztecs or the four rain Chaahks, four Pawahtuuns, and four Bakabs of the Maya), trees, birds, the four colors of maize, and the four colors of beans has been one of the best known traits of Mesoamerican cosmology ever since the earliest research was carried out.²⁵ Even without the abounding references to the Toltec and other Mexican ethnicities, any student of Mesoamerican religion cannot fail to see the inspiration. On the other hand, just as in the case of the Tonal/Nagual, Castaneda never stoops so low as to simply copy the motifs literally. Even here he remains creative and playful, elaborating on his own symbolism, which does not match the Mesoamerican one. Nevertheless, the importance the cardinal points acquire in *Tales of Power*, *The Second Ring of Power*, and *The Eagle's Gift* is another proof of Castaneda's interests which, in comparison with the early period, slid ever further south. If the early writings favored the Yaqui, Huichol and the spirituality of the Plains, in the transitional period, Mesoamerica reigns supreme.

At the same time, the extensive Mesoamerican references in *The Eagle's Gift* are, as far as Castaneda is concerned, Mesoamerica's swan song. While the term Nagual (in its strictly hierarchical line) remains in use up to Castaneda's death, the symbolism of the cardinal points, which reaches its highest peak in *The Eagle's Gift*, is absent after *The Fire from*

23 Alfredo López Austin's concept of *cosmovision* has been greatly debated among Mexican scholars: the best explanation of the concept can be found in Alfredo López Austin, “Sobre el concepto de *cosmovisión*”, in: Alejandra Gámez Espinosa – Alfredo López Austin (eds.), *Cosmovisión mesoamericana: Reflexiones, polémicas y etnografías*, México: Colegio de México – Fondo de Cultura Económica – Benemérita universidad autónoma de Puebla 2015, 17-49. As for the origins of the term, see Andrés Medina Hernández, “La *cosmovisión* mesoamericana”, in: Alejandra Gámez Espinosa – Alfredo López Austin (eds.), *Cosmovisión mesoamericana: Reflexiones, polémicas y etnografías*, México: Colegio de México – Fondo de Cultura Económica – Benemérita universidad autónoma de Puebla 2015, 55-120.

24 David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, San Francisco: Harper and Row 1990, 19-23, 51-52, 166.

25 See also Z. Kostičová, *Náboženství Mayů...*, 293-298.

Within. And as we will see, the term “Toltec” only lasts one book longer. The late writings, starting from *The Power of Silence* (1987), finally part from every specific ethnographical setting, whether current or historical, and plunge Castaneda’s mature doctrine into the eclectic realm of 1980s’ alternative spirituality. If a “tradition” is referred to, it is a pan-Indian line of Naguals, which even includes Nagual Lujan, an emigrant from China.

The Toltec connection: The Toltec migration theory

Unlike in the case of Tonal/Nagual and cardinal point symbolism, the term “Toltec” has been surrounded by some controversy, impacting the way Castaneda used it. The Theosophical usage of the term aside, there have been different opinions on what culture the word denotes and where we ought to look for it. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, specific interpretations were established, forming the theory of an early Postclassic Toltec migration. This theory was subsequently heavily criticized in the last few decades, causing it to fall into disuse. Nevertheless, during the heyday of Castaneda’s Mesoamerican interests, the theory still reigned supreme and Castaneda probably took it for granted, just like almost any other scholar of the time.

Ever since the discovery of the Mesoamerican world in the early 16th century, soldiers, friars, missionaries, and scholars were confronted with different native concepts and tales of Mesoamerica’s past. Generally speaking, ever since the conquest, there has been a powerful tendency to regard them as “history” (albeit sometimes mixed with myth). In this sense, it was the Aztec culture that proved to be most interesting to the conquistadors – and, for various reasons, to scholars of the 19th and early 20th century as well. At the time of the conquest, the Aztecs held the hegemonic power in a great part of Mesoamerica and for a long time, the prevalent idea was that Aztec culture was the political and cultural apex of the area’s development. Only in the 19th century, after a series of discoveries in the southern jungles and specifically after Stephens and Catherwood published their two famous books, was the learned public informed of the existence of the Maya culture. Here we need to stress that the entire landscape of Maya history only opened to enthusiasts in the 1980s, when the first results of deciphering Maya script were published – and, at the same time, it took years of serious archaeological research for scholars to learn of the importance of Teotihuacan in the Classic Period. In other words, during the first half of the 20th century, the main dependable sources of the history of Mesoamerica were those that referred to Central Mexico and, specifically, to the Aztecs and their immediate (that is, early Postclassic)

predecessors – hence, Wigberto Jiménez Moreno’s 1955 statement that Mesoamerican history begins with the Toltecs.²⁶

Also, for different reasons, these primary sources were of a specific character. First of all, a greatest emphasis was put on written sources, as opposed to archaeological ones. This was partly because there was an abundance of written sources of a specific character. It should be emphasized that we only have a small number of pre-Columbian written sources on the history of Mesoamerica. If we discount the Maya inscriptions, whose contents were still unknown to the public in the early 1980s (when Castaneda wrote his transitional period books), we only have a few pre-Columbian codices: Aztec, Maya, and Mixtec. And we have to stress the peculiar content of the sources. Mesoamerican culture, perhaps with the exception of the Classic Maya political and religious elites, was predominantly an oral culture. This applies specifically to Central Mexico, where script started to evolve in the Classic period at the earliest, many centuries after the first Olmec inscriptions appeared in the Gulf area. Even in the Postclassic period, the script remained imperfect, although it already showed traits of its logo-syllabic nature, and mainly served as support for the oral culture. Unlike the Maya inscriptions, one had to know the story beforehand to be able to read it from the codex. Moreover, most of the content of the surviving pre-Columbian books was of a religious and calendrical nature – such is the case both of the surviving three Maya codices and of the most important Aztec ones, such as *Codex Borbonicus*.

On the other hand, there was an abundance of other material regarding Mesoamerican history. Many documents were written after the conquest; both illuminated codices of a pre-Columbian style (e.g. *Codex Mendoza* or *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*) and texts in Latin script, both in Nahuatl and Spanish. It is precisely these texts that served as the main source for the early reconstruction of Mesoamerican history. Among them, the most important were Sahagún’s *Codex Florentinus*, the painted codex known as *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, *Codex Boturini*, *Histoire du Mechiqwe*, *Anales de Cuauhtitlán*, and others. And many of them somehow mention Tollan, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and “the Toltec”.²⁷

As for Quetzalcoatl, I have made a brief summary of the different approaches to this mythical god-king elsewhere;²⁸ here I will omit this ma-

26 Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, “Síntesis de la historia precolonial del Valle de México”, *Revista mexicana de estudios antropológicos* 14, 1954-1955, 219-236: 219.

27 For an impressive discussion about the primary sources regarding the mythical Tollan and its god-king, see Henry B. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs*, Boulder: University Press of Colorado 2001, passim.

28 Zuzana Kosticová, “Quetzalcoatl and Human Sacrifice”, in: Barbora Půtová (ed.), *Identity, Tradition, and Revitalization of American Indian Cultures*, Praha: Karolinum

terial completely, since Castaneda never once mentions Quetzalcoatl's story (unlike, for example, his later follower Victor Sánchez). This is one of the traits of Castaneda's unique approach, which I have already dared to label as "novel" and "wholly surprising": except for Castaneda, virtually every text, regardless of its genre, mentions the names "Toltec" and "Quetzalcoatl" together. Precisely for this reason, I believe the omission is fully intentional: Castaneda received a first-class anthropological education and he makes a clear allusion to it in *The Second Ring of Power*, when Pablito first introduces him to the term "Toltec". The surprised Carlos asks Pablito whether he was aware of the "anthropological meaning" of the word – that is, that the Toltec were a Central Mexican, Nahuatl-speaking ethnic group that was "extinct" by the time of the Conquest. Pablito counters that a Toltec is a "receiver and holder of mysteries". The same happens in *The Fire from Within*: countering Carlos' Western preconception, don Juan insists that the Toltecs were the sorcerers of old. Both of these dialogues contain clear proof of Castaneda's knowledge of the topic and his intention to re-interpret the concepts on his own terms. I believe that if he omits Quetzalcoatl's story, it must have been out of a conscious decision, not ignorance.

From the absence of the Quetzalcoatl narrative also follows the absence of the story of the fall of Tollan. In primary sources, this is the triggering event for the Toltec migration, which ensues after Quetzalcoatl's reign reaches its end (due, as many sources have it, to direct actions by Tezcatlipoca or his priests). The great priest-king is forced to leave his city in, as Nigel Davies has it, "The Mayan March": the Toltec were supposed to emigrate southeast to the Maya area and establish themselves at Chichén Itzá, where they created what Alfred Tozzer used to call the "Maya-Toltec culture".²⁹ While the story apparently has no direct relevance for the context of Castaneda's books, it also sparked a lengthy scholarly discussion of its possible historical meaning. Starting probably with Eduard Seler,³⁰ historians set out to separate its "mythical" and "historical" content, creating a celebrated theory that reigned supreme in the field of Mesoamerican studies at least until the second half of 20th century. The events related to the fall of Tollan, meaning the specifics of Quetzalcoatl's rule, such as his rejection of human sacrifice and the ensuing anger of the gods (or their priests), were interpreted in a strictly historical way. All the leading figures in the field, from Seler through Jiménez Moreno and Paul Kirchhoff up to

2017, 215-228.

29 Alfred Tozzer, "Toltec Architect of Chichen Itza", in: Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons (ed.), *American Indian Life*, New York: B. W. Huebsch 1922, 265-271.

30 See Nigel Davies, *The Toltecs: Until the Fall of Tula*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1977, 30.

Nigel Davies, referred to the necessity of separating the mythical addenda from the true historical substrate and firmly believed that a historical reconstruction of Toltec history is possible. For us (and for Castaneda), the most important part is the theory of the Toltec migration. After the (supposed) religious reform failed, the city was virtually torn in half and a great part of the population left, creating a substantial wave of migration towards the Maya area. On the way, the Toltecs influenced most of the important early Preclassic cities, such as Xochhicalco, Cacaxtla, and Cholula, finally reaching Chichén Itzá, overpowering the native Maya population and settling there. While different authors twisted the tale in different ways,³¹ all agreed on the essential point – that the striking similarity between Tula and Chichén Itzá clearly confirms the theory.

While the theory had its opponents even in the first half of the 20th century,³² it was not until the 1990s that it was seriously attacked and proven wrong.³³ Nevertheless, its final dismissal is of little importance for Castanedan studies. Mesoamerican references are very frequent in the writings of the transitional and early mature period, starting with *Tales of Power* (1974), where the concept of Tonal and Nagual is introduced; the term “Toltec” first appears in *The Second Ring of Power* (1977), is mentioned several times in *The Eagle’s Gift* (1981), and appears prominently in *The Fire from Within* (1984). This means Castaneda had adopted the term by the late 1970s, used it until the middle of 1980s, and then suddenly abandoned it for all practical purposes. As the absence of the term in the memoirs of Amy Wallace suggests, the term was not actively used in the religious practice of the group in the 1990s.³⁴ We may safely assume that Castaneda’s preliminary knowledge of Toltec culture, which he refers to in *The Second Ring of Power* and which served as a basis for the reinterpretation of the term, is intimately tied to the academic milieu of the time. And this milieu strongly favored the Toltec migration theory.

It is easy to see how in the theories of Toltec migration the term “Toltec” became somewhat fuzzy, its confines blurred. Originally denoting a citizen of Tollan – that is, Tula, Hidalgo, and specifically one of its ethnic factions (since the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* insists the inhabit-

31 See e.g. the discussion in J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1990, 3-47; see also N. Davies, *The Toltecs...*, 220-224.

32 Most notably George Kubler: see George Kubler, “Chichen Itza y Tula”, *Estudios de cultura maya* 1, 1961, 47-80.

33 Susan D. Gillespie, “Toltecs, Tula and Chichén Itzá: The Development of an Archaeological Myth”, in: Jeff Karl Kowalski – Cynthia Kristan-Graham (eds.), *Twin Tollans: Chichén Itzá, Tula, and the Epiclassic to Early Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2006, 85-127.

34 A. Wallace, *Sorcerer’s Apprentice...*, passim.

ants of Tollan were divided into the Nonoalca and the Tolteca) –, with the spreading of Toltec influence throughout Mesoamerica, the term acquired a more general meaning. Apart from in Chichén Itzá, the “Toltec” style has been recognized in Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, Tajín, Cholula, and other cities, along with the general influence of the culture in Veracruz and Tabasco. In his earlier works, William Ringle even speaks about an “international cult of Quetzalcoatl”.³⁵

The international character of the early Postclassic sphere of influence may have had some impact on the formation of Castaneda’s concept of the transcultural Toltec tradition of sorcery. Starting from *The Fire from Within*, he distinguishes between the “old seers” and the “new seers”, only using the term “Toltec” explicitly for the former. The old seers flourished during the heyday of the “Toltec empire”, as Castaneda calls it – they were fearsome, powerful sorcerers, able to manipulate people’s consciousness and use them at their will. They also consumed “plants of power” in great quantities and learned how to defy death. However, their fascination with the content of their visions and their practical immortality turned them into dangerous, monstrous beings. While most of them were wiped out during the fall of the Toltec empire and the last remnants disappeared during the Spanish conquest, some are still alive leading a horrific half-life in earthly pits, more resembling inorganic beings than people. La Gorda’s encounter with one of them has already been mentioned. Don Juan takes Carlos to a place where one of these surviving ancient seers is hidden: the creature Carlos briefly gets to see is dangerous, bizarre, and nightmarish.

The “new seers”, according to don Juan, learned from the old seers’ mistake, took great care not to be overly fascinated with their knowledge, stopped using plants of power almost completely and mostly focused on the techniques of stalking, dreaming, and intent. They also forged a new, transcultural tradition that defied even the Spanish conquest. *The Fire from Within* seems to use the term “Toltec” exclusively for the old seers, while the new ones are said to “learn the teachings of the ancient Toltecs”, specifically in connection with the power of the intent and inorganic beings.

I believe the structure of Castaneda’s image of the Toltec is akin to the general outline of the Toltec migration theory. Just like its proponents, Castaneda postulates a powerful empire centered in Tula, Hidalgo (as we saw in *The Second Ring of Power* and *The Eagle’s Gift*), which was subsequently destroyed and which the remains of its populace left, acquiring

35 William M. Ringle – Tomás Gallareta Negrón – George J. Bey III, “The Return of Quetzalcoatl: Evidence for the Spread of a World Religion during the Epiclassic Period”, *Ancient Mesoamerica* 9, 1998, 183-232.

an international, trans-cultural character (“... we are Toltecs. All of us are Toltecs ...”, states Pablito³⁶). This is further intensified in *The Fire from Within*, where the new seers lose their specific ethnic status and become a sort of hidden spiritual elite, a “tradition” (albeit originally Toltec)³⁷ that operates across Mesoamerica: don Juan is Yaqui, don Genaro comes from Oaxaca, Silvio Manuel is a Maya. And as Nagual Luján’s and Carlos’ cases attest, even Mexican provenience is not required to become a sorcerer.

The wise Toltec: The Aztec sources and the “Toltec” as a “sorcerer”

As to Castaneda’s concept of the Toltec, further context is provided by Aztec sources and the way they treat Toltec culture in general. The original meaning of the term itself is simply a denotation of geographical origin. Tollan, coming from *tolli*, “rush” or “reed”, and the locative suffix *-tlan*, “a place”, simply means “the place of rushes” or “the place of reeds”. Toltec (*Toltecatl*) is subsequently formed by the word *Tollan* merged with *tecatl*, man. A *Toltec* is thus, literally, “a man from Tollan” or “the one from Tollan”.

Again, we have to stress that the great importance ascribed to Toltec culture is more connected to written sources than to archaeological ones: primary texts describe the Toltec as wise men, great artisans and artists, a culture that invented both religion and the written script. Tollan was a marvel of the world and its king was the wise and divine Quetzalcoatl, the epitome of an ideal ruler. To some extent, the city plays the role of a metropolis, a mythical place of culture, which the ancient tribes must pass through in order to turn into civilized, properly attired, wise peoples. In the description of the Aztec peregrination from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan, the self-styled barbarians stop in Tollan for some time and leave as refined, cultured men, masters of various arts.³⁸ In pretty much the same way, the primitive Chichimeca of *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, rescued from Chicomoztoc by the Toltec of Tollan, first need to return to Tollan and become civilized before the group finally leaves the city.³⁹

36 Carlos Castaneda, *The Second Ring of Power*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1991, 184.

37 Carlos Castaneda, *The Fire from Within*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1984, 13, 47, 170.

38 Michael E. Smith, “The Aztlan Migrations of the Nahuatl Chronicles: Myth or History?”, *Ethnohistory* 31/3, 1984, 153-186.

39 See e.g. Dana Leibsohn, *Script and Glyph: Pre-Hispanic History, Colonial Bookmaking and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2009, 28-36.

Indeed, many early archaeologists rightly point out that the description of Tollan as a seat of a high and unsurpassed culture better fits the stately Teotihuacan than the smaller and comparatively less impressive ruins of Tula.⁴⁰ Many later authors pointed out that it was so easy to identify Tollan-Tula precisely because of the tendency to regard written sources as “history”, albeit mixed with myth and other religious content; in fact, Tollan is a full-fledged mythical place, albeit perhaps inspired by some historical culture that flourished some time before the Aztecs reached their full power and influence. It may be identical with Tula, Teotihuacan, both, or neither – the message of the narrative of the fall of Tollan would still stand.⁴¹

It is fascinating to see how Castaneda's interpretation of the Toltec, specifically in *The Second Ring of Power* and *The Eagle's Gift*, is closer to this timeless, mythical image of the wise Toltec of Tollan than to any historicized image of a specific material culture. While in *The Fire from Within*, he puts this original concept into a firmer historical context (as we saw above), the idea of a kind of timeless tradition of wise men and sorcerers remained influential and in the end had wider success in the spiritual milieu than the concept of the old and new seers. In the writings of Castaneda's successors, most notably in those of Miguel Ruiz, the Toltec finally lose the rest of their vague historical setting and become fully identified with a general concept of “sorcerer” or “wise person”.⁴² This is also the contemporary mainstream spiritual interpretation of the term. When Czech actor and influential Toltec spirituality enthusiast Jaroslav Dušek was asked in a DVTV interview whether he was using the name “Toltec” to refer to a historical culture, he admitted he knew little of the historical cultures of Mesoamerica, but said the question was obsolete anyway. “Toltec”, he said, meant “sorcerer”, “seer”, “wise man” – and the possible historical background had no impact on this fact.⁴³ An avid reader of Miguel Ruiz, Dušek knows little about Carlos Castaneda and is (or at the time of the interview was) largely ignorant of the Western origins of

40 Some, such as Laurette Séjourné, even insisted that the sources actually do speak about Teotihuacan: see Laurette Séjourné, *Teotihuacan: Capital de los Toltecas*, Buenos Aires: Siglo veintiuno editores 2004 (2nd Spanish ed.), 26 and passim.

41 Z. Kostiřová, “Quetzalcoat and Human Sacrifice...”, 224-225; see also Susan Gillespie, *Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History*, Tucson: The University of Arizona Press 1989, 203-206.

42 See Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*, San Rafael: Amber-Allen Publishing 1997, passim.

43 “Historie je iluze psaná vítězi, říká herec Jaroslav Dušek” (History is an Illusion Written by the Winners, Says Actor Jaroslav Dušek) [online], <<https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/historie-je-iluze-psana-vitezi-rika-herec-jaroslav-dusek/r-65cbcc0ca89e11e49e4b0025900fea04/>>, 6 February 2015 [14 November 2018].

Toltec-inspired spirituality. His outlook exemplifies perfectly the prevalent popularity Castaneda's creation enjoys in the present alternative spirituality – and the meaning in which it is used.

Conclusion

Castaneda's early works relied mostly on the religious culture of what has been called "Oasisamérica" by Kirchhoff: despite the *Teachings* subtitle "A Yaqui Way of Knowledge", the main sources were the Huichol, complemented by the general spirituality of the Great Plains with its stress on vision quests.⁴⁴ In the works of the transitional period, however, Castaneda's interest largely shifts towards Mesoamerica. The first motif to be introduced is the concept of Tonal/Nagual – while the term Tonal disappears, the term Nagual remains in use until Castaneda's death, both as "the unknowable" and as a title of the leader of a group of sorcerers. Second, the stress on cardinal point symbolism appears; even though cardinal orientation was already important in the early period, the symbolism here is elaborated on even further, only to be basically forgotten both in the late works and in practice (since Amy Wallace makes no reference to this theme whatsoever). Finally, the term "Toltec" first appears in *The Second Ring of Power* (more or less meaning "sorcerer") and is re-defined in *The Fire from Within* as "the ancient seer". After *The Fire from Within*, it falls into disuse again – Castaneda settles for using the terms "ancient seers" and "new seers". The mature doctrine may still work with it, but only implicitly.

Out of these three main Mesoamerica-inspired concepts in Castaneda's work, the last became the most successful. Miguel Ruiz, who is probably the best-known Castaneda-inspired popular spiritual teacher and writer, has helped to disseminate the term both by means of his books (*The Four Agreements* being the most famous and influential) and through the way he speaks about his past. Interestingly enough, he insists that his father was a member of a line of Naguals, thus actively resuscitating an old Castanedan term that has been used only rarely outside of the immediate Castanedan milieu. While the term "Nagual" remains far less well known and significantly less popular, its Castanedan meaning lives on.

The problem of Castaneda's Mesoamerican inspiration is another reason current scholars should appreciate the full context of Castaneda's writings instead of focusing exclusively on the early period, which produced

44 Richard de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory*, Lincoln: iUniverse.com 2001, 33-85; J. C. Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda...*, 61-86; cf. Barbara Myerhoff, *The Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press 1974, passim.



his biggest and most discussed bestsellers. While the first three books (and, specifically, the *Teachings* and *Journey to Ixtlan*) remain the most influential of the corpus, the case of Toltec spirituality attests that Castaneda's importance extends beyond the immediate context of Huichol peyote sessions and Plains-inspired vision quests. In this sense, the context of emerging pre-Harnerian Neo-Shamanism, in which Castaneda is usually placed, is not sufficient. I suggest that Castaneda needs to be studied as a prominent personality of the alternative spiritual milieu of the last six decades, as well as an important creator of postmodern spiritual concepts. After all, as I have tried to show in this article, some of his creative and intellectually challenging ideas inspired by Native American spirituality have managed to become part of the mainstream.



SUMMARY

Castaneda's Mesoamerican Inspiration: The Tonal/Nagual, the Cardinal Points and the Birth of Contemporary Toltec Spirituality

On the basis of his most celebrated bestsellers, Carlos Castaneda has usually been analyzed as a precursor of the emerging pre-Harnerian Neo-Shamanism, one that was chiefly inspired by the cultures of the so-called Oasisamerica and the spirituality of the Great Plains. Nevertheless, in his transitional period (the 1970s and the early 1980s), Castaneda also explored ancient Mesoamerican symbolism. The fruit of this new inspiration mainly consists of three concepts – the Tonal/Nagual, the symbolism of the cardinal points, and the Toltec. The term “Nagual” as well as “Toltec” persisted long after Castaneda’s death and proved to be one of the most popular traits of the author’s doctrine. Such contemporary celebrity authors as Miguel Ruiz owe their idea of the Toltec to Castaneda.

Keywords: Castaneda, Carlos; Toltec culture; New Age; alternative spirituality; Mesoamerica; Nagualism; Nagual; Tonal.

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