The Conquest According to La Malinche

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Translated Marlene Ramirez-Cancio

[Figure 1. Jesusa Rodríguez as La Malinche. Photo courtesy of Jesusa Rodríguez.

Editor’s note. In this conversation with Diana Taylor, Jesusa Rodríguez illustrates how Mexicans tell entire histories using the verb ‘to tell’ in all its manifestations. Here, she assumes the role of Malinche, telling about the conquest of Mexico, in terms that point heavily to the political corruption of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, President of Mexico from 1988-94. The video of this conversation, as well as the Nahuatlismo one, is available on the Holy Terrors website]
This is La Malinche, the woman I was telling you about, from the Conquest...

“Good evening, dear urinal-goers. Today I have come to inform you, or to tell you, or to narrate to you, what really happened when what happened came to pass. I mean, that time when it happened, whose annals are so faithfully recorded by Bernal Díaz del Castillo and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. It so happens that we were all looking into the black mirror of Tezcatlviso, when suddenly the Tlatoani, our Leader, says, “Look,” he says, he tells me, “look Malinche,” he says, he says, “look,” he says, “go check it out, go, go to Veracruz,” he tells me, “because I think what I’m seeing here is turning ugly,” he tells me. And I tell him, I tell him, “Oh really? Why?”, I tell him. “Well cause I say so,” he tells me. “Well,” I say, “if you say so,” I tell him, “what can I say?” And then he tells me, he says, “Well, then go,” he says, “and see what you can tell me.” And so then I went to Veracruz. It was amazing, because by that point, this Tlatoani had got it in his head that he wanted wireless Papantla bungee jumpers, to modernize the state or whatever. So I got there, to Laguna Verde, and just imagine my surprise when I see these conquistadors walking my way, and they were half-man, half-hotpant! And then I tell one of them, I tell him, “What?,” I tell him. And he tells me, he says, “Nothing,” he says, “you tell me.” “Oh yeah?,” I tell him, “you tell me.” He tells me, he says, “Look,” he says, “we,” he says, “we want you to tell us.” “Oh...” I tell him, “and what should I say?” I tell him, “Tell me what you want me to tell you, and I’ll tell you,” I tell him. “Cause if you don’t tell me, then how am I gonna tell you?” And he tells me, he says, “Look, just tell us where the water is,” he says. “We’re looking for Evian water.” And I tell him, I tell him, “Evian quoi?” As if I couldn’t speak French, right? And I tell him, “I’m the first cunnilingual translator of Mesoamerica.” Then he tells me, he tells me, “No,” he says,
“Evian water, of the pure kind” he says, “they already told us you can tell us how to find the city that has this water.” I tell him, I tell him, “Well yeah,” I tell him, I say, “but what do you say?” [extending her hand for money] “You don’t say,” he told me, and I tell him, “Okay,” I tell him, “you said it, let’s go,” I tell him. “Just don’t tell anyone,” I tell him, “cause if you go around telling, then they’ll come to me and start telling me ‘Why’d you go around telling?!’” “No,” he tells me, “I won’t tell,” he tells me. “Okay,” I tell him, “perfect, if you tell me you won’t tell, then let’s go.” So off we went, and we were walking to Tenochtitlan, and we passed through Ixtapalapa, and everything was falling apart over there. There wasn’t even any water left, but I didn’t even tell them, cause if I told them then they’d tell me, “Why’d you go and tell them?!” That’s why I said, “Look,” I tell him, I tell him, “go ahead,” I tell him. Then he says, “Well, if you say so, I’ll go ahead.” Then we really got into a horrible jam over there, and well, they told us we could all go to hell. “What did they tell you?” I tell him. “Nothing,” he says, “what did you tell them?” “Nothing, what could I have told them? I’ll just go around telling and then they’ll tell me.” “Oh!,” I say, “you’re the one who’s been telling.” “No,” he says, “I didn’t say anything!” “Listen, don’t even tell me,” I tell him. “Let’s go to the palace.” And so we get to the palace, and there’s the great Tlatoani, and he was, well, in a manner of speaking, he was saying something to everyone, and I tell him, I tell him, “Oh Great Tlatoani, these gentlemen have come to tell you something.” “They want to say something.” He says, “why don’t you tell me?” he tells me. “No,” I tell him, “they should tell you. I shouldn’t have to tell you anything.” “No,” he says, “you tell me.” “Well, okay,” I tell him. “After all, I’m the only one here who knows how to say anything. But anyway. They say they want to buy the city’s spring waters from you.”
Then he says, he says, “Well,” he says, “you don’t say. Let me see, hold on, I’ll tell you in a second.” And he goes back there and meets with Lilia Patricia, his wife, and you can tell they have a very good relationship, because he tells her, he tells her, “Listen, they say they want to buy the spring waters from us, what should I tell them?” he tells her. “Just sell them, you fucking idiot!” “Oh yeah, I guess,” he says, “right?” It’s great to have such a clear and honest relationship with people. So he comes back and says, he says “Alright, I’ll sell them to you.” I mean, they sold themselves so easily over there, so I tell him, “Tell me how much they gave you,” I tell him. “I’m not telling you,” he tells me. “Well,” I tell him, “why not?” And he says, “Cause you’ll go around telling.” And I say, “What have I ever told anyone?” I tell him, “Who’s told you I’ve been telling?” “Well, they just told me,” he says. And I say, “They shouldn’t go around telling you! I never said anything.” Anyway. The point is that he starts saying the spring waters had been emptied out, so the sewage channel of Mexico City, which used to be like this, sloped downwards—so that all the shit and the filth and the nastiness that comes out of the human body could go down— it turns out that by now the great channel is like this, going up. We’re the only city that pumps shit uphill, and it’s incredibly expensive. But one of these days, all the shit will come back to us, and that’s why I’m narrating the true story of the collapse of the great Tenochtitlan. That’s the way it happened, and it was the great Tlatoani’s doing. I have spoken. It’s a way of narrating the conquest with very few elements.