

Aztec Mythology: Quetzalcoatl and the Creation of Man

Close Reading Part 1

UNDERLINE each time you see a similarity to a previously read CREATION story.

HIGHLIGHT each time you see a reference to social values, customs or cultural details

Story

- On this night, Obsidian Snake waited impatiently for the sound of his mother finishing her days work. All day long, as he had gathered wood for fire and helped his father work their fields of maize, he had thought of Turquoise Maize Flowers words from the night before. Soon the moon would rise up in the sky and he smiled as he thought of the moon's surprise and embarrassment when the gods whacked it with a rabbit because it shone as brightly as the sun. Now it knew its proper place and shone dimly in the night sky, still wearing the mark of the rabbit.
- What happened next, wondered Obsidian Snake? I know how the sun and moon came to be. How did mankind get here?
- As if reading his mind, his mother quietly appeared beside him. He knew she was tired as she had woven much cloth to be sold at the market place in Tenochtitlan and would welcome the chance to sit quietly with him for a while.
- "How did we get here?" asked Obsidian Snake as his mother took her place beside him in the cool, dry night.
- "We are the children of Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent," his mother began. "He is our creator; he discovered maize so that we might feed ourselves. He taught us how to find jade and other precious stones and taught us how to polish them. From him the art of weaving our many colored cotton cloth was learned and passed down from mother to daughter for many generations. The Plumed Serpent taught our people how to use the feathers of the *quetzal*, the hummingbird and other birds with colorful plumage to make beautiful designs. He also taught our people how to measure time. He gave us our calendar with its special days set aside for certain prayers and festivals."
- "But that is the end of my story, Obsidian Snake. It begins after the creation of the fifth sun when Quetzalcoatl went to the lord of the dead, Mictlantecuhtli, to ask for bones from dead men with which to create new men. When Mictlantecuhtli gave a bag of bones to Quetzalcoatl, he immediately began to run with them because he had been told that the lord of the dead was not to be trusted. As Quetzalcoatl was running, he slipped and fell, breaking all the bones in the bag and spilling them about. He was still able to gather them up and escape from Mictlan, the underworld. Once safe, Quetzalcoatl mixed his blood with the bones and created a new breed of men. Since the bones that had fallen broke into different sizes, that meant that the people he created were all different sizes. That is why, Obsidian Snake, when you look around you, you can see that no two people are exactly the same. Its because of our creator, the Plumed Serpent, and the bones that got broken."
- "Now, having created man and being a kindly god, Quetzalcoatl realized he needed to find a way to feed his new creation. One day he spotted a big black ant with a kernel of corn. This, he knew, would

be the perfect food to feed mankind. To find out where the ant got the corn, Quetzalcoatl turned himself into an ant and followed the black ant to a mountain. In a crack in this mountain Quetzalcoatl saw not only corn but beans, peppers, sage, and other kinds of food fit for mankind. Quetzalcoatl, still in the body of an ant, squeezed through the crack, took a kernel of corn and dragged it back to man so that man could plant it for food. Quetzalcoatl realized that there was much more food beside corn in the mountain which could be used to feed mankind. He asked the other gods what to do with the mountain. They said to split the mountain open to give the food to mankind, and so one of them did. This, however, angered Tlaloc, the rain god who, with his children, stole the beans, corn, peppers, and sage from within the mountain before it could be given to man.”

- “So it is today that Tlaloc and his children still have the food that was in the mountain. Each year they give part of the food back to man, some years more than others. And that is why, my son, Obsidian Snake, we sacrifice to both our creator and protector Quetzalcoatl, and to the rain god Tlaloc, so that they will continue to look upon our people with kindness and keep our world in balance. Without them our crops and our people will perish.”
- With those word, Turquoise Maize Flower stopped and smiled down at Obsidian Snake. He leaned against his mother and could feel his eyes beginning to grow heavy in the quiet cool of the night. Even in his sleepiness, he knew these were the accounts that had been told to her by her mother and father and these were the accounts that one day he would share with his children on dry, clear evenings when the moon with its rabbit markings looked down on them.

Compare, Contrast, Connect...

Compare/Contrast/Connect the bones in this story to the “bones” mentioned in Ovid’s story of Deucalion and Pyrrha.

Compare/Contrast/Connect Tlaloc’s anger to that of Zeus in the story of Prometheus.