

Aztec Mythology: Tezcatlipoca and the King of Tula

Close Reading Part 1

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

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

Story

- As Obsidian Snake lay on his reed mat, he awoke to the sound of Turquoise Maize Flower and Speaking Eagle, his mother and father, moving about preparing for the day. Through his squinting eyes he could see that it was still very dark outside. He could smell the wood smoke of the fire his mother had rekindled and heard scraping sounds as she ground maize for tortillas. Outside, his father moved around in the darkness searching for a few more sticks for the fire. Why, he wondered, are mother and father awake so early? Suddenly his eyes opened wide as he remembered that today was market day. Before the sun came back around to light up the day, he and his mother and father would be on their way to the market to sell the many fine cloths Turquoise Maize Flower had woven.
- Obsidian Snake loved the market where people crowded together to bargain with the women who sat behind their piles of peppers, onions, maize, beans, fruits, animal furs, cocoa and pottery. There would be others there ready to trade wood for building and frogs to eat that had come from the lake. Obsidian Snake especially liked to look at the obsidian mirrors whose polished black surfaces would shine in the sunlight. When he looked at them he could see the reflections of a small brown face framed in straight black hair whose eyes squinted when smiling and whose cheeks were round and full. Perhaps at the market he would see Eagle Snake, son of his mothers sister, and together they could travel through the rows and rows of goods for sale. If his mother sold her cloths, perhaps he would be able to buy tamales or spicy maize porridge.
- Soon night was fading away and Obsidian Snake was on his way to the market, his mothers cloths tied securely to his back. Speaking Eagle and Turquoise Maize Flower both carried cloths, too. As they walked, Speaking Eagle began to talk, his quiet voice carrying in the early morning silence.
- "Our trip today reminds me of a story that took place in another market place a long time ago. This is a story about Tezcatlipoca, the Mirror that Smokes, the god of the night sky. He is a sorcerer and the god of evil. What happened, Obsidian Snake, was that Tezoatlípoca, turned himself into a wild, crazy man who walked naked around the city of Tula's marketplace selling chili peppers."
- "At this same time, the king of Tula had a beautiful daughter who was sought after by many men. The king, however, would not let her marry any of them. One day, however, the daughter saw the chili pepper man in the market and immediately fell in love with him. Day after day, she yearned so much for a glimpse of the wild man that she became sick. The king, who loved his daughter very much and could not stand to see her so sick, had all of his men search for the chili pepper man. Finally they found him, wild and dirty, in the market place right where the kings daughter had first seen him. They took him back to the king where he was washed, given new clothes and made to look very presentable. When the princess saw the chili pepper man again, she was immediately cured of her

illness. The king was so happy to see his daughter well again that he gave his daughter to the man to be married.”

- With this, Speaking Eagle stopped walking and talking and paused on the road to adjust his bundle of cloths. That is not the end of the story, Obsidian Snake, he said as he once again began walking towards the market. It turned out that the people of Tula had started laughing at the king for allowing his daughter to be married to a crazy man. The king, of course, was embarrassed and did not like being laughed at. He began plotting a way to get rid of his new son-in-law.
- Here is the plan he devised. He had his men take the chili pepper man to fight in a war against Tulas enemies. They put the man in charge of some dwarfs, thinking that when the fighting started and the kings men left, he would be killed. However, when the fighting did started, the pepper man encouraged the dwarfs with inspiring words and before long, the pepper man and the dwarfs had killed all of the enemy.
- When word of the chili pepper mans victory got back to the king of Tula, the king knew he had to greet his son-in-law as a hero when he returned from the battle. This time, when the pepper man entered the market place, people danced and sang songs of praise instead of laughing at him. At the palace of the king, the people crowned him with a headdress made of quetzal feathers and gave him a turquoise shield. The king announced that the people of Tula had been satisfied and that the one-time wild chili pepper man was indeed his son-in-law.
- Speaking Eagle stopped and pointed down the road. Tezcatlipoca continued to work his sorcery against the people of Tula and even some of the other gods, he began again. But I will have to save those stories for another time. Look, Obsidian Snake, the market place is just ahead.

Additional Questions

List questions about Aztec life and the world around them that are answered in this story.

Define and discuss the meaning of the word agriculture.

Explain why agriculture is so important to the Aztecs and their religion.

Compare/Contrast the food that the Aztecs eat and the food that we eat today.