

Aztec Mythology: The Mark of the Rabbit

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

- On a clear evening long ago, the sun was setting as Obsidian Snake sat quietly outside his home. He had eaten his maize cakes during the hottest part of the day and soon he would sleep. Inside his house, he could hear the sounds of his brother, Smoking Shield, moving about before he returned to the Telpochcalli (tail poch CAL ee), the House of Youth, for the night. Each evening Smoking Shield returned home to eat his meal only to return, after bathing, to the House of Youth where he learned to be a model citizen and warrior of the Aztec state. Obsidian Snake missed his brother, especially late at night, when he awoke from sleep on his reed mat and did not hear the sound of his brothers breathing on the mat beside him. Right now Obsidian Snake was too young to go the House of Youth. He was taught by his father during the day how to fish, gather sticks for the fire, and how to handle their canoe. At the House of Youth, Smoking Shield was learning how to be a good citizen, obedient and respectful, and to be a model warrior, too. Obsidian Snake knew that soon he too would sleep at the House of Youth, coming home only for his meals and to bathe.
- At his back, the adobe bricks of his house were still warm even though the sun had ended its journey across the sky. It was the growing time when days were warm and dry and the maize was on its way to harvest. All the family prayed to Tlaloc, the old god of rain and the god of the farmers plenty, in order to be sure rain came as needed along with plenty of warmth and sunshine.
- Inside, too, he could hear the sounds of his mother, Turquoise Maize Flower, as she moved around the hearth. The fire glowed quietly through the open doorway. Obsidian Snake smiled as he thought of her. In his mind he could hear the sound of her grinding the maize for their two meals. He could hear the slap, slap sound as she patted maize dough into tortillas. All day his mother had worked at grinding maize between volcanic stones, preparing flour for the maize cakes and the maize porridge she sweetened for him with honey. Today, their afternoon meal had included crayfish his father and he had caught in the lake nearby their house.
- His mother also spent many hours spinning cotton thread and weaving at her loom. Throughout the area, his mothers cotton cloth was known to be fine and soft. It brought a good price in *cocoa* beans on market day.
- Obsidian Snake thought of the way his mother had smiled when he had presented her with the crayfish he had caught. He knew his mother missed him now that he was too old to stay by her side as she worked by the hearth inside or wove her fine cotton outside in the small courtyard of their house. That was why each night she found her way to him for a few moments. Tonight he heard the sound of her bare feet as she crossed the beaten earth floor and entered the darkness outside the house.

- "Look, Obsidian Snake," said Turquoise Maize Flower. "The moon is making its way across the sky. We can see the marks of the rabbit which it wears. With the next full moon, it will be time to harvest our maize."
- "Why does the moon wear the mark of a rabbit, Mother?" Obsidian Snake asked.
- Just as he could see the white of his mothers *cueitl* (kway eetl) that was wrapped around her waist and hips and fell to her ankles, in the soft darkness of the moons light, Obsidian Snake could see her smile as she sat down beside him, ready to answer his question.
- "Four times, Obsidian Snake, the gods had tried to create our earth and our people and four times they had found their efforts wanting. Each time the world was destroyed by great jaguar, by flood, by wind and by rain. With each destruction, too, went the sun. Finally, the gods met in Teotihuacan (tay oh tee WAH cun) and decided that one among them would be sacrificed and changed into the sun."
- She continues, "There were two volunteers; one god was rich and handsome, the other god was ugly and covered with sores. When the time for sacrifice came, the rich, handsome god ran to the edge of the sacrificial fire but stopped at the edge, unable to take the final step into the fire. Four times he tried and four times his courage failed him."
- "Next it was the turn of the poor, ugly god. Even though he was thought to be a poor second choice, with no hesitation he jumped into the middle of the fire. The handsome god, embarrassed and ashamed by his cowardice, finally jumped into the fire. He, too, was devoured. Just then the jaguar, mighty animal, jumped into the ashes of the fire. When he came out, his coat was spotted with soot and so it remains to this day."
- "Time passed and even though the gods had been sacrificed, there was still no sun. Suddenly, the sun appeared in the sky. Right then too, came the moon, shining as brightly as the sun. By now, the gods had lost their patience. Angered by the boldness of the moon, they slapped the moon right in the face with a rabbit. Those are the marks of that rabbit that we are looking at right now."
- "And what happened next, my mother?" asked Obsidian Snake. "Did the gods succeed in making our world and our people?"
- "My son, it took a lot more of the gods to be sacrificed. When they did, they created the stars. It was Quetzalcoatl though, the Plumed Serpent, who visited the gods of the underworld to get the bones of past generations to create mankind. But that, Obsidian Snake, is another story for another night. The moon, with its rabbit marks, has traveled far across the sky. Tomorrow's sun will be here to wake us soon enough. Let us go to our mats now and sleep."

Questions to think about...

Do you know any stories about the moon? How do they compare to this one?

Go to this website and read some other moon stories: <http://www.windows2universe.org/mythology/planets/Earth/moon.html>