Clyde W. Ford

The Miracle Worker

United States (1999)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





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General information	
Title of the work	The Miracle Worker
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Original Language	Unknown
First Edition Date	1999
First Edition Details	Clyde W. Ford, *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999, 227 pp.
ISBN	0553105442
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	1999 (date of publication of the book from which the story was summarised)
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



Clyde W. Ford (Author)

Clyde W. Ford is African-American native of New York City. He is the author of three other books: *Where Healing Waters Meet: Touching Mind and Emotion Through the Body* (1989); *Compassionate Touch: The Body's Role in Healing and Recovery* (1993) and *We CAN All Get Along: 50 Steps You Can Take to Help End Racism* (1993). As a prominent guest speaker on American TV, he has taken part in more than 150 TV shows. He has written numerous articles in journals and newspapers. For more on Ford see here (accessed: July 3, 2018).

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Date and place of collection: Unknown. However, Clyde Ford states in the Preface to his book that "the myths in this book come from numerous sources, principally from the published transcriptions and translations of missionaries, ethnographers, and anthropologists" (p. xiii)

Cultural Background*: BaRonga of South Eastern Africa.

The BaRonga people comprise the populace of the countries Botswana, Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They are generally hunters and adventurers, and have gatherings in the communities that serve for recitations, singing, and the exchange of jokes, proverbs, and tall tales grounds. When the man and woman marry, the BaRonga consider that the next generation will ensure their survival and continuation. They equally believe that the spirit of the deceased returns to the community, and the deceased heads of extended families (the ancestors), have a powerful influence on the BaRonga family life.

* Source: MichelleL, *Southern & Eastern Africa's most recognised tribes*, acacia-africa.com, December 30, 2014 (accessed: June 19, 2019).

Summary

The full text of this myth is found in: *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa* by Clyde W. Ford, in the United States and Canada by Bantam Books, 1999, pp. 96–101.). This is only a brief summary of the story. The full text of the myth and others can be read in the book cited above.

A young man fails to find any damsel beautiful enough to be his wife in his village. So, he travels to a distant village in search of a wife against the counsel of his elders. He subsequently finds a beautiful lady. The lady's tribesmen are a bit wary about entrusting their daughter to a complete stranger, but very soon succumb to the

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temptation of the handsome bride price he is ready to pay. After the marriage, they offer the bride a maid to help her at her matrimonial home as it is the custom. Surprisingly, she rejects the offer and instead demands to take the village sacred buffalo known as “Miracle Worker of the Plains”. The elders refuse because the survival of the village depends on the beast and failure on her part to feed it properly could have fatal consequences on the village. Somehow, this lady is able to cause the buffalo to follow her though unseen by her husband. The lady makes the buffalo to perform all her house chores and farm work to the amazement of everyone. Unfortunately, because the lady does not feed the buffalo sufficiently, it is forced to steal food from people’s farms. This raises an alarm and the people decide to hire a skilled hunter to track down the beast and kills it. The hunter they hire is the girl’s husband who is completely unaware that the buffalo belongs to his wife. The hunter finds it and kills it and the flesh is shared among the entire village. The lady tries and fails to resurrect the beast using magic. So, she travels back home and informs her people of the calamity that has befallen them. Soon afterwards, her husband follows her to the village to look for her. Upon arrival, people accuse him of killing their sacred buffalo. As he tries to explain his ignorance, the people take their own lives.

Analysis

Totems are an integral part of African traditions and may be either individually or communally owned. These totems are believed to help their owners spiritually and to perform sacred acts for them. They may live for as long as possible, provided they are well fed and kept. It is believed that the spirits of the individuals or communities who own totems live in them, if any evil that befalls the totem is immediately transferred to its owners. That is why the villagers kill themselves after the death of their totem. Totems are therefore a source of help in times of trouble and a source of disaster if not handled with care.

The myth illustrates the consequences of neglecting the bond with a totem, which leads to the death of a whole village. It also demonstrates the disregard for traditional norms that ensure the spiritual strength of a people. The bride does not heed the advice of the elders of her clan.

The sacred animal motif is common to many cultures worldwide, including the ancient Greeks and Romans, or even ancient Egyptians where it took the form of religious animal worshipping.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Disobedience Magic Old age (Old people) Respect Society Violence
Further Reading	Edwards, Eric, *Totemism Revisited: An essay on the meaning, origin, history and mythology of totemism and totemistic society from prehistoric times to its survivals in modern folklore*, ericwedwards.wordpress.com, July 4, 2013 (accessed: June 19, 2019). Ford, Clyde W., *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

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