

NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE FOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is probable that a student entering secondary school has come into contact at some point in his education with literature that has been classified as mythical, probably introduced to him by the reading or hearing of some of the better known Greek and Roman myths. His knowledge of myth may be limited to a familiarity with the stories, rather than to a more complicated and often controversial study of what myths are, how they can be interpreted, and how contemporary societies involve themselves in the process of myth-making. It is likely, also, that he has no acquaintance with the mythologies and folklore of those cultures in close proximity to him, in particular, those of the aboriginal North American Indians. Though knowledge of their semihistorical heroes is fragmentary, "no other primitive people has such an extensive and accurate record of its myths, tales, and legends as these people."¹ Having withstood the test of oral tradition, their body of tales is well established and now well preserved through the efforts of Indian and non-Indian collectors alike, who have recognized the

¹Stith Thompson, Tales of the North American Indian (Bloomington, 1929), p. xvi.

important contributions these primitive tales could make to the study of man and to the preservation of a most important part of Indian culture.

Lacking a writing system by which to record their philosophies and literature, Indian Americans gave their attention to the spoken word, experimenting with it in order to discover the most effective elements of the ancient and basic art of telling a story. It is unfortunate that many of the old tales are known by only a few Indians, most of whom are over seventy years of age. Those younger Indians who are not aware of the presence of giants, monsters, and superhuman heroes in the earliest literature of other peoples often seem embarrassed by the superstitiousness of their ancestors and, consequently, are apologetic.² The person who is familiar with the folktales in the languages of the Old World may be amazed to find the obvious parallels between them and the oral Indian literature. Those who approach the study of Indian mythology and folklore condescendingly, thinking of them as the quaint and trivial fables of a subhuman species, will find instead the Indian effort to answer the most basic questions which man has about his existence and its meaning. Daniel Brinton describes their philosophy as "in image and incident, the opinions . . . on the mightiest topics of human thought, on the origin and destiny of man, his motives for

²Ella E. Clark, Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest (Los Angeles, 1966), p. 2.

duty and his grounds of hope, and the source, history and fate of all external nature."³ Therefore, these stories have much to say regarding Indian concepts and attitudes about life.

The qualities shared by human beings are as readily apparent in these tales as in the tales of those cultures more closely connected with the earliest history of the white man. The pattern of human life is the same everywhere, and the psychiatrist C. G. Jung has shown that in every group of human beings, no matter how isolated in time and space, there is a set of myths which conforms to an elaborate pattern of identical propositions and characters and of parallel situations. Jung attributes these identical phenomena to a "collective unconscious." Following Jung's idea, the literary critic Northrop Frye develops the principle of literature following after a mythology in the history of civilization. He defines myth as "a simple and primitive effort of the imagination to identify the human with the nonhuman world, and its most typical result is a story about a god."⁴ Frye sees mythology as merging into literature, with myth then becoming a "structural principle of story-telling" and the continuing framework of the mythology taking the shape of a "feeling of lost identify which we had once and may have again."⁵

³Daniel G. Brinton, American Hero-Myths (Philadelphia, 1882), p. x.

⁴Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination (Bloomington, 1968), p. 110.

⁵Ibid.

The study of ancient legends, of primitive people, and of fictions in contemporary societies reveals that mankind has the propensity to personify its instincts, delegating to a personified god or hero the responsibility for man's desires, strengths, weaknesses, moral laws, and his destiny. These figures, or models, which recur in all literatures have been called by Jung archetypes, which means "implanted from the beginning" and applies to the numberless similar experiences that, to Jung, are embedded in the racial memory. Whether or not one accepts the idea of the "collective unconscious," he must still recognize the appearance of these patterns in different mythologies. Albert Lavin, writing in The Uses of Myth, groups these experiences into stories such as those of "death and rebirth, sexual duality, mother earth and heavenly father, the Promethean struggle with the gods, the search for an ultimate illumination, etc."⁶ Foremost of these archetypes is the hero, whose presence in Indian tales will be discussed later.

The greatest contribution these North American Indian tales can offer to any student is pleasure, and they are worthy of study if for no other reason. But there is much more to be gained from such a study. What a remarkable opportunity is available for the observation of literature at its most fundamental level, where the story is the thing,

⁶Paul A. Olson, editor, The Uses of Myth (Champaign, 1968), p. 45.

where the approach to the subject is direct and unhindered by the compulsion to be subtle! Characterized by a simple faith and by a loving acceptance of life as it is, these Indian stories are not concerned with the scientific, logical accuracy demanded by a technologically superior people. While most myths and legends are now considered by Indian and non-Indian alike to be entertaining history, they were at one time closely related to the Indian's intensely religious life. For him, these religious tales were as sacred as the most sacred book of any other religion is to its adherents. To some, these stories are still sacred, and there are other stories that have not yet been told to the outsider because of their connection with present religion and ritual. Speaking with authority, Indian tales tell the Indian "how the world came to be the way that it is, reveal to him exactly what he must know to adjust to his environs, and give him a glimpse at the sheer excitement offered by danger and pleasure, evil and good--in brief, by life itself."⁷ For the Indian, the "word" is the powerful, supreme reality, and his respect for it has made him a master teller of tales. It should be made clear at this point that each tribe has its own peculiar way of expressing itself. There are more than fifty distinct Indian languages in which are expressed the individual characteristics of a tribe, differences based on influences such as natural

⁷Tristram P. Coffin, editor, Indian Tales of North America (Philadelphia, 1961), p. xv.

environment, the form taken by the group, and individual differences in values and attitudes.

Most of the mythological tales are set in a much earlier era, in a time when any part of existence, whether animate or inanimate, behaved as human beings behave; this concept of humanity dominates most of the tales. One must accept this concept and, like the Indian, not question the logic involved in a hero being at once both animal and human. Coffin finds that the tales serve to account for the Indian's way of life, the mysteries of nature, the structure of the Indian social system, and the origin of necessities such as hunting.⁸ Other stories, like the Greek fables of Aesop, aid in tribal socialization by pointing a moral. No reality of life, no matter how unpleasant or earthy, is passed over in Indian literature. The stories are true to life, incorporating "fancy, evil, cruelty, crudity, beauty, and good all at once. . . ."⁹ Through their study, one may gain a better understanding of the primitive mind and of its direct approach to mythmaking, where metaphor figures prominently. Albert Lavin, in discussing myth, makes the following comments about it and the benefits to be gained from its study:

Myth, conceived of as symbolic form, underpins all human expression; as a way of organizing the human response to reality, it holds a central place in literature. It is a fundamental aspect of the way we "process" experience and give it shape in the forms of language. The study of myth therefore

⁸Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

⁹Ibid., p. xvi.

should enable us to understand our discipline and give depth and order to our teaching of literature; it should deepen our understanding of metaphor and clarify the intimate connections between history and literature as it watches the interplay between social mythology and timeless archetypes. Myth gives voice to the whole of man; it is a mode of knowing, metaphor its characteristic device.¹⁰

Lavin further states that these archetypal images of experience may help the student to explain his own world. He may be able to enact vicariously those problems of identity which cause such agonies to a child as he grows up.¹¹ Stith Thompson, feeling that the American Indian tale offers ample material for profitable study, suggests that attention be given to "the groping toward literary style, the attempt to narrate interestingly, the primitive conception of humor--such are only a few of the possibilities of their use for the student."¹²

Through a study of North American Indian folklore and mythology, the non-Indian can at last begin to know the Indian with whom he has shared a continent and to find out something of his religion, traditions, history, humor, and tribal peculiarities. The approach to this study through motifs, already familiar to the students from other literature, offers a practical approach and one that can be adapted to classroom use, perhaps either in the study of myth, the study of literary types, the study of literature per se, or perhaps in the

¹⁰Olson, pp. 19-20.

¹¹Ibid., p. 46.

¹²Thompson, p. xxiii.

study of cultural differences. With the aim of developing the concept of the universality of man, this emphasis on recurring motifs can build from the common experiences of students. Four of these motifs will be discussed in later chapters, and in order that the wide variety of possibilities for these motifs in Indian literature may be shown, the discussion of each motif will be accompanied by some summaries of myths which utilize the motif in question. A final chapter will be concerned with suggested uses of Indian mythology and its recurring motifs in the secondary school.

CHAPTER II

THE INDIAN TRADITION OF STORYTELLING

The Indian tradition of storytelling had doubtlessly begun when the first Americans arrived on this continent, for they had language and the inevitable accompaniment of language--mythologies. These homo sapiens, now designated as Indians, were the first humanoid species to have occupied the Americas, as far as it is known. Coming from central and eastern Asia, and perhaps even by raft from the Pacific Islands, these early travelers, the vanguard of a long series of migrants, began arriving here, some think, as early as ten thousand years before Christ.¹ These first Americans came with the knowledge of fire; they could make weapons of stone and cordage of sinew or vegetable fiber. The dog was the only animal they had domesticated. Later, they developed the working of soft metals into ornaments, and domesticated plants. Their migration pattern was not a simple west-to-east movement, as Alice Marriott and Carol K. Rachlin explain:

Some groups followed the western mountain ranges from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Some stopped on the way; some turned back and reversed their steps to the northward along the coasts and rivers of the continents. In every place where the migrants

¹Alice Marriott and Carol K. Rachlin, American Indian Mythology (New York, 1968), p. 3.

settled there followed a period of learning to use and control their environments, and of adapting themselves to the ecology of the new area.²

Probably these first Americans brought a diversity of languages with them from Asia, and these languages further developed into more than two hundred ethnic units of eight great stocks.³ Those who translate or transcribe the oral Indian literature face certain problems in working with this wide variety of American Indian speech. A further complication in translating is that these languages are extremely different from all Indo-European idiom. The translator must translate not only the actual words but also the "cultural matrix of which the verbal document is an organic part."⁴ A translator can hope to make the translation exact only in spirit, for the word order and the entire way of thought are different. For example, the Hopi language has many words symbolizing concepts that are alien to the non-Indian; these words may connote factors that are invisible, fluctuating, and intangible.⁵ It is unfortunate that some transcribers and translators have not been as faithful to the original verbal document as they might have been. Their "Anglicizing" of certain stories has done an injustice, resulting in the impression that these stories are sterile and lifeless.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴Margot Astrov, editor, American Indian Prose and Poetry (New York, 1962), p. 5.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

Though one can not always be sure that he has an accurate account of a story, he can still find an interesting and worthwhile story, enhanced by his visualization of the story as it must have been told earlier or, in some cases, as it is still told. Sight as well as sound has been important in the oral literature of some tribes, with gesture, or sign language, accompanying the story. The oral literature of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest is still presented in the following manner:

A skillful Indian storyteller is actor as well as narrator. His facial expressions are lively, his eyes twinkle, he gestures not only with his hands but with his feet, he changes his voice to fit his characters. When one of his characters sings, the storyteller sings.⁶

Clark quotes the description the poet-adventurer Joaquin Miller gave of the storytelling custom among the Modoc of southern Oregon and northern California:

At night, when no wars or excitement of any kind stirred the village they would gather in the chief's or other great bark lodges around the fires, and tell and listen to stories; a red wall of men in a great circle, the women a little back, and the children still behind, asleep in the skins and blankets. How silent! You can hear but one voice at a time in an Indian village.⁷

In some tribes the most respected members who were good storytellers gave the children the information they needed through stories; a man took the boys, and a woman, the girls. This instruction took place in a special winter lodge, kept

⁶Clark, p. 2.

⁷Ibid., p. 9.

warm all day by hot rocks.⁸ When it was too cold to play outdoors in the early winter mornings, the grandparents in some tribes would instruct the children through tribal tales. Sometimes the storyteller was a professional who went to Indian villages to entertain with his tales. Another situation among some tribes was to recognize one or two old men or women as the best storytellers and to invite them to a host's lodge to entertain for an evening. A much more common tradition, especially in the Pacific Northwest, was to have the legends and myths told by the best storyteller in the winter lodge, inhabited by two or more related families. Evidence leads investigators to believe that this kind of entertainment took place in winter only.⁹ Through the long winter evenings the Indians had the best entertainment available to them--nature studies, history, fables and the stories of adventure, tragedy, and comedy.

Among the Yaqui Indians today storytelling is quite informal, with only the pascola stories relegated to a special fiesta time for their relation. No special person is an assigned storyteller; rather, any adult may be the storyteller whenever a group gathers in the ramada or in the house. Older Yaquis tell of a time when storytelling was done differently, and when more Yaquis knew the stories.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 129.

⁹Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰Ruth Warner Giddings, Yaqui Myths and Legends (Tucson, 1959), p. 15.

Today one still has an opportunity to hear Indians carrying on their long oral tradition, even though the oratory may be delivered in English. There remains yet in their expression, however, the solemnity, grace, and respect which have come to be associated with the Indian use of language. Had one the opportunity to be present now at some Indian religious ceremony, without much effort he should be able to imagine himself far back in time, lost for the moment in a primitive world.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Indian myths, like all others, came into being as a result of the universal desire for knowledge, pleasure, and tradition, and these legends, an integral part of tribal organization, related to everything that the Indian did; for each of his acts there was a tradition. From these stories Indians learned the "habits and characteristics of the animals, and the social code and history of their people."¹ Environment had much to do with shaping the nature of a story; therefore, it is usually possible to tell from what section of the country a story comes. At the same time, the limited activities of hunting, camping, and warfare did not offer a wide variety of subject matter, and for this reason similar incidents occur in legends of tribes widely separated. Another explanation for their occurrence, other than the Jungian, is that stories were exchanged by captive prisoners, trading parties, or through intermarriage. There exists also the possibility of some original unknown relationship. When stories were exchanged, they were "either adapted to conform to the ideas and patterns already familiar

¹Marion E. Gridley, Indian Legends of American Scenes (New York, 1939), p. 10.

or were repeated as heard, a practice which quickly identified them as 'foreign material.'² In addition to the correspondence found among Indian tales, there exists also a correspondence between them and the tales of other lands, including the stories of the Bible. Every Indian tribe has a legend of the flood and other stories which are "reminiscent of Jonah, the building of the tower of Babel, the banishment from the Garden of Eden, and the persecution of Christ."³

As did all primitive people, the Indian once lived in a world of which he knew nothing objectively, and not knowing what the mysterious elements of nature were or from whence they originated, he assumed that they had life and gave each of them a personality. Everything had life or spirit--the trees, birds, animals, rocks, earth, "even the hail which fell from the sky, had a spirit and a language and a song of its own and might be an inspiration to a warrior."⁴ He saw within the things of the forest and the animals a life "perfect and free from the weaknesses of man, and therefore a life superior to man."⁵ Because man could not survive without the "fruits of the earth, the sacrifice of animal lives, and material means," he was surely, he thought, the most humble of all living things.⁶

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴Clark, p. 7.

⁵Gridley, p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 10.

Because these spirits inhabited each element and force of nature, it was they who controlled nature and they who were worthy of respect. If an Indian had been treated well by some force of nature, he regarded its spirit as good; ill treatment indicated to him the presence of an evil spirit. He would do whatever was necessary to win the spirit's favor and avoid its wrath. One such spirit venerated by the Indians of the Pacific Northwest is described by Ella Clark.

The spirit of the storm was visualized as a huge bird. The flapping of its wings caused the sound of thunder; the flash of its eyes was the lightning. It lived in a cloud above the highest peak the tribe could see, or in a cave in the mountains. Indians near the coast believed the Thunderbird flew to the Pacific Ocean to get the whales which were its food. Rain clouds and thunderstorms often followed it home from the ocean. The Indians feared Thunderbird and tried not to anger it.⁷

In some traditions nature spirits seem more like people than like the mountain, lake, or rock whose name they bear. Mountains could move about and could have wives and children, these being the smaller peaks and buttes nearby. It is common for a story about them to begin, "Long ago when the mountains were people."⁸ Many myths and legends were connected with rivers and lakes, one of them being the myth regarding a demon supposed to be living in a lake near Tacoma. Because of his presence, Indians never fished or swam in the lake.⁹ Those spirits who were in control of rain were supposed to

⁷Clark, p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 8.

⁹Ibid., p. 51.

have lived in deep lakes surrounded by tall trees. These spirits, it was believed, did not want their waters disturbed; therefore Indians would not disturb the lakes in any way, and from some of them would not even take water for cooking. Other lakes were said to be inhabited by strange animals, the spirits of beings long dead, who in the dark and quiet of the night would come out on shore for food.

Many tribes believed that before the first Indians were created, the world was inhabited by a race of animal people, and in his myths the Indian has given these animals personalities, just as he has such phenomena as rivers and mountains. In some myths they appear as giants, an ant being larger than a cow is now. Though possessing the same characteristics as animals today, they could also talk, reason, and perform superhuman feats. They lived exactly as the Indians themselves lived. As gods, they could transform themselves into other bodies at will. As mediators between man and a higher spirit, they were man's spirit-helpers and protectors. Most tribes practiced the custom of having an animal helper for each individual, determined through the medium of visions which one could receive when he fasted and prayed.¹⁰ Different tribes had different heroes, but in each tribe this Culture Hero stood for the "strength, wisdom, and perception of men."¹¹ He protected women and children

¹⁰Gridley, p. 9.

¹¹Marriott and Rachlin, p. 15.

from harm, sent visions of power to young people, and intervened between man and nature.¹² In the myths of many tribes, this hero, or "Changer," transformed the ancient world into the world that now exists. It was he who transformed the creatures of the mythological age into "animals, birds, fishes, stars, rocks, and trees, in preparation for the race of human beings he was planning to create."¹³

When this Culture Hero is used to explain natural phenomena, especially those which point a moral, he is called the Trickster, or Trickster-Hero. In this role, he makes trouble and displays traits like greed that are considered undesirable by the white man. Often he is found as the central character in stories best termed "ethno-pornography."¹⁴ Sometimes the good he does is accidental; at other times it is intentional. In the role of Hero, he often performs valuable services for his people, such as bringing them food. A more thorough discussion of his place in Indian mythology will follow in a later chapter.

Other than the Hero, the Trickster, and the Trickster-Hero distributed almost universally among the American Indians north of Mexico, there are also the figures of Grandmother Spider and her grandsons, the Twin War Gods. Grandmother Spider may be described in this way:

¹²Ibid.

¹³Clark, p. 82.

¹⁴Marriott and Rachlin, p. 15.

Grandmother Spider is all of womankind, Eve and Lilith in one, old to begin with wherever we meet her although she is capable of transforming herself into a young and beautiful woman when she wishes. Spider Woman lives alone, or with her grandsons between their adventures. Grandmother Spider directs men's thoughts and destinies through her kindness and wise advice, or lures to the underworld those whose thoughts and actions seem to her profane.¹⁵

The War Twins symbolize the duality found in all men and in all religions. One is good, the other bad; though young, they can become old suddenly. Often they are described as having as many female traits as male traits. In Hopi myth the Twins face each other, their balance keeping the world steady on its axis. In numerous myths, they are virgin-born or of supernatural parentage on at least one side. Usually they are presented as human beings, active rather than contemplative. Having destroyed enemy gods, they bring safety and harmony into the world.¹⁶

There is disagreement about the Indians' belief in a Supreme Being before the white man came. In some myths mentioned previously, a supernatural being, or "Changer," was creator and transformer, but apparently he was not worshipped. In mythologies where the Creator is a Supreme Being, it is he who makes men of dust or of mud. Under him is a group of other great supernatural beings. The animating force of the universe, Power, comes from this Creator.¹⁷ In other stories it is not clear whether the "Great Spirit" was a Supreme

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 16.

Being, chief of the sky spirits, or some other powerful supernatural.¹⁸

Numerous mythologies state that the period of the animal people ended suddenly, with the world changing, turning over, or turning inside out. At this time human beings were created. Some tribes believed that at this time animals reduced to their present size and became more numerous. In some traditions where Coyote is "the Changer," Coyote overcomes evil and creates Indians:

. . . Coyote destroyed the power of the monsters and other evil beings and then changed the good ancients into Indians. He divided them into groups and settled them in different places, giving each group a different name and a different language. These good ancients became the ancestors of all the Indian tribes.¹⁹

The concept of only one supernatural being and, in some cases, the concept of a Supreme Being over all are not easy for an Indian to accept or to understand. And it is the polytheistic view that distinguishes Indian from non-Indian literature on the North American continent.

Most North American Indian mythologies provide for a world, or worlds, beyond this one, and sometimes the concept of an after life is clearly stated. The concept of an after life is missing entirely in other Indian mythologies, and whether it ever existed at all remains a mystery.²⁰ The

¹⁸Clark, p. 8.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 81-82.

²⁰Marriott and Rachlin, p. 17.

concepts about death and an after life vary greatly from tribe to tribe, offering some of the most fascinating reading in Indian mythology. A version from the Pacific Northwest, "Coyote and Eagle Visit the Land of the Dead," uses the familiar motif of the husband going to the World of the Spirits to bring back his wife, just as Orpheus of Greek mythology went to Hades to bring back Eurydice. Coyote, who has lost his sister and some of his friends, is saddened that man must die and go away to a spirit world. Eagle's wife has also died, and Coyote tries to comfort Eagle: "When spring comes the dead shall again come back." But spring is not soon enough for Eagle, so he and Coyote start out for the land of the dead. After several days they come to a big body of water, across which they see many houses. No one comes for them until after sunset, for the dead sleep during daylight hours. When the four spirits in a boat reach Coyote and Eagle, the two accompany them across the water to a lodge where the spirits can be heard singing and dancing. The lodge is heavily flooded with light from the moon hanging above the spirits. Coyote and Eagle see many of their old friends, dressed like all the others in ceremonial robes that are decorated with shells and with elks' teeth. No one notices the two strangers, nor pays any attention to the basket Coyote carries.

When the spirits leave early in the morning, Coyote kills Frog, the guardian of the moon, and puts on his clothes.

When the people return later to dance and sing, they do not realize that it is Coyote standing by the moon. When no one is looking at him, Coyote swallows the moon, and under the cover of darkness Eagle puts the spirit people in Coyote's basket. After they have traveled a long way toward the land of the living, Coyote and Eagle hear noises from the basket. The spirit people are coming to life, complaining and wanting out, but Eagle says that they must remain in the basket until they have reached their destination. Coyote, tired from carrying the basket, decides to free the spirit people. As they leave his basket, they immediately resume their spirit forms and start back to the land of the dead. Not feeling able to recapture them, Coyote rules that after people die, they shall never again return to life.²¹

²¹Clark, pp. 193-195.

CHAPTER IV

THE HERO IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

The hero in Indian mythology differs remarkably from the usual hero known to students in this country, for he can be foolish and wise, lazy and industrious, boastful and humble, destructive and helpful, and evil and good. Judged by Christian standards, he may seem "unethical, dishonest, and petty."¹ There are now hundreds of legends concerning this heroic figure, though there surely must have been thousands earlier. Whether a tribe refers to him as Coyote, Raven, Saynday, Spider, the Foolish One, or by some other name, he is the same. Most often he is represented in his trickster role, where he behaves foolishly, boasting of his abilities. Full of guile, he usually works on the side of evil, but his mischievous plans fail more often than they succeed. Because of his failures, parents often tell of his adventures to children to illustrate human weaknesses and faults and to show what should not be done. In many cases his works bring good to man, some of his gifts being the first canoe, fire, and tobacco. Often, too, he is the creator and transformer of the earth. As a performer of wonderful deeds, he figures prominently in tribal mythology, his legends being told in

¹Coffin, p. xvi.

the tribal religious organization. In addition to his roles as regulator of the world, trickster, and teacher of culture habits, he was further regarded as a guardian spirit and as an ancestor of the tribe. Generally, his character corresponds with the character of those who venerate him. The imagery used in myths about him corresponds, also, with the scenery of the area occupied by these Indians.² In most mythologies, this hero existed before the great flood, having had an untimely birth through the armpit or the side of his mother, causing her death. Some of these myths state that he had a virgin birth.³

To the Indian, the existence of good and bad, both strongly emphasized in this hero, is not hard to reconcile. He explains that in every person are found both good and bad principles of behavior. In some people, good predominates; in others, bad is dominant. His concern, then, lies with the way people are, rather than with moral questions of good and evil.

In the Algonkin Indian mythology, this divine hero usually appears as a rabbit, the personification of dawn. He was the great creator and the ancestor who survived the flood.⁴ Among the Delawares he is called Manibozho and is identical with the great rabbit. The Menominees call him

²Stephen D. Peet, Myths and Symbols (Chicago, 1905), p. 362.

³Ibid., p. 374.

⁴Ibid., p. 369.

Manibush, and this little rabbit, born from a virgin, destroyed the evil manitou, the great fish.⁵ The earth-maker of the Winnebagos was Maunna, the wolf. The chief divinity of the Eskimos was a phantom in the shape of a huge dog.

As the chief character in the myths of the western half of North America, Coyote is the hero of numerous stories, which form a regular cycle, a saga.⁶ Raven, however, plays a more important role in some Pacific Coast Indian mythologies. In some myths he is the culture hero who created and changed the world; in others he helps the Man-Who-Changed-Things.

Among the Kiowa Indians this Trickster-Hero is Saynday. Yet he is the same as Old Man Coyote of the Southwest, Kimokomas of the Great Basin, or Gitchi-Manito of the Great Lakes. Each Saynday story begins, "Saynday was coming along." Bad children are compared to Saynday when they receive this scolding, "Daw! Sayndaym!" meaning "Messy! Like Saynday!"⁷ While many Saynday stories are outright pornography, others have no references to things pornographic. A later Saynday story tells of his meeting Smallpox, "dressed like a white man, in a tall hat and gloves," from whom he buys freedom for the Kiowas from the smallpox epidemic of the 1870's. Saynday

⁵Ibid., p. 371.

⁶Jaime de Angulo, Indian Tales (New York, 1953), p. 239.

⁷Alice Marriott, Saynday's People (Lincoln, 1963), p. x.

sends the spirit away, to settle with another tribe, yet Saynday himself contracts smallpox.⁸

The description Alice Marriott gives of Saynday in her collection of Saynday stories, Winter-Telling Stories, does not fit the stereotyped physical description of a non-Indian hero. Saynday's appearance alone is a source of humor.

When he was here on earth, he was a funny-looking man. He was tall and thin, and he had a little thin mustache that drooped down over his mouth. The muscles of his arms and legs bulged out big and then pulled in tight, as if somebody had tied strings around them. He had a funny, high, whinny voice, and he talked his own language. His language was enough like other people's so they could understand it, but it was his own way of talking too.⁹

Humor, also, prevails in many stories about him, such as the story "How Saynday Ran a Foot Race with Coyote." In this account the Trickster-Hero Saynday is foiled and an important moral is pointed. It begins as Saynday is "coming" along, when he sees some prairie dogs dancing in the hot sun. Feeling hungry, he decides that they look like what he wants for lunch, but, unfortunately, he has no bow and arrow with him. He walks over to them, but they ignore his greeting and keep on dancing. Picking up a big stick, he says aloud, "That's a funny kind of dancing." This time they listen to him, but they continue dancing. Again Saynday speaks, "I know a better kind of dancing than that." Being vain about their dancing, they stop to ask what kind of dancing. He

⁹Ibid., p. 1.

explains that his kind of dancing is different, the kind done by some foreign tribes. When the leader asks Saynday to demonstrate, Saynday tells everyone to make a line, join hands, close his eyes, and dance forward while Saynday sings a very complicated song. Only one prairie dog, at the end of the line, objects. The rest are enthusiastic and begin to dance. Saynday, who is standing behind the line, drums the stick on the ground and sings. Each time he says a certain word of the song, he hits a prairie dog on the head, killing him. As he reaches the end of the line, the prairie dog who disapproved of the dance opens her eyes, sees what has been happening, and quickly runs into her hole. Unable to reach her, Saynday reasons that it would be bad for people if he killed all the prairie dogs.

Next he gathers up the prairie dogs and prepares to cook them. He finds an old iron kettle which he fills with water; then he builds a fire of sticks, chips, and odds and ends. As his soup cooks, he sits there, sniffing the good cooking. Someone else has smelled it too--Coyote--and he looks for the source. Looking over the edge of a rise, he sees Saynday and the boiling kettle. He sits down to think how he can get Saynday's lunch, for Saynday has surely played a trick on somebody himself in order to have got it.

Coyote follows his plan; he sticks sunflower sap and milkweed down all over his body to give the appearance that he is covered with sores. Then, leaning on a crooked stick,

he limps over to Saynday, whom he greets warmly. When he asks Saynday to share his meal, Saynday refuses, saying that he has barely enough for himself. Even when Coyote reminds him that he is crippled and covered with sores and that he would gladly share were his health improved, Saynday still refuses.

Coyote then proposes that they gamble for the soup by racing to Mt. Scott and back, the winner getting the pot of soup. Looking at Coyote's bent body, Saynday laughs, agreeing to the race and offering to tie rocks on his arms and legs as a handicap. In the early part of the race, Coyote hobbles along, staying about even with the heavily-weighted Saynday, but when they round Mt. Scott, Coyote throws away his stick and moves like a racehorse. He flies straight to the soup, which he devours completely. Arriving just as Coyote is finishing, Saynday complains that Coyote has eaten all the soup and won in an unfair race. But Coyote has an answer for Saynday: "The race was as fair as the way you got the soup in the first place."¹⁰

The Trickster-Hero Coyote also fails in some of his grand plans. One such failure occurs in the Ute story "Coyote Borrows Feathers," which contains the world-wide motif of failure to follow instructions being the cause of an unsuccessful flight. This version, however, is typically American Indian. The Trickster Coyote comes to a big river

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 52-58.

and jumps in for a bath. After he eats, he goes to sleep in the brush and willows. All the while he sleeps, he dreams of birds, and he awakes to find a number of geese on the lake. He joins them, inquiring of them how they fly so easily without falling. They explain that flying is as easy as walking. Heartened by their explanation, Coyote asks them for some feathers so that he, too, can fly. They refuse him the feathers because they are afraid that he might fall, or be too noisy, or get lost from the others. Coyote cannot accept their refusal, for the idea of the glorious sight he would present to the Indians is uppermost in his mind. At last they agree to help him, and they completely cover him with their own goose feathers. He flies easily over the lake, to the approval of the geese. All together, they rise from the lake, uttering the goose cry. But Coyote does not stop crying; he continues after the proper time for the rising cry to end. When they all alight, the geese reproach him for not following their custom. His defense is that he may forget the cry unless he continues to practice it. They warn him that they will pull out all of his feathers if he cries again improperly. When they have again risen into the air, Coyote does not stop crying. The geese pull out his feathers, and he falls to the ground. Though he is injured, he gets up and says, "From now on I think I'll like to travel on the ground."¹¹

¹¹Coffin, pp. 140-141.

As a teacher of culture habits to the ancients, Coyote meant a great deal to the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, especially to those who lived along the Columbia River. Many of Coyote's worthy deeds are recounted in "How Coyote Helped the People." According to this account, Old-One, who had made the earth and the ancient animal people, sends Coyote to teach the best way of doing things and to kill the evil beings who threaten earth. To ease the hard life of those ignorant people, Coyote first breaks down the dam five Beaver women have built in the lower Columbia, telling them that it is wrong to pen salmon there, for others farther up the river need the salmon for food. As a punishment, he changes these women into sandpipers, who will always run by the water's edge. With the released salmon following him in the water, Coyote walks along the bank, bringing these fish to the hungry people at all the villages.

At one point he stops to teach people how to make a fish trap, how to dry fish, and how to store them. Farther along, he teaches the way to make a spear and to spear salmon. At each stop he demonstrates ways to cook fish; before his coming they had eaten fish raw. To this day there is a round-bottomed hole in the rocks where Coyote taught people how to cook in a pothole.

Then he and the people have a great feast of salmon, at which he explains that every spring salmon will come up the river to lay their eggs. To celebrate the coming of the

salmon, he directs the people to have a big feast and at this feast to thank the salmon spirits for guiding the fish to them. During the five days of the feast, the people must not cut the salmon with a knife and must cook it only by roasting it. Such a practice will insure plenty of salmon to eat and store.

Coyote continues up the river, leading the salmon. Wherever he is treated kindly, he makes the river narrow, insuring a good place to catch salmon. When he reaches the Chelan River, he asks the animal people there for a nice young girl for a wife in return for salmon. They refuse, for they think it improper for a young girl to marry anyone as old as Coyote. In anger, he blocks up the canyon of the Chelan River, thus creating a waterfall over which no salmon can pass. To this day, there are no salmon in Lake Chelan. Wherever he is refused a wife, he creates a waterfall.

As he travels up the rivers, he names the streams and mountains, kills threatening monsters, kills the Ice People and defeats Blizzard. In defeating Blizzard, he provides that winters not be so cold. He also plants trees, bushes, and roots so that there will be food for the new people. When the new people, the Indians, come, he shows them how to make fire, a knife, an ax, a canoe, a bow and arrow, a net, a fishing platform, and a basket trap for catching fish. He teaches them that salmon must always be kept clean, lest they be ashamed and refuse to enter the Indians' river.

Coyote did many good things for the Indians, but he did some wicked things also. Some say that for his good work he was given a place in the sky; others say that he was punished by having to climb a rope to the sky, from which he fell. When he at last struck ground, he was mashed flat. A voice spoke to him as he lay there, "You shall always be a wanderer and shall forever howl and cry for your sins." And to this day, coyotes howl at night and wander friendless and hungry over the earth.¹²

¹²Clark, pp. 96-98.

CHAPTER V

THE CREATION IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Most tribes have some explanation of their beginnings, either gathered together in relatively long mythologies or told as separate tales. Perhaps these American Indian cosmogonies ought to be described as "cosmic myths of migration and transformation," rather than as creation myths.¹ Some tribes have no account of the act of creation itself; they accept that the world has always been. The Zuni Indians do include a true creation ex nihilo; most tribes, however, focus on the arrival of man on the present earth and on the re-creation and transformation after the great flood. Hartley Alexander describes the usual pattern of creation myths:

A few tribes recognize a creator who makes or a pro-creator who generates the world and its inhabitants; but the usual conception is either of a pre-existent sky world, peopled with the images of the beings of an earth-world yet to come into being, or else of a kind of cosmic womb from which the First People were to have their origin. In the former type of legend, the action begins with the descent of a heaven-born Titaness; in the latter, the first act portrays the ascent of the ancestral beings from the place of generation. Uniformly the next act of the world drama details the deeds of a hero or of twin heroes who are the shapers and lawgivers of the habitable earth.

¹Hartley Burr Alexander, North American Mythology (Cambridge, 1916), p. 278.

They conquer the primitive monsters and set in order the furniture of creation; quite generally, one of them is slain, and passes to the underworld to become Plutonian lord. The theft of fire, the origin of death, the liberation of animals, the giving of the arts, the institution of rites are all themes that recur. . . . Universal, too, is the cataclysmic destruction of the earth by flood, or fire and flood, leaving a few survivors to repopulate the restored land. Usually this event marks the close of a First, or Antediluvian Age, in which the people were either animal in form or only abortively human. After the flood the animals are transformed once for all into the beings they now are, while the new race of men is created.²

The most common myth to account for the coming of man to earth begins with the earth being covered with water; out of this primeval water some animal, usually a muskrat, takes either sand or mud, which he brings to the surface. Taking this sand or mud, a culture hero then develops it into the world. Another common myth, though less widely distributed than "The Earthdiver," tells of man as first emerging from a hole in the ground. Generally, no tribe would have both explanations. Myths of the latter type are often quite long and include the coming of death and sex, among other things, into the world. Among the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the explanation of beginnings is sometimes incidental to the story; in these myths, too, the "Creator" begins with something already existing.³ In some other myths the creation of mankind is a rather unimportant theme. Sometimes men are made from grass, ears of maize, feathers, sticks, or the

²Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

³Clark, p. 132.

bones of the dead. Sometimes they issue from a swamp or a spring.⁴ Especially apparent in all creation myths is the imagery drawn from local scenery.

In "The Earthdiver" myth of the Canadian Indians, the great hare, Manibozho, is floating on a wooden raft with all kinds of animals. He persuades an otter, a beaver, and a muskrat to dive to the bottom of the water for soil. Only the muskrat is successful. Manibozho takes a grain of sand from him and makes a mountain of it; this mountain soon grows to become the earth.⁵

The Zuni myth, a true creation story, is transcribed by Brinton from Cushing's Zuni Creation Myths:

With the substance of himself did the all-father Awonawilona impregnate the great river, the world-holding sea, so that scums rose upon its surface, waxing wide and apart, until they became the all-containing earth and the all-covering sky. From the lying together of these twain upon the great world waters, all beings of earth, men and creatures came to exist, and firstly in the four-fold womb of the world. In the nethermost of the cave-wombs of the world, the seed of men and creatures took form and life. The earth lay like a vast island, wet and shifting, amid the great waters, and the men groped about down in the murky underworld. Then arose the master magician Janauluha, and bearing a staff plumed and covered with feathers, he guided them upward to the world of light. There, by the power of his wand, caused them to be and become birds of shining plumage, the raven and the macaw, who were indeed the spirits of the winter and the summer, and the totems of the two first clans of men.⁶

⁴Alexander, p. 311.

⁵Peet, pp. 377-378.

⁶F. H. Cushing, Zuni Creation Myths, cited in Daniel Brinton, Myths of the New World (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 229-230.

This ultimate Zuni god, Awonawilona, as a "he-she," may mean a god beyond sex, or may indicate a god with attributes of both males and females.⁷

Among the Hopis, "Hard Beings Woman" is the generatrix. Though she is of the earth, she lives in the heavenly world and owns the moon and the stars. She creates a youth and a maid, he (Muingwu) to be god of crops, and she (Sand Altar Woman) to be the mother of kachinas in charge of fecundity. In the beginning, Hard Beings Woman lives on the only piece of solid land in existence, around which gathers matter. She and Sun, her equal, cause dry land to appear in the water and the waters to recede eastward and westward. In another version Sun, in making his trip to the east, goes under the earth. When he comes out, he turns over Hard Beings Woman's submerged land, thus making her world into dry land.⁸

The Osage creation myth is another myth of migration. It tells of a time when a part of the Osage lived in the sky. To find out their origin, they went to the Sun, who told them that they were his children. When they came to the Moon, she told them that she had given birth to them and that Sun was their father. She told them that they must go down to earth to live, but when they arrived there, earth was

⁷Hamilton A. Tyler, Pueblo Gods and Myths (Norman, 1964), p. 81.

⁸Ibid., p. 85.

covered with water. Because they were not allowed to return to their home in the sky, they floated about in the air, seeking help from some god. The finest of the animals with them was the elk, and they asked him for help. In an effort to help, he began to sink into the water, calling to the winds. They responded to his plea by blowing the waters upward as in a mist.

Rocks were the first land exposed, and the people journeyed over them, finding nothing there to eat. When the waters had gone down enough, the earth was exposed. The elk was so happy that he rolled over and over, and wherever his loose hairs clung to the soil, they sprang into all things that grow.⁹

The Tewa Indians' emergence myth, "How the People Came to the Middle Place," explains that in the very beginning the whole world was dark. People lived underground in darkness, wondering if their world were all that existed. When Mole came to visit them, they asked if he knew of another world, a different kind of world. He explained that in his travels upward, he could feel a different world, though he could not see it. The people wished to follow him to the other world. With them behind him, he clawed away the earth, passing the dirt back down the line, and thereby closing the tunnel; consequently, they could never find their way back to their old world.

⁹Astrov, p. 96.

When they reached the new world, they were blinded by the light. Frightened, they covered their eyes, but as they did so, they heard a woman's voice instructing them to take their hands away from their eyes slowly, to adjust to the light. The speaker was the bent old Spider Woman, the grandmother of the Earth and of all living things. With her were her twin grandsons, the War Twins. She cautioned the Indians not to be like these War Twins, but to abstain from making weapons or from hurting anyone in any way. Then she showed them corn, and told them how to care for it. Then she told them how to locate their proper home at the Mountain of the South, the Turtle Mountain [Sandia Mountain]. The next day they began to quarrel about the direction in which to travel, and disregarding her warning about going to the Red Mountains of the East, they traveled there. Many were killed by enemy Indians, their shed blood giving the mountains the name Los Sangres, the Mountains of Blood. Continuing to quarrel, they began to make weapons, which they used against their brothers. This time, still disregarding instructions, they went north to the Taos Mountains, where a white bear breathed its cold breath on them, killing some. With no better harmony among themselves, they started back, crossing black lava beds with sharp stones which cut their feet. To this day, there is yet visible a bloody trail on these rocks. When they reached the place at which they had emerged, they saw Grandmother Spider in the sky, crying because of their foolishness. All but two

people ran up into the sky to join her via the road known as the Milky Way. The man and woman who were left obeyed Grandmother Spider's original instructions, which brought them to the Rio Grande. There they found a little animal with a hard back and a design carved and painted on it; the design was of Grandmother Spider's web. This animal was shaped like the mountain they saw in the distance, so they knew that this little animal, the turtle, had shown them their rightful home. Mole and Spider awaited them there.¹⁰

¹⁰Marriott and Rachlin, pp. 65-72.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT FLOOD IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

The conception of a great deluge of waters is found in Indian myths all over the North American continent, occurring so frequently in conjunction with the concept of primeval water, or water that existed before mankind or the world was created, that it is often impossible to distinguish between the two. Sometimes this deluge precedes a new creation of the world rather than a restoration of it. When the idea of the two waters occurs in the same myth, the first is the primeval water, and the second the great destructive flood that covers the entire earth. The cause of the flood is not always the same. Commonly, it originates in the people's sins, though some myths place its origin in the jealousies of the gods.¹ Sometimes a monster, after having drunk up a lake, is killed, and the waters spurt from its stomach. In other accounts, the tears of a jealous suitor or a deserted husband cover the earth.² Some tribes, like the Pueblos, place the flood very close to the emergence, or join the two. The waters do not come from rain but miraculously from the earth, having been loosed by a Horned Water Serpent.³ The causes of

¹Peet, p. 374.

²Thompson, p. 287.

³Tyler, p. 109.

the flood are no doubt affected by the physiographic conditions to which a tribe is accustomed. In places like the arid Southwest the Indians probably could not imagine the existence of primeval water, but conditioned as they were to the sudden floodings of canyons after heavy rains, they could accept the flood as having poured out from the underworld.⁴

Though there are many points of similarity between the deluge myths of other lands and those of America, some of the latter have a peculiar characteristic. The person who survives the flood is usually the first man, the highest deity, the creator of the world, and the guardian of the race.⁵ The way in which this one or these few escape is by a familiar method, one which the tribe knows. The survivors may climb a mountain or a tree, float in a raft or canoe, or hide in a cave.⁶ The Navajos and Aztecs relate that survival is accomplished by the victims' being transformed into birds that can stay above water.⁷ Algonkin legends do not even tell of an antediluvian race nor of any who escaped a flood. The myths of the Dakotas tell of the world having once been destroyed by water, but they suppose that no one escaped. A California Indian group, the Aschochimi, state that no man escaped the flood, but that the animal-man Coyote went forth after the

⁴Alexander, p. 299.

⁵Brinton, Myths of the New World, p. 236.

⁶Ibid., p. 235.

⁷Ibid., p. 240.

waters had gone down and planted the feathers of birds, each kind growing into a different tribe of men.⁸

In numerous myths there is evidence of Christian influence, with the myth being clearly an Indian adaptation of the story of Noah. The deluge myths among the Eskimos may have come from missionaries, but they do possess one remarkable feature, which is that the mountains, after the water had retired, were left covered with a cap of ice. Of course, this tradition may be a remnant of the glacial period, or it may be a means of accounting for the still existent glaciers.⁹ Another unusual account worthy of mention is that of a Northern California tradition which connects the flood with Lake Tahoe. Supposedly, Lake Tahoe was caused by an earthquake, and at the same time a great wave swept over the land. To save themselves, people fled to a "temple tower, which rose like a dome above the lake; but the divinity thrust them like pebbles into a cave; he keeps them there until another earthquake shall occur."¹⁰

Hartley Alexander compares the American deluge myth with the deluge myths of other lands, giving the pattern common in some way to all of them:

Most, if not all, of the incidents of the Noachian deluge are duplicated in one or other of the American deluge myths--the raft containing the hero and surviving animals, the sending out of a succession of

⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁹Peet, p. 364.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 247.

animals to discover soil or vegetation, the landing on a mountain, even the subsequent building of a ladder to heaven, the confusion of tongues, and the dispersal of mankind.¹¹

Though this pattern may be considered universal among myths of all lands, there does exist a great amount of variety in Indian mythology at each stage of the pattern.

The Pawnee version of the deluge myth follows the pattern of the flood's being caused by a god angered at the sins of his people. Pawnees tell that the giants who existed before them did not believe in any of the religious traditions; they did not pray to Tirawa nor show him proper respect. When Tirawa became angry with them, he caused the water to rise up to the level of the land, making the ground very soft. These giants sank into the mud and were drowned. The great bones found on the prairie and in the deep canyons are theirs. After Tirawa had destroyed the race of giants, he created small men like those of today, first a man and a woman. To them he gave corn, and from these two sprang the Pawnees, who have always cultivated corn.¹²

A deluge myth told by Indians of the Pacific Northwest gives the same cause for the flood; however, it does have a unique means of escape from the flood. According to this version, the Great Spirit lived on top of Takhoma, now known

¹¹Alexander, pp. 299-300.

¹²George Bird Grinnell, Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales (Lincoln, 1961), pp. 355-356.

as Mount Rainier. He decided to get rid of all the wicked people and bad animals and to spare only the one good man and his family. The Great Spirit directed this good man to shoot an arrow into a low cloud hanging around the mountain, and then to continue shooting arrows into the shaft of the arrow previously shot. When he had finished, the arrows reached from the cloud to the ground, forming a ladder. The Great Spirit then commanded the good man, his family, and the good animals to climb the arrow-ladder and to keep the bad people and animals off the ladder. Just as the chosen ones had reached the top, they saw the others climbing up, and the good man broke the rope to prevent their ascent. Then the Great Spirit caused heavy rains to fall for many days and nights, covering the earth and rising to the snow line of the mountain. When all the bad people and bad animals had drowned, the rains stopped. As soon as the land was dry, the survivors were told to return to earth and to build a new lodge. To this day no bad animals or snakes are found on Takhoma.¹³

¹³Clark, pp. 31-32.

CHAPTER VII

THE THEFT OF FIRE IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Perhaps no agency of nature has done so much for mankind as fire, which gives heat, light, and power. And because of its benefits, no doubt, myths everywhere ascribe to it a divine origin. Often the source of fire is the heaven or some other far-away place presided over by guardian powers. As in the Greek tale of Prometheus, this fire must be stolen and carried to mankind, for the improvement of his circumstances. Usually the thief is a Trickster-Hero in his culture-hero role, but sometimes he is one of the lowliest of creatures. It is not difficult to understand the universality of the theft-of-fire story in Indian mythology, for the Indian considered fire emblematic of happiness or good fortune. Its importance is evidenced in these words of a Chippewa prophet:

The fire must never be suffered to go out in your lodge. Summer and winter, day and night, in storm or when it is calm, you must remember that the life in your body and the fire in your lodge are the same and of the same date. If you suffer your fire to be extinguished, at that moment your life will be at its end.¹

Of the theft stories known to tribes all across the continent, the tales telling of the theft of fire and of

¹Alexander, pp. 46-47.

light are the most widespread, though the details differ somewhat in the various areas. Many tribes confuse the two, or make the details parallel. Sometimes light is identified with the sun; sometimes it is connected with the idea of summer weather. In a few cases no identification with light is made.² Generally speaking, in all of the theft tales, the figure in control of the element is aware that his treasure is to be taken, but he is powerless to do anything to stop the theft. The essential plot of a theft story includes the use of craft in obtaining the light or fire from heaven or another remote region; when the theft is discovered, the jealous guardian pursues the thief or thieves. By relaying the treasure from one to another, the animal people succeed in obtaining at least a fragment of their desired element.³ One variation in this customary plot occurs in a version in the Northwest, which derives fire from the ocean or from ghosts.⁴ Often, too, a myth achieves a utilitarian purpose, as illustrated in the fire-theft tales which describe the different kinds of wood in which the stolen fire has been deposited. It is also customary for a theft tale to be explanatory about details incidental to the theft, such as the explanation that a possum's eyes are squinted as a result of his drawing closer to the sun he tries to steal.

²Thompson, p. 281.

³Alexander, p. 230.

⁴Ibid., p. 301.

The myth of the theft of fire occurs often as a way of accounting for the presence of the sun, which is not represented as being anterior to the world. The method whereby the sun is stolen varies a great deal. In a number of tales the thief transforms himself into something else, usually something smaller. Then he is swallowed by a maiden, usually the daughter of the guardian of the sun, and reborn from her. Interesting, too, are the stories which tell of fire being brought in a flute, for this method parallels the Greek account of the theft of fire by Prometheus. The Coos tradition gives an unusual method of theft, by which fire and water are taken from a magician by another magician who has succeeded in terrifying his maggot-eaten opponent into fleeing.⁵ A Kato version combines the motif of mice being of help when they chew through cords with a unique account of what happens to the stolen sun. In this version Coyote and his three mice companions set out toward the sun they wish to obtain. They come at last to a lodge where the sun, overseen by two old women, is bound to the floor. When the women sleep, the mice gnaw the bands that hold the sun. Coyote grabs the sun, and when the women pursue him, he changes them into stone. From the sun, he creates all the heavenly bodies and commands that they follow the course he gives them.⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 231.

⁶Ibid.

The following version, this one of a Puget Sound tribe, combines the universal themes of the origin of fire and the origin of daylight. It begins like most other myths with these motifs, with the animal people living in darkness. These people had no fire or fresh water, because the guardian of these things, Gray Eagle, hid them from the people. Raven fell in love with Gray Eagle's daughter, and by changing himself into a snow-white bird, gained her favor. She invited him to her father's lodge, and as soon as he got the chance, he stole the moon, stars, sun and fresh water hanging on Eagle's lodge; he also stole a brand of fire. When he was safely away, he hung the sun in the sky, giving him light to fly on. That night he hung the moon in the sky and scattered the stars around. With the light from the moon and stars, he kept flying, still carrying the water and the fire brand. Flying over land, he dropped the water, making the first fresh-water lakes and streams. The smoke from the fire brand he was holding in his bill blackened his white feathers, and he became the black bird he now is. As his bill began to burn, he dropped the brand. It fell to the rocks, and because it entered into them, a person may strike two stones together now, and fire will drop out.⁷

⁷Clark, pp. 150-151.

CHAPTER VIII

USES OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

The preceding chapters have offered some idea of the nature of the mythology and folklore of the North American Indian, as well as benefits to be gained from their study. Summaries of the tales, each suitable for classroom study, illustrate the various motifs and sub-motifs, giving the teacher a view of the diversity of the tales and of the possible variations on a theme. From these stories and from the discussion of characteristics relative to them, the teacher can build a more detailed study of other tales, other motifs, or other mythologies, adapting and expanding to meet whatever goals may be desired.

When the Study Group on Myth of the Dartmouth Seminar met in 1966 to formulate a position on the uses of myth, they found less than complete agreement among themselves and among other interested persons, with some expressing the view that myth, to be of greatest therapeutic and intellectual value in study, should be psychologically understandable to the teacher so that he could be adept at selecting myths that express feelings relevant to the student's stage of development and its accompanying tensions. Such a plan of myth study, however, seems impractical and unnecessary; indeed, psychiatrists

such as Jung and Freud are not in agreement on the meaning of specific myths.

Northrop Frye's suggestion that myth study be included in a sequential study of the literary genres, with romance, comedy, tragedy, and irony forming a sequential order of development, does not receive complete endorsement, either. Some points about the uses of myth do seem to be widely accepted: that a knowledge of major motifs and of their metamorphoses is of intrinsic value and that the study of myth can lead to a student's representing "his or his group's idiosyncratic vision of what makes the world tick."¹ Whatever their use, myths should be engaged in their natural setting, taught inductively from within, with a desired outcome being to lead students to the "sense of the power of myth to make and continue to make art. . . ."² Imperative also in myth study are the individual study of a myth, the emphasis on the process of oral storytelling, and the assignment of work that will enable the student to use myth in his own reading, speaking, thinking, and writing.

Hopefully, a child will have heard or read some representative Indian myths by the time he enters secondary school, at which time he may be ready to begin a study in greater depth. He should continue hearing and reading Indian myths for pleasure, but to this dimension can be added a

¹Olson, p. 56.

²Ibid., p. 18.

comparative study of mythology--perhaps Greek, Roman, Norse, and Egyptian, as well as American Indian--approached through the study of motifs, thereby building his store of motifs that may be found in all literary forms. Along with this study, students could be introduced to Stith Thompson's comprehensive index of motifs. Another possibility for the expansion of motifs is suggested in Thompson's Tales of the North American Indian (pp. 361-367), including these motifs: the origin of tides, the world fire, the determination of the seasons, the determination of night and day, the confusion of tongues, and the origin of corn. Were it of particular interest to a student or a group of students, a study of the tales of a particular group of Indians could prove fruitful.

Any of these studies should stress myth as a literary type, as well as myth-making as a human inclination. To follow a comparative study of mythologies or a study of motifs in Indian literature in particular could be a study of motifs as found in a variety of literary genres. Another possibility for exploration is the more comprehensive examination of myth, in all its forms, past and present, following the growth of myth from its earliest root in primitive literature--myths such as those of the North American Indian. Inherent in any level of myth study is the application of the student's ability to apply logic and to learn inductively the narrative point of view and the literary form. Actually, the uses of Indian mythology are limited only by the imagination of the teacher and

student, who meet in the study of Indian myth and folklore a fertile field relatively unexplored to date by students and teachers.

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