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BELIEF AND MYTH

Myths in Native North American Religions

ANY EFFORT TO DISSECT AND CLASSIFY THE MYTHS of the North American Indians in a short presentation must necessarily be selective and superficial. Not only is the concept of myth as such highly controversial and therefore difficult to handle, North American tales which may pass as myths are extremely numerous. Some of them have been dealt with in detailed, bulky monographs, but most of them have either been published in collections of tales or have not been published at all: they exist as manuscripts in the files of the Smithsonian Institution or other public or private archives. Many mythological tales are still part of the traditional store of narratives told on Indian reservations.

It is not my intention to try to embrace all this material here, to account for scholarly achievements and the range and dimensions of North American Indian myths. My object is more specific, as the title of the chapter reveals. In my consideration these myths have not received in all respects the scholarly treatment they deserve. My aim is therefore to outline the religious import of North American myths. In contradistinction to most colleagues in anthropology and folklore, I consider "myth" to be primarily a religious concept. Consequently, its place in religion and its meaning should be sought for first of all. To

my understanding this analysis has been used very sparingly, whereas historical, formal, and psychological investigations have been performed quite frequently.¹ In proceeding from a religio-scientific point of view, we may arrive at important conclusions as to the types of myths, the role played by myths, their relations to the ritual and to belief systems. Moreover, it can be shown that each cultural area of North America has a myth system that corresponds to historical and ecological factors.

The reader should be aware of the fact, already made clear, that in the face of an enormously abundant material the following account can only be very selective. First of all, I have used material with which I am well acquainted and which has been discussed earlier in my literary production. If this means a slight predilection for myths from the Plains and Basin areas, it cannot be helped.

Mythological Research in North America

Myth is, as I said, primarily a religious concept. This statement will no doubt be questioned by opponents: why should a tale, a myth, be analyzed solely from the viewpoint of its religious contents when there are so many other aspects that could be applied? "Myth" is a *terminus technicus* in many disciplines (cf., e.g., Chase 1949). Literature, history, folklore, anthropology all contend that the subject of myth properly belongs within their own domain. Myth is oral "literature," or folktales, or speculation about natural occurrences, or untrue statements about the world around us. With the exception of the latter category, all the others are products of scholarly thinking over a long time.

It may be advantageous here to look back upon the approaches to North American myths and tales that have been in current use up until now (cf. Dundes 1967: 61 ff.; Hultkrantz 1966-67b: 21 ff.). Disregarding euhemerism and other early western ways of understanding the myth, it was the symbolism of O. T. Müller and the *Naturmythologie* of Max Müller and others that constituted the prevailing myth interpretation when the scientific study of myth began. As far as I can tell, it left few traces in North American Indian mythog-

1. It is however possible that the "new ethnography" will mean a turning point. Scholars working in this vein attempt to place ethnographical traits in their proper setting, the cognitive world of the peoples concerned. Religion is part of that world.

raphy except for Brinton's obsession with solar and Kunike's with lunar mythology (Brinton 1882; Kunike 1926). The historico-geographical schools started by Boas in anthropology and Krohn in folklore have far more important repercussions. Most myths and tales were analyzed according to the diffusionistic key provided by Boas. The latter's *Tsimshian Mythology* and Reichard's study of Plateau Indian myths are good examples of the method (Boas 1916; Reichard 1947), while Krohn's influence may be traced in Thompson's famous study of the Star Husband tale, for example (Thompson 1953). As Dundes has shown, the preoccupation of the same Finnish school with tale types and motif indexes had a precursor in Swanton's call for a concordance of North American myths and Kroeber's and Lowie's listing of mythological catchwords (Dundes 1967: 63). This was a line that Thompson took up later on; his survey of North American Indian tales from 1929 remains a source of comparative information (Thompson 1929). Tale type and motif index mean to a historical interpretation what genre analysis means to a religio-scientific interpretation: they are both necessary methodological tools.

In the time between the two world wars, Malinowski's functionalism had a great following among students of myths. Its impact on North American scholars was less remarkable, however, due to the predomination of the Boas school and its, as it were, submerged functionalism. (As Kroeber has demonstrated, Boas was more interested in function and process than in history.) Malinowski's genre analysis of Trobriand tales is well known; it had apparently little effect on American anthropologists and folklorists. This was unfortunate, for in this way the religious factor in mythology continued to be bypassed. Indeed, Waterman's analysis of explanatory tales had demonstrated the nonessential import of religious *aitia* in such tales (Waterman 1914).

Another trend from the same time, the psychoanalytic approach (also present in Malinowski's writings), had a stronger and more lasting impact on the interpretation of North American myths. A mythical key figure like the culture hero (or, as American students of myth prefer to see him, the trickster) attracted because of its janus-character, the attention of both professional psychoanalysts (Róheim; Jung) and anthropologists (Radin; La Barre) (Róheim 1952; Radin 1956; La Barre 1970). The center of the interest was and is irrational man, in particular his *id* and its sublimations. Religion comes in as an illustration of the sway of the subconscious forces. This reductionistic attitude, clearly demonstrated in La Barre's work, has unfortunately meant that, for instance, the solutions to the tricks-

ter problem residing in the religious context have been overlooked.

A most important way of understanding myth was introduced by sociological students. Two main approaches may be distinguished, originating with Robertson Smith and Durkheim, respectively. The former stated that mythology on the whole constituted a description of ritual. He is therefore held as the progenitor of the British myth-and-ritual school, later called the Cambridge school (after Jane Harrison and others). The Near Eastern mythology investigated by this group (and like-minded Scandinavian historians of religions) yielded a good harvest of confirmations of the theory. However, the close-knit societies in the Near East have few counterparts in North America, and although a case might have been made for Zuni and Winnebago myths, North American Indian myths were not investigated from this perspective.² Here, again, the lack of concern for religion among most American anthropologists may have played a role.

Durkheim's position, subsequently heralded by a majority of French sociologists and, in Britain, by Radcliffe-Brown and his pupils, was simple enough: religion, including myth, is modelled on and integrated with society. It will remain a problem whether the American studies of cultural reflections in mythology, initiated by Boas (on the Tsimshian and Kwakiutl) and followed up by, for instance, Ehrlich (on the Crow), Spencer (on the Navajo) and Stern (on the Klamath), were stimulated by the sociological school (cf. Hultkrantz 1956: 24; Dundes 1967: 66 f.). In any case, these studies are the closest counterparts from the North American field to this kind of mythological research. Common to both approaches was a deficient interest in religious aspects of myth and, in the French-British social anthropology, a tendency toward reductionism in dealing with religion and myth. These reservations on my part should not conceal the fact, however, that the sociological school has contributed greatly to our understanding of religious oral traditions in their socio-cultural setting. Likewise, the students of this school have shown in what important ways a myth can serve as a *charta*, or sanction, of both ritual and profane institutions.

The latest fashion in mythological research is, as we know, structuralism. It has greatly affected North American Indian mythology. The culture hero behind this approach, Lévi-Strauss, used Tsim-

2. American scholars have not been immune to such studies in other fields (cf. Hyman 1955). The intimate relation between myth and rite in North America was observed by Matthews, but he meant that myth had priority over ritual (see Matthews 1902).

shian materials from Boas' already mentioned monograph in his classic essay on *Asdiwal*, and North American myths have been used extensively in his later volumes, known under the collective name of *Mythologiques* (Lévi-Strauss 1958, 1967). There is no need to recapitulate more closely the French scholar's ideas here. His main target is the operations of the human mind, not the myth as such. By structural analysis he finds that all myths aim at resolving conflicts that haunt human existence. In coded messages the myths hide their ulterior meanings, which may be found out through dialectic logic and different kinds of transformal procedures. The manifest, religious contents of myths are never discussed. Such questions have to give in to the deeper problem of the structure of the human mind. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss confesses that he does not understand what religion is (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 43).

This is not the place to launch a full-scale criticism of this scholar's program. Some scholars are satisfied with it, while others, like myself, are not. His analysis is both arbitrary and, with respect to the results, monotonous; that it evinces the brilliancy of a creative thinker is another matter. What cannot be disputed is that this structuralism reveals the inherent logic of a myth, its rhythm, its style. Questions of style have been an enduring theme in studies of American tales (cf. Reichard; Jacobs), and no doubt Lévi-Strauss has contributed to the genre.

Nevertheless, some students of religion have approached the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss in a positive way. There is thus an analysis of the Sedna myth among the Central Eskimo in which the author, J. F. Fisher, finds "that Sedna mediates between several sets of oppositions in Eskimo culture." He also concludes that Sedna provides a means of dealing with oppositions that are inherent in the Eskimo world-view (Fisher 1975: 36 f., 38). This is a trivial conclusion. The main fact is that Sedna, mistress of the sea animals, is such a central person in the Eskimo world that she has attracted a set of myths, well analyzed by Fisher. As we shall see, it is dangerous to infer from myth what belongs to religion.

A structural approach also underlies Dundes' analysis of North American folktales. However, it concerns the narrative rather than its contents. It is in many respects a scholarly work. Unfortunately, the author commits the sin of identifying tales on the basis of their structures as outlined by him. The outcome is that, for example, the North American Orpheus tradition is identified with a completely different abduction tale (Dundes 1964: 77). This example shows that formal structures are too general to define a tale. Only analyses of

contents can lead to constructive definitions. If we are dealing with religious tales—and the Orpheus tradition belongs to this category—the functional setting of the tale is also important.

This short review of research on North American myths and tales shows that scholars have avoided denoting myth as a religious category. Only one American, the philosopher Alexander, endeavored to identify the religious contents of American Indian myths after Brinton (Alexander 1916). It is remarkable that the editors of the series *Mythology of All Races* designated a philosopher, not an anthropologist or folklorist, to compose the North American volume of the set. Scholars like Lowie, Radin, and Speck occasionally subjected myths to religious analysis, but halfheartedly (cf. Hultkrantz 1966–67: 192, 194 f.). European Americanists with their background in comparative religion did more, but they were few, and their ideas were ruled by fashionable theories of perishable nature.

This is no condemnation of the approaches and methods that have been used so far in studies of North American myths. The field of mythic creations is a wide one, in which many disciplines are involved, and many facets are explored. However, myth is more than just a tale. It is a myth because it has religious relevance. As myth it should therefore be primarily investigated with an eye to its religious value. Thus the necessity to perform such research seems urgent, indeed, compelling here.

The Definition of Myth

This approach presupposes, of course, that we know what a myth is. Here again there is much confusion, not least in the ranks of North American mythologists.

Let us return to the source of our systematization, Jacob Grimm himself. In his *Teutonic Mythology*, first published in 1835, Grimm laid down the essential differences between myth, legend, and fictional folktale, or fairytale (*Märchen*). He observed that the folktale is flighty, fantastic, migratory, and the legend local bound, close to history, whereas the myth portrays gods and supernatural animals and all kinds of metamorphoses (Grimm 1966, 3: xv ff.). This scheme, admittedly inspired by the specific conditions in continental Europe, was widely accepted in its general outlines (whereas the criteria for the respective categories were soon refined). For instance, it was adopted by British folklorists and students of comparative reli-

gion (Hartland 1914; Harrison 1912: 330). When, at the turn of the century, American anthropologists published collections of epical narratives under the heading "myths and folktales" this was an echo of Grimm's classification (see, e.g., Boas 1915). At the same time, American folktales were never systematized in a rigorous way; anthropologists speak indifferently about myths and folktales even today. Indeed, Boas was opposed to a classification if it was not supported by native terms (Boas 1915: 310). It is true that few American Indian collections of traditions can be categorized according to Grimm's system; Bascom lists a few, however (Bascom 1965: 9 f.).

This is scarcely surprising. The Oriental "wonder tale" that invaded Europe in the eighteenth century gave rise to fictional tales. Among American Indians this type of tale is not unknown, but there is no doubt that it was introduced at a rather late date by Europeans (cf. Thompson 1919). The original situation in both Europe and North America was, then, that two types of narrative could be distinguished, both of them objects of belief: myths and legends (traditions). It is necessary to stress the word "could" here. If we go back in European cultural history, we find that the Greek word *mythos* originally meant tale in a very general sense. Since most of these tales concerned the gods, the genre was soon settled (cf. Kirk 1970). Similarly, many American Indian tribes know only one word, tale. There are, however, quite a few tribes that distinguish between two categories which we could label "myths" and "legends" (cf. Beckwith 1938: xvi f.). As Boas has pointed out, the two classes refer mostly to a distance in time. Among the Winnebago, for instance the *waika* refer to divine actors in a distant mythical era, while the *worak* refer to human actors within the memory of man (Boas 1915: 310 f.; Radin 1948: 11 f.).³

Even in those cases where only one native (linguistic) category can be identified, an analysis may show a covert categorization. Thus in my interpretation of Shoshoni religious narratives, I found the term for narrative stands for two main types of religious epic accounts, myths and legends. Not only the distance in time but also the attitude of veneration and sacredness were criteria for my judgment. A third category, fictional tales, has apparently developed in more recent times but plays a minor role (Hultkrantz 1960b). Some may object, as Boas did once, that an analysis which is not supported by the overt categorization of the aborigines themselves should not be permissible. My answer is that modern cultural research is acknowl-

3. Like Bascom, I am inclined to identify the second category with legends.

edged to operate on two levels: we may see things as the natives see them, or we may systematize them according to guiding principles which we perceive to be basic. Anthropologists talk about emic and etic units (Pike), or unconscious and conscious models (Lévi-Strauss). Certainly, Bascom is in agreement with my views when he says: "Despite the incompleteness of the evidence, and despite these variations in native categories, the definitions of myth, legend and folktale offered here are analytically useful. They can be meaningfully applied even to societies in which somewhat different distinctions between prose narratives are recognized" (Bascom 1965: 15).

With his article on the genres of folk narratives, Bascom has reintroduced the Grimm classification as a legitimate tool in American folkloristics. It would be advantageous if also American Indian traditions could be subjected to the same kind of analysis. In that way we would arrive at a clearer understanding of the religious contents of North American tales and could compare them with Old World myths in a more relevant way.

With this discussion in mind the genres should be defined. A thorough definition should contain all those criteria which have been laid down as essential by Honko in an important paper (Honko 1968). However, most of our North American materials were collected during the first fifty years of this century, without the collectors transmitting to us information on all the circumstances that we need to know for a classification in Honko's spirit. If we use a few basic criteria, it should be possible to identify, as I have tried to demonstrate in my book on the North American Orpheus tale, a good number of texts in archives and printed publications as myths, legends, and fictions (Hultkrantz 1957: 274 ff.).⁴ I suggest that our criteria will include the time and scene for the action, the character of the personages, and, as far as it goes, the form of tradition. We arrive then at the following classification:

1. The myth. It takes place at the beginning of time, its acting personages are gods and mythic beings like the culture hero, primeval man, and the prototypes of animals, and the scene for action is the supernatural world. The myth has a fixed pattern of events, and actions are often repeated four times in North American texts.

2. The legend. It takes place in historical and recent times, its acting personages are human beings in their encounters with repre-

4. I am aware that misjudgments may be caused since we do not know one of the most essential details, the attitude of the listeners, the situation of story-telling.

sentatives of a supernatural world—spirits, ghosts, monsters—and the scene for action is this world or the supernatural world.

Both these categories are considered to be true. The myth depicts events in a far off time “when animals were human beings,” as it is often said in North American myths. Furthermore, the myth has been passed down through the generations as a sacred tale, or as a contribution to knowledge about the world. The legend, again, with its supposed roots in a later, historical reality can often be traced back to a memorate, that is, a narrative of a certain person’s meeting with a supernatural in a vision or a dream. It stands to reason that North American Indians with their vision-quest pattern have a rich store of such legends.

3. The fictional tale. It belongs to any time and any place, but it is always framed in a world of wonder. Its characters are fictive persons, in North America mostly supernaturals from European tales. The form of the tale may reveal the same European provenience.

Strictly speaking, the fictional tale is not at home in North America. Hallowell mentions that the Saulteaux of Manitoba believe all their tales to be true (Hallowell 1947: 547). It seems the same rule prevailed all over North America. Only where a disintegration of old cultures has taken place, or where European fairy tales have been accepted, the genre of fictional narratives for entertainment has spread. Many would perhaps refer the adventures of the trickster to the fictional tales, but they are indeed basically myths (see below).

The Sanctioning Power of Myths and Legends

Our genre classification means, of course, that the range of folktales that may pass as myths becomes much more narrow than it generally is in the opinion of most of my American colleagues. It becomes even smaller if we separate sacred myths from other, less functional myths. On the other hand, there is an affinity between sacred foundation myths and certain legends having the same general function. This complicates our picture. However, in the interest of comparative research, the line we have drawn between myth and legend ought to be upheld.

In principle every bonafide myth serves as a model, a *charta*, of the world and of human institutions. As I have expressed it in another connection, “the myth gives instruction concerning the world of the gods, and therewith concerning the cosmic order; it confirms the

social order and the cultural values obtaining and it is in itself sacred" (Hultkrantz 1957: 13). Modern scholars of religion, in particular Eliade, have emphatically asserted that this is the real importance of myth; they have thus expanded the view put forth by Malinowski that the myth "expresses, enhances, and codifies belief" (cf., e.g., Eliade 1949). (The latter statement is, as we shall see, not entirely acceptable regarding North American material.) If the myth allows us to experience a drama *in illo tempore* (Eliade), in a "dream-time," to quote Australian aborigines, which is present even today, this mystery is facilitated by the tense constructions of Indian verbs (Brown 1976: 28). At the same time there is the deep meaning behind it all that the mythical events form the prototype for things today: not only the world-view but also the daily occupations and events have their model—and of course, their origins—in the mythical world. In a way the perspective is etiological, but this concept does not include the model and sanction functions of the myth and is therefore insufficient.

This is the ideal myth, as we meet it in Eliade's writings. I suppose it is the same type of myth Kluckhohn seeks when he points at "the connotation of the sacred as that which differentiates 'myth' from the rest of folklore" (Kluckhohn 1942: 47). However, North American myths are not always sacred, as will soon be demonstrated. Furthermore, there are legends that have mythical functions; we are here reminded of Boas' general view that in North America myths may turn into legends and vice versa (cf. Boas 1915: 310 f.). These reservations are justified, if we proceed from a general idea that myths and legends always keep clear of each other. But in fact, all I want to do here is to insist upon a correct *classification*. Myths, or at least mythical patterns, may be integrated with legends, just as legends may be reinterpreted into myths. Both processes may be illustrated with the North American Orpheus tradition. As I have tried to show, it is basically a tale of a shaman bringing back a sick person's free-soul from the realm of the dead, a soul-loss cure through the shaman's soul-flight (Hultkrantz 1957: 259, 261). In most North American cases it appears as a legend, but in a few societies it is told as a myth. It is a real myth among the Modoc, Nisenan, Navajo, and Taos Indians in California and the Southwest, and among the Cherokee of the Southeast (Hultkrantz 1957: 279). The actors are here exalted supernatural beings. Among the Winnebago the legend has been endowed with mythic details so that Radin classifies it as a "myth-tale": it includes "motifs and incidents from the mythological

background" (Radin 1926: 22). Surely, the demarcation line between myth and legend is not absolute in this material.

Whether the same situation obtains or not in other areas of the world, there is no doubt that the importance of the vision-quest in North America has determined the ease with which genres overlap. The vision paves the way for the mythical integration of the legend or the legend's transformation into a myth. Indeed, the vision is so powerful that it even creates myths. This is the situation among the Mohave Indians of California. Their medicine-men receive whole myths in their dreams (see on this matter, e.g., Kroeber 1948: 1 ff.). In practice it means of course that dream contents are worked into a prefigured mythic pattern. Above all, visions have produced many legends which have the same sanctioning power as sacred myths.

Some examples. The Orpheus tradition in North America which is mostly a legend reinforces and gives authority to beliefs in the afterworld (Gayton 1935: 285; Hultkrantz 1957: 290). There is positive information that it even forms eschatological ideas (Hultkrantz 1957: 282). In the last century the Orpheus tradition, probably on account of its shamanistic background, functioned as an "institution legend" for the Ghost Dance (Hultkrantz 1957: 145 f., 263, 307, 311 f.). Another legend with similar functions tells of a warrior who, resting on a hill distant from his camp, received a vision. A buffalo spirit appeared to him, gave him instructions on how to set up and perform a Sun Dance, and ordered him back to his camp to realize the vision. The Indian did so, and that was the beginning of the Sun Dance. This tale is told by Shoshoni and Ute.⁵ Finally, there is the well-known legend of the two Dakota men who met a buffalo maiden out on the Plains. One of them wanted to seduce the beautiful girl and turned into a skeleton; the other had decent thoughts and was endowed with the sacred pipe by the buffalo maiden. This is the origin legend of the sacred pipe and the ceremonies surrounding it.⁶

These legends all show that supernatural actions in legends in which humans take part may receive the same binding force as such actions in myths on two counts, namely (1) if the course of events is supposed to have happened long ago, and (2) if the events have proved to have importance for a whole group of human beings.

5. The version given here was told me by the Wind River Shoshoni. For a Southern Ute variant, see Jorgensen 1972: 26.

6. There are many versions of this legend. See, for instance, Brown 1953: 3ff.; Dorsey 1906a; and compare the ritual in Fletcher 1883.

Classification of Myths in North America

The North American Indian myths may conveniently be divided into sacred myths and myths of entertainment or—if that term is preferred—mythological tales. By the latter term I do not mean what Boas had in mind (or Radin, when speaking of myth-tales), but tales which have the status of myths but have no serious function. The sacred myths, which all have a sanctioning purpose, may be divided into cosmological myths, institutional myths, and ritual myths.

We arrive at the following four groupings:

1. Cosmological myths are sacred myths that describe the cosmos and the interrelations of its phenomena by anchoring them in a series of supernatural events in primordial time. The cosmic phenomena are thus seen as products of an *Urdrama*, a cosmogony. Cosmological myths may be connected with a ritual, but this is not always the case, particularly not among the hunting and gathering peoples. Cosmological myths procure for a man a world-view but not necessarily a religion (cf. below). The people that appear in these myths are not necessarily the deities and spirits of practical religion.

Among cosmological myths proper we may primarily count the creation myths and the astral myths. The former exist in many different types (Rooth 1957). There is the North Central Californian myth according to which the world came about through the power of the Creator's word (cf., e.g., de Angulo and Benson 1932). There is the South Californian myth that describes the emanation of the world as a result of the cohabitation between the sky god and Mother Earth. As Kroeber remarked, it recalls Polynesian creation myths (Kroeber 1925: 677). And there is, last but not least, the myth of the Earth-diver, in which the Creator orders animals to dive for mud in the primeval sea, or dives himself; out of the mud he creates the earth. This myth is associated with a widespread mythological theme, the rival twins (Count 1952). This is not the place to discuss this interesting relationship. However, there is clear evidence that both the myth and the idea of dual creators have disseminated from the Old World (Hultkrantz 1963: 33 f., 44 f.).

The position of astral myths is somewhat enigmatic in North America. Usually a myth is not astral all through, but it ends with an astral motif, or the final episode in the narrative has astral symbolism. Among the Wind River Shoshoni, for instance, many tales of Coyote's adventures have astral motifs appended at the end. When Coyote tries to seduce his daughters they flee to the sky where they become a star constellation, or three mountain bucks pursued by

hunters finally flee up to the sky and turn into stars (cf. Hultkrantz 1960b: 567). These endings remind us of Waterman's discussion of explanatory tales. It is difficult to judge how they once came about. However, knowing the development of the trickster tales (cf. below) it is possible to see them as remnants of old myths, perhaps attached to other tales (cf. Hultkrantz 1972a: 343).

There are, namely, astral myths in a true sense, myths that connect the star-spangled sky with primordial times. The Pawnee and Blackfoot possess such myths. Indeed, the former identify their gods with stars (cf. Dorsey 1904, 1906b). Many tribes in the Southwest, Southeast, and on the Plains connect the Supreme Being with the sun. Among them, the sun figures in a few myths but shows little of the religious dignity and kindness that is the stamp of the Supreme Being. Most widespread is the myth of the cottontail and the sun. In some versions we are told that the sun burned the earth, killing people, because she (observe the sex) was not as much loved by them as her sister, the moon. The tension between stars is a dominant theme in many star myths. The San Juan tale of two stars, man and wife, who follow each other through the skies, is an example of the genre (Parsons 1926: 22 ff.).

To the cosmological myths we may also refer the transformer myths and the myths about human origins. The former are associated with the assistant creator, who is often also the culture hero. Raven of the Northwest Coast Indians and Glooscap of the northeastern Algonkian belong to this category of divine beings, vigorous in primordial times but not active in the present. The myths of Raven, for instance, describe how, among other things, he stole the fire (or the sun) and the salmon from the mysterious beings who kept these treasures and delivered them to mankind. Among the myths about human origins the emergence myth deserves particular mention (Wheeler-Voegelin and Moore 1957). This myth that is disseminated in the southern parts of the continent (and quite clearly related to agricultural ideology) tells us how the first human beings ascended from the underworlds where they had lived before. Most Navajo regard this myth as their most sacred, but, if we may believe Kluckhohn, it is not held by them to be the basis for any single ceremony (Kluckhohn 1942: 60 n. 61; cf., however, Haile 1942).

There are many other myths associated with the beginning of times which could be mentioned here, for instance myths about the origin of night and day, the change of the first beings into animals, and the dispersion of the animals, etc. Of particular interest are the myths of the origin of death. They tell how the human fate was

determined by two divine beings through an agreement or by divination (Boas 1917).

2. Institutional myths relate how cultural and religious institutions were established in primordial times. The way the mythic beings arranged it has to be followed today by the people. The ancients gave the pattern, the people repeat it, but there is no ritual identification. All those myths belong here in which the culture hero instructed the ancestors how to make houses, canoes, how to regulate the laws, how to deal with menstruation and death—although these myths may often also be catalogued as myths of entertainment.

As we have observed, many of the institutional myths tend to merge with sacred legends. We have seen how the Shoshoni and Ute had their Sun Dance presented to them by a buffalo spirit that appeared to one of their warriors. In the Cheyenne origin myth of the Sun Dance, the warrior has turned into the culture hero Erect Horns who, with his woman, receives the ritual in the mythical mountain of Roaring Thunder (Dorsey 1905a: 46 ff., Powell 1969, 2: 467 ff.).

Very prominent is the place taken by institutional myths in the celebration of sacred bundles. For instance, the opening of the Arapaho flatpipe bundle is accompanied by four nights of telling the myth that belongs to it (Carter 1938).

3. Ritual myths are cosmological myths which serve as “texts” for ritual performances. The ritual procedure is identified with the incidents of the myth, the officiants of the ritual represent the mythic personages. Not all cosmological myths are, or are used as, ritual myths. Students of religion who deal with Near Eastern mythology tend to consider all myths as ritual myths, and they consequently conclude that every myth has taken form in a ritual setting (cf. Widengren 1968: 130). The North American materials show that such ideas are unwarranted (cf., in particular, Kluckhohn 1942: 61). Although no exhaustive investigation of the occurrence of ritual myths in North America has been done, it is my impression from my own reading, that cosmological myths occasionally are integrated with rituals, particularly in more complex and agricultural native societies. (This statement needs, of course, empirical corroboration.)

Let us adduce an example. The Sun Dance is, at least among the Plains Algonkian tribes (Cheyenne, Arapaho above all), a reproduction of the primeval creation. It is a dramatization of the myth of the Earth-diver: pieces of mud that are placed on the ground of the Medicine Lodge should represent the solid ground that grew from the sods picked up out of the primeval sea. Furthermore, the Sun Dance pole is held to be a ritual replica of the cottonwood tree on which the

woman of the Star Husband myth climbed to heaven (Hultkrantz 1973b: 10, 15). Thus two migratory myths, one of them—the Earth-diver—of Asiatic provenience, have in this instance become ritual myths. It would not be possible to prove the other way round.

The impersonation of mythic beings (not necessarily divinities in religion) may be illustrated with details from the Great Medicine Society (*midewiwin*) among the Ojibway. The person to be initiated into the society is identified with the culture hero, Minabozho, and his actions in the sacred lodge imitate, for example, the journey of the culture hero to the realm of the dead as described in the foundation myth of the ceremony (see Hoffman 1891: 280).

Ritual myths, as I said, seem primarily at home in the fertility rituals of agrarian societies. This does not imply that all myths from these societies are ritual myths, particularly not in the East. In a Seneca myth the corn goddess, who is the daughter of the earth goddess (cf. Demeter—Kore in Greece), becomes a captive of the bad twin under the earth. However, she is found by a sunbeam and returns to her fields (Converse 1908: 64). This is an accurate description of the life of the grain during the agrarian year and a close counterpart to a well-known theme in Near Eastern and Mediterranean mythology connected with a ritual. However, we do not know if the American myth was part of a ritual. There is greater probability that the Pawnee sacrifice of a captive girl to the Morning Star was connected with the so-called immolation myth. The latter (which has a wide diffusion in eastern North America, Mexico, and South America) describes how the corn mother is killed and her body dragged around on the ground, thus giving rise to corn and other crops (Hatt 1951: 854 ff.). In the Pawnee ritual drama the body of the sacrificed girl was cut in pieces, the blood of which was poured over the soil to enhance fertility (cf. Dorsey 1907).

The evidence from the Southwest is less controversial, and less spectacular. Zuni creation myths are recited during ritual performances (cf. Bunzel 1932c and d), and the Flute Ceremony of the Hopi may be seen as a dramatization of their emergency myth (Parsons 1939, 2: 1042).

4. Myths of entertainment, or mythological tales, are myths that have been elaborated by the raconteur and thus lost their sacredness but are nevertheless considered as basically true. Their counterparts in literate cultures are the literary myths (Homer's books, Snorri's Edda). The whole series of so-called trickster tales belong here. However, the trickster is just one side of a mythic being that also appears in the sacred myths, the culture hero. What seems to have

happened is that this ambiguous personality, at once both adversary and helper of the Creator, because of his ludicrous shortcomings has become a favorite object of the raconteur's imagination (Hultkrantz 1963: 35 ff.). In particular, his sexual appetite, his greediness, and anal capacity have been embroidered upon in these myths, but also his buffoonery, stupidity, and treachery. On the Plains this category of myths is the most beloved, the most told, and the most widespread.

Two questions naturally arise here: why do we call such stories "myths," and why did not the raconteur also manipulate other myths?

A perusal of all these tales (as far as they have been available to me) has convinced me that they are basically sacred myths that have developed into plain folktales. They have lost their sacred cosmological character but have kept two original qualities: they are considered true (at least by old-timers), and their main character is a true mythic being (cf. Hultkrantz 1960b: 559 ff.). They are consequently not fictional tales, even if the listeners know that some episodes have been added to the general pattern. "Truth" is, of course, a relative concept here. What is true to some is not true to others, and the degree of truth can vary in one and the same individual. But the tendency is clear enough.

The role of the raconteur has been particularly stressed by Radin (Radin 1926). There is certainly always a raconteur's talent at work in oral tradition. However, its influence is restricted in the recounting of a sacred myth,⁷ unless the actions and character of one outstanding personage invites to diffusive narration—and the Coyote of the western Plains and Basin folktales is such a personage. The composition of an original sacred myth has a firm structure, whereas Coyote myths offer a chain of unrelated incidents that betray their origins in the raconteur's art.

Myth and Religion

Myth has thus a religious value, but is myth religion, as many anthropologists and historians of religions tend to think? The foregoing account, with its differentiation between cosmogonic and religious figures, between gods and mythic personages, should have given the

7. Informants are particularly keen to point out that they have memorized the right words of the sacred myth.

answer. Myth deals with primordial times, religion with the present day; myth is epic, religion symbolic. There is thus a natural separation between myth and religion. However, ritual myths create a link between myth and ritual and thereby afford an identification between mythic beings and the gods of religion.⁸

The situation is different in different places. In the Pueblo area myth and religion go together to some extent. In the Great Basin the reverse rule holds (Hultkrantz n.d.). The Wind River Shoshoni believe in different sets of supernatural beings, one belonging to mythology, the other to religion. There is almost a wall between these "configurations of religious belief" (Hultkrantz 1972a). The Winnebago clans have each one a separate creation myth. Nobody finds this peculiar: the recitation of the origin myth is a kind of clan identification (Radin 1923: 207 ff.). Also subdivisions of the Cheyenne tribe have different creation myths that legitimized the political existence of these divisions. The consequence is, however, that group conflicts arise (Moore 1974: 355).

The religious import of myths is thus highly variable. It is to be hoped that more research will be done on this interesting but much neglected subject which, in my estimation, is the most important aspect of myth.

8. Some Papago rites have a vague connection with myths which, according to Ruth Underhill, is "a rationalization made for the sake of unity" (Kluckhohn 1942: 49).