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SOME PARALLELS IN FOLK LITERATURE

ELLA E. CLARK

Associate Professor of English

E. E. Clark

Nineteenth century students of the myths and legends of the North American Indian, men with the classical training of the period, frequently pointed out parallels between the folktales of the New World and those of the Old World. John Wesley Powell, the first director (1879-1902) of the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, drew parallels with Greek, Norse, Egyptian, Hebrew, and Hindu traditions in his "Sketch of the Mythology of the North American Indians," published in the *First Annual Report* of the new bureau. Daniel G. Brinton, pioneer anthropologist in the United States, made a more extensive study of comparative mythology in his *Myths of the New World* (1868 and 1896). The titles of two of Brinton's chapters will suggest the themes of myths of many peoples: "The Myths of Water, Fire and Thunder Storms" and "Myths of Creation, the Deluge, the Epochs of Nature, and the Last Day."

The Reverend Silas Rand, who in 1846 began his forty years with the Micmacs of Nova Scotia, wrote that their giants "correspond in every particular with the horrid monsters of European folklore. . . . Their fairies are exactly like those of European folklore. . . . One of these fellows seems to have been a pretty near relation of our 'Puck' or 'Robin Goodfellow'."¹

George Gibbs, using materials recorded in Washington and Oregon territories in the 1850's, pointed out resemblances between the stories about Coyote, the trickster-transformer of many western Indian tribes, and the cycle about Reynard the Fox, the trickster-hero of many tales and poems popular in Europe in the Middle Ages: "The history of Spilyai [Coyote], among the Klikitats, is as finished a theme as that of the German Reinecke Fuchs, than whom he is hardly a more reputable character. Innumerable tales are related of his various adventures or pranks."²

In the mythology of this Northwest region are numerous other

¹"The Legends of the Micmacs," *American Antiquarian*, XII (1890), 6.

²Although written in 1865, this study was published only recently. See the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, LVI (1955), 293-325, and LVII (1956), 125-167.

analogues. Many Indian tribes told stories about the Great Deluge, in which the highest point near them—Mount Baker, Rainier, Hood, Shasta, Steptoe Butte—was the Ararat.³ A female monster in the Columbia River near The Dalles caused the water around her to whirl and then swallowed boats and their occupants,⁴ as did Charybdis of Greek mythology. Eagle and Coyote went to the World of Spirits seeking their dead wives, just as Orpheus went to Hades to bring back his lost Eurydice; and as Orpheus was warned by Pluto not to turn round to look at her, so Eagle and Coyote were warned, "You shall not look in any direction."⁵ A Coos Indian legend of the Oregon Coast has some interesting parallels with an old Danish tale that Matthew Arnold used in his poem "The Forsaken Merman."⁶ Many tribes told stories about the Pleiades and other constellations. The Nez Perce myth about the Seven Sisters of the Sky has amazing resemblances to ancient Greek myths about the Pleiades and "the lost Pleiad."⁷

The parallel lines can be extended still further. Nevertheless, if a representative collection of tribal tales from the North American Indians, or even of one tribe or region, were placed beside a collection of European folk literature—in the greatly refined versions which have reached us—the dissimilarities in the two would be far more obvious than the similarities. The very spirit of the two mythologies is different, though the purposes in creating the stories and in telling them were fundamentally the same: "For all myths," wrote Gayley, "spring from the universal and inalienable desire to know, to enjoy, to teach."⁸

Almost unknown to nineteenth century American mythologists and anthropologists was a body of folktales that resemble Indian folktales much more closely than do European myths and legends. I refer to African folktales, to the stories related by the Africans

³ Ella E. Clark, *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest* (University of California Press, 1953), pp. 11-12, 14-15, 31-32, 42-45. (Hereafter to be referred to as *Indian Legends*.)

⁴ G. B. Kuykendall, "The Indians of the Pacific Northwest—Their Legends, Myths, Religions, Customs," in Elwood Evans, *History of the Pacific Northwest: Oregon and Washington* (Portland, 1889), II, 75-76.

⁵ *Indian Legends*, pp. 193-195.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-199. And "The Mortal Who Married a Merman," *Journal of American Folklore*, LXIX (1949), 64-65.

⁷ *Indian Legends*, pp. 155-156. And "The Pleiades: Indian and Greek Versions," *Research Studies*, XIX (1951), 203-204.

⁸ Charles Gayley, *The Classic Myths in English Literature*, rev. ed. (1911), xxxiii.

south of the Sahara.⁹ I say "almost unknown," for Joel Chandler Harris, in his volumes of Uncle Remus stories (1880 and later), preserved African lore as he had learned it from plantation Negroes whose ancestors had come from the Congo region. Harris was surprised that scholarly experts eagerly compared with folktales from various parts of the world the narratives he rather casually had retold.

Harris's stories about Brer Rabbit have been compared with the tales that the Algonquian tribes of eastern North America told about the Great Hare. But as far as I know, African folk literature has not been compared with the oral literature of the Indians of other regions. Two years ago, a student from Africa (Mosobalaje Oyawoye, usually called "Shoba"), spent most of an evening exchanging notes with me about parallel stories related in Nigeria and in western United States. In his tribe, children participate less in active games than do American children; instead, they often entertain each other with tales they have learned from their elders, many of them fables giving ethical instruction.

One of these is familiar to all of us: the Aesopian fable of the race between Rabbit and Turtle, as our Plateau tribes tell it, between Hare and Tortoise, as Shoba translated his version. With his people, the story is the basis of a proverb: "I, the never-stopping, have won the prize of the race." Both Modoc Indians and Nigerians teach another lesson in the following fable: in a war between Birds and Beasts, Bat was on the side of the Birds when they were victorious, on the side of the Beasts when they were victorious. When the war had ended, it was decided in council that Bat must stay out of sight during the hours of sunshine; after dark he could fly around alone. "No one wanted Bat, for only the winners were his friends."¹⁰

Woodpecker, once a beautiful red color, was vain and lazy, according to both Nigerians and Sanpoil Indians; to spoil his beauty and perhaps cure his laziness, an old grandmother smoked him with a smudge. Trying to save his bright feathers, Woodpecker

⁹ In the extensive bibliography of Alice Werner's *African Mythology* (1925), relatively few titles were published in the 19th century. A large proportion of those were in German periodicals which, the author says, "were not always readily accessible." If they were not readily accessible at the School of Oriental Studies in London University, it seems likely that they were even less accessible in nineteenth century America.

¹⁰ Jeremiah Curtin, *Myths of the Modocs*, p. 213.

pressed his hand hard on the top of his head.¹¹ "That is why Woodpecker now has a red head and why all his other feathers are black; and that is why he so industriously pecks wood," added Shoba. Bear lost his long, bushy tail in almost identical ways in the Columbia River area and in Africa. As related by a Colville Indian, Coyote persuaded Bear to fish with his tail through a hole in the ice; the tail froze fast and, when Bear jumped as Coyote had directed, it broke off. In Shoba's version, Bear fished with his tail and it was bitten off.¹² (In an analogue from another African tribe, Lion, tricked by Jackal, lost his original long tail in a similar way.)

On nearly every page of most chapters of Alice Werner's *African Mythology* is the abstract of a story or a bit of folklore parallel with the folklore of the North American Indian.¹³ Her study, which is most of Volume VII of *The Mythology of All Races*, covers the three branches of native Africans living south of Egypt and the Sahara—the peoples who speak the Bantu, Sudanic, and Hamitic languages.

"The animal stories . . . may be said to make up the great mass of African mythology," says Miss Werner.¹⁴ Stories about animals that often have the abilities of human beings and sometimes superhuman form a large part of North American Indian mythology. Uncle Remus somewhere explains that once upon a time the animals were "just like folks; the necessity for such an explanation would never occur to the genuine African." Indian storytellers also usually take it for granted that even the white listener understands. But Peter Noyes of the Colville Indians once explained to me: "Long ago—I don't know how long ago—the animals

¹¹ Verne Ray, "Sanpoil Folk Tales," *Journal of American Folklore*, XLVI (1933), p. 60.

¹² "This one motif comprises one of the most famous animal stories in Europe, especially in the Baltic countries. . . . There are three known African versions of this story and 13 North American tellings. [This unpublished Colville story may be the 14th.] In the African version the tale adapts itself to an iceless portion of the world in that Fox fools Bear merely into using his tail to fish with, and it is bitten off. The story turns up among southern United States Negroes with Rabbit having his tail snapped off through the ice in the same way." (Funk and Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (1949), p. 126.)

¹³ "I have not attempted to state any theories or to work out any comparisons with any folklore outside Africa, though here and there obvious parallels have suggested themselves." Werner, p. 105. Miss Werner made no effort to distinguish between folktales and myths; hence I have not except in clearly indicated instances.

¹⁴ Werner, pp. 120 and 281.

were the *people* of this country. They talked to one another the same as we do."

The five principal characters in the African beast-fables are the Hare, the Antelope, the Jackal (almost identical stories are told about these three, each in a different area), the Tortoise, and the Spider. The larger and stronger animals—the Elephant, the Hippopotamus, the Hyena—are often the victims and the butts of the smaller heroes¹⁵—as Bear or Grizzly Bear is in some tales of the Plateau Indians. Bantu-speaking Negroes brought their stories to America, where Hare and Antelope became Brer Rabbit; Hyena, Brer Fox and Brer Wolf; Elephant, Brer B'ar.¹⁶

The Hare was not a new figure in the folklore of the continent, for the Great Hare is the principal character in countless tales found among many of the wide-spread Algonquian tribes. As a culture hero, in the tales recorded by early travelers and missionaries in the Great Lakes region, he is a supernatural being of miraculous birth, the creator and transformer, the giant being who taught the Indians all their arts, skills, and religious ceremonies. Menaboju, Nanabozho, Michabou, Michabo, Nannebush are some of the spellings of Indian names for the Great Hare. As a trickster, he resembles the Hare of African lore. The Indians' ready identification of trickster and supernatural culture hero is not paralleled in any of the tales included in Miss Werner's study of African mythology.

Spider and Tortoise, or Turtle, also appear frequently in North American Indian folktales. Spider, in the mythology of tribes in southwestern United States, is usually a beneficent character; "Spider Man and Spider Woman are Navajo supernaturals or Holy People who taught the Earth People how to weave. . . ." In the tales of the Arapaho and Dakota tribes, Spider appears as a trickster,¹⁷ as he usually does in the tales of West Africa, where he is considered clever but mean and cruel.¹⁸

Turtle, in the religious beliefs and in some myths of the Iroquois and Algonquian tribes of eastern America, is both a beneficent and a sacred character. In their creation myths, the earth is said to rest on the back of Turtle, because he alone among the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 282-285.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 282 and 292. ". . . for many of the 'Uncle Remus' stories African originals have actually been found, and probably many, if not all, of the remainder, can be similarly traced to their sources, though, of course, they have all been adapted to American surroundings." (p. 292.)

¹⁷ "Spider," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, p. 1074.

¹⁸ Werner, p. 323.

animals could keep the earth steady. But among some of the north-eastern Algonquian tribes, Turtle is a source of humor,¹⁹ as he is in African tales.

In addition to the fable of the race between Tortoise and Hare already cited, Africans and Plateau Indians describe another Tortoise-Turtle race in almost identical tales. In the African version, Tortoise, preparing to race with Eagle, stationed several tortoises at intervals along the route and told them what they were to say to Eagle as he passed overhead. Whenever Eagle looked down, he saw a tortoise and was surprised at the speed his rival was making; as Eagle neared the finish, the original Tortoise emerged from hiding and waddled to the goal to ask for the prize.²⁰ A Sanpoil woman of central Washington related the same tale about Mud Turtle and Frog; a Colville, about Turtle and Coyote. Turtle asked his six brothers to help him in what actually was a relay race; the real Turtle hid himself near the goal until the strategic moment. The Colville continued this story with details about a race in which Eagle was defeated by Turtle assisted by Magpie.²¹

Knowing how Indian storytellers chuckle at these and similar tales, I am inclined to think that the sense of humor of the two peoples is much alike. In an African tale, Hare, caught by the other animals and overhearing their discussion about killing him, "suggested that the way to kill him was to tie him up with banana leaves and throw him down in the sun." When the leaves had thoroughly dried, Hare stretched himself and then jumped away so quickly that no one could catch him.²² In some Indian tales, Turtle begged the animal people not to throw him into the lake; when they did, he climbed up on a log and thanked them for sending him back to his home.

The "practical jokes" in African and Indian stories are similar. In one from Africa, Hyena, while Hare slept, devoured the roasted guinea fowl which they had trapped, and then he put the legs and the feathers into the fire; when Hare awoke, Hyena explained that he had gone to sleep and let the fowl burn. Hare said nothing but arranged to have Hyena caught as a thief among the banana trees. Later the two teased each other by singing riddling ditties about

¹⁹ "Turtle," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, p. 1133.

²⁰ Werner, pp. 310-311.

²¹ Author's ms. collection.

²² Werner, pp. 297-298.

guinea fowls and banana leaves.²³ In a Nez Perce tale, Eagle, Owl, Fox, Wolf, and Raccoon ate the big salmon that Coyote left to roast while he slept. He retaliated by eating the turtle eggs which his friends were roasting and then placing the empty eggshells back in the fire; while his friends slept, he changed their appearance by smearing them with charcoal and with egg yolk. In a long story related by a Cree in northern Alberta, Fox ate the ducks that Weesackachack was roasting and then pushed the legs back under the ashes.²⁴ From other tribes of the Western Plateau and northern Plains similar stories have been recorded, varying only in details.

Probably a combination of humor and a sense of fair play accounts for the stories in which the smaller and weaker animals show themselves superior to the larger. Again and again, in African tales, Hare and Tortoise are victorious over Hyena, Elephant, Hippopotamus;²⁵ occasionally Tortoise circumvents Hare.²⁶ In the western Indians' story of the animals' relay race with the first fire, it is often "squatty little Frog" that makes the final jump to safety—and leaves his tail behind him.²⁷ In the numerous tales that Plateau and Coast Indians relate about the people's making a ladder of arrows from sky to earth, the big animals can never make a bow large enough or can not shoot far enough; always it is Sapsucker or Woodpecker, Wren or Chickadee that steps up with a strong bow and shoots so far away that the first arrows can not be seen. Huge Grizzly Bear can not join the others in the climb to the Sky People.²⁸

The Africans also have a group of stories about the adventures of people who have gone to the sky world, but these are human beings.²⁹ Several African sayings and chants indicate traditions of a rope by which one could climb to heaven. Dwarfs believed to live on top of Mount Kilimanjaro "are said by the Wachaga to have ladders by which they can reach the sky from the summit." In a Congo story, animals do go to the sky: Spider takes with him Tortoise, Woodpecker, Rat, and Sand-fly; with their help he brings

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

²⁴ Author's ms. collection. The stories appear in most collections of Nez Perce or Cree tales.

²⁵ Werner, pp. 285-286.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

²⁷ *Indian Legends*, pp. 187-189 (and p. 211 for references to other versions).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-192 and 211.

²⁹ Werner, p. 131.

down the heavenly fire.³⁰ In an analogue related by a Sanpoil woman, Eagle and Beaver are the leaders in the expedition to steal the fire from the Sky People. This Congo tale of the theft of fire is the only fire myth in Miss Werner's study of African folklore. In the mythology of most North American Indian tribes there is at least one story about the origin of fire. Western tribes have many versions of the animals' stealing it from the Sky People, from the Fire People, from two or three old hags guarding it at the top of a mountain.

Tales of the kind that Kipling made famous in his *Just So Stories* are not uncommon in either African or Indian mythology, but they occur less frequently than might be expected in such a mass of animal folklore. Apparently Columbia River Indians alone related more such tales than did the Africans: a few of them explain how Rabbit lost his long, bushy white tail; how Chipmunk got his stripes; how Porcupine got his quills; why Rattlesnake has only one head instead of three. In both African and Indian tales are incidental explanations of animal features. Because some of these have been mentioned already, one further illustration will be sufficient: In a Hottentot story, Jackal got his fur burnt in a struggle with the Sun, and it is still black. In a Shoshoni Indian story, Cottontail got his fur burnt after he shot his fifth arrow and broke the sun to pieces; ever since he has had a brown spot on his back.

Among the nature myths of the two races, an interesting parallel is in the references to Lightning-bird by the Africans and to Thunderbird by the Indians. In Zulu myths, Lightning-bird is a glistening red; sometimes found dead after it strikes the earth, it "is greatly prized by medicine-men as an ingredient in powerful charms." In the myths of another African tribe, lightning is caused by flocks of gaily colored birds; the thunder is the sound of their rushing wings.³¹ Many Indian tribes related stories about Thunderbird, which was usually very large and very powerful; the flash of its eyes produced lightning, and the rushing or flapping of its wings caused the thunder. In the Northwest, Thunder was greatly desired as an individual guardian, for it gave a man unusually strong spirit power.

Though the details are not alike, both races have stories about

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.

the origin of the Sun and the Moon; both have mythical explanations of the Milky Way and of some of the constellations. Among the Africans, the Rainbow "is looked upon as a living being—usually a snake, and, curiously enough, dreaded as a malignant influence. The people of Luango, however, believe in a good and an evil rainbow."³² To the Shoshoni of our Southwest, "the rainbow is a beautiful serpent that abrades the firmament of ice and gives us snow and rain."³³ To the Makah of northwestern Washington, the "rainbow is an evil being associated in some way with Thunderbird. It is armed at each end with powerful claws," with which it seizes anyone who comes within its reach.³⁴

Both Africans and Indians tell pretty little stories about how the birds were painted by some supernatural power, to become the gaily colored creatures we know today. Each race tells of mountain spirits and river spirits, sometimes friendly and sometimes hostile. Africans know of demons that "haunt lonely places—the deep shade of the forests, or the sun-baked steppe country."³⁵ Northwest Indians warned early nineteenth century travelers about evil spirits that lived in the lake at the base of Mount St. Helens³⁶ and about others that lurked among the rapids and the rocks of the lower Columbia River.³⁷

The "Little People" in African folklore also are similar to the "Little People" in the Indian lore of the Western Plateau and the northern Rocky Mountain region. Both peoples refer to these dwarfs as having been former inhabitants of the country. The Nez Percés call them "the Stick Indians," probably because they live in the forests. The Yakima call them the *Wahteetas*, "the little ancient people."

Mysterious rock paintings in Africa, others on a cliff near the Naches River in Washington, still others in the mountains near the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming—all these pictographs were the work of the Little People. "Their rock paintings and sculptures," wrote Miss Werner, "seemed to have served some magical pur-

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

³³ Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³⁴ *Indian Legends*, p. 161.

³⁵ Werner, p. 119.

³⁶ Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* (London, 1859), pp. 199-200.

³⁷ Samuel Parker, *Exploring Tour beyond the Rocky Mountains, 1835-1837* (1842 ed.), p. 246.

pose."³⁸ Seeing the little picture painters, said the Yakima Indians, brought strong spirit power to small children; and so five-year-olds were sometimes left on the cliff at night, Indian parents hoping that their child would see one of the Wahteetas at dawn.³⁹

"They are commonly supposed to dwell on the tops of high mountains. . . . All medicine [occult science] is in their country."⁴⁰ The words were written about African lore, but the illustrative story is about a fourteen-year-old Kalispel boy of Montana who was determined to receive unusual spirit power. After fasting four days, he climbed to the highest peak in the near-by mountains; in a crater at the summit, he found some of the Little People. One of them became his guardian and so gave him special power ("sumesh") whenever the Indian needed help or wished to aid someone else. The boy became a great shaman, whose power is still remembered by the two Salishan tribes on the Flathead Reservation in western Montana.⁴¹

In both African and native American folklore, some of the Little People are friendly and helpful; others are mischievous and destructive, skillful in shooting their poisoned arrows. In one African district, they were referred to as "cannibal dwarfs"; "cannibal fairies" they were called by Granville Stuart in his account of the baby-eating *Ninnimbe*, which his neighbors, the Northern Shoshoni, told him about.⁴² Every illness among horses and cows, every sudden death among the Shoshoni and the Arapaho, was attributed to the invisible arrows of the *Ninnimbe*.⁴³ Belief in the Little People is widespread among African tribes, and "a native belief in dwarfs is practically universal among the North American Indians."⁴⁴

Monsters or gigantic beings that swallow people appear in the folklore of both continents. Usually they were malevolent, but an African tribe has a tradition of a strange being that kindly swallowed a war party that was invading his country. In the African tales, the people swallowed were human beings, later rescued by some hero-deliverer. In Indian tales, the monsters lived before the days of human beings, and most of them were slain by the various

³⁸ Werner, p. 257.

³⁹ *Indian Legends*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁰ Werner, pp. 258-260.

⁴¹ Harry Turney-High, *The Flathead Indians of Montana* (Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, 1937), pp. 33-34.

⁴² *Forty Years on the Frontier*, pp. 56-58.

⁴³ Sarah Olden, *Shoshone Folklore*, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁴ "Dwarfs," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, p. 331.

culture heroes. A sucking monster, a common type, lived in the upper Clearwater valley, according to the favorite tale of the Nez Percés; after it had swallowed more "animal people" than were left outside its stomach, Coyote killed it and from its huge body made many of the Northwest Indian tribes.

Creation myths or myths of origin are so numerous and so varied among the tribes of both races that they defy treatment in a short space. Many African myths explaining the origin of death are connected with the belief in a "High God"; most Indian myths on the subject repeat an argument between two characters "when the world was young," one of whom has recently lost a near relative. In a Yakima-Klickitat myth, the conversation is between Eagle and Coyote; in a Quinault myth from the Washington coast, it is between Eagle and Raven. In the latter, Eagle, grieving over the death of his child, tells Raven that people who had died should come to life again; Raven decides that they should remain dead.⁴⁵ In many versions of an African myth, Chameleon wants people to return from death or not to die at all; Lizard wants them to pass away completely. "Since that time, death has reigned on earth. Both animals are hated, the Chameleon is poisoned with tobacco-juice wherever found, and the Lizard has to run for his life, for the Bushman eats every one he catches."⁴⁶

Other African stories about death are connected with their "ancestral spirits." "The belief in the continued existence of human beings after death, and their influence on the affairs of the survivors is really the bed-rock fact in Bantu and Negro religion."⁴⁷ A belief in guardian spirits is generally considered the basic concept of North American Indian religion. "Throughout North America, Indians of almost every tribe sought to acquire supernatural spirit teachers, or guardian spirits, who through songs and advice bestowed supernatural gifts for war, hunting, gambling, curing, oratory, and other pursuits upon the human being fortunate enough to establish contact with them."⁴⁸

Stories about ancestral spirits and about guardian spirits are not frequent in the oral literature of the two peoples, and consideration of them probably belongs to a study of religion rather than of mythology and folktales. It is notable, though not surprising,

⁴⁵ *Indian Legends*, pp. 193-195 and 87.

⁴⁶ Werner, pp. 160-164.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁴⁸ "Guardian spirits," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, p. 467.

that both peoples refer to "our Earth-Mother" and to "our Sky-Father" or "our Sun-Father." Totemism also is closely related to mythology; a comparison of the myths explaining the totems of the northern Algonquian tribes with the totemic myths of certain African tribes may some day be a study in itself.

Definitive analysis of the parallels between the oral literature of the Africans and that of the North American Indians is impossible now because of the relatively small number of African folktales that have been published. Twenty-five years after Miss Werner's study, Richard Waterman and William Bascom reported that "in reality only a beginning has been made at recording Negro folklore"; that "collections of Negro folktales usually suffer from the suppression, deliberate or unintentional, of non-animal tales regarded as atypical or non-Negro, of variants considered inaccurate, and of 'dirty stories'"; and that African tales, as distinct from myths, "are regarded as sacred and often esoteric" and consequently an informant understandably refuses to relate them to an outsider. "Among the thousands of tribes in Africa, there is not a single one for which a complete collection of myths and tales has been published."⁴⁹

Although the last statement can be made of tribes in North America also, and although no tales from some tribes have been published, nevertheless there is a considerable body of Indian folk literature. Some dissimilarities between it and the published African folk literature should be pointed out, but conclusions must be regarded as tentative only.

On the basis of what is now known, it can be said that many of the differences between the folktales of the Africans and those of the North American Indians are due to one basic dissimilarity: the absence, in African folklore, of stories about culture heroes and transformers, and the abundance of such stories in the lore of most Indian tribes. With few exceptions, the African tales that have been published seem to have been created to entertain—to amuse children and childlike adults—and possibly to teach a lesson in conduct not always perceptible to readers in another culture; almost none are myths created to explain origins and causes, and then transmitted to preserve important traditions of the tribe.

This conclusion, based on admittedly brief study of African

⁴⁹ "African and New World Negro folklore," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, pp. 18-24.

folklore, has the support of a statement from Miss Werner: "The figure of the Hero who is also the Demiurge, the institutor of the arts of life and, in another aspect, the 'trickster-transformer,' is not very frequently met with in Africa, at least as far as our knowledge goes. . . . The Hare never appears as a Demiurge," the Spider very rarely.⁵⁰ And in the stories Miss Werner summarized about heroes of supernatural birth, there are only occasional suggestions of a benefactor who at some time in the distant past may have "figured as a culture hero."⁵¹

Consequently, African myths that give information about the material culture or the ceremonial life or the local topography of a tribe seem to be almost non-existent. But "in the legendary lore of all [North American] Indian tribes the part played by wonder-workers in the affairs of men is the predominating theme."⁵² Tales about these "wonder-workers," therefore—whether Menaboju of the eastern part of the continent, Coyote of the Great Plains and westward, Raven of the North Pacific Coast, or the Changer of the Olympic Peninsula and Puget Sound area—the culture-hero stories reveal much concerning the natives' ways of living and often details about their physical surroundings.

Because Menaboju and Coyote showed their people how to fish and hunt, make their equipment and weapons, build their canoes, prepare and cook their foods, certain stories were instructive to young Indians and now have sociological values. Menaboju taught the Ojibwa the cultivation of vegetables, the making of maple sugar, the art of painting the face for warfare, the rites and mysteries of their religion. And all along Lake Superior and the rivers flowing into it, wrote nineteenth century travelers, "you can not come to any strangely formed rock or other remarkable production of nature without immediately hearing some story of Menaboju connected with it."⁵³

Coyote led the salmon up the rivers west of the Rockies, made good fishing places in them, taught the people the salmon taboos,

⁵⁰ Werner, p. 213.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Chap. VI.

⁵² " . . . Sometimes these are demiurgic beings, exercising and evincing their might in the process of creation. Sometimes they are magical animals, endowed with shape-shifting powers. Sometimes they are human heroes who acquire wonderful potencies through some special initiation granted them by the Nature-Powers, and so became great prophets, or medicine-men." H. B. Alexander, *North American Mythology*, p. 120.

⁵³ J. G. Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior* (London, 1860), p. 415. Ephraim G. Squier, "Manabozho and the Great Serpent," *American Review*, VIII (1848), pp. 392-393.

gave instructions about the First Salmon Ceremony; he planted the forests, the camas, the kouse, the huckleberry and the service berry shrubs.⁵⁴ And he is responsible for many important landscape features from Yellowstone Lake to Celilo Falls and the Columbia River Gorge. The Changer of the area west of the Cascade Range, and Glooscap of the St. Lawrence River region, demiurgic beings, likewise were benefactors and left their marks upon the landscapes.

In other stories, each of these characters appears as a buffoon or a numbskull or a clever deceiver. The identification of the trickster with (1) a creator, (2) a transformer of topography and of "first beings," and (3) an instructor in crafts, skills, social customs, and religious ceremonies—this seems to be a unique feature in folk literature, as well as a very important characteristic of the stories related by the North American Indian.⁵⁵

When the tales in Miss Werner's study of African mythology are compared with the myths and tales in Hartley Burr Alexander's study of the North American Indian (Volume X of *The Mythology of All Races*), other differences are apparent. In these volumes, the Indian literature shows greater variety of character, theme and incident, more beauty, and more maturity. The greater variety of Indian animal stories has already been indicated; there are also myths about demiurgic beings that are not animals, legends about human heroes,⁵⁶ many forms of sun myths and fire myths. Several star myths have a kind of Grecian beauty, as do a few about the "three sisters"—the spirits of the Maize, Bean, and Squash. Those explaining the ceremonies of the Navajo and their neighbors have poetic symbolism and therefore are imbued with a spiritual quality.

But aside from the fact that Africans consider ceremonial myths sacred, Miss Werner drew a sharper, straighter line between mythology and religion than did Alexander. Furthermore, the latter's strong interest in Indian religion and ritual may have led

⁵⁴ *Indian Legends*, pp. 96-98.

⁵⁵ See "culture hero," *Standard Dict. of Folklore*, p. 268.

⁵⁶ Unique among Indian stories about human heroes is the mythical history of the demigod Hiawatha, carefully recorded by both Iroquois and Onondaga elders since Schoolcraft and Longfellow confused the exploits of the hero with the deeds of Manéboju, the Ojibwa culture hero. The Iroquois and their neighbors have a long and complicated story about the Onondaga chieftain Hiawatha and the Oneida Chief Dekanawida, about their struggles with the magician and war-chief Atotarho (whose head was covered with tangled serpents), in the efforts of the two peace-loving heroes to form a league of nations that would ensure peace in eastern America. (Alexander, pp. 51-52.)

him to overemphasize myths about ceremonies.⁵⁷ The tales of the Plateau and Pacific Coast Indians, tribes that did not develop an elaborate ceremonial symbolism, seem to have more parallels with African tales than do those from other regions. In addition, those Western Indians related myths and legends about the volcanic peaks, the curious rock formations, and the waters of the region.⁵⁸ Whether any African tribes told stories with topographical themes I do not know.

In the present collections, it is in the tales about animals as somewhat humanized beasts and as tricksters that most of the parallels between Indian and African folktales may be found. It is chiefly in other types of Indian stories that parallels with European folk literature may be found. But Alexander compared the unsystematized stories about the Great Hare with the European cycle about Reynard the Fox, as George Gibbs did the Coyote stories of the West. And Alexander said of Coyote: "In general he resembles the Devil of mediaeval lore more than perhaps any other being—the same combination of craft and selfishness, often defeating its own ends, of magic power and supernatural alliances."⁵⁹

These numerous analogues in the folk literature of three races on three continents do not indicate, as some nineteenth century folklorists thought, that any people borrowed from the others or that their lore was derived from a common origin. A more logical explanation, it seems to me, is that peoples who lived close to nature and who were in somewhat similar stages of culture (long ago, as far as the ancient Greeks are concerned) interpreted their observations and used their imaginations in somewhat the same way. In the words of the mythologist John Fiske:⁶⁰ "The fact that certain

⁵⁷ A posthumous volume by Alexander—*The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians*—is one of several indications that he was particularly interested in Indian religion and ritual.

⁵⁸ See *Indian Legends*, pp. 1-126, 199-201, and Pauline E. Johnson, *Legends of Vancouver*.

These collections contain non-explanatory stories about landscape features, as well as explanatory myths. For a discussion of "The Explanatory Element in the Folk-Tales of the North American Indians," see an article by T. T. Waterman, in *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XXVII (1914), 1-54. He concludes that explanatory tales "do not by any means constitute the bulk of traditional literature today" and that an explanation is often an after-thought.

⁵⁹ *North American Mythology*, p. 142.

⁶⁰ *Myths and Myth-Makers* (1896), p. 159.

mythical ideas are possessed alike by different races, shows that in each case a similar human intelligence has been at work explaining similar phenomena."⁶¹

"... I incline more and more to the view that the same or similar incidents may occur to people independently all over the world, and receive in each case the appropriate local setting. Of course this is not to deny the possibility of derivation in other cases." (Werner, p. 398.)

"Any careful student of such incidents [twin heroes' or twin gods' going on adventures together] soon learns that logical relationship does not necessitate organic connection and that identical simple ideas arise over and over. It is not necessary to strain for an explanation either by proposing dubious routes of diffusion or by asserting a mystical theory by which all men through a necessity of some kind make up tales of twin gods. If men tell tales at all they must sometimes hit upon the same motifs. And no copyright office even today prevents this." (Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1946), p. 385.)