

MYTH AND THE UNCONSCIOUS: SPEAKING THE UNSPOKEN

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling was once a time worn tradition in Aboriginal communities across Canada. It is time to renew the places of warmth and welcome by the fires and at the knees of our Elders. Some stories, like the one that follows, are for the older generation and remind us that there is strong purpose behind the words that teach, entertain, and warn against certain behaviours. Our communities continue to struggle with the residue of colonialism, missions, and Indian Residential Schools, and too many have forgotten how our stories and tricksters illuminated Pimatisiwin in our lives. Our old stories have been sanitized by the Church and have lost their ability to reach our unconscious and correct “crooked” thoughts and behaviours. The story “How it came about that Some People are Small and Some Large” is one of the few that have been left relatively intact. The message is a powerful reminder that our behaviour can sometimes speak louder than our words, and therefore we must listen with our entire selves to be truly well. It is time she said, “Hold up your lives so we can see, we have strayed too far from the path and we long to go home” (Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010).

Key Words: myth, storytelling, trickster, creation stories, psychoanalytic theory

INTRODUCTION

It is said that at one time the mental, emotional, and spiritual lives of Aboriginal peoples all across the Americas were deeply steeped in the lore of mythology, and that these stories guided their physical lives as well. There was no separation between the sacred and the secular in myth, because stories reflected the sacred and the secular aspects of “all life” and the entire cosmology that informed them. The time for sharing these teachings was in the deep, dark, and cold of the long winter months when adults were willing and able to sit and listen to the storyteller since they could not hunt as often, and children stayed close to the fire for warmth. Anishnaabek Elders have said stories would usually commence in autumn with the falling of leaves and would often last long past the last snowfall and into springtime, because there were so many to be told (Copway, 1858). There are various references in the literature and in oral traditions to storytelling time, and why it is in the winter. Many of the Mesquakie stories, or stories of Wisaka, are also “winter stories.” If you tell them at any other time, when the ground is not covered by snow, it is said that snakes and frogs may hear them and take them away, but many are also just good stories and when a good teller tells them, people listen carefully, and it makes the winter shorter. George Copway, an Ojibway Elder living in the 1800s, attesting to the large number of legends told wrote that,

I have known Indians who would commence to narrate legends and stories in the month of October and not end until late in the spring, sometimes not until late in the month of May, and on every evening of this long term would tell a new story. (Copway, 1851, p. 98)

Each one of these myths generally contained the entire story of creation from the beginning to present time; had humankind living peacefully here on Mother Earth; and often explained how the Anishnaabek, composed of the Chippewa (Ojibwa), the Odawa (Ottawa), and the Pottawatomi, who were allied with the Three Fires Confederacy on both sides of the once nonexistent border of the US and Canada came to be the way they are today.

According to Freud, it was power in the words of these myths that brought people back, again and again, to sit at the fire and hear the tales of the ancestors, and ensured that they were passed on to each generation:

Words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of their ancient magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words the teacher conveys his knowledge to his pu-

pils, by words the orator carries his audience with him and determines their judgement and decisions. Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men. (Freud, 1976, p. 41)

Oral tradition was at one time carefully safeguarded by the Anishnaabek through constant repetition of the same myths, year after year, and generation after generation. Telling the stories ensured the passing on of tribal history, lore, the sharing of personal and community knowledge, and rooted social, cultural, and spiritual experiences deeply in the daily life-ways and expressions of the people.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It apparently came as quite a surprise to those who studied Anishnaabek culture in the late 1800s that they even had such a rich repository of mythology to draw from (Schoolcraft in Barnouw, 1977). For Aboriginal people themselves, who lived in an oral tradition (society), the telling of myth was a natural part of life, and was something that continuously fostered strong links to their collective past and confirmed the authority of their traditions. The myths and storytelling served to build consensus on shared attitudes and values and the cyclical nature of Anishnaabek cosmology (Geertz, 1989, p. 179). Myths and stories revolved around renewal; individual and family connections; and the assertion of power between the Anishnaabek, the earth, and what were perceived as sacred or spiritual forces. To most Aboriginal people the recurrent natural rhythms of circular time have always been considered sacred, and “worthy of the most profound veneration, with each rhythm steeped in signs and significance for all humankind” (Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992, pp. 144–5). Clyde Kluckhohn made the following observation about myth cycles in particular; their constant repetition; and their relationship to ritual; “Their very familiarity increases their efficacy, for, in a certain broad and loose sense, the function of both myths and rituals is the discharge of the emotion of individuals in socially accepted channels” (Kluckholm, 1942, p. 64). A.M. Hocart further observed; “Emotion is assisted by the repetition of words that have acquired a strong emotional colouring, and this colouring again is intensified by repetition” (Hocart, 1939, p. 208). The myths were repeated again and again to provoke this covert emotional release at an unconscious level, because in Anishnaabek culture the overt expression of “feelings and emotions” was not considered culturally appropriate. Even today, Aboriginal peoples are reluctant to share much emotion or talk openly about painful feelings. As a people we often refer

to a pervasive “conspiracy of silence” when trying to deal with issues like physical or sexual assault in First Nation communities (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004; Wesley-Esquimaux and Snowball, 2010). This reticence has stymied a stronger force of healing across cultural boundaries. The early myths evolved into very carefully crafted vehicles of emotional introspection and release, becoming a valued part of the sacred circle of life, and an effective tool to ensure mental health and wellness. The circumstances may have changed as the stories were retold, but the moral or emotional issues generally remained intact; and as Boas pointed out, “the storytellers prefer to draw on their memories, rather than on their imaginations” (Boas, 1916, p. 340). Later authors and editors, such as Young (1995), Caruth (1995), Antze and Lambek (1996), and even myself, Wesley-Esquimaux, (2010), have had much to say on the efficacy of this particular practice. As circumstances changed, the way stories were framed by storytellers has also been irrevocably altered in effect, and the way we remember must now be examined for efficacy of expression.

To Aboriginal people, certainly in the case of the Anishnaabek of the Great Lakes Region, myth was functionally true and according to Hallowell, “both their sacred stories and their tales are thought to be true” (Hallowell, 1947, p. 547). To them, their stories did not belong in a category of fiction, nor was their purpose primarily one of entertainment in spite of the fact that the stories were often exceedingly humorous; the myths rather, “represented an expression of their reality as they knew it” (Smith, 1995, p. 19). A.I. Hallowell has pointed out that:

After all, what people choose to talk about is always important for our understanding of them, and the narratives they choose to transmit from generation to generation and listen to over and over again can hardly be considered unimportant in a fully rounded study of their culture. When, in addition, we discover that all their narratives, or certain classes of them, may be viewed as *true* stories, their significance for actual behaviour becomes apparent. For people *act* on the basis of what they believe to be true, not on what they think is mere fiction. Thus one of the generic functions of the “true” story, in any human society, is to reinforce the existing system of beliefs about the nature of the universe, man and society. (Hallowell, 1947, p. 548–9).

Theresa Smith (1995) has proposed that the functionalism of myth is neither in the beginning or the end, because each myth is in fact a story about something, or more appropriately, in an Ojibwe context, a story about someone. Therefore, as she sees it, “it is the inherently meaningful

memory of a people spoken in the form of a symbolic narrative. It both defines and reflects reality and possibility in the world" (Smith, 1995, p. 20), and includes their dreams and behaviours. The myths address the process of creation: creation of the universe, the world, mankind, animal kind, and everything else in existence; in effect, their entire cosmology. Historically then, might the Anishnaabek have been better able to address their emotions, their cosmology, and the world around them *because* they had a large repository of myth? The stories contained important teachings, which profoundly reflected their inner worlds and ensured balance in their day-to-day individual and community lifeways.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

The myths that Aboriginal peoples told contained moral teachings laced with humour, along with an easy acceptance of the truth that a multitude of behaviours can reside in the same person — and you can never predict which face will show itself next; nobility, foolishness, or lustfulness. Reading any of the myths in Radin and Reagan's 1928 "Ojibwa myths and tales" will aptly confirm the levels of humour and moralizing that were ever present in the myths and stories told. Therefore, I would ask, even though the question has probably been raised before; exactly what kind of logic would combine all of these behaviours and facets of character together in one place? I believe the response would be: an exceedingly human one indeed. The myths and stories of old clearly reflect what are commonly known today as the seven deadly sins: pride, gluttony, lust, envy, vanity, greed, and sloth. A good example of these "sins" in short story form is contained in, *The Windigo: and other Tales of the Ojibway*, written by Herbert T. Schwartz and illustrated by Norval Morrisseau. These "sins" are depicted so often in "old" Anishnabek myth, that there must have been both social (conscious) and emotional (unconscious) motivation to address them in a form that people were receptive to. These "sins" are not necessarily named in the text but they are often self-evident through the behaviour of the "first people" who are generally referred to as just that — "first people" — and they are often not named or defined in any other way. The myth I have included in this paper names the "mother/wife" figure, but like the entire myth itself, this is unusual. Trickster figures are generally named; Nanaboojoo, Manabohzo, Wenebojo, etc., and are repeatedly referred to by the same name in specific regions. In addition, the many trickster figures took many different forms and roles in mythology, ranging from formless, to male/female form all at once, and of-

ten different kinds of animals, such as rabbit, hare, coyote, raven, and sometimes bear. He/she is a prankster who is grossly erotic, insatiably hungry, inordinately vain, deceitful, and cunning towards friends and foes; a restless wanderer upon the face of the earth; and a blunderer who is often the victim of his own tricks and follies. However, I found that many of the so-called “modern” stories are sharply devoid of sexual reference and situations that might address the unconscious. Taking the “grim” out of “Grimm” seems to have occurred in Anishnaabek myth and storytelling as well.

MYTH, FIRST PEOPLE, AND THE TRICKSTER

In many Anishnaabek stories there is a “trickster” figure called Nana’b’oozoo, just one of many spellings, who is seen as an archetypal unisex being, although in most stories Nana’b’oozoo is referred to as a “he.” His name means “being well,” but he is usually unable to fulfil his best intentions to be well because the coarser side of his human nature — his drives, emotions, whims, desires, etc., regularly get in the way of his good intentions and fulfilment of his responsibilities. Like most human beings he blunders along and is sometimes successful, sometimes not in his undertakings. He is often seen as the “first being” of creation, or at least directly related to the “first people” of the world, although he generally travels alone. This is an important point from a psychoanalytic perspective: since people always “act alone” even if they are part of a crowd, because they are always alone in their unconscious, and in their own minds.

Contrary to Franz Boas’ theory that the trickster was a purely egotistical figure, expressing only the outward extension of self, Mac Ricketts has shown that even in the most “archaic hunting cultures,” the trickster figure successfully combined both hero and the obsessed egotistical renegade roles (1966, p. 329). Even from a contemporary standpoint, we are able to see through the dichotomous representation, and his humorous, bumbling, lustful, gluttonous, greedy, and usually selfish actions, to a trickster figure that is a hero who is taught and teaches not only independence, as Victor Barnouw would have it, but interdependence (Barnouw, 1955, p. 341–355). From the beginning, the trickster and first beings are interrelated, interdependent figures that teach and learn hard lessons about being a human in an all too human world.

There have been many analyses done on trickster figures around the world since the early 1900s, with most focusing on the figure itself, rather than the role it played in balancing Aboriginal cosmology. Addressing the

unconscious through myth allowed sexual realities to be played out in the form of nonthreatening, humorous, stories. Everyone, especially children, could be made aware, without being told directly, of the impacts that lust and sexual improprieties could generate, and how different things could divide a community and bring about punishment or even death. Repetitious unspoken sanctions, in the form of stories, encouraged each individual to behave very “appropriately” so as not to offend or be ridiculed by the group. Since each person’s behaviour would also have been potential material for trickster stories, even as they evolved into myth, life in small communities put a premium on each person’s consideration of the other. However, even the best intentions are not always enough, and things can go wrong, as Franchot Ballinger noted about human frailty,

The individual is made, thereby, a cohesive part of the social structure. Ideally, then, these mechanisms instil in one what we might call social appetites which satisfy community needs by satisfying individual needs. Trickster shows us, however, that such links between the individual and society fail, that the mechanisms go awry, when the balance between the two forces is tipped by self-indulgence, self-delusion or any other failure of self-restraint. (Ballinger, 1989, p. 22)

There was a strong emphasis in myth and in Anishnaabek culture on instilling a sense of social and community interdependence and responsibility. The myths made it easy to see the folly of lacking self-restraint through observing the trials of the first people, and the ridicule the trickster was inevitably subjected to for his antics. There was so much unspoken in the stories that must have spoken volumes to the unconscious. Certainly, the message in most stories was that it was best to do as others did, conform to societal expectations, and keep your head (self/ego) down.

Anna Freud in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936) suggested that myths supply abundant materials for introjections and likewise (in the form of witchcraft myths) suggest an easy and culturally acceptable method of projection of hostile impulses. Along the same line, Kluckhohn suggested that, “[their] rituals provide ways of sublimation of aggression and other socially dis-approved tendencies, in part, simply through giving people something to do” (1942, p. 71). Exploring myth from a psychoanalytic viewpoint has merit for Aboriginal mythology and culture, because perhaps it can provide much deeper answers to sociocultural problems in contemporary Aboriginal culture, and contribute to the healing necessary from historic and mythologized trauma (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004).

The Anishnaabek used myth for many reasons, including entertainment, because humour was/is very important to Aboriginal lifeways, and as already noted, the trickster figure can be found cavorting about in humorous stories and myths from coast to coast.

Laughter has always had an important place in the life of man; truly it is one of his saving graces. In mythology, trickster figures are the embodiment of humour — all kinds of humour. He plays tricks on others, he ridicules sacred customs, he breaks taboos, he boasts when he should blush, he is the world's greatest clown, and he can laugh at himself. (Ricketts, 1966, p. 347)

Through stories the Anishnaabek could laugh at themselves without laughing at any “one” and even death in the context of myth, can become something strangely yet necessarily, laughable. The myths were the reflection of unconscious wishes, knowledge, desires, and fears of the Anishnaabek. Many of the mythological stories, including the trickster tales, demonstrate the many complexes that an analyst such as Freud saw as inherent in all of humanity (Mitchell, 1996, p. xix). The myths depicted the “unruly and asocial instincts that were finally wrestled into adaptation through long and arduous struggles of the ego” (Mitchell, 1996, p. 136). Major features of Freud’s own contributions that were highly controversial in his time have become commonplace ideas in our world: unconscious motivation and meaning, the infinite variability of forms of sexuality, the formative power of early events, the centrality of oedipal themes in family life, the sexual and sensual dimensions of infantile and childhood experiences, the efficiency of the mind in disavowing unpleasant truths, and so on (Mitchell, 1996, p. xix). Can it be demonstrated that the oedipal complex and other aspects of psychoanalytical theory are in fact present in Anishnaabek myth? Through the presentation and analysis of the Anishnaabek creation story, “How It Came about That Some People are Small and Some Large,” it is my intention to demonstrate that what Freud had to say about myth and wish fulfilment, the unconscious, and phantasy are in fact well represented in Ojibwa myth. The analysis of myth may have some present and positive utility in helping the Anishnaabek reframe and address contemporary societal and cultural conundrums (Radin and Reagan, 1928, p. 103).

[A] “WORLD PARENT” CREATION MYTH

It is unknown whether the following story came from a male or female storyteller, only that it was collected between the years 1911–1914, and writ-

ten down by A.B. Reagan from a source at Nett Lake, Minnesota, where many American Chippewa/Ojibwa are still located today.

Unlike many of the creation myths that have been recorded across North America, the following myth does not follow the "Earth Diver" mode, which appears to be the most common creation story. The "Earth Diver" mode involves the trickster figure having to save himself after foolishly eating a talking bulb that makes him repeatedly empty his bowels, until his faeces cover the earth, and he has to prompt a flood in order to clean up the mess. He eventually sends various animals to dive down and bring up a bit of earth so that he can re-create the land. The following myth is more likely a "world parent" myth, a type not as widespread as might be thought based on the volume of literature that is available. I came upon this myth only once, and was immediately struck by the unconscious/unstated sexual expression in it. By contrast, many of the Winnebago myths and tales that have been repeatedly analyzed (not psychoanalyzed) and discussed by various authors, have little or no hidden (unconscious) sexual expression, although plenty of overt sexuality, incest, rape, long penises, oral and anal themes, and scatology. Is the implicit (unconscious) sexual connotation of this myth the reason that it has not been treated with the same attention?

How it Came About that Some People are Small and Some Large

It was in the long, long ago. At this time, women were fully developed, had arms, legs, eyes, nose, and features, and peculiar characteristics as women do now, but man had not yet reached a state of development. Though a god, in fact, the only god of earth at that time, he was still in a sort of cocoon state. He had a large mouth and an elongated, cigar-shaped body composed mostly of genital parts; otherwise he was wholly undeveloped. He had no eyes, no ears, no nose, no arms, and no legs. He was totally helpless. His wife had to care for him as if he was just a newborn babe. She had him wrapped well in the warmest kind of clothes and, on account of his helpless condition; she was compelled to take him with her every place she went. This was quite a task, too, for he was very large and heavy. To take him about she contrived a sort of toboggan sled and on this, well wrapped, she drew him after her from place to place, day after day and month after month, one whole retreat and return of the sun after another. And yet he always remained the same, completely helpless. She even had to feed him out of her hand. For a long time she was faithful to him, but finally she tired of always being a drudge and always having to draw this worthless burden around after her. She decided to get rid of it. He was totally helpless so that would be an easy job. So on a certain day she set out to destroy the father god of all the earth.

On this day, the sun rose through a hazy frost. It was winter-time. It was very cold. The streams of the land were frozen over, but not to their bottoms. At a

certain place, also, there was a deep hole where the water falling over a precipice for untold ages had scooped the rock under it so as to form a large depression in the bed in the stream. At this place, there was usually an opening in the ice, no matter how cold it got, and at this time the spot was clear of ice. So this unfaithful woman, whom we will call Tah-go-nay-ge-shig-oke (Sky Garden Woman),¹ decided to kill her husband at this place. With the rising of the sun on this particular day, she set out from home to the place chosen for the terrible deed. She had wrapped her husband well in the best robes she had and had tucked them in tightly and then sewed them snugly and firmly; she was going to make sure of her work. She then took a sleeve of each arm of an old dress and put one on each side of him and, in addition, she gave them supernatural powers and told them to answer any questions the helpless man should desire to ask and to answer the questions so as to make the asker believe that she herself and not her arm sleeves were making the replies. She then put him on the toboggan sled and drew him down to the river's brink near the large open pool at the foot of the falls in the stream. She slid the toboggan to the open ice and then shoved it under the ice on the down-stream side. Then she fled.

So the man-god was under the ice, but did not know it, as he had no means of knowing anything except by feeling. Soon, however, he began to feel a little wet through the numerous robes that were wrapped around him. Feeling uncomfortable, he exclaimed, "Old woman, why am I getting wet?"

"Oh," exclaimed the dress sleeves, "just a little water has splashed up on you. You'll be all right soon."

So he continued to float down stream under the ice. Soon he began to get very wet and again he exclaimed, "Old woman, how is it that I am getting so wet?"

"Oh," answered the sleeves again, "It is warming up a bit and the snow is getting pretty slushy and, of course, one on a sled cannot help but get wet. We'll be out of this soon. Then you will be drier. Don't worry."

Again there was silence for a time as they drifted farther and farther downstream under the ice. Now and then they went smoothly along. Then the toboggan would strike against boulders and would descend quickly and roughly over rapids. At length, becoming exasperated at such treatment, this god-father of all men exclaimed again: "Old woman what does all this mean? I am drenched to the skin! I am bumped about here and there! What does it mean?"

"Oh," answered the sleeves for the old woman, "we are just going over some rough places; it will be better very soon."

But this first god of mankind began to feel that something was wrong, that some diabolical deception was being practiced upon him. He had always been

1. I asked several Anishnaabek speakers to translate this name for me: Chief Ed Williams of Moose Deer Point gave me this translation and noted that he was told from his sources that it was in an "old" style spelling that the Jesuits used when writing the Native language down from the "Indians" speaking.

a good-natured fellow. But now that his wrath was kindled, his rage knew no bounds. He wriggled his body in his furious struggles. He tore, he broke asunder the robes and cords that bound him down to the toboggan. He crushed the ice to shivers [sic] with a wrench of his head. He burst his cocoon-skin. He sprang from the water to the river's bank a developed male human being, developed in every way as the men that walk the earth to-day, except that he was a giant in size. He had arms, legs, face, eyes, nose and mouth. He was in every respect a fully developed man.

As soon as he reached the bank and found that he could run and walk about at will, he began to try and find his wife. He looked about and finally found her tracks. Then he ran after her with the greatest possible speed he had at his command. Every now and then he could see her ahead of him and knew that he was gaining upon her. And every time he could see her going over the top of some ridge ahead, he would halloo, "Old woman, stop old woman. I, your husband, am coming. Stop!" But she ran all the harder. She heard him and feared the consequences of her unfaithfulness. So she ran and ran hard. But she knew that her husband was gaining on her and would soon overtake her. And her heart was guilty, and her body trembled. On she ran. As she was running she saw a small teepee ahead of her with smoke issuing from the top. She knew that someone must be there and possibly she would find help. So she rushed into the wigwam. As she entered it, she saw an old woman sitting by the fire warming herself. She was sitting with her back to the fire in a sort of humped-over position. She was old and gray. On entering, Tah-go-nay-ge-shig-oke addressed the aged lady in a hurried voice. "Grandma, Grandma, there is a god after me. Hide me." But the old lady paid not the least heed to what she said. Instead she kept on smoking her pipe, just as though no one was about. Again Tah-go-nay-ge-shig-oke addressed her, this time leaning anxiously over and hallooing into her ear. "Grandma, there is a god after me. Hide me. He'll kill me. Hide me."

Leisurely the old lady turned to her and said, "A god after you! There are no gods in these parts. You've lost your mind."

"Yes, grandma," [sic] reassured Tah-go-nay-ge-shig-oke, "I hear him coming. I hear him calling my name. I beg you to conceal me, quickly, or he will find me."

By this time the footsteps of the enraged giant-god could be distinctly heard coming at a run toward the teepee. Even the aged, deaf old woman could hear them and could hear the beating breath as he panted over the ground. "Quick, here, get under my apron," commanded the aged lady to Tah-go-nay-ge-shig-oke in a subdued voice. "He'll not get you there." It was as quickly done as said, and not too soon either, for at that instant the god-man entered the teepee. "Grandma," he panted, "where is my wife?" But the aged lady never turned her head or acted as if she had noticed him or heard his question. She just kept smoking her pipe and puffing the smoke upward toward the chimney-exit. Again the god-man addressed her, "Grandma, where is my wife?" At this

juncture the old lady laid her pipe in her lap and turned her face slowly toward him and looked him sharply in the face and remarked, "Your wife! You want your wife! She's not here." Then returning to her former position, she resumed her smoking. "But I want my wife," demanded the god-man. "She came to this place. I tracked her here." The aged woman again turned toward him and said, "A woman went by here some time ago. Is that the woman you mean? Well, she went on by. You'll have to overtake her."

On hearing this statement, that the woman had gone past the house, the man-god was out at once and onward he ran in the direction the old lady had pointed. On, on he ran and fainter and fainter grew the sound of his foot tread. Then they heard him plunge into the river; they heard the ice break as he trod over it. Then they heard his steps die out in the distance on the other side of the river. Then Tah-go-nay-ge-ship-oke and Grandma breathed more freely. But soon they could hear his footsteps, his patter, patter, patter of footsteps approaching. He came near. He swam the river again, or rather half swam, half waded. He came up on the bank on the same side as the wigwam. He encircled the wigwam. Then he entered it and demanded, "Give me my wife. She's here. I've been all around this place. I tracked her here and she has not left this tepee. Give her to me."

"She's not here."

"She is here and you surrender her to me at once or something will happen to you. Give her to me."

"She is here, but you can't have her."

"I'll get her. I'll teach you a lesson."

Here he doubled his giant self up and started to fall upon the little dried up old lady, he called Grandma. But the old lady was equal to the occasion. She was a sharp-back-finned pike-fish and just as the mad god was about to fall on her, she straightened out her back fins so as to make a sharp-edged knife of them and upon this the giant fell and cut himself in two and he died then and there.

Instantly, his wife was out from under the apron of the old lady and quickly the two were consulting what had best be done, for the giant was then the only male human being. Was the race of mankind thus to come to an end? Grandma had a thought. She handed the other woman, the wife, a sharp knife and quickly the two women hastily and promiscuously cut the huge body to pieces. Then the pieces they threw and tossed in all directions. And these became the human beings of our time.

The women in their hurry neglected to cut the pieces the same size and that is why some people are large and some small. They correspond to the part of the original man-god from which they have sprung.

THE END (Radin and Reagan, 1928, pp. 103-106)

PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES

To early psychoanalysts such as Karl Abraham and Otto Rank, myths were seen as “group phantasies,” wish fulfilments for a society, and were strictly analogous to the dreaming and day-dreaming of individuals (Abraham, 1927, p. 32; Rank, 1909). Rank concluded that myths were relics from the infantile mental life of the people, and dreams constitute the myths of the individual. Rank also attempted to show that hero myths originated in the delusional structures of paranoiacs. Their focus on the symbolic structure of myth, and the interpretation of this symbolism, which was seen as primarily “a sex symbolism,” was postulated as universal and all-pervasive, and like Jung, who would range over all time and space with the “dream book of absolute archetypical symbolism,” only to rediscover eternally only what was in the book, this was not considered an exhaustive look at the possibilities. To LaBarre, (1948–49) this was an ethnocentrism, which the anthropologist and (he hoped) the modern folklorist would reject. “It is the very nature of the symbol not to be the thing, but to stand for it” (1948–49, p. 384).

Victor Barnouw claimed that the Chippewa tales he studied reflected social and psychological traits. Accordingly, he formulated a hypothetical picture of the Chippewa as having “a rather fearful, depressed attitude toward the world, involving some repression of sexual and aggressive impulses (Barnouw, 1977, p. 46). The tales that he read probably did reflect both the social and the psychological, but they also reflected the truth of humanity generally, as the Anishnaabek understood it. Because the myths contained so much material of a sexual nature, including manifestations of pride, sloth, envy, etc., (the seven deadly sins), they also provided an avenue for the unconscious to express and diffuse that which the society inherently knew to be a threat to its own safety and functioning. As Freud noted, one of the very unpopular assertions of psychoanalysis is that “mental processes are in themselves unconscious and that of all mental life it is only certain individual acts and portions that are conscious” (Freud, 1976, p. 46). They would not then necessarily “consciously” have a rather fearful, depressed attitude toward the world, but they may well have “unconsciously” repressed sexual and aggressive impulses that didn’t fit into their worldview. This is not to suggest that each Anishnaabek member understood that the myths were being told to diffuse unconscious wishes and desires, only that the myths must have been developed over a very long time to ultimately have achieved that end.

Clyde Kluckhohn lists ways in which myth and rituals protect “cultural continuity” and “stabilize society,” but he also asks, “how are myths and rituals rewarding enough in the daily lives of individuals” so that they “continue to prevail at the expense of more rational responses?” In sketching a tentative series of working hypotheses with which to approach this question he points out the way in which emotions, seeking discharge, seize upon culturally supplied sanctions which are emotionally charged, to — among other things — reduce the individual’s “anticipation of disaster.” In short, these cultural manifestations are used by the ego as “mechanisms of defence” in accordance with “psychoanalytic principles” (Kluckhohn, 1942, p. 471).

Freud believed that civilization was created under pressure of the “exigencies of life at the cost of satisfaction of the instincts”; and that “civilization to a large extent is always being created anew, with each individual making a fresh entry, or being born,” and repeating this same sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefit of the whole community (Freud, 1976, p. 47). This was certainly expected in early Anishnaabek culture, and the group or community was held paramount over the self or the individual. Also, for the Anishnaabek, clownish or unusual figures such as those that appear in some capacity in most stories and the trickster-god’s humorous actions enabled the people to adjust to social and natural realities and restrictions by allowing them to make fun of them through these characters. Unfortunately, this is no longer true today, with more and more Anishnaabek people living apart from the group, primarily fending socially and economically for themselves, and not telling the “old” myths and stories to their children, if they even have occasion to know those stories themselves.

According to Kluckhohn, mythology was essential to psychoanalysts (so far as what they did with it is concerned) because they saw it as “societal phantasy material, which reflected impulse repression” (1942, p. 46). Many psychoanalysts of the day considered myths simply “a form of collective daydreaming” and Kluckhohn apparently heard a prominent (unidentified) psychoanalyst say, “Creation myths are for culture what early memories (true or fictitious) are to the individual” (1942, p. 46). At the same time, at least during the early 1900s, no attempt was made to discover what the practical function of mythology was in the everyday behaviours of Anishnaabek individuals, nor to link the mythology and ceremony of a community together to define specific interactions. Boas later showed how the origin of all folklore is based on the ordinary social life of the society

in question, and in later publications on the Kwakiutl demonstrated how mythology reflected social organization — *not* how mythology preserved social equilibrium or symbolized social interaction.

Freud, along with others, agreed that there was a connection between myth and ritual or ceremony, and he supported the proposition that mythology was mainly a description of ritual. Clyde Kluckhohn also developed a theory of myth as a description of ritual. “Myth,” he writes, “... may express not only the latent content of rituals, but of other culturally organized behaviours (Kluckhohn, 1942, p. 54). More significantly, the idea prevailed that myths reflected the social organization of the community and it was through the stories that people were able to act out those individual impulses that were otherwise repressed in the interests of overall community membership.

Malinowski’s sociological theory, in which myth performs an indispensable function in primitive societies, suggested that, “it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief” (Malinowski, 1926, p. 19). In fact, it does more; “it enforces morality” and “vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man” (Malinowski, 1926, p. 19). The myths served to remind each person of their collective dependence upon the others; and spoke loudly that which remained unspoken among people without singling out specific individuals; threw light upon the shadow self by poking fun at it (Jung, 1956); and revealed the wishes and shortcomings of the people in order to keep them in check and provide a healthy spiritual balance (Smith, 1894). There are indeed many myths regarding wish fulfillment and warnings against actually getting that which you wish for.

... there was once a number of young girls who took for their husbands anything that they could get, even such things as stones and bones of dead animals or people. A girl once took a stone for her husband, and because she did this she was turned into a stone.... In many instances it is because the girls are fickle and will not chose from the males they are presented with, because they are ‘wishing’ for something [someone] else. (Smith, 1894, p. 210)

There was clear emotional content in the stories, and people related to the tellers and the myths on that basis. As Hassan noted, “It is faith and emotion channelled to specific cultural purposes” (1952, pp. 205–215). The purposes have been lost in antiquity, but now require a resurgence and restoration of guidance, cultural discipline, and social efficacy.

Freud taught that in psychoanalytic treatment success was not in the ability of someone to listen, or someone to tell, but in the special emotional

attachment of the patient to the doctor (1976, p. 42). Anyone could tell their (a) story in a passionate or even dispassionate way and be truthful, the question was whether the story sent and the response received resonated within the “other.” Anishnaabek storytellers had that special emotional attachment with their people, and myth telling was effective because the teller was a trusted Elder or “doctor” to the audience, and therefore believable. Myths were the vehicle by which information from the world around the Anishnaabek could be validated. Had the myth been inconsistent with their empirical knowledge, they would not have “believed” or trusted the storytellers. As Christopher Vecsey (1983, p. 93) has noted, “...since they interpreted events around them employing the means provided by the myth itself, the myth received constant reinforcement,” and Hallowell also noted that,

Experience and belief must be harmonized if beliefs are to be believed. The Indian is no fool. He employs the same common sense reasoning processes as ourselves, so that if he firmly holds to certain beliefs, we may be sure that they are supported in some degree by an empirical foundation. (Hallowell, 1934, p. 393)

Freud stated that psychoanalysis works best if applied to a single person, and while this may not have been the case in Aboriginal culture in the days when myth was still being told around a winter campfire, it is likely that each myth was heard by the individual unconscious as required. Mythology taken literally can be somewhat nonsensical, and therefore we understand today that it would appeal more directly to the unconscious than to the conscious mind of each person receiving it.

There are lots of funny mythical stories, and even in a tale in which a trickster obtains fire for mankind, the listener can detect a humorous tone. During the telling of trickster tales, by narrator Rudolph Kane, he teases audiences, *mainly composed of children*, by affecting an apology for the humour of the stories: “I don’t want to make you laugh. That’s the truth” (Haseltine, 1985, p. 44). Such statements create ambivalence in the listener, a condition especially conducive to instruction. Freud noted that, “ambivalent — emotional attitudes, which in adults would lead to conflict, remain compatible with each other for a long time in children, just as later they find a permanent place beside each other in the unconscious” (Freud, 1976, p. 375). Whether nonsensical or deliberately humorous, the sophistication of the storyteller was a key element in the ability to weave a narrative that could effectively reach into the unconscious mind of the listener and confirm their societal imperatives.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Christopher Vecsey has noted how surprising it is that, “only a few modern scholars have attempted analyses of myth” (Vecsey, 1983, p. 88). In his opinion, myth provides “stunning insights and valuable verifications” for those outside of traditional Ojibwa (Anishnaabek) who might wish to understand who they are. I would further suggest that the analysis of Aboriginal myth, might perhaps show surprising similarities to non-Aboriginal people, regarding unconscious motivations, wishes, and even fears, rather than showing them to be so very different from those outside of the culture. Myth reflects the very humanity of people, rather than the surface differences that we have a tendency (also very human) to focus on.

The preceding myth has a number of interesting components that can be placed into a psychoanalytic framework. The synopsis that follows is a short summary of a larger commentary on what the passages might reflect in the unconscious, or at least what might be reflected from a psychoanalytic perspective, as well as pointing out a few things in Anishnaabek culture generally. It should be noted that myths told to anthropologists, ethnologists, and other strangers probably were altered in some way from those told to family and community members gathered around the winter campfire in order to preserve the “sacredness” of the story. Also, as noted earlier, the content of more recent myths may have been altered as the circumstances and religious views of the Anishnaabek changed. Changing social mores and repressed fears would have been consciously and well as unconsciously related to uncertainty in the environment, their culture, as well as their emotional state. As William Morgan has noted;

The investigators of psychotherapy have been interested in the content, rather than the processes, of subjective activity. But a knowledge of content, and more precisely the meaning of content, is essential for detecting and tracing processes. This meaning is the unconscious meaning and not those manifest interpretations of behaviour and imagery, which are conscious afterthoughts and rationalizations. (Morgan, 1945, p. 170)

Each myth can therefore be seen to be many stories at one and the same time, and interpretation always depends on the teller/listener combination. In an effort to demonstrate how knowledge regarding psychoanalysis and storytelling might be utilized, the following synopsis describes how the myth included in this paper might be interpreted based on a psychoanalytic process.

In this myth we find a description of the human birth process and the experience of infancy and oral fixation; male penile fixation; separation anxiety; wish fulfilment; the “rebirth” of man as he breaks away from his mother and “kills” his incestuous desire for her thereby becoming a fully developed man; himself as a rebirthed (married) man; mother-in-law taboo; initiation of sexual intercourse and his confusion as to what was happening because he could only “feel and not see” as a penis having the experience; his ultimate “death” (orgasm) at the hands of a woman; the human creation process and how one aspect of humanity came to be the way it is; and the recurring process of creation out of death (an important concept to Aboriginal people), and a statement on the goodness that comes out of death — he (the man-god) becomes the father of all creation and humankind.

ONCE THERE WERE MANY STORIES

The Anishnaabek once had a full repository of mythology that they relied upon to guide and enforce social mores and intimate interactions within and between individuals and families. The reinforcement of interdependence allowed Anishnaabek peoples to continue to adapt and adjust their lives to a rapidly changing, and often alien environment, especially during the years after first contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans.

Unfortunately, over time the repetition and sharing of myth seems to have been abandoned or forgotten in the face of increasing external pressures imposed by proselytization, colonialism, assimilation, and modernization. Eventually, movement towards other methods of social control such as physical punishment, ostracism, and increasing outside intervention replaced myth as a social regulator. More generally, the myths have come to reflect the many crises that Anishnaabek society has been subjected to in the historical period. Aboriginal people were dealing with the ravages of disease, societal disequilibrium, increasing resulting factionalism, the depletion of food animals, the loss of homelands, cultural anomie and geographical displacement, increasing political powerlessness both internally and externally, the loss of religious confidence in their own people, and religious intolerance from missionaries.

Eventually, Anishnaabek stories came to describe a society on the verge of extinction through epidemics and colonization, and to reflect the private crises of its members. The myths that had sustained their beliefs and life-ways were put aside.

Sadly, as their culture disintegrated, the Anishnaabek story-tellers ceased to pass down the entire corpus of myths to their membership. By the twentieth century many story-tellers no longer knew all the episodes of lengthy myths; and others had begun to add Christian elements. (Vecsey, 1984, p. 70)

INDIVIDUAL PHANTASY OR COMMUNITY MYTH?

Changing environmental and social conditions had the effect of highlighting individual behavioural responses to the stress of increasing colonial impacts. As Paula Gunn Allen notes,

this is not to suggest that Native Americans [are] unaware of the enormity of the change they have been forced to undergo by the several centuries of white presence in our midst, but it is to say that much of that change is at deep and subtle levels that are not easily noted or resisted. (Allen, 1985, p. 87)

According to Kluckhohn, this type of impact “had the effect of making obsessive behaviours and private ritual practices appear congenial to the general population” (1942, p. 53). Thus, norms became reversed and the private rituals or behaviours of individuals became socialized by the group with the phantasy of the individual ultimately becoming part and parcel of the myth of his society, and integrated into the cultural whole. Hassan commented on this idea of a “basic personality,” providing a much more satisfying technique of studying the relations between culture and personality, thereby elaborating on Kardiner’s (1945, pp. 21ff) idea that for any society the basic personality is that “shared by the bulk of the society’s members” (Hassan, 1952, p. 212). This was not always a positive shift, and how this is interpreted today brings specific forms of meaning to our evolving Anishnaabek world and how members adjust to unrelenting change.

This behaviour was most clearly demonstrated through the adoption of the “Ghost Dance” (Kehoe, 1989), in 1889, which spread across the continent during the reservation period. This movement was generated from the dream and ritual of one man, a Paiute Indian, named Jack Wilson (Kehoe, 1989, p. v). Dorothy Eggan eventually reversed Kluckhohn’s statement that when an individual fantasy becomes congenial to the group it becomes a myth, and asserted that, “when a myth is congenial enough to the individual he/she may use it as a personal fantasy” (Eggan, 1971, p. 110). This personalization constantly contributed to the perpetuation of myth as inherently recognizable, familiar, and culturally acceptable. As William Bascom pointed out;

Among other things it would be pertinent to ask, for example, whether the study of oral narratives has by any means contributed its full share to our understanding of culture and its functioning in human societies, or whether the study of myth and tale has nothing whatsoever to do with investigation of human psychology and the adjustment of the individual to his culturally constituted world? (Bascom, 1954, p. 334)

The “death” ritual practiced in the Ghost Dance period also contributed to the repository of Orpheus myths (Gayton, 1935, pp. 263–291) among Aboriginal peoples, which expressed the emotional phantasies of grieving people. Many of the stories were generated in response to the massive death rates from disease and the Indian-settler wars. The Orpheus stories addressed the wish of people to bring the dead back to life, to cross over into the land of the dead, survive, and bring back their loved ones. These stories usually ended with the dead coming back only very reluctantly, the living not having the necessary patience to fulfil their side of the agreement which would bring them back permanently, and the dead ultimately crossing back over the bridge of life and returning happily to the other side (Gayton, 1935, p. 286). Other aspects of the Orpheus tales helped to explain why communication is forbidden between the dead and the living, and why the worlds have become completely separated.

Franz Boas noted that,

For the study of the development of folktales modern material is of particular value, because it may enable us to understand better the processes of assimilation and of adaptation, which undoubtedly have been of great importance in the history of folk-tradition. (Boas, 1914, p. 377).

I would suggest that this statement remains very true today, and that myths like the one interpreted in this paper incorporate changing life-views, relationships, and cosmology, just as they did when Boas was collecting them in the late 1800s-early 1900s. This myth was recorded around the same time frame, and while the sexual undertones, and somewhat obvious sexual imagery is still present, there is also an element of physical violence perpetrated on each other when the woman “dumps” the god-man into the river to kill him, and when the woman stresses repeatedly that, “he’ll kill me,” and the circumstances do not only affect the trickster figure, but everyone. This violence is also there when the “god-man” tries to fall on the “Old Grandma” (trickster/fish?) when he fails to find the “wife” and punish her disloyalty. It would be worth further research to determine whether this threat to other persons is present in earlier myths, or whether social and

familial violence and punishment developed and was incorporated within myth and newer stories because of increasing changes through contact and the subsequent breakdown of Anishnaabek society.

Gerald Vizenor's book, *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (1981), addresses the question of whether or not the old myths have died and whether people can still believe (revive) them. A discussion between two of his characters, guardian spirit MacChurbbs, and a scholar-author named Mouse Proof Martin concerning the survival of myth in the modern world produces the following scenario:

MacChurbbs demonstrates a transformation into a river otter to convince Mouse Proof that myth lives, his shape-shifting antics do not settle the question, and in response, the wise shaman crow Libertina laments changing belief: "Once upon a time, we were all leaves, like these leaves around us and the leaves floated in the river. Once we showed our teeth under water in myths ... but now the foolish giants have become machines more than leaves, and we are no longer important to our myths. (Haseltine, 1985, p. 38)

After much discussion back and forth, and intense dialectical and poetic discussion, it is concluded that the "wind is not dead, but like the language and the river, it bears the poisons of time" and the author makes the convincing argument that "myths survive where they always have — in the poetic imagination." The question now is; in whose poetic imagination? Does it survive in the phantasy of the individual, or in the corpus of community myth and the memory of the people as a whole?

CONCLUSION

I would like to close with a question posed by A.I. Hallowell, because I feel it closely addresses my own personal musings on the subject of the psychology of myth, and in particular my interest in an ongoing psychoanalysis of myth from the perspective of anthropology in a modern context. I personally see value in further study and reflection on psychoanalytic theory, and its applicability in interpreting myth and culture. Not only for Aboriginal people, but for all of humanity in general; Hallowell notes;

Among other things it seems pertinent to ask, for example, whether the study of oral narratives has by any means contributed its full share to our understanding of culture and its functioning in human societies, or whether the study of myth and tale has nothing whatsoever to do with investigation of human psychology and the adjustment of the individual to his culturally constituted world? (Hallowell, 1947, p. 546)

Viewed in the spotlight of psychoanalysis, I would suggest that there is much to be learned and understood from the body of myth and stories that have been recorded over the past century from Aboriginal people. That the Anishnaabek no longer recount ancient myth or tell stories of the Trickster in the long, cold winter months, or share them with their children, does not dispel the value of interpreting myths and utilizing their lessons in a modern context. The many scholars who study myth have demonstrated that it is imperative to explore all avenues in order to understand the human condition. Studying myth can shed light on Anishnaabek culture, society, and the underlying psychology of those who continue to struggle to find their place in the world today. It is possible to analyze ancient myths and more contemporary stories in order to gain a better understanding of, “how the Anishnaabek have come to be the way they are today”, because it is only through looking back, and attempting to understand, that we can look forward with any confidence to a better future.

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