CLOTHED-IN-FUR AND OTHER TALES:
AN INTRODUCTION TO AN OJIBWA WORLD VIEW

Thomas W. Overholt
and
J. Baird Callicott

With Ojibwa Texts by William Jones
and
Foreword by Mary B. Black-Rogers
THE FIRST-BORN SON

Now, once upon a time, they say, there dwelt a first-born son. Ten was the number of his sons, and his daughters were also ten. Thereupon said the youths: "Well, my father, the time is now at hand for us to be leaving you. To a different land are we going."

And so, in truth, he let his sons depart; whereupon they started away. And when they came to the place where they were going to live, they then built a wigwam. And so from that place they set out when they went to hunt for game; all kinds of things they killed, what they were to eat. Now, this was what they did: each of them had a road; now, the road of the eldest was the first to branch off towards where he was to hunt for game; and the road of the next eldest then branched off towards where he was to hunt for game; and so on, (as they stood) next in order of age, the road of each one went branching off; and now that was what they always did when they went to hunt, (the roads continued branching off) until all (the youths) had separated.

Now once, when they had come back home, they observed that somebody had come to the place where they lived. Nice was the arrangement (of things) inside; it was like the work of a woman; and some cooking had been done; and carefully arranged where the balsam-boughs at the sleeping-places; and there was also some firewood outside. Accordingly said the one who was eldest: "I will simply remain at home to-morrow. I will wait to see who it can be."

And truly on the morrow the first-born remained at home, but by nobody was he visited.

Therefore on the next day all went away. And then evidently must the woman have come again; again she must have done some cooking; and everything was nicely cleaned (in the wigwam), but she was not there. So on the next day he that was the next in age said: "Just let me take a turn remaining at home."

Verily, on the morrow he said at home all day long, and by nobody was he visited. And that was what happened even to all the other nine youths.

And now there was the one who was their younger brother, it was now his turn to remain at home. And when all his elder brothers had gone away, then was he visited by a woman; indeed, she was a beautiful woman. And so by his side she came to sit to be his wife.

And when back home came the youths, they were very happy to see the woman that was a wife to their younger brother. Thereupon by her were they waited upon, for them she cooked, and all their garments the woman fixed.

And now it had been agreed among them that the one who was married would always come home first; but he who was the eldest, the first-born, did not like it. He thought: "Would that I had been the one to marry her!" Now, one morning they
The Narratives

were setting out one after another, when the first-born had left to go his way; he stood among some balsams, watching all his brothers as they went walking past; and then he went back home. Thereupon he hid himself near the wigwam. And so, after the woman had finished her work indoors, she then went outside to gather some fire-wood. There was a tree which she observed had dry wood. And then the first-born beheld a flash of lightning, and at that the entire tree was splintered into pieces. And then the woman began carrying the fire-wood. Now, once while she had her back turned towards him, then it was that with his knee the first-born struck his bow, his feathered arrow he fixed upon the cord; thereupon slyly he went up to his sister-in-law, and then shot her. By her he was observed when approaching. "What foolishness, first-born, in what you are doing!"

And then presently on his way went the first-born.

Now, when home had come the man who had the wife, no present was she there where they lived. Thereupon he went to look for her; now at the place where the woman was wont to gather fire-wood was where he found her barely yet alive. Therefore he said to her: "Who did this to you?"

Thereupon said the woman: "It was that elder brother of yours, first to be born, he was the one who shot me this morning." So then he was told: "Please take me away somewhere."

Thereupon truly he started away with her. And now he was told by the woman: "A small wigwam do you make, and it is there that I will stay. Not till ten days are up must you come to seek for me."

Thereupon back home went the man; he felt sad about it.

And when all the men came home, they did not see their sister-in-law. Thereupon secretly he informed all his brothers, saying: "It was indeed our elder brother who shot her." Yet they said not a word to their elder brother. Now, the first-born made believe that he was sad too.

Thereupon once more were they waiting upon themselves. And when the eighth day came round, he became extremely anxious to see his wife, whereupon thither he went. And when he was coming in sight of the little wigwam, he then saw a large bird rising from the place and flying away. And when it alighted on a tree, he was then addressed by it saying: "You are to be pitied, for too soon have you come to look for me." And then off it went flying away.

And he too set forth, following after it, keeping always straight towards the west. Now, once upon a mountain he climbed a tree that was standing high, and so he asked of that tree: "Did you not see the one that I am pursuing after?"

Whereupon he was told: "To this place it flew, and alighted upon my head; and then away it went straight towards the west."

And so once more he started on. And now that was what he did all day long, of the trees he made inquiry. Sometimes he could barely get within sight of it, but that was usually when he came to a turn in the trail. And when it was evening, he came to where his grandmother was abiding, whereupon he entered.

"Whither, my grandson, are you going?"

"Of my wife am I in pursuit."* 

"Ah, me! my grandson, you never will overtake her. It is hard for you to reach her (there where she has gone), here within this very place she slept. Look, see the blood!"

Thereupon truly he saw that the place was bloody where she had slept. Thereupon he was fed by his grandmother upon dried blueberries and upon grease mixed with them. And then he went to sleep. And in the morning he was again fed by his grandmother.

Thereupon again he started on, always straight ahead he kept going. And so again all day long he kept inquiring of the trees. Sometimes, "Close by she came when she passed," he was told. Sometimes, "Hardly could she be seen when she was passing," they would say. And then again he turned off the trail. And when it was evening again, to another grandmother of his he came.

"Whither, my grandson, are you going?"

Thereupon he told her that he was in pursuit of his wife.

Whereupon he was told: "Ah, me! my grandson, you will never come to where she is." Thereupon next he boiled one grain of rice in her tiny kettle. And when the rice was done cooking, he was handed the tiny kettle with a stick. "My grandson, eat!"

Thereupon then thought the man: "I shall not get enough to eat, such a small bit is my grandmother feeding me." Then into his hand he poured the rice, ever so full was his hand, (and continued so) till he was satied with food. And then he went to sleep. And on the following morning, after he had been fed by his grandmother, he started on his way again; and always straight ahead he kept on going. Thereupon he did the same thing as before, he inquired of the trees: "Did you see any one flying by?"

Sometimes he was told by the trees: "Here on this head (of mine) it alighted."

And always straight ahead he kept going. And on the next evening he came to an old man.

"Come in, my grandson!" he was told. So next he was fed corn in a tiny kettle. After he had eaten, he was asked by his grandfather: "Whither are you going, my grandson?"

Thereupon he said to him: "Of my wife am I in pursuit."

So then he was told: "Stop looking for her, for you will never overtake her. Many people has she brought to destruction."
The Narratives

Whereupon said the youth: "I am determined to go."

He was told by his grandfather: "To another grandfather of yours will you come this evening, and he will be the one to tell you rightly about the place where you are going."

Thereupon he started again; and he did what he had been continually doing, he kept on asking the trees. And on the next evening he came to his grandfather; and next he was fed upon meat and grease. Thereupon he went to bed.

And in the morning he was addressed by his grandfather saying: "At soon you will come to a steep cliff; and there you will see the bones of all the people that have died there." Then the old man sought something in his bag, and then he took out from it some metal, some pieces of copper. Now, four was he given, bent into the form of a hook were the four. And these were what he took along.

And when he was come at the steep cliff, he then saw there many bones. Thereupon he took two metal pieces. "What am I to do with these?" And when he tried them on the rock, they then stuck where they hit; thereupon another he struck (against the rock), and so on up the cliff he climbed.

Now, when he was far (up), then dull became the (point of the) metal, it did not stick (into the rock); he flung it away. So another he took. Another he flung away, and another he took. And then again he started on. And when again it became dull, it did not stick (into the rock). Alas! so there on high was he hanging. "Verily, the truth my grandfather told in what he said," Thereupon he recalled to mind what had been told him in a dream, and so thought of a butterfly about which he had dreamed during the time of his youth. Accordingly he said: "Now, like a butterfly will I look." Whereupon truly like a butterfly he appeared. But not so very high was he able to go. Thereupon the butterfly alighted upon some black lichen. So then again he said: "Well, now like a duck will I look." And truly like a duck he looked. Thereupon, as up it flew, it quacked: "Kwâwâ, kwâwâ, kwâwâ." "Thereupon he succeeded in getting to the top of the mountain. But a short way he went, when he discovered an abyss. And he saw a rock that had the form of (the blade of) a knife. He was not able to walk by that way. So at last again he said: "Now like a squirrel am I going to look." Whereupon truly like a squirrel he looked. And then the squirrel started off on a run. At the same time it could be heard with the sound, "Sûk, sîk, sîk, sîk!" (such) was the sound it made. So when he was come at the foot of the mountain, he started again straight to where he was going.

Now, it was once on an evening that he beheld a town, and a small wigwam he saw there at the end of the town. And he also saw a pole standing in the centre of the town, a flag-pole. And so he went into the little wigwam, (and he beheld) an old woman dwelling there.

"My grandson, come in!" he was told. And this she said: "To-morrow there is to be a great contest, for the chief's daughter is to be married. Whoever shall win in the contest will be the one to marry the chief's daughter. Do as well as you can, my grandson, for you will also be invited."

The First-Born Son

So truly on the morrow they came to invite the man, likewise all the youths of the town were invited. And so he saw a mussel-shell, a red mussel-shell. Thereupon the chief said: "This mussel-shell is to be touched on the inside; now, on whosoever's hand it shall stick, he shall be the one to marry my daughter."

Many people went inside, likewise all the various kinds of birds.

Thereupon the mussel-shell started on its course; and every one had a chance to make it stick, but on no one did it stay. And so for the lad himself, "I wish it would not stick to any one's hand!" he thus thought. And so it went, till nearly all had touched the shell, but without success, for it did not stick (to any one). Now, when it was coming near, the lad thought: "If only now I had some glue! I dreamed of it (once) in the past." It was true that some glue happened there upon his hand. And when they came, placing before him the shell, he accordingly touched it on the inside, and then it stuck there to his hand.

"Hurrah!" with a great shout they cried. "Hurrah! for the chief's daughter is to be married."

And so there was a great time extending invitations to the feast. Many beings were asked. His sisters-in-law were nine in number, so therefore his wives were ten; and his brothers-in-law were also ten.

And so there at the place continued the man. Now, once he was addressed by his father-in-law saying: "Son-in-law, if you become weary of the place, you should go off on a walk." Thereupon truly he went away, (and came) to a great plain, and he saw a place where the water came forth (like a fountain) from the ground. And now he saw a foam there that was red; he took some, and upon his legs he put it. He found two fountains of water; and he did again what he had done before, he put some foam upon his legs. Thereupon he went his homeward way. Now, when he was observed by his wife with his legs marked in design, joyful was the woman.

She said to her mother and her father: "Two bears have been found," said the woman.

And the man was embarrassed. "I did not find any bears."

"Truly, indeed, you did find some bears. Just glance at your legs (and see) how they look! Why, there's froth!" she said.

Now, one of his brothers-in-law came, and by him was he examined. Thereupon he was told: "Look, my brother-in-law! truly some bears have you seen." And then they said: "To-morrow, then, will we go get the bears." So then on the morrow they set out. "Where did you see them?" was said to the man.

Thereupon he pointed out the place. And when they had seen the place, they said: "Truly, a bear stays here."
Now, there was a hillock near by the place of the fountain, and that was where
the bear was. Now, the one that was good at sounding the voice was chosen to
frighten the hillock. It was true that from out of the water into view came the bear.
And they who were standing at the place struck the bear with a blow that killed it.
Now, part of them came home bringing the bear, and the rest went over to where
the other fountain was playing; therefore another bear they got from that place.
And likewise they went their homeward way, taking it along.

And so that was what the man was always doing, he went seeking for places
where the water gushed out from the ground; many bears were slain; much food
they had from what the man was killing.

Now, once the lad got to telling about things: "There are elder brothers of mine
abiding over there from whence I came; they are nine. Perhaps they are lonesome."
Thereupon was he told by his father-in-law: "Well, if you long to return home,
you may go. And these your sisters-in-law may go along."

And so on the following day they set out, and by a different way they went.
Not by yonder ash did they go. And then after a while, when they came out upon
the edge of the cliff, then down sat the women. While they sat by the edge of the
steep cliff, he was told by his wife: "Here at my back do you take your place. The
moment you see me spread forth my arms, then upon me spring. Hold on tight to me."
Thereupon truly, when his wife spread forth her arms, then there he flung himself;
tight held he on. Thereupon afterward all of them went flying away. Now, near
the home of the lad (and his brothers) was the place where they alighted. Thereupon
like people again they looked.

"Here in this place do you remain," he said the then; "wait till I first go on
ahead." And as he went on his way, (he saw) where the tracks of all kinds of game
were passing. And when he reached the place where (his elder brothers) lived, he
saw and coming forth from the doorway. And when he reached the place where
they lived, he addressed his elder brothers, saying: "O my elder brothers! I have now
come home."

Then the first-born took up a spoon (and) dipped up sand at the doorway.
Thereupon another time was he addressed by his younger brother saying:
"Truly, my elder brothers, I have come home."

And when the first-born looked, he opened his eyes with his hand, whereupon
he truly beheld his little brother. And when he had seized him, he kissed him.
Thereupon he was told: "Bathe yourselves, and clothe yourselves neatly in fine raincoat.
Comb your hair."

And after they were all gaily dressed, he went after his sisters-in-law. Thereupon
he said to them: "Behind me come. Keep at my back, and in a regular order are you
to take your seats beside my elder brothers."
INTERPRETIVE ESSAY: UNDERSTANDING AN OJIBWA WORLD VIEW

In the “Introduction” to the concept “world view” was discussed, and we were alerted to the possibility that members of each distinct culture will have a characteristic way of looking “outward upon the universe” (Redfield, 1953, p. 85) which differs to some extent from every other. It stands to reason that when one grows up in a culture one appropriates its world view, and indeed Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann suggest that the “trick” which primary socialization plays on each of us is to convince us that the way we have been taught to view the world is the way the world really is (1967, p. 135). Similarly, Hallowell observes that “cultural variables are inevitably constituents of human perception,” since culture provides the symbols through which experience is transformed and represented. As an illustration of this process, he offers the following anecdote:

Many years ago when I was trying to demonstrate the relation between language and perception to a class I used the stellar constellation we call “the dipper” as an example. I pointed out that this constellation was given a different name in other cultures as, e.g., “the plough” or “the bear,” and that although the constellation itself remained constant in form, the actual perception of it was a function of language and associated concepts as well as of our organs of vision. The members of the class seemed to have grasped the point so I was about to pass on to something else when one young lady raised her hand and said, “But it does look like a dipper!” And of course it does—to us. (1951, pp. 171f.)

He also reminds us that it is best to begin by assuming and attempting to appreciate the integrity of each of these world views, rather than with the assumption that our own culturally-conditioned perception of reality defines the standard from which all others are only more or less intelligible deviations.

Every society has a complicated set of mechanisms for passing on its world view, and in traditional Ojibwa culture the telling of myths and stories was an important part of this process. Of course, these narratives did not have to bear the entire burden of transmitting the world view. Dreams were also important, so much so that one could speak of children going “to school in dreams,” as were practices like conjuring. We will later see how all of these phenomena are interrelated.

A reading of the narratives, however, will have shown that they are not simply didactic in our common, somewhat formal, sense of the term. The stories obviously have considerable entertainment value, and that was one of the purposes for which they were told. They are given in full here because they are first of all narratives with intricate plot-lines and a richness of detail which would be impoverished by summarization. But the stories do teach, as well as entertain. Sometimes the moral is explicitly stated, as in the case of the young moose (7) who, overproud of his own
power and unaminful of the advice of his father, is told that he is "greatly to be pitied." Similarly, after an account of a typically bungling performance in which he has tried to exercise powers which he did not have, the narrator comments, "What a fool Nanabush must be to forever trying to do what he sees others do." (21C).

Mainly, however, they teach more indirectly by means of a consistent and coherent set of underlying assumptions about the nature of reality which in one way or another is repeated in them again and again. And thus the question arises: What is the shape of the world as it is mirrored in these narratives?

THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD VIEW

When one who has been nurtured in the technologically-oriented European-American cultural tradition reads a collection of Indian myths like the one presented here, he or she will inevitably encounter ideas and occurrences which from his or her perspective seem quite strange. Some of these will be on the level of everyday life and will represent little more than differences in taste (e.g., the idea that a dried beaver tail could be considered a delicacy, 18), but others will have more far-reaching significance. In what follows we propose to identify a number of these "strange" ideas which are essential to a systematic understanding of the Ojibwa world view.

Power

Perhaps one of the most striking features of these stories is that so many of the characters, creatures, and objects in them are pictured as performing actions which from a Western point of view we would consider quite extraordinary. From the canoes of the wicked old man of the first narrative, which moves under its own power when struck by its owner's paddle, to the unusual method of luring and killing moose employed by Nanabush in the last, we are confronted with a variety of occurrences without analog in our world of everyday experience. These aptitudes and capacities of the various actors may conveniently be designated as manifestations of "power," and they occur in every one of the myths here assembled.

We must not, of course, take the term "actors" in too narrow a sense, since it is clear that not only humans can be wielders of power, but manitous, animals, plants, and material objects as well. We notice, however, that when manifest in non-human subjects, the latter tend to be pictured as displaying "social" characteristics like volition (the animals determine to set out on an expedition to release the captive birds of summer, 15), speech (trees tell a man which direction he should travel, 2), emotion (beavers are said to be "very fond of the people," 4), rationality (animals plot elaborate strategies in response to clearly-defined problems, 15), generosity (Nanabush's hosts always offer him food, 21), and existence within a family or community (the beaver and moose, 3, 4, 7).

Power is not manifested in any one way exclusively. Most often in these tales its exercise involves a metamorphosis, either of the actor himself or of some other person or object which he is pictured as transforming. Sometimes it takes the form of knowledge about future events (1A, 6) or of the ability to bestow a blessing (9, 11). Some men have a special capacity for hunting a particular species, like the bear (2, 5), while for their part animals have the power to withhold or give themselves to the men who hunt them (3, 4, 5). The source of the power is not often specified. Presumably, extraordinary power is a defining characteristic of the manitous, though even there, power is unevenly distributed: Nanabush himself, a manitous, is sometimes pictured as being blessed by a being more powerful than himself (18, 22). As for men, the stories indicate that any special powers they may acquire tend to come as the result of fasting, dreaming, or the obtaining of certain medicines (2, 10, 11, 17).

That every one of these tales makes mention of the exercise of some (to us) unusual power suggests that such powers are conceived of by the Ojibwa as a regular part of their everyday experience. Indeed, in some respects it might be said that the quality of life depends on the balancing of these powers. If, for example, either animals or humans act inappropriately, both will suffer, the former from a poverty of offering goods or perhaps from a failure to return to life (or to do so with a whole and healthy body) after being killed in the hunt, the latter for want of food (3, 4, 7). It is evident, of course, that some have more power than others. The tales display what has been referred to as a "hierarchy of power," sometimes simply assuming it (the Great Sturgeon is obviously more powerful than the man he blesses and rescues, 18; fear of more powerful beings motivates humans to make offerings, 9; the woman who had sexual intercourse with the snakes had greater-than-human powers, 1A), but sometimes raising it to the level of conscious reflection (while debating whether the stump is in fact really Nanabush, one of the manitous expresses his doubts that such is the case on the grounds that "He is without the power of being a manitous to that extent," 19; see also Nanabush's acknowledgement that Great Fisher is an older and more powerful manitous than he, 20). In the story of "Little-Umige" (10) both the man and the bear dream and have power, but in their contention that of the former proves greater than that of the latter. Within the same animal species certain individuals, sometimes while in color, may be singled out as being especially powerful (sturgeon, 6; lynx, 19).

Perhaps we should view as another aspect of this hierarchy of power the notion that one cannot use powers which are inappropriate. Mahoos (11) is unable to use heated stones to make himself a path through the snow, and the "bungling guitarist" episodes (21) are a classic example of this notion, since the actions so productive of food when undertaken by one with the proper capabilities produce only pain and humiliation when copied by Nanabush. As if this lesson could possibly be lost upon the attentive listener to such stories, the narrator of the squired episode explicitly calls Nanabush a fool for always imitating others (21C).

There is much about this conception of power which has a familiar ring. Indeed, the word "power" serves precisely because the commonest connotation which the term has in Western culture—the ability to act—seems so appropriate to our analysis of this aspect of the narrations. The plural, "powers," even refers frequently to a special capacity for such action, as in the phrase, "powers of persuasion." It is true that for us the term may have a decided mechanical and/or quantitative aspect (cf. its use in the language of physics, optics, electricity, and mathematics) and imply the existence of certain causal sequences. Still, though they stand outside the world view of Western science, these narratives do sometimes give the impression that power is associated with recognizable causal sequences (cf. below on reciprocity and hunting rules).
Understanding An Ojibwa World View

But for all that, a fundamental difference remains. This is perhaps most noticeable in the non-mechanical ways in which this power is exercised. Canoes and awls made of their own volition (1B, 16), animals act like humans (14, 15), and all sorts of things change their outward forms in the most surprising ways. Objects and entities in the physical environment may not always be what they seem. Appearances can be deceptive, for power resides not in a tangible outward form, but rather in some intangible inner essence. One might say that in these narratives power has a certain spiritual quality.

Metamorphosis

Let us take up more explicitly the matter of metamorphosis. In these tales changes in bodily form and appearance are a characteristic way in which power becomes manifest. These metamorphoses are striking not only in number, they occur in most of the stories assembled here, but also in their variety and the apparent fluidity which exists between what seem to be distinct categories. For example, beings which we would consider to be “alive” can change into objects to us insensitive: Naanbushu turns himself into a stump, 19 “Little Image’s” burying himself in the ice may be another somewhat attenuated example of a manitous changing into an object, 10; animals can do the same (a fisher into a constellation, 15), as can men (the youth in 3 seems to turn himself into a ball; at the very least he transforms himself into such a minute figure that he can conceal himself within a ball). And of course the reverse is also true; chips of ice may become sturgeon and moose in dried beaver tails (18), a piece of dried fish may become a grousse (5) and metal a serpent (8, cf. also 1A, 16). Frequently humans change into animals, and while the transformation sometimes seems to be considered permanent (the brother-become-wolf of 1B; the rejected wives who become wolf, raven, porcupine, and Jay, 3; the boy-robins, 12), the ability to alternate between the two forms at will is presupposed for the beaver and bear (3, 4), the woodpecker and mallard “hostes” (21B, D), and the woman (bird) and man (butterfly, duck, squirrel) who are the chief actors in 2. Among the manitous, the Thunders are able to assume either a human or a bird form (2).

The circumstances under which such transformations are said to take place are similarly varied. Abandoned by his human protector, the infant brother is apparently infuriated by wolves and becomes one of them (1B). While pursuing his fleeing wife, a young man encounters obstacles which he is able to overcome only by taking the form of a butterfly, then a duck, and finally a squirrel (2). In one case the metamorphosis is an unwanted and unfortunate consequence of over-fasting (12), while in another it is a useful part of a strategy for revenge (19). In the “bunting host” episodes (21) it is an act preliminary to the exercise of the special power of a particular species. Beyond this, however, there are two circumstances which are recurring in these tales: sometimes transformations take place in order to establish and maintain a marriage relationship between an animal and a human (2, 3, 4), while in others the metamorphosis occurs as part of an actor’s escape from a dangerous situation (1A, 3, 15).

It should be noted that the general setting for most of these tales, and thus the context in which the transformations take place, is the mythical world, the world at the time of its “origins,” in which the order of things is not yet firmly fixed. It is a

Elements of World View

world in which the duration of the seasons has not yet been determined (15); the wolf, raven, porcupine, Jay, kingfisher, and painted turtle have not yet attained their final form (3, 19); and a manitous can undertake to fundamentally reverse a previous situation, so that now people will fear bears and not vice versa (10). Because the changes they bring about result in the world assuming the form in which later humans experienced it, the characters of the myths sometimes appear in the role of transformers and culture heroes (cf. also 11). And here, as was the case with “power,” one finds oneself in a world in which the inner subjective dimension of experience is more fixed and permanent than the physical.

As Hallowell has shown, when one stands puzzling before this phenomenon of metamorphosis one is prompted for the recognition that the notion of “person” is one of the basic categories of Ojibwa metaphysics. The “person” category is, however, somewhat more inclusive in Ojibwa thought than it is in European, encompassing both human and “other-than-human” persons. The latter term is favored by Hallowell over such alternatives as “supernatural beings” which mistakenly imply that the Ojibwa distinguished between an orderly “natural” world and some realm which transcended it. It of course follows from the fact that the category “person” is not limited to humans that what one might term “society” is cosmic in scope.

One notices in reading these narratives that the bodily form of the actors is sometimes ambiguous. The young woman who fasted, for example, beheld a “man” standing before her and inviting her to accompany him (3). The text says that she went along with him who was in the form of a human being” and became his wife. Only after some intervening description of her new life are we told that “the woman knew that she had married a beaver.” Conversely, even while in his sturgeon form the boy-turned-fish is referred to as a “human being” (6). Human form as such appears not to be a defining characteristic of beings belonging to the category “person.” More central to the definition of “person” is the ability and willingness of such beings to enter into social relationships. One might note parenthetically that the European tradition has also looked upon such ability as an important characteristic of personhood, so much so that there are debates over the extent to which the unborn and the comatose are fully persons. The difference, of course, is that the European tradition resolutely limits the category to humans. The Ojibwa narratives, on the other hand, mirror a series of complex interrelationships among a variety of kinds of persons: spirits and men (10, 13, 17), spirits and animals (15), spirits and spirits (20), men and animals (2, 14, 15), men and men (1), men and animals (2, 4, 7), men and “manitous” objects (11). We notice also that animals are said to possess what we would normally consider to be human qualities: they can speak, plot complicated strategies (15), and they have human emotions (3). Naanbushu is a prime example of the fact that the same is also true of the spirit beings: he talks and plots, and is stubborn, short-tempered and disobedient. The fact that the spirit beings “play” men and grant them blessings will be discussed below.

The impression of a broader than human social world is strengthened by the frequency with which the characters of the myths undergo metamorphosis, though the narrative does not openly explicit about how all of this is possible. Scholarly discussions like that of Jennis (who reports that the Parry Island Ojibwa whom he studied thought of all objects in the world as made up of three parts, body, soul, and
shadow; thus in theory anything can appear to be animate, and a part of one's self can wander free of the body) may be of some help. What is important for our purposes, however, is that the narratives simply assume that this is the way reality is, a fact that the attentive reader is likely to find both obvious and puzzling.

The Situation of Blessing

In the stories power is often pictured as flowing from one "person" to another, the more powerful of the two assuming the posture of a bestower of blessings. We therefore need to turn our attention to the characteristics of what we might call the "situation of blessing." We may say first of all that upon receipt of a blessing an individual's circumstances are altered (or at least potentially so) for the better. The harassed son-in-law, for example, was aided when his life was in danger by beings who had "blessed" or "pitted" him in the past (a sturgeon, a gull, and a cedar, 1B). The recipient of a blessing may be given food and/or the ability to successfully acquire additional supplies of that precious commodity (4, 5, 1B, 18, 22), or may obtain the promise of a long life (11, 13, cf. 10).

A second characteristic of the situation of blessing is the already-mentioned fact that the movement of the action is from the more to the less powerful actor. Such action can, of course, involve the relative power of humans, as in the case of the "grandmothers" who "pitted" the fleeing brothers and Masho's daughter, who subsequently became the protector and wife of the elder of the group (1A, 1B). Usually, however, blessing flows from other-than-human persons (that is, from beings like Great Sturgeon, Great Gull, cedar, bear, bear, Thunderbirds, cliff-dwelling spirits, and Nanabushu) to humans. Because of his relative powerlessness over against the powers in the world around him, man's situation is inherently "pitable," and the act of blessing can be seen as motivated by "pity": thus, the small boy who was continually flogged by his old father was rescued, provided for, and blessed by a bear who had "come to take pity upon him." (5)

Though the bestowal of blessing is often a more or less spontaneous occurrence, it is a third characteristic of the situation of blessing that it can be, and frequently is, created (or at least facilitated) by humans. Our tales specify one way in which this is accomplished, namely the fast. After a ten-day fast, the boy was rewarded with long life and a game for the amusement of his people (11), the woman who fasted gained both a beaver husband and knowledge of the proper relationship between beavers and the men who hunt them, which she was ultimately able to carry back to her human relatives (4), and the man and children in the story of "Little-Image" (10) fasted to gain long life and the specific powers needed to be successful in their contest with the bears. Offerings appear to be another way of effecting the proper situation for the giving of blessing, as the cliff-spirits' response to the gifts of tobacco, ribbon, and other goods indicates (17). In the tales which deal with the hunting of animals by humans, offerings seem to perform the function of maintaining the continuing effectiveness of the blessing (4, 7). More will be said on this subject below. The unwilling transformation of the fasting youth into a robin illustrates another aspect of this matter, the danger inherent in over-exploiting the situation created (12).

Our tales make it clear that the modes by which the fact of the blessing most frequently comes to consciousness are dreams and other encounters with guardian spirits (like the youth's encounters with Sturgeon and Gull, 1B). Thus the situation of blessing highlights again the fact that for the Ojibwa it is the spiritual rather than the material aspects of experience which deserve to be considered the more fundamentally real.

Finally, we notice that in two of the episodes involving Nanabushu (18, 22) over-confidence in the blessing one has received, taking it for granted, so to speak, is explicitly frowned upon. In the former the contrast is explicit between Pifferer, who follows all the medicine's instructions perfectly but does not aggressively assert his claim to the blessing ("perhaps we shall yet be blessed"), and Nanabushu, who is disobedient but still confidently claims the blessing ("I have been blessed... By no means a mere morsel have I seen."). Only after coming up empty-handed does Nanabushu display the requisite obedience and reticence ("Yes, but it is uncertain how it will turn out; for according as I was told so I did."). One wonders whether such an attitude is bad in itself (the harassed youth of 1B seems the picture of confidence), or whether it is so only in conjunction with the kind of foolish disobedience to the terms of the blessing for which Nanabushu is famous. To this matter of obedience we now turn.

Disobedience and its Consequences

Early in this collection of myths (2), we encounter the story of ten brothers, the youngest of whom acquires a wife under what seem to us somewhat unusual circumstances. Motivated by jealousy, the eldest brother shoots and severely wounds the woman. When the husband finds her, she instructs him to place her in a small, isolated lodge and not to return to her for ten days, but after eight days he "became extremely anxious to see his wife" and went to the lodge. As he approached, however, he saw a huge bird rising from the place and flying away. Presently it alighted on a tree and addressed him saying, "You are to be pitied, for too soon have you come to look for me." And then off it went flying away." Similar episodes occur in other tales: a young moose is warned by his father not to run away from the hunters, but he does so and is mutilated and humiliated as a result (7); otter ignores fisher's instructions and laughs when the old lady farts, with the result that she withholds her food from the traveling band of animals (15); and Nanabushu is constantly getting into trouble because he ignores the instructions of his benefactors (18, 20, 22); the first of these episodes shows us that partial obedience is not good enough. In all, this theme of obedience occurs in twelve of the tales in our collection (in addition to those already mentioned see 1A, 3, 11, 12, 17, 19).

What we notice is that the giving of instructions is the predominant context for speaking about obedience. Often the instructions are disobeyed and the offender suffers negative consequences, as in the case of Clotee-in-Fur, who kept losing "wives" because he failed to obey their instructions (3; cf. the mother's fate in 1A). In one instance, that of the boy who was transformed into a robin (12), instructions are obeyed and disaster results, but here the instructions themselves are clearly out of harmony with the values of the culture: greed is frowned upon, but the father has urged upon his son a greedy over-eating, though he had already "dreamed of
Receptivity, Life, and Death

Closely related to the elements already discussed are the notions of receptivity and of the fluid line that exists between life and death. We encounter these concepts chiefly in stories which deal with the relationship between man and animals. Toward the end of the tale about Clothed-in-Fur we learn that the beavers are willing to give themselves to humans for food, but only if the humans live up to a certain set of obligations centering around the giving of offerings and the proper treatment of the bodies of the dead beavers (3; similarly, 4 and 7). Similar reciprocal relationships exist between humans and mammoths (12, 14).

What is the nature of the requirements on the part of the human-animal relationship? Two things seem to be required of humans. First of all, they must make appropriate offerings to the animals, who are said to be "happy" with the material goods given them (attuas, clothing, carriages, and the like) and wealthy because of their accumulation (4, 7). The beaver is said to like tobacco (4), and several times the pipe, acting under its own power, is pictured as playing the role of mediator between humans and animals (3, 7; similarly, between men and the cliff spirits, 17). The second requirement is that they have the proper attitude toward the animals they intend to hunt. Several things are involved here, for one the caution against creditling one's own hunting ability too highly. In the story of Clothed-in-Fur the people initially recognize the physical difficulties involved in successfully hunting the beaver and make the proper offerings (send a pipe); as a result, they hunt successfully. But then one of them notices the low water level around the beavers' lodge and reports this to the others. Confident that the taicing of beavers will now be easy, that is, within their own unaugmented abilities to accomplish, they fail to make the offering and are unsuccessful in their hunt. The prohibition against thinking disparaging thoughts about the one upon whom you depend is another aspect of the required proper attitude. "Never speak you ill of a beaver!," said the woman to her own people after returning from years as the beaver's wife (4), for "should you speak ill of (a beaver), you will not be able to kill one." We notice that the emotions attributed to the beaver here are quite "human" in character. The beavers love those who love them, but tend to reciprocate in kind against those who do not. Similarly with respect to the Ilumunous from whom the people received "every kind of medicine there was," there was a prohibition against speaking "rasonse upon a cliff or upon the water" (17). Finally, we infer that a continual, appreciative remembrance of the gifts received from a benefactor also constitutes part of the propper attitude (16).

For their part, when the men fulfill their obligations faithfully, the animals will give themselves willingly to the hunters to be killed. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that they must do so, since the coming of the pipe into the animals' dwellings seems to have a certain compelling effect (3, 7). In these stories the pipe is refused only when it is known that the humans are guilty of a prior infraction. The apparent harshness of this requirement is mitigated by the notion that the death of animals killed under the proper circumstances is not final; rather, they will come back to life to enjoy the offerings they receive (3, 4, 7; while not dealing directly with hunting rules, 5 also demonstrates the willingness of animals to give themselves to humans, and 14 illustrates the fluidity of the line between life and death). The specific mechanism for facilitating this rebirth often involves special treatment of the bones. And just as humans must not be overconfident in their own abilities, the father's admonishing of the young moose regarding his arrogant attitude toward humans shows that the reverse is also true (7).

The last section of the story about Clothed-in-Fur (3) illustrates some of these points nicely. Clothed-in-Fur learns that it is all right for him to kill and eat his beaver relatives, as long as he preserves the bones intact and gathers them up for deposit in a watercourse. If the bones are broken, the revived individual will be deformed, now others appear on the scene. At first they make the proper offerings and the beaver allow themselves to be killed, but eventually they neglect the offerings and the beaver withhold themselves. This state of affairs continues for some time until the beaver again decides, somewhat reluctantly, to accept the offerings that the humans have been sending. The beaver wife seems to express at least part of the reason for this reluctance to reestablish the relationship with the humans when she says, "The people surely iluse us." But to what does she refer? The answer may be suggested in a conversation which follows. The next day the people come again with their hunting dogs which, as usual, the beavers shoo away. But of one old dog they ask, "On what do they by whom we are killed feed you?" When the dog replies, "Your livers," the beavers are satisfied and again allow themselves to be killed. The implication is that since they are fed on livers, they are not being given the beavers' bones to eat and the men are therefore not disrespectful ill-using the beavers.

If men keep the rules, the deaths of the animals are not final. For practical life in the world this means that the instinct toward self-preservation, certainly observable in nature, need not be the most powerful factor influencing animal actions. There is a hint of ambiguity in the story of the young moose (7), for in the father's warnings there is a sense of foreboding, as if one should avoid meeting men whenever possible. Yet when the offering pipe is sent, the father submits and advises the others of his family to do likewise. Could it be that to be shot by a man met by chance (from whom, that is, one had not received a pipe or in advance) would be dangerous because one would not know if he had kept the rules and therefore whether one would be able to return to life whole?
Dreams provide an important means of coming into direct contact with other-than-human persons, and the "good life," as we shall see, depends heavily upon a proper relationship with such persons. Dreams, therefore, had a crucial role to play, for "whereas social relations with human beings belong to the sphere of waking life, the most intimate social interaction with other-than-human persons is experienced chiefly, but not exclusively, by the self in dream" (Hallowell, 1966/1976, p. 456). Dreams provide knowledge of these persons and of the nature of their relationship to the dreamer (1), a knowledge which supplements and is supplemented by that gained in the myths. The dream visitors are not strangers, "but well-known living entities of the Ojibwa world...[relations with whom] could not be interpreted as other than [actual] experiences of the self" (Hallowell, 1966/1975, p. 461).

There is another thing worth pointing out about dreams. Not only were they a prime source of knowledge about matters important to the Ojibwa people, they were also "a positive factor in the operation of their aboriginal sociocultural system" (Hallowell, 1966/1976, p. 453). Hallowell in fact considers that from the standpoint of the Ojibwa world view the boys' puberty dream fast was "a necessary institution." This is true in the first place because in the pubertal dreams the very existence of other-than-human persons, so important in the individual's relationship to the surrounding world, was experientially validated. In the second place, the life of the hunter was not an easy one. The quest for game was a rigorous and often dangerous enterprise, and the animals were never completely predictable. Dreams in which one learned the direction of the dreamer's life and was given the power to pursue it engendered a self-confidence in meeting these vicissitudes. Finally, living in a society which lacked formal legal controls over behavior (e.g., police and the courts), the dream experience "reinforced a type of personality structure that, functioning primarily with emphasis upon inner control rather than outward coercion, was a necessary psychological component in the operation of the Ojibwa sociocultural system" (Hallowell, 1966/1976, pp. 470-1).

WORLD VIEW AND "REALITY"

To identify the elements just discussed as central to the world view of the people who told these stories, is to designate rather precisely the problem which a person of another culture may have when reading them: these things do not at all reflect our everyday experience of the world from the Western point of view. Europeans and Euro-Americans are children of another culture, forever looking into the starry northern sky and thinking "dipper." It is, therefore, important for us to grasp the fact that for a traditional Ojibwa, schooled in a different way of perceiving, the stories do reflect the way in which the world is experienced.14

As we have said, these stories and hundreds of others like them were important in the transmission and reinforcement of the traditional Ojibwa world view: the repeated tellings of such stories during winter evenings reenforced this understanding of the world and gave it the stamp of social approval. At the same time, other cultural institutions served to confirm the world view which they contained. When the conjurer began his performance, the sprite entered and shook his specially-