The Praxis of World-ordering in Native American Creation Myth

Frank W. Stevenson

ABSTRACT

Here I want to explore a hypothesis which, if correct, would have clear implications for the field of "Asian-American Studies": Native American thinking, as expressed in traditional narratives and particularly in creation myths, shares with Chinese Taoism a metaphysical worldview embodying pervasive immanence rather than the Western (Greek and Hebrew) immanent-transcendent duality. My starting point is the Native American model of an extended series of worlds or ontological levels separated by indefinite or permeable boundaries: the narratives often depict a journey or flight between levels. I then set this model in relation to the Pima picture of a Creator-figure ambivalently inside and outside the world he creates—suggesting a marginality or indeterminacy "at the origin" as well as at the limits of the conceivable world—and in relation to this Creator's "experimental" praxis of world-making, in which (as for the *bricoleur*) use is made of whatever materials lie at hand. This notion of creation as a tentative and ongoing process fits again the pervasive immanence of an (indefinitely) extended world-series. It also suggests looking at this as an open-and-closed economy, a projection of the actual lived economy (survival economy) of Native American peoples: closed because driven by the necessity of choosing among elements actually at hand, but open in time (thus allowing repetition or "recycling" of elements). I conclude therefore by comparing the economy or *ecology* of an Inuit narrative, in which a dead man's body becomes a boat for his brother, with that of Chuang-tzu's narrative of the gourd that is unexpectedly "used" as a body-boat for pure world-floating, and thus set in the context of the Taoist "empirical praxis" of spiritual flight.

KEY WORDS

Native American
creation myth
Taoist metaphysics
pervasive immanence
world-series
difference-at-the-origin
experimental praxis
world-ordering
ecological thinking
recycling

The definition of "American Literature" has been increasingly based on a multi-ethnic, multi-racial theory of culture which gives the "minority" voices of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans at least equal weight alongside white European-American "literary" writing.[1] And yet in this grouping Native Americans are clearly the "odd men (women) out": as the original (and thus the only "true") Americans they were not immigrants like these other groups; they became subjugated and hyphenated, became themselves "minorities," in a different way, and still therefore maintain a problematic and marginal position with regard not only to the white majority but also, ironically enough, to those other hyphenated-American minorities. For Native American cultures have been marked from the time of the first European incursions into their native continent as "aboriginal," that is to say, as "primitive" by the dominant white culture. If then they are also seen, from the latter's perspective, as more "foundational" it is only through the force of reaction: like other aboriginal cultures on other continents this one was largely feared and despised by the late-coming white colonists as pagan, heathen, barbarian. The late-comers to the land attempted to root out by force, to exterminate, the culture and indeed the "historical memory" of its original inhabitants, almost as if the "original" culture of the land they had adopted embodied the irrational forces of their own repressed unconscious.[2]

And yet, most anthropologists agree, these same Native Americans are after all also migrants to the New World, if we go back at least eight thousand years. They very likely came across an ice bridge from Northeast Asia[3] and due to certain physical characteristics have been classified as belonging to the "Mongoloid" race along with Japanese,

Koreans and Chinese.[4] Yet, because their migration occurred much earlier, these peoples tend to be associated with other "aboriginal" groups around the world rather than considered a subset of the class, "Asian-Americans." Here however I will not try to argue that the Native Americans, whom Brotherston (*Book of the Fourth World*, 1992) takes as denizens of a "Fourth World," should be welcomed into the domain of "Asian-American Studies," although such a shift in thinking would seem to give the latter a greater discursive range: on one front (the Indian front) it would have an entry into "precolonial" discourse, a more direct link to the discursive field of ecocriticism, ecofeminism. The "original" sense of colonizing, its most proper sense is, after all, as the ecocritics like to remind us, the "human colonizing of the earth."

Rather I shall be content with making at the outset the more modest claim that the presumed "original Asianness" of Native Americans makes their cultures, their religious ceremonies, poetry and narratives intrinsically interesting to Asian students of "American Literature"—interesting because Asian students will find here something familiar, or at least anticipate the possibility of finding something familiar. Of course, Native American narrative already has many attractive points (wild imagination, social satire, irony and comic absurdity are among the most salient), yet precisely this underlying cultural similarity—if there is one, if we could just pin it down—is the crucial (the most fundamental) point. Coming then as I do from a background in philosophy, more specifically in comparative Chinese and Greek metaphysics, I want to set forth here a necessarily speculative hypothesis: namely, that the metaphysical worldview of classical Chinese Taoism and what I am going to extrapolate (from a selected group of creation myths) as the Native American metaphysical worldview share a common ground. That is, I do not want to unequivocally claim but rather suggest, based on certain textual evidence, that ancient Chinese and traditional Native Americans have a common metaphysical worldview, which if true has clear pedagogical implications for the ease and effectiveness of teaching Native American poetic and narrative texts to East Asian students.

Admittedly this is a move from pedagogical practicality back to the sort of metaphysical abstraction that may seem even more "foundational" than the typical discourse of multiculturalism, postcolonialism, cultural studies. But that is just the point: it is more foundational. Here we must keep in mind Arnold Krupat's point in his Preface to *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism* (1993): "ethnocriticism" is "mutual study" and needs to be grounded in comparative epistemology and metaphysics, comparative ways of thinking and seeing the world. This point is of course also political: it is a question of challenging dominant epistemes, a dominant Eurocentric discursive practice, as Foucault would say, of knowledge-power. Krupat says the American frontier is no longer where "Western thinking ends" as if there confronting a void but rather where another, quite different kind of thinking (a more "native," more truly "Western" one as it turns out) comes forth to meet it, perhaps to make a stand (unlikely to be the last stand) against it. But perhaps here we are overstating the case. Ironically enough, the sort of metaphysical worldview one can attribute to ancient Chinese and native Americans has certain links to Nietzsche, through him to Deleuze, perhaps Foucault, and to a certain postmodernist perspective current in some Western theoretical discourses, including those which may try to determine the boundaries of such "fields" as "comparative literature" and "Asian-American Studies." Thus, echoing David Hall's claim that ancient Chinese thought is in a sense "already postmodern," I can say that "The Injuns have won."

Joseph Campbell speaks of a "circumpolar Mongoloid culture"[5] whose essential design-patterns (as on pottery, bronzes and other artifacts) are shared by proto-Chinese and Native American peoples.

> A stylistic similarity has been noted . . . between the decorative patterns of the Shang period and the arts of many tribes of North and South America; notably the totem-pole arts of the fishing peoples of the Northwest coast and the monuments of the Mayan-Aztek sphere . . . Among the most striking shared traits of this circum-Pacific style are: a piling up of similar forms in vertical series (principle of the

> totem pole), a way of splitting animal forms, either down the back or down the front, and opening them like a book (bilateral splitting), eyes and faces placed on joints and hands, and a particular way of organizing angular spirals and meanders. (398)

If we take the first design-pattern mentioned here, the "piling up of similar forms in vertical series (principle of the totem pole)," as a hierarchy of ontological levels[6] or "worlds," then we might tie it to the standard "pervasive immanence" model of ancient Chinese thought. According to this model, whereas ancient Greek thinking distinguishes a transcendent world of gods/spirits from the immediate (earthly, physical) world, mind (soul) from body, subject from object, the ancient Chinese saw the world as an indefinitely extended "thing" (Lao-tzu 25: Tao is a 物混成, *wu hun cheng*, "thing confusedly formed" that is "born before heaven/earth"): the nature and ancestral spirits people prayed to were seen not as absolutely "transcendent" powers or forces of nature but as part of the larger, extended (earthly, human) "family."[7] This pervasive immanence model means then that, since there is really just "one" (indefinitely extended) world or ontological system with no "absolute limit" (with nothing, e.g. no God, "outside" it), this world (nature) "self-generates" (Lao-tzu 25: 道法自然, *Tao fa tzu-ran*, "Tao follows the self-so") rather than being "created" by a world-transcending *Archai* (first principle) or Creator. This view is tied by Hall and Ames to the notion of "creation" as a kind of "aesthetic patterning"—where we think of the art work as having its own internal or "organic form" (shades of Aristotle and Coleridge)—and this is indeed a persuasive way of "reading" the world-picture presented by the late Shang/early Chou *I Ching*.[8] The praxis of creation within this "pervasively immanent" world is then the praxis of a gradual (self-) emerging or (self-) development out of an indeterminate mixture or *apeiron*, chaos, a view much closer to that of Hesiod ("First Chaos, out of Chaos came Mother Earth and Eros, out of Earth came Father Sky) and Anaximander than to the "Logocentrism" of Plato (absolute models or "exemplars") or of Judaeo-Christian thought (creation of world by Jehovah's absolute power or "fiat").[9]

My hypothesis then is that the metaphysical thinking and worldview of Native Americans, as expressed in their traditional (tribal) narratives and particularly creation myths, has features that, as predicted by Campbell's "circumpolar Mongoloid culture," fit this pervasive immanence model. The first element in the pattern or design of interrelated themes which emerges from these mythic texts is indeed Campbell's (indefinitely) extended vertical world-series, with "flight" or "floating" between levels. Thus in Momaday's Kiowa narrative we get a post-creation account of the "place" where the "first people" lived, a sort of mythic history of this culture which features the simple ontological split or duality of earth-sky, sky-world above earth-world. A child climbs up a tree after a "redbird," the tree begins to grow taller and the child was "borne up into the sky." Abruptly we get time's transformation:

> She was then a woman . . . in a strange place. Instead of a redbird, there was a young man . . . he was the sun . . . After that the woman grew lonely. She thought about her people . . . One day she had a quarrel with the sun, and the sun went away. In her anger she dug up the root of a bush which the sun had warned her never to go near. A piece of earth fell from the root, and she could see her people far below . . . she had a child—a boy by the sun. She made a rope out of sinew and took her child upon her back; she climbed down upon the rope, but when she came to the end, her people were still a long way off . . . It was evening; the sun came home and found the woman gone. At once he . . . went to the place where [the bush] had grown. There he saw the woman and the child, hanging by the rope halfway down to the earth. He was very angry, and he took up a ring, a gaming wheel . . . He told the ring to follow the rope and strike the woman dead. Then he threw the ring and it . . . struck the woman and killed her, and then the sun's child was all alone.
>
> (Beaty 256-57)

Here the woman, fleeing ("flying") from her sun-husband but returning home to her own people, is left suspended between the two worlds—or rather, in the upper region (the sky) of the lower (earthly) one. The woman opens a view down into the earth-world by "digging up the root of a bush" in the sun's (not so Edenic)[10] garden: this gives the sky-world itself a "ground" that now becomes (opens into) the sky of our accustomed earth-world; if not quite inverting our normal awareness of "ontological levels" this at the very least shocks and "disorients" us. It also suggests the thinness and permeability of the "boundary" between the two worlds. Perhaps one meaning of the "ring" or "gaming wheel" that kills the woman is pure chance or contingency; the rope made of "sinew" (human or animal muscle tissue) on which our protagonist was left suspended in-between, the rope which in a sense "connects" the two worlds, could suggest that this whole structure (both worlds) is set within (or is) a larger "body." The second feature of Campbell's circumpolar Mongoloid design-pattern—"a way of splitting animal forms, either down the back or down the front, and opening them like a book (bilateral splitting) . . ."—suggests a model in which the vertical world-ladder becomes a horizontal bifurcation, as in the splitting open (and "folding back") of the larger (encompassing) world-body; this is also a possible reading[11] of the "twins": "The grandmother spider told him never to throw the ring into the sky, but one day he threw it up, and it fell squarely on top of his head and cut him in two. He looked around, and there was another boy, just like himself, his twin. The two of them laughed and laughed" (258-59).

The Navajo "origin legend" comes closer than the Kiowa tale to being a "creation myth" but even here there is no actual creation; rather, we are presented with a world-system already in place, a world where (as at the opening of the Kiowa story) the "first people lived": "At Tobilhaskidi (in the middle of the first world), white arose in the east, and they regarded it as day . . . blue rose in the south . . . yellow rose in the west . . . dark arose in the north . . . [here] water flowed out (from a central source) in different directions . . . In the ocean to the east lay Tieholtsodi; he was chief of the people there. . . ." The very visual design-pattern works through a parallelism or repetition of "fours" (four directions, quadrilateralism); the earth's "space" is being mapped out perhaps on a two-dimensional surface. But again, as with Momaday's story, we get what may be the "legendary history" of the people. While Momaday draws an explicit (and overtly patriarchal) moral—"Bad women are thrown away"—the spatio-temporal (or narrative) opening-out of the Navajos' vertical world-series is also driven by sexual morality: these new worlds are "discovered" by a group of moral outcasts (the womens' guilt is foregrounded at the outset) who have committed adultery and are thus forced to "flee" ("fly"). At each successive level within what may be a concentric or "Chinese-box" structure they repeat this crime (or "original sin")—though now a man performs the crucial act—and are thus pushed on until they finally reach the "fourth world":

> The people quarreled among themselves. . . . They committed adultery, one people with another. Many of the women were guilty. . . . Those who dwelled at the south again committed crime . . . At dawn Tieholtsodi began to talk . . . "you must go to some other place. Not upon this earth shall you remain." . . . They went in circles till they reached the sky. . . . While they were flying around, one having a blue head thrust out his head from the sky and called to them, saying: "In here, to the eastward, there is a hole." They entered the hole and went through it up to the surface (of the second world). . . . The Swallow People lived there. . . . The first world was red . . . the second . . . was blue. . . . They all lived together pleasantly and happily for twenty-three days, but on the twenty-fourth night one of the strangers made too free with the wife of the Swallow chief . . . [who] said . . . "you cannot live here long." The Locusts took the lead . . . the others followed, and all soared and circled till they reached the sky . . . but while they were circling round under it, they saw a white face peering out at them—it was the face of Ni'ltsi, the Wind. He called to them and told them . . . to the south they would find a hole . . . through this slit they

> flew, and soon entered the third world in the south. The color of the third world was yellow. Here they found nothing but Grasshopper People. . . . As before . . . when the wrong was discovered, the chief . . . bade them depart. . . . "Begone!" Up they flew again . . . they saw a red head stuck out of the sky, and they heard a voice which told them to fly to the west. It was the head of Red Wind which they saw. . . . They flew up in circles through . . . the passage . . . and came out in the fourth world. . . . The surface of the fourth world was mixed black and white. . . . When they arrived on the surface of [this] world they saw no living thing. . . . (Matthews 63-67)

We may be especially struck here[12] by the cartoon-like abruptness with which the various alien "heads" (Sparrow, Yellow Wind, Red Wind) pop out repeatedly through a hole in the sky, guiding the fugitives through a separate aperture in the same sky-surface or inter-world boundary. The shock of disorientation (and thus too the comic absurdity[13]) we experience each time another "opening" appears, signaling that this sky is now the beginning (ground) of another world (earth), is something like what we feel in "The Truman Show" when Truman's boat strikes an invisible sky-wall, that is, comes up against a wall (limit) where we had assumed there was an indefinitely (or infinitely) extended "sky."[14] In the film Truman proceeds to pass through a small door (or rabbit hole) into another (the "real") world, and that's the end of the story. Truman only has to deal with two world-levels but the duality here is clearly marked by an "ontological difference," as in Plato's duality of transcendent and immanent worlds.[15] This, however, is precisely that (Greek and Hebraic) "logocentric" duality which the pervasive-immanence model presumably avoids or overcomes. Thus a crucial issue arises: if the Native American world-series (as we get it for instance in the Kiowa or Navajo stories) is marked by a less absolute (ontological) difference between its levels, then is there really a "vertical" difference here at all, as opposed to a kind of horizontal surface mapping into different regions?

Perhaps the Pima creation story can help us think about this problem. Here we get a real "creation" inasmuch as we begin with the Creator (*Juh-wert-a-Mah-kai*, hereafter "J") and witness his world-making; we also get a variation on the vertical (or Chinese-box) world-series, and on the "flight" between levels/worlds. Here J (the original "Person") makes out of the sweat of his own body the (first) earth, then "out of his eye, out of the shadow of his eyes" he makes an assistant "Person . . . Noo-ee (the Buzzard)" and (out of his body sweat again) a pair of "dolls" who come alive (the prototypical human couple, a bit like Adam and Eve, Adam having been made out of "dust" in *Genesis*) who will propagate its human inhabitants—but this first world becomes "evil" (essentially it destroys itself) and the Creator generates a second, third and finally a fourth world (our present one):

> And now for a time the people increased till they filled the earth. For the first parents were perfect, and thee was no sickness and no death. But when the earth was full, then there was nothing to eat, so they killed and ate each other. But J did not like the way his people acted, to kill and eat each other, and so he let the sky fall to kill them. But when the sky dropped he, himself, took a staff and broke a hole thru [*sic*], thru which he and Nooee emerged and escaped, leaving behind them all the people dead. And J, being now on the top of this fallen sky, again made a man and a woman, in the same way as before. (Baym 33)

But "this man and woman became grey when old, and their children became grey still younger, and their children became grey younger still, and so on till the babies were grey in their cradles," so J. destroyed this world in the same fashion and created another. "But these new people had a vice of smoking . . . and each generation [smoked] still younger, till the infants wanted to smoke in their cradles. And J did not like this, and let the sky fall again, and created everything new again in the same way, and this time he created the earth as it is now" (Baym 33) .

If we compare the motivation of the Creator here in destroying

primeval waters are similarly divided . . . . (Kirk 33-34)

While an early Greek Hesiodic variation actually echoes the Pima story by placing Darkness before Chaos—"Some say that Darkness was first, and from Darkness sprang Chaos. From a union between Darkness and Chaos sprang Night, Day, Erebus, and the Air" (Graves 33)—Hesiod's "better established" version begins with Chaos: "*He toi men protista Xaos genet*," "Verily first of all did Chaos come into being," then from Chaos comes Earth and Eros, from Earth comes Sky, and Sky and Earth (heaven-earth) then join to generate (erotically) all the gods (Kirk 24-25). And we can see this Chaos (or Disorder) both as an indeterminate "thing" (Lao-tzu's Tao as "thing confusedly formed"), a "mixture" out of which earth-heaven "order themselves,"[18] and as (Cornford's suggestion) the primordial "chasm" or "gap" between heaven-earth. This latter view, while it may stretch our logic (and/or our imagination)—for how can X and Y be generated out of the "space between X and Y," how can there be a "space between X and Y" before there are "X and Y"?—also has its echo in Lao-tzu 5: 天地之間, *T'ien di chih chian*, "Heaven-earth between" is like a "bellows, empty but inexhaustible" (like the "fertile void" of Tao itself). If the *Old Testament* begins with a Creator who separates, or commands the separation of, earth-heaven, the *Theogony* begins with an earth-heaven separating out (whichever way we look at it) of Chaos. Then the Pima Creator (J) is in a sense "between" these two views—he is a personified Creator-figure (like Jehovah) who is situated so fully "within" the Darkness (within Chaos) that his "indefinitely extended Body" (Body as "thing confusedly formed") becomes almost indistinguishable from it—and thus too "marginal" in his position at the origin, ambivalently within/without the world that he creates out of his own Body, the world that is really an (indefinite, pervasively immanent) extension of himself.

Closely tied to this marginal position of the Creator at the origin of his creation is the radically "experimental" nature of his world-making praxis:

He wandered around in the nowhere till he thought he had wandered enough. Then he rubbed on his breast and rubbed out *moah-haht-tack*, that is perspiration, or greasy earth. This he rubbed out on the palm of his hand and held out. It tipped over three times, but the fourth time it staid [sic] straight in the middle of the air and there it remains now as the world. (Baym 32)

Rather than a creation by absolute (divine) *fiat* in a single moment—for this is really the sense of the creation in *Genesis*, even if this "moment" is stretched out to seven days—the Pima creation proceeds tentatively, by trial-and-error. J is the "Doctor of the World": the note (Baym 31) says this means J. is a "medicine person, or shaman, with great powers" (African tribes have their shamanic "medicine men"); we may also think of "medical doctor" (in the usual sense) inasmuch as medicine like any applied science seeks results through a gradual process of experimentation; or we can see J. as a kind of artisan, mechanic or engineer, perhaps a *bricoleur* who makes what he can out of the materials at hand, and in the simplest way he "knows." (This suggests that his own knowledge as well as the materials at hand may be limited, not absolute as for Jehovah.) This *bricoleur* aspect is strikingly clear once again at a slightly later stage of J's world-creation. He freezes water to make the sun: "this hardened ball he placed in the sky. First he placed it in the North, but it did not work; then . . . in the West . . . in the South . . . in the East and there it worked as he wanted it to. And the moon he made in the same way and tried in the same places, with the same results." Then he makes the stars: "he took the water in his mouth and spurted it up into the sky. But the first night his stars did not give light enough. So he took the Doctor-stone (diamond), the *tone-dum-haw-teh*, and smashed it up, and took the pieces and threw them into the sky to mix with the water in the stars, and then there was light enough" (Baym 32) .

Keeping both of these stages (and also the later stage of destruction-and-recreation of the world-series) in mind but focussing especially on the initial earth-creation (setting up an earth or world "in the

middle of the air"), we note that if J's world-making is then neither pre-ordained nor self-complete *within the moment*, it takes on a sense of (unplanned) spontaneity and radical immanence, which fits the model of a Creator who is marginal with respect to his own creation, partly inside of it (one part of it). J indeed makes the world out of one part (particle) of his own body: it is a pervasive and undefined Chaos-Body (Tao as *wu hun ch'eng*) self-ordering into a world, yet as personified Body (Creator) it/he also stands (partly) in a position "outside" and "prior to" the/his praxis of world-ordering. There is here in a sense neither an absolute (fixed) beginning or end to this process of creation—it is rather an ongoing experiment, a point here emphasized by the fact that the "earth" which finally "stays in place"—jumping over now the creation of sun, moon and stars—will later be destroyed and replaced in a further ("second-order creation") series of "steps." And this description also fits the model we started out with, that of a vertical, concentric and/or superimposed (Chinese-box) world-series, an (in theory) indefinitely extended series with no fixed boundaries between levels or at either "end."

Implicit in this model, then, is the notion of repetition: an extended world-series is one in which each world is repeated (with variation) by its successor; experimental making proceeds by successive "attempts," each a repetition (with variation) of the previous one; here J's second-creation or second-order series of creations-and-destructions (failed experimental "attempts") is a kind of repetition-with-variation of the initial series "at the origin." Indeed this trope of human worlds accelerated or "whirled" toward their own doom—one thinks of Yeats' "gyre" in "The Second Coming"—echoes that of those "wobbling" (whirling) earths that fall down before finally one "stays." We have then in this model of a pragmatic world-ordering a kind of open-and-closed economy: there is a limited supply of materials at hand, so that the Maker must use, with the greatest "economy"—an economy or "simplicity" worthy of Thoreau on Walden Pond—the sweat of his own Body; on the other hand, there is also an infinite (or indefinitely extended, indeterminate) amount of time, so the limited materials, made as they are into limited, finite worlds, can be constantly rebuilt or

indeed "recycled" in an ongoing process.[19] This is then economy as "ecology": those permeable boundaries of the pervasive-immanence worldview allow, after all, the limits of "earth" to be extended out indefinitely, to the widest conceivable "range."

Of course, the open-and-closed economy of a metaphysical worldview may well be the projection of the real-life economy (based on survival) of a people, society, culture. Just as social rituals themselves (whether independently or because of their "transcendent" meanings) serve to reinforce socio-cultural solidarity, just as the Native American ritual or ceremony of "story-telling" (and *a fortiori* the recitation of creation myths, those essentially religious narratives which most clearly "ground" a culture) is itself a social praxis to reinforce the communal bonds and thus the narratives themselves a form of "social discourse," so we also can see the "natural" economy of a society reflected or projected in the economy of its mythic texts and (as a function of these texts) in that of its most "abstract" thinking or world-modeling (world-designing). Here then, coming back now to my initial hypothesis that Chinese Taoist and Native American thinking might share a ("circumpolar Mongoloid") pervasive-immanence worldview, I want to look at the natural-textual-metaphysical economy (or ecology) of an Inuit and a Taoist "narrative."

In the Inuit (Eskimo, Arctic, circumpolar) story of the "human kayak," two young brothers have just passed their test (initiation) and become hunters. But one day they found themselves on a "very large pan of ice which had broken away from the shore . . . The wind and current carried them farther and farther away . . . [until] they would finally find themselves in the land of Peeleeuktuk, the land of missing men, from which no man ever returned . . . Apparently the spirits of the sea were unfavorable to them . . ." Then the younger brother got sick; the spirits told him that "one's body will turn cold in death before two more suns pass":

> [When] the older brother . . . entered the hut, he found his brother dead. Thus his brother's body had turned cold in death . . . He could not leave his brother's body on the drift-

> ing ice. That would offend the spirits of the sea animals beyond repair and would bring famine upon all his people . . . Dragging his brother's body . . . he came . . . to the edge of the ice nearest to the land . . . How to get to land across the rapidly widening open water, and at the same time take his brother's body ashore, gave him a problem almost beyond his ability to solve. At length, after many trials and failures, he struck upon the plan . . . With his hunting knife he quickly opened the body . . . and removed the viscera. Then he lashed the shaft of his harpoon to the back of the corpse in order to hold it rigid. He then placed the corpse in the water with the face turned up, and carefully assumed a position within the body cavity, as he would sit in his kayak. In this manner he had converted the body of his brother into a human kayak. After much hard paddling with his bare hands and very slow progress, he finally reached the shore ice safely. (Beaty 243-45)

The young hunter is a kind of *bricoleur*: driven by economic necessity, that is, by the restrictions of a closed economy, he uses the scant materials at hand within it to solve his problem. By effectively "recycling" his dead brother's body as a boat he is in a sense opening the economy within which he has been trapped. In fact, by "inventing" this boat from a body (as J invents the earth from part of his own body) he is solving *two* economic problems: he can now get across the icy water and home without freezing to death (personal survival) and he can bury this body according to the proper rites. The latter is a form of survival on another level or indeed other levels: not only will it reinforce socio-cultural solidarity and continuity, but also, if he "left his brother's body on the drifting ice," it "would offend the spirits of the sea animals beyond repair and would bring famine upon all his people." That is, we are here expanding the human and social economy/ecology out to a wider range where it encompasses the spiritual world as well. For in the pervasive-immanence worldview (and this if anything is its definitive characteristic) there will not be

clear-cut boundaries between individual, social, natural and spiritual (or "cosmic") levels of reality; rather, these will be taken as a successive (vertically-ordered) series of "worlds" within one (ultimately indeterminate) World-Body.

That these "spirits of the sea animals" suggest we are here opening into wider economic or ecological[20] domains or "ranges" becomes clearer with the later soul-body "flight" of the young hunter as he transforms into a hawk:

> From his parka sleeve her husband drew the skin of a bird. He wet the bird skin in his mouth and then stretched it over his body, thereby transforming himself into a bird. . . . After flying about the *innie* for a while, he suddenly dived into the pail of water and came out with a small fish in his beak . . . he dropped the little fish onto the floor. To the great amazement of his wife, the little fish suddenly turned into a seal. Again the bird man dived . . . and this time brought up a larger fish. This one turned into an *oogrook* when dropped . . . Suddenly the bird man flew through the window. . . . Thereafter, the young man used the bird skin when hunting food for his own people. (245-46)

This "magical" transformation, common to many sorts of folk (and "fairy") tales, is here explicitly pragmatic: as a hawk the young man can more easily hunt, thus helping his people to survive. While this is in the first place a physical or bodily transformation—brought about by the putting on of the bird's *skin*[21]—it is also a spiritual one, and we may want to interpret this as the taking on of the dead brother's (now free-soaring) soul or spirit by the living brother, just as the latter has already used his brother's body. Or, perhaps a better reading: the dead brother's spirit now inhabits the living brother's body, just as the living brother had inhabited (sailed in) the dead brother's body. This fits a certain textual-economic demand for balance, reconciliation, "completion." In any case the symbolic soul-body/inter-brother interplay clearly moves us beyond the exigencies

of a purely "material" economy here into a wider "spiritual" one that includes nature (animal) spirits as well as human ones, in an (ultimately harmonious) interplay or intermixture. Thus there is no clear boundary now between body and spirit (soul); in this indefinitely extended system or ecology the limit of the "material" world, that is, the material world-spiritual world boundary, is (if not quite nonexistent) extremely porous and permeable.

In *Chuang-tzu* 1 we also get a concern with praxis and survival within an economy which extends with ease from the material into the spiritual realm. This opening chapter indeed begins with the theme of "flight," and the relativity of things suggested by the "differences" (which might be identified when set "against infinity") between the flights of large birds and small insects (locusts perhaps, or sparrows), as well as the relativity of "worlds" in a vertical series as we might look "up" or "down" at them: "Is the azure of the sky its true color? Or is it that the distance into which we are looking is infinite? [The P'eng] never stops flying higher till everything below looks the same as above . . ." (Graham 43). But Chuang-tzu is interested as well in the empirical practice or praxis of (spiritual, trans-world) flight, the "aerodynamics of lift":

> If a mass of water is not bulky enough it lacks the strength to carry a big boat. When you upset a bowl of water over a dip in the floor, a seed will make a boat for it, but if you put the bowl there it jams, because your boat is too big for such shallow water. If the mass of the wind is not bulky enough it lacks the strength to carry the great wings. (Graham 43)

While we do have a certain kind of flight which seems to require no "physical wind" whatsoever—"As for the man who rides a true course between heaven and earth, with the changes of the Six Energies [六氣, *lyou chi*, six breaths] for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends upon?" (44)—it seems Chuang-tzu is inviting us to see this economy of "windless flight" as a further extension of the economy of "winded flight," given his emphasis throughout

on praxis and indeed physical survival. The praxis of survival is closely tied to the praxis of "knowing how to use useless things"—it is somehow by being "useless" (like the ugly old tree which no one wants to cut down in order to use its wood) that we survive. It is in this context that we get the story of the gourd:

> Said Hui Shih to Chuang-tzu: "The king of Wei gave me the seeds of a great calabash [*hu*, 瓠, "gourd"]. I planted them, they grew up, with gourds of five bushels. When you filled them with water or soup they weren't solid enough to stay upright, if you split them to make ladles they sagged and spilled over. It's not that they weren't impressively big, but because they were useless I smashed them to bits." (46-47)

The initial "earths" set up experimentally by J in his first-order creation, earths made from his own body and like him "floating in Darkness"—also are not "solid enough to stay upright." How then would we compare these "useless gourds" with the earths/worlds of J's second-order creation, created and then destroyed and replaced—were these also destroyed because "useless"? Chuang-tzu replies to Hui Shih:

> "You really are clumsy, sir, in finding uses for something big . . . Now if you had five-bushel calabashes, why didn't it occur to you to make them into those big bottles swimmers tie to their waists [*da dzun*, 大樽, "big wine vessel;" Ware 8: "why didn't you give some thought to making a huge raft with them"] and go floating away over the Yangtse and the Lakes?" [*fu hu chiang hu*, 浮乎江湖; Ware 8: "so that you may float on rivers and lakes?"] (Graham 47)

Hui Shih didn't think of "using X for Y," recycling or reinventing the large gourd as a *dzun*-"vessel" for floating around on or with. Even if we take this *dzun* as a kind of "life-jacket" or "life-saver" (survival again) rather than "boat" or "raft" in the proper sense, the similarity of

the *hu*-gourd to the body-kayak is clear: as "bottle" or "vessel" the (hollowed-out) gourd is also like a body-boat for "floating." At first the two cases appear different: while the Inuit hunter needs the body-raft for survival (at various levels of the ecological "field"), Chuang-tzu suggests that his friend could have used the gourd-vessel for "floating around *at his ease*," which more likely suggests the pure meditation or "spiritual flight" of a sage. But the Inuit, we recall, later undergoes a transformation (of body-soul) into a bird: his flight will be pragmatic (for hunting) but may also imply pure spiritual "freedom." Similarly, while Chuang-tzu's *fu*-"floating" here most easily implies purely spiritual flight he has set this meaning within an essentially pragmatic economy/ecology: "Why didn't you think of using (*yung*, 用) the gourd in this way, that is, in this 'useless' way?" The pragmatic side here is clearer when we compare this to the above-mentioned parable (which immediately follows the gourd-story) of the ugly old tree that can survive because it is "useless," because no one *wants* to cut it down. Chuang-tzu ties this notion also to the praxis of "big saying," of words which, while seemingly useless (too "abstract" or "spiritual," filled with too much "air" or "*chi*-breath") from Hui Shih's perspective, are actually the most useful of all. A more strikingly "empirical" demonstration of this can be found in the dialogue of Chapter 26:

> Said Hui Shih to Chuang-tzu, "These sayings of yours are useless (*yen wu yung*, 言無用)." "It is only with people who know about the useless that there is any point in talking about uses (*yen yung*, 言用). In all the immensity of heaven and earth, a man uses no more than is room for his feet. If recognizing this we were to dig away the ground round his feet all the way down to the Underworld (黃泉, *Huang Chuan*, Yellow Springs), would it still be useful to a man?" "It would be useless." "Then it is plain that the useless does serve a use." (Graham 100)

That is, purely spiritual or metaphysical "big saying" (expanded discourse, "long-winded" or rather "solid-winded" discourse), by

"grounding" our more immediate ground/discourse/thinking, is crucial to our very survival. We must keep this notion (or "figure") in mind when we read the passage in Chapter 1 that precedes the story of the gourd:

> Chien Wu put a question to Lien Shu, "I heard Chieh Yu say something, he talked big but there was no sense in it, he left the firm ground and never came back. I was amazed and frightened by his words, which streamed on into the infinite like the Milky Way, wild extravagances, nothing to do with man as he really is." "What did he say?" "In the mountains of far-off Ku-yi lives a daemonic man . . . [who] sucks in the wind and drinks the dew; he rides the vapour of the clouds . . . I thought him mad and wouldn't believe him." "Yes [replies Lien Shu], the blind can never share in the spectacle of *emblems and ornaments*, nor the deaf in the music of drums and bells. Is it only in flesh and bone that there is blindness and deafness? The wits have them too."
> (46, my emphasis)

We might have thought that if the sage flies "off the ground" he would not need the "grounding ground" of big words beneath him. But on the contrary, it is because he already possesses such a deep ground—the bouyant force of that *dzun*-"vessel" or (in the widest ecological sense) "world-Body"—because he has perhaps identified himself with this "wide vessel" which is also "wide discourse,"[22] that he can fly, or float ("at the origin"), in the first place. But here we must wonder: by moving out to the very limits of the "ecology of usefulness" and looking beyond them—thereby also subverting them—into the realm of the "useless," is Chuang-tzu going beyond the permissible textual-economic "limits" of the kayak story, even of Native American narrative generally? Clearly the whole theme of inter-world "flight" in Native American mythic discourse, of those purely imaginative or meditative flights which themselves embody or lead to an understand-

and recreating earths/worlds with that of a Judaeo-Christian Jehovah who also destroys the world (just once, with a flood), the former will be seen to have a less obviously "moral" basis; it also seems less clearly "ethically" based than the flight of the outcasts in the Navajo story, those (bestial, insect-like, locus-like?) "people" who (although or because they are "immoral"?) discover the series of worlds and populate our own (fourth) world. For while the Pimas' first world here becomes evil or self-destructive in a way that is not too far from the Hebraic view in *Genesis*,[16] the second and third worlds simply embody an "acceleration" of human growth (development): this looks more like Blake's "experience" than like "evil" in that more traditional, absolute sense which Blake subverts.[17] The image of little babies already getting grey hair and smoking is of course (also) a blatantly comic one; indeed, the technique of acceleration here has (again) the comic-absurd effect of fast action ("fast forwarding") in an animated film or even a "real" one. But I suspect there may be (as well) a deadly serious meaning here, based on real-world observation: each successive generation is becoming mature (experienced, jaded) faster than the previous one, so that the world is itself on a steady (and accelerating) downward course toward moral decay, increasing disorder, chaos.

With the inter-world "flight" of the Creator here, accompanied by his assistant Nooee (the Buzzard), we get again the shocking discontinuity of the world-series, the "breaks" between worlds. J unexpectedly (and absurdly) pokes a hole in the sky in order to climb through and, standing "now on top of this fallen sky" (the hard sky-surface again, as in the Navajo story), again makes "a man and a woman" and a (new) world above him—which again will fall, so that the must again "escape" in the same fashion. In the process of each new world-creation J is effectively exiting the old (collapsing) world; this is his "flight." But here it is not a post-creation group of "fliers" who travel between worlds, it is the world-Creator himself (with his assistant). That the Creator himself must escape from beneath his own falling sky, escape a collapsing world of his own creation (and his own destruction) is obviously ironic and comically absurd, but it also has a serious metaphysical implication: this Creator was apparently not (fully) "outside" his

world when he created it. Nor is he fully "inside" it: his "marginal" (ambiguous or paradoxical) location with respect to the worlds he creates is implicit in this "scene" of his repeated escapes, his inter-world flight.

Here is how we get our genesis at the opening of the Pima narrative: "In the beginning thee was no earth, no water—nothing. There was only a Person, *Juh-wert-a-Mah-kai* (The Doctor of the Earth). He just floated, for there was no place for him to stand upon. There was no sun, no light, and he just floated about in the darkness, which was Darkness itself" (Baym 31). J's pre-creation "floating around in Darkness" (or in Nothingness) may seem ambivalent with regard to the issue of the Creator's initial location within or without his own creation. I want to suggest that this is just the point: his position is in this respect ambiguous or marginal—he is inside *and* outside (on the "margins" of) the world he makes, located "in-between," "floating at the origin." To see this we would need to compare the Pima genesis to Hesiod's at the opening of the *Theogony*, and to Jehovah's world-creation at the opening of *Genesis*. Jehovah is fully outside his creation; he "commands" it by the absolute power of divine fiat: "Let there be light." Or we can say that he "separates" the waters into celestial and earthly ones (separates earth-sky), rather than being (like J) originally *between* heaven-earth, that is, *within* the darkness of the indeterminate Abyss, of Chaos. This "separation of the waters" is an archetypal Near Eastern motif (going all the way back to Babylonian mythology) but also a Greek one:

> The splitting of earth from sky is a cosmogonical mechanism that was widely used, long before the earliest known Greek cosmogonical ideas, in the mythological accounts of the great near-eastern cultures . . . In the Babylonian Creation-epic . . . Marduk splits the body of the primeval water-goddess Tiamat and makes one half of it into sky (containing the celestial waters) and the other half into Apsu, the deep, and Esharra, the "great abode" or firmament of earth. . . . In another, later Semitic version, *Genesis* I, the

ing of the world's "origin" or "creation," is (at least implicitly) a theme or discourse of the "praxis" of what might in fact seem "useless." (And the Navajo "Locust-people" who found our modern humanity, as if representing, within a self-referential Chinese Box structure, the nature of their own inter-world flight, are themselves "useless" outcasts.) The question then becomes, to what degree (in order to compare it with Chuang-tzu's philosophical level of discourse here, "Big Saying") can we analyze the Native American mode of narrative discourse ("story-telling") itself as a "praxis of uselessness?"[23]

Here I am not trying to assert unequivocally that ancient Northeast Asian culture, including a certain metaphysical worldview, directly influenced (or indeed became) ancient North American culture (Campbell's notion of a circumpolar Mongoloid culture). I am merely saying that we *can* also see the "pervasive-immanence" model commonly attributed to ancient Chinese thinking (or at least a variation on/of this model) in Native American mythic narratives—with the further (more or less implicit) suggestion that there may indeed be an influence here or direct historical "connection." As discussed in my introductory remarks, this would if true have important implications, on both the theoretical and more explicitly pedagogical levels, for the field of Asian-American studies.

Even less would I try to claim (as no one would) that Native American thinking/culture directly influenced the thought and writing of such later European-Americans as Emerson, Thoreau or Dickinson. Or rather, while the Indian culture did obviously influence White Americans (partly or mainly through their reaction to it), there is (according to my hypothesis) much less ground for assuming a substantive cultural "congruence" *here*, or a similar metaphysical worldview.[24] Yet, as mentioned at the outset, Hall among others has suggested that the ancient Chinese pervasive-immanence worldview is actually nearer to Nietzschean and postmodernist Western thinking than to classical Western thinking. Must we then call purely contingent, to pick a not-so-random example, the seeming "familiarity," in this context, of Dickinson's abrupt jumps, her ironic and grotesque breaks between

discontinuous worlds? For Dickinson too loves to stupefy, disorient our minds (and thus perhaps "enlighten" them) with inter-world flights that go crashing through the permeable interfaces:

> And then a Plank in Reason, broke, /And I dropped down, and down—
>
> And hit a World, at every plunge, /And Finished knowing—then— (280)

The permeability of the inter-world surfaces is echoed by the open-endedness (or "indefinite extension") of the ending, which has two opposite readings: "I stopped knowing (anything) at the end/bottom (of my plunge)," and "I finished (my plunge) by (finally) knowing. . . ."

Dickinson also loves to stupefy and enlighten by abrupt "world-inversions," in this case an inversion or "reversal" of the earth's *surface* so that we seem to be simultaneously on the inside (looking in) and outside (looking out) of this highly permeable (self-reversing, equivocal) membrane:

> I saw no Way—The Heavens were stitched—/I felt the Columns close—
>
> The Earth reversed her Hemispheres—/I touched the Universe—
>
> And back it slid—and I alone/A speck upon a Ball—
>
> Went out beyond Circumference—/Beyond the Dip of Bell— (378)

NOTES

[1] These minority "voices" may seem (and to a degree may be) more grounded in folkloric traditions of oral narrative than are the European and European-American literatures. But the latter have not

(necessarily) gotten further away from their oral-narrative roots than have these minority literatures; rather, as we see with the works of Kingston, Morrison and Cisneros, Hyphenated-American writers living in the U.S.A. are reaching back to their cultural-narrative roots in order to assert their ethnic identity as minorities within the white American context. In the volume which came out of a seminal 1981 meeting of the Modern Language Association (see Ruoff), Theresa Mendez's essay poses a question to the traditional "canonists" of American Literature: "In the definition of 'folklore,' who are the 'folk' and what is the 'lore'?" and Linda Ching Sledge discusses the "Oral Tradition in Kingston's *China Men*."

[2] John Smith and William Bradford speak of the Indians' "barbarian religion," and even in Hawthorne's "Goodman Brown" the woods are rampant with the noises of "wild Indian pow-wows" and "pagan" black magic. Cooper, Freneau, Longfellow and even Thoreau (see note 24) have more "romanticizing" ("Orientalizing") views of the Indians, that is, condescending or patronizing views. Surely before Afro-Americans could have become, as Morrison suggests, the "repressed Other" or Dark Side of the white American consciousness, the Native Americans played this role; indeed, they essentially defined or created the role.

[3] Recently there has been evidence that some of these peoples came eastward across the Pacific by sea routes further south; also that the first Caucasian presence in the New World, and thus the initial Mongoloid-Caucasian mixing, may have been much earlier than previously thought possible. But clearly those proto-Americans classified on the basis of certain physical characteristics as Mongoloid (see following note) came across from what is now called East Asia.

[4] I realize that the term "Mongoloid" may be a sensitive one for East/Northeast Asians who include in their number Han Chinese as well as Japanese and Koreans; here I will not try to defend the use of this or any other racially demarcating term, but accept it as a sort of practical necessity within the context of my discussion here. Of course, if we are to have an "Asian-American Studies"—where often the cultural identity of a particular Asian ethnic group living in America is at

stake—then it seems that in the first place the respective ethnic identities of the East Asian cultures themselves would need to be as clearly marked as possible. If the Native Americans as primitive Americans may seem to haunt the cultural unconscious of White Americans, as the "original Mongoloids" they perhaps also haunt that of East Asians.

[5] See the previous note.

[6] Here however we must be careful with our use of the term "ontological," since the key point of the pervasive-immanence worldview is going to be that, unlike Plato's "ontological difference" of transcendent and immanent worlds (think too of the dualistic pictures we get in films like "The Truman Show" or "The Matrix"), we now have less determinate or rigid boundaries (differences) between levels (worlds), thus too a "multiplicity" of levels/worlds. (See the later discussion of the vertical world-series in a Navajo narrative.) Such a non-Platonic worldview also bears some relation to Nietzsche, Deleuze and "postmodernism," an issue mentioned above and one lying well beyond my present scope.)

[7] But Hall among others has pointed out that in ancient Greece it is in fact only with Parmenides' (500's B. C.) that we get the clear immanent/transcendent duality (Way of Seeming/Way of Truth)—Pythagoras and later Plato (300's B. C.) develop this into the philosophy of transcendent logical form or Logos; the pre-Parmenidean thinking of Anaximander (origin as *apeiron*, unlimited) and Heraclitus (reality as constant flux, identity of opposites) centers on logical paradox (or contradiction), indeterminacy and indeed Chaos (Tao as *wu hun cheng*). Derrida's "uncovering" of those Platonic and Judaeo-Christian logocentrisms which form the basis of "Western metaphysics" is in fact much indebted to the earlier return to these earlier Greeks by both Nietzsche and Heidegger.

[8] As for an "indefinitely-extended" world with no absolute boundaries, no absolute beginning and end, while the first two hexagrams of the *I* are "heaven/creative"and "earth/receptive," the last two are "after completion" (water over fire) followed by "before completion" (fire over water, where *k'an*-water is also "abyss").

[9] This sort of praxis on the "Chinese side" may be tied also to

Hansen's view of Chinese language: while Indo-European languages like Greek have a syntax based on "predicating" the qualities (or objects) of a subject, so that philosophical discourse was essentially a making of "statements" about (corresponding to) reality, Chinese (philosophical) discourse was (on the model of Austin and Searle's "performative utterance") essentially taken to be a socially guiding ("formatting") discourse. Thus Lao-tzu's "*Tao ke tao, fei ch'ang Tao*" is read as meaning, not that Tao is a language-transcending metaphysical *Archai* but that the only tao we have (the tao that can be spoken, discourse) is constantly changing: this is the performative praxis of its "utterance." This sort of "praxatic utterance" is obviously then a (pervasively) "immanent" one as against the Judeao-Christian "Logos."

[10] In the Eden story in *Genesis*, of course, Adam (and later Eve) is warned: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Lawall 53)

[11] The boy's "split identity" more obviously invites, of course, interpretations in terms of Greek myth (Narcissus and Echo) and (echoing Narcissus via Freud) Lacan's mirror stage.

[12] The imaginative picturing of the wind as a force which could open twisting tunnels "through" the sky is of course also stunning: "The passage which they found in the west was twisted round like the tendril of a vine; it had been thus made by the wind" (67). The creative energy of imagination (or proto-scientific speculation?), over-reaching itself into ever-newer worlds, is perhaps expressed in/as the thrusting gusts of wind.

[13] Freud in *Jokes and the Unconscious* analyzes wit and humor in terms of disjunctions and discontinuities: when our "psychic economy" is hit with the totally unexpected ruptures of the "absurd," we laugh to release the excess energy saved by "not having to make the rational connections." I'm not sure if Freud has this exactly right—if we "naturally think logically" (as Plato and Chomsky would agree) then why do we expend more energy thinking logically than thinking non-logically? —but I suspect he is on the right track. (The brain-computer analogy might be useful here.)

[14] This (the film but also the Navajo narrative) actually raises the issue of continuous extensions ("infinities") versus discontinuous ones (those that are "broken," divided into "levels"): in a sense the indeterminacy of the latter (discrete "limits" implying a larger unlimited) is more concrete, and helps us to reflect on or "understand" the indeterminacy (pure unlimitedness) of the former.

[15] Or as in another recent film, "The Matrix," where the protagonist learns that most people are effectively "asleep" and living their lives in a kind of dream-state or "virtual reality"; his quest is to become aware of his actual situation, one which parallels the journey of Plato's would-be philosopher-king up and out of the "cave."

[16] Though actually it is nearer to the account we get in the Babylonian *Gilgamesh*, a much earlier prototype for the Genesis story: here *the gods* destroy mankind with a flood because the earth is now "teeming" with humans, has become "too noisy" with them, so that "the gods cannot sleep."

[17] "Innocence" and "experience" as "two sides of the human soul." In fact the trope of "acceleration" here reminds me of the sense of accelerated life-spans (and/or reversed or interchanged ones) in Blake's "The Mental Traveller."

[18] Chaos theory in physics: order (that is, ordered "bodies") is (are) a temporary and tenuous self-ordering, through a kind of folding-back or repetition, of chaotic and reversible atomic flows; (ordered) bodies must then inevitably "decay" again back into chaos.

[19] Nietzsche's late ("cosmic") version of the eternal return: given a finite amount of matter/energy (the theory of "world as will to power" arguably predicts Einstein in making matter/energy interchangeable if not equivalent) and an infinite (or indefinite?) amount of time, every conceivable "world-combination" (e.g. atomic or molecular combination) will come around again sooner or later, including every human life on earth down to its minutest detail. Nietzsche replaces the Christian (or Platonic) notion of a world-limit outside of which stands God and eternity (or the transcendent Logos) with the notion of a world "indefinitely extended" (read by some postmodernists as "indefinitely

extended textuality") through (temporal) repetition.

[20] "Ecological" in a sense that I mean to include "ontological" although, as discussed earlier, we can perhaps no longer use the latter term in the Greek/Western sense, as that sense depends on certain distinctions which may no longer be viable. See the earlier discussion of the Navajo world-series.

[21] In another Native American narrative, "The Girl and the Protector," "the Protector . . . went toward the place where he'd killed the Old Lady . . . The Protector skinned the Old Lady Granduncle then he sewed her skin up like a sack with yucca. He got some yucca fiber and sewed until it was done and when it was sewn he made it stand up . . . : 'Ah, this should work.' And there he put it on his back and climbed up Corn Mountain . . . he made this Old Lady stand up . . . he tried it and it was working . . . " And then (in a truly weird passage) the Protector will meet his (the same?) grandmother and "fool" her (frighten her) by wearing his "disguise" (or is it a "transformation")? See Tedlock 103-05.

[22] In an essay on Kafka and Chuang-tzu ("Useless Parables") I have tied Chuang-tzu's "use of uselessness" to Kafka's notion of "becoming parable."

[23] It is the figure (sage-and clown-like) of the Trickster, appearing in many Native American tales (J in the Pima story may be a sort of prototype) who can more readily be compared with Chuang-tzu's "sages"—or rather, his discourse (a useless "big saying") compared with theirs. See e.g. Wiget ("The Native American Trickster and the Literature of Possibilities") in Ruoff and Ward (90-94). On another "level" (which, like the Trickster, lies beyond my present scope) and perhaps much more easily, we could make the comparison in terms of the actual rhetoric of the stories as they are told by story-tellers, that useful uselessness of the "mere words" of a performative utterance, the praxis of the Pima "Song of Creation" which, set within the narrative proper, invites and exhorts its listeners: "*Juhwertamahkai* made the world—/Come and see it and make it useful!/He made it round—Come and see it and make it useful!" (Baym 32).

[24] Thus, while Cooper is obviously much "influenced" by the Indians—whose virtues he glorified in characters like Unka and Leatherstocking—we may ask to what extent he was really "Indianized" and not just a Eurocentric white man who made money by writing about U.S. colonial history, giving a prominent role to Indians. The crucial issue is really whether Emerson's transcendentalism *might* be seen (with many qualifications no doubt) as essentially a pervasive-immanence worldview, one influenced by Hinduism, as we know, as well as by Kant and Coleridge (though apparently not directly by Hegel or Schelling). Emerson is looking at a kind of encompassing Nature which points beyond itself (like a language pointing to its meaning, signifier to signified) to "Spirit": "Nature is the symbol of spirit." The unspeakable beauty of the sunset makes us sense a spiritual meaning "beyond" it; natural phenomena actually *mean* what we normally take them to be (mere) archetypes or symbols of: spring actually means "rebirth," flowing water actually means "time," points unequivocally to this meaning. Not only does this world-model seem to have a (post-) structuralist-linguistic aspect which moves it beyond Platonism or Neo-Platonism; here also the very boundary between "Nature" and the "Spiritual" world beyond it (as in a vertical or Chinese-box series of worlds, ontological levels) may seem (though we could also approach this from a post-structuralist perspective) finally permeable, porous, indeterminate.

Much has been written on Thoreau the pragmatist (radical empiricist) as nature writer and ecologist. But Ramsey (Ruoff 52) shows that, though Thoreau was editing *The Maine Woods* on his deathbed (and uttered among his last words, according to friend W. E. Channing, "moose . . . Indian . . ."), the attitude he takes toward his Abenaki Indian guides in Maine Woods is equivocal at best: he speaks of the "wild barbarian sounds" of these "first people," a language of which "I understood not a single word." Still, the central focus in *Walden* is on survival through simplicity of lifestyle, that is, on "economy" (or "ecology") in the same sense in which we have been using the term—the material expands to encompass the spiritual. For in *Walden* Thoreau does after all combine the most pragmatic, "materialist" concern with living simply and economically with what we traditionally took to be its opposite: the absolutely spiritual life, reading Plato and Confucius, deep meditation in the woods, deep

deep meditation in the woods, deep ecology. The point is that, as with later (Zen-influenced) poets like Snyder, nature *is* spirit, the boundary between these two worlds has become so porous and permeable that it effectively disappears.

WORKS CITED

Baym, Nina *et al. The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (Shorter Fourth Edition). New York: Norton, 1995.

Beaty, Jerome. *The Norton Introduction to Fiction*. New York: Norton, 1973.

Brotherston, Gordon. *Book of the Fourth World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

Campbell, Joseph. *Oriental Mythology: The Masks of God*. New York: Penguin, 1962.

Graham, A. C. *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

Hall, David L. "Modern China and the Postmodern West." *Culture and Modernity*, ed. Eliot Deutsch. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1991.

____ and Roger Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius*. Albany: SUNY, 1987.

Hansen, Chad. *A Taoist Theory of Chinese Thought*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Kirk, G. S. an J. E. Raven. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1963.

Krupat, Arnold, ed. *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution P, 1993.

Matthews, Washington. *Navajo Legends*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1994.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Ruoff, A. L. B. and J. W. Ward, Jr. *Redefining Native American Literary History*. New York: MLA, 1990.

Stevenson, Frank. "Useless Parables: Chuang-tzu's Lost Ground and Kafka's Broken Wall." *Tamkang Review* 28.4 (1998): 41-101.

Strachey, James, ed. and trans. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. VIII. London: The Hogarth Press, 1960.

Tedlock, Dennis. *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983.