

‘Creators, Virgins, Shamans, and Witches: The Anthropology of Religion and Gender’

Anthropology 2240

Lecture Outline and Quotes Package

November 20, 22, 27 2006

1) Religion Backgrounder: Definitions and Concepts

2) Creators and Creation

- General Comments
- Creators
- Creation
 - Tahltan
 - Navajo
 - Christian
 - Science

3) Blood and Taboo

- Menstrual Taboos in Cultural Context
- Explanations and Interpretations

4) Priests and Shamans – Religious Specialists

5) Witchcraft and Witches

- Concepts
- Image of the Woman as Witch

6) Film: The Kitchen Goddess

Opening Quotations

-A-

There is also, beyond the juvenile, a strong feminine element in folklore, because its origin antedates the emergence of reason and belongs in the instinctive and intuitional areas. It is irrational and highly imaginative: much of it truly is termed 'old wives' tales.' Women have always been the savers and conservators of beliefs, rites, superstitions, rituals, and customs.

Charles Francis Potter, folklorist, Unitarian Minister,
collector of tongue twisters, 1885-1962 (Weigle 1982:289)

-B-

Women *and* mythology, women *in* mythology: we know more about the latter. As generally understood and undertaken mythology ... concerns men's myths and rituals. Most extant documents, field data, and interpretations come from male scribes, scholars, artists, and 'informants.' Thus we know a fair amount about women *in* mythology, about the female figures who people men's narratives, enactments, philosophies and analyses, and almost nothing about women *and* mythology or women's mythologies ... It should not come as a surprise, then, if the [research on mythology] shows how men have treated women mythologically. How women have treated men and each other in mythological terms we can only strongly suggest.

Marta Weigle, anthropologist and folklorist, 1982:vii

-C-

'Women's expressive vehicles are the nonlegitimate forms, even though they are as ordered and as rule-governed as the male forms' ... In short, myths have served as the measure of narration while gossip and so-called old wives' tales have been relegated to insignificant status or ignored altogether.

Marta Weigle (1982:289), quoting and commenting on folklorist Claire R Farrer

Creators

-D-

Quite simply ... female creator deities are rare. On the whole, goddesses play second fiddle to gods in cosmogonic and origin myths dealing with the early stages of creation. Only when creation myths tell of a cosmos generated through natural reproductive strategies do female creator deities enact significant roles.

Marta Weigle, anthropologist, 1982:45

-E-

They came out of the earth from Iatik'^u, mother. They came out through a hole in the north called Shipap. They crawled out like grasshoppers; their bodies were naked and soft. It was all dark; the sun had not yet risen. All of the little people had their eyes closed; they hadn't opened them yet ...

Leslie White, Anthropologist (1932)

Creation Stories

-F-

Tahltan Raven Story

Told by Rosie Dennis to Linguist Dr. John Alderete, 1999

This is a Raven story. How silly he could be? He could make himself into anything. Raven saw that one guy, a wife and daughter had daylight, sun and the moon. Only their place, a brush house, had light. And this whole earth was just pitch dark, yet people lived on it, and Raven thinks to himself, "How could I get the lights away from those people – how could I make myself so that girl could swallow me? Then she'll bear me and I'll cry for daylight first, then I'll cry for the sun, and then I'll cry for the moon." So he made himself a little dust – that's how crow does that, he made himself dust and this young girl eats it. He puts himself on that girl's food so she could swallow him and have a baby. The girl spots it, and tells her mother to look at the dust on her food. They claimed that's the story. Those people were so neat and clean that nothing would come near them because they were the only ones that had light. And the crow thinks, "Oh I don't know what to do now – what could I make myself so that girl wouldn't see me so she'll swallow me? She has a wood cup." And the crow thinks, "Oh, if I put myself around the rim of that cup, make myself a small little dust, I bet that way she'll swallow me." So he did! Sure enough the girl didn't see it and she swallowed that little dust.

In a few months, it's showing that she's pregnant – and her mother and Dad ask how did she get pregnant, how could we find out? They couldn't find out, nobody came around, it was just them. Finally she's in labour; here it was the boy that was that crow! The way grandma and the old timers tell us, they say it's a true story. So the mother of the girl tells her husband, put up your camp outside my daughter's, she's in labour. So her Dad put up a little brush house. He moved out of there, that's our Indian way when a woman is going to have a baby. When a woman is in labour, the man has to move out till the woman has the baby – so that's what they did. Here it was that boy! That baby grew up fast, they figure he started creeping around in about a week. The grandfather and the grandmother loved that kid so much it isn't funny! And when he figured that he was big enough to carry the daylight, sun and the moon, he cried for daylight. But first he cried to his grandpa. He points to that daylight, he can't talk but he points to that daylight. So his grandpa asks his wife, "Shall we give to him? He wouldn't spoil it." The grandmother said "He might cry himself to death, give it to him." So the grandfather brings it down, and hands it to him. He played with it so long, he cried for the sun. Then he pointed to the sun and he wanted that too. They both said the same thing, he might cry himself to death – we better give it to him, so they gave him that sun. When he bounced the daylight and sun together, the grandpa and the grandma just hollered! Then he started to cry for the moon. They tried to give him something else but he wouldn't take it, he wouldn't quit crying so they figured that again he might cry himself to death – so they gave him that moonlight. Now he had all three of them – he practised when they weren't looking at him ...

-G-

Navajo

The 4th World

The Fourth World was black and white. There was no sun, moon, or stars, no real day. There were four mountains on the horizons of each of the directions. There did not seem to be inhabitants, but Locust scouts reported that they had in fact found people in the north who lived in houses and who grew things in fields. These were the Pueblo people who visited the Insect people and offered them kindness and food. The Insect people vowed among themselves not to make the mistake here that they had made in the other worlds, and things went well for quite a time.

Then they were visited for four days in succession by four strange beings who made incomprehensible signs. These were White Body, Blue Body, Yellow Body, and Black Body. On the fourth day, Black Body explained to the Insect people that the gods wished to make more people, but ones the looked like

themselves, without odd appendages and foul smells of Insect people. Black Body instructed the Insects to bathe themselves and await the return of the gods in twelve days.

The Insect people bathed themselves on the morning of the twelfth day and dried themselves with corn meal – white for males, yellow for females. Then the gods called out as they approached, appearing on the fourth call. Blue Body and Black Body carried buckskin while White Body and Yellow Body carried one yellow and one white ear of corn. The gods performed a sacred ceremony during which supernatural Mirage people appeared. The yellow ear of corn became a woman and the white ear of corn became a man. The wind came and gave breath to these beings. The gods instructed the Insects to make a brush hogan for First Man and First Women, who lived together as husband and wife.

After four days, First Woman gave birth to hermaphrodite twins. After four more days she produced another set, a boy and a girl. Five sets of twins in all were born, and in each case they became fully grown in four days and, except for the hermaphrodites, each set lived together as husband and wife.

First Man, First Woman, and each set of twins were taken at four-day intervals to the home of the gods in the east and were taught the mysteries of life, including witchcraft. They were taught how to wear masks in certain ceremonies, and how to pray for necessities. They learned to impersonate the talking god, the house god, and many others. They also learned to keep their incestuous marriages secret, to marry outside of their own immediate family, and to marry among the Insect people. Soon they inhabited the land. They build dams and planted fields, like the Pueblo People. One of the hermaphrodite twins invented pottery, the other the wicker water bottle. The People also learned to hunt, and with the help of the gods they learned to use deer heads as masks to make the hunt more successful.

Leeming and Leeming, 1994:204-205

-H-

Christian

2:7 ... then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil ...

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

18 Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.'

19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for man there was not found a helper fit for him.

21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh;

22 and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh.

25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:7-25

-I-

The Origin of the Universe: As Told by the 20th Century Peoples of North America and other Industrialized Lands

Lead up to the big bang ...

We are searching for a theory that describes the origin of the universe. Let us begin by considering the concept that the universe was *created out of nothing* ... Quantum fluctuations in the vacuum – that is, empty space – result in the spontaneous creation of particles and antiparticles. The idea is that a similar quantum fluctuation could also result in the creation of an entire universe. The argument goes as follows: initially, there was nothing, but then a quantum fluctuation occurred and caused a tiny, fledgling universe to emerge from the emptiness. This universe subsequently inflated and grew into the complicated structure that we observe today (Lidsey 2000:113).

The Big Bang ...

Our current understanding of the history of the universe is that the superstring theory applied when the universe was just 10^{-43} seconds old. In the chaotic inflationary picture, different Planck-sized regions had different initial conditions. In some regions, the conditions were suitable for inflation, but the universe need not necessarily have been hot before inflation began. Those regions that inflated underwent a very rapid expansion and increased in volume by a huge factor. This inflation of the universe can explain, at least in principle, why the universe is so large today and yet contains stars and galaxies.

When inflation came to an end, there was a huge transfer of energy. The energy that had been driving the inflationary expansion was converted into elementary particles and radiation, which resulted in a dramatic increase in the temperature of the universe ... The conclusion that we should draw from our cosmic journey, therefore, is that the 'bang' may have been much *bigger* than we had previously imagined (Lidsey 2000:127-129).

Menstrual Taboos

Native American

-J-

And like a young woman. That's one of the dirtiest things you can do ... dirtiest thing that happens is a woman stepping over your furs. Or over bones or meat. That's bad luck for hunters. Hunter have ... no luck if they do that.

Cree Hunter (Brightman 1993:125)

Christian

-K-

The change in secular power coincided with the rise of sun worship under a male priesthood, which began to supersede the much earlier moon cults, which, however, remained in the hands of women. Sun worship was usually introduced and established by an edict of a military dictator, as happened in Babylon and Egypt, and probably in other countries as well.

M. Esther Harding, Jungian psychologist, 1973:34

-L-

12:1 And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;
2 She was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

Revelation 12:1-2

Menstruation as Curse

-M-

The daughter of the Sun had not yet reached puberty when her father made love to her. The Sun committed incest with her at Wainambi Rapids, and her blood flowed forth; since then, women must lose blood every month in remembrance of the incest of the Sun and so that this great wickedness will not be forgotten.

Tukano Indians, Brazil, in Weigle 1982:169

-N-

If a man lies with a woman having her sickness, and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood; both shall be cut off from among their people.

Leviticus 20:18 (in a chapter on rules for the family)

-O-

The twin ideal the Virgin represents is of course unobtainable. Therefore, the effect the myth has on the mind of a Catholic girl cannot but be disturbing ...

Warner 1976:337, in Weigle, 1982:92

-P-

Pubescence was considered a 'great mystery.' At this first budding out of womanhood girls were believed to be endowed with certain supernatural powers over persons and this the misuse of which might do very great harm to both themselves and people in general. A girl could unwittingly cast specks on people if not prevented. She was also unclean and therefore capable of giving offence to game animals or of making them afraid.

Teit, 1956:116

-Q-

On the first appearance of catamenia the pubescent girl is separated from the family and is confined in the small brush or bark house in the rear of the dwelling. This seclusion covers a period of from six months to a year, and is more strictly observed with the daughter of a chief ... When taken out to walk at night [by her female relatives], she is completely enveloped in a caribou skin robe which covers the head and reaches to the ground. She wears around the neck a hollow tube ... through which she drinks. Were she to drink in the ordinary way it is believed that she would suffer from stomach trouble in old age ... During this period of seclusion the girl's diet is generally restricted to dried fish and meat although sometimes she is allowed fresh porcupine meat and fresh berries. The uterus, the head, and generally the feet of animals the pubescent girl is prohibited from eating; if the head or brain is eaten, her child will suffer from an abscess in the ear. If the feet of the mountain goat are eaten the offspring will be lazy and a poor traveler. Partaking of the beaver's feet will produce a stumbler ...

Emmons, 1911:104-105

Witches

-R-

18:10 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer,
11 or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer.
12 For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord

Deuteronomy 18:10-12

-S-

22:18 You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

Exodus 22:18 (in association with rules of proper conduct)

-T-

20:27 A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones ...

Leviticus 20:27

-U-

All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a women ... What else is a women but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted in fair colors ... The word woman is used to mean the lust of the flesh, as it is said: I have found a women more bitter than death, and a good woman more subject to carnal lust ... There are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is, that they are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks than [than men] ... Women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit ... They have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things by which evil arts hey know ... Women are intellectually like children ... She is more carnal than a man as is clear from her many carnal abominations ... She is an imperfect animal, she always deceives ... And indeed, just as through the first defect in their intelligence they are more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft, or by some other means. Wherefore it is no wonder that so great a number of witches exist in this sex.

Malleus Maleficarum (1486), in Stein and Stein, 2005:238-239

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Film: The Kitchen Goddess
Location: Maritimes, Canada

What is the basis for women's religious abilities or role?	
Do the religious practices of these women replace other forms of religious experience or expression? Complement other forms?	
Why does the role of the neighbourhood psychic endure?	
Why is this a woman's role?	
What kinds of questions do these women answer?	
Are these women like the Korean Mansin in the article by Kendall? How so?	