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Animal Symbolism Among The Numa: Symbolic Analysis Of Numic Origin Myths

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This article focuses on two creation myths of the Numic hunters and gatherers of the North American Great Basin (i.e., Southern Paiute, Northern Paiute, and Western Shoshoni). Through an analysis of 25 variants of these myths, two major themes, female and male maturation, are expressed. Attention is drawn to the relationship between mythological animal characters and their counterparts in reality. The symbolic analysis of the origin myths illuminates the logically structured, conceptually based, and symbolically expressed system of thought and knowledge of the Numa.

CONCEIVED as a cultural mode of symbolic expression, myth serves primarily as a means to an end, manifesting both a content and context by which to gain access to the cognitive processes underlying a culturally prescribed system of thought and knowledge (Firth 1973; Geertz 1973; Sperber 1975; Keesing 1974). As a body of oral literature, Numic (Southern Paiute, Northern Paiute, and Western Shoshoni; see Fig. 1) origin myths represent a shared conception of creation and dispersal and provide a key to certain concepts and assumptions fundamental to Numic cosmogony and worldview. In the case of the Numic origin myth, it does this through an overt animal symbolism. Not only does this symbolism suggest a certain relationship between the Numa, as a people, and the animals in their environment, it simultaneously provides a basis by which to explore the assumptions and conceptions associated with various animal species, and their relationships and interrelationships with other animal species and the Numa.

The focus on animals, as they are expressed within the mythological corpus, provides insights into the way the Numic people classify and order their environment. The intent of this article, therefore, is to develop a Numic natural history

as one aspect of a larger Numic cosmology (i.e., the conceptualized relations, interrelations, and interactions of various elements within the Numic universe). By demonstrating a conceptually based, symbolically expressed, and logically structured system of Numic culture, this study represents an initial, preliminary attempt to define and elaborate the structuring of the conceptual repertoire and symbolic processes underlying Numic thought and knowledge.

NUMIC MYTH AS A REPOSITORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Inasmuch as myth is defined as a mode of symbolic expression, it also serves as a repository of knowledge. It offers a means by which the physiological, morphological, behavioral, and social repertoire of biotic elements (i.e., animals) can be described and defined to the listening public. These animals play a paramount role in the Numic origin myth, as well as in the mythological corpus in general. Each animal provides a means by which the Numic people, individually and/or collectively, expresses certain concepts about the universe, using the accompanying characteristics and behaviors of such animals as a vehicle for symbolic expres-

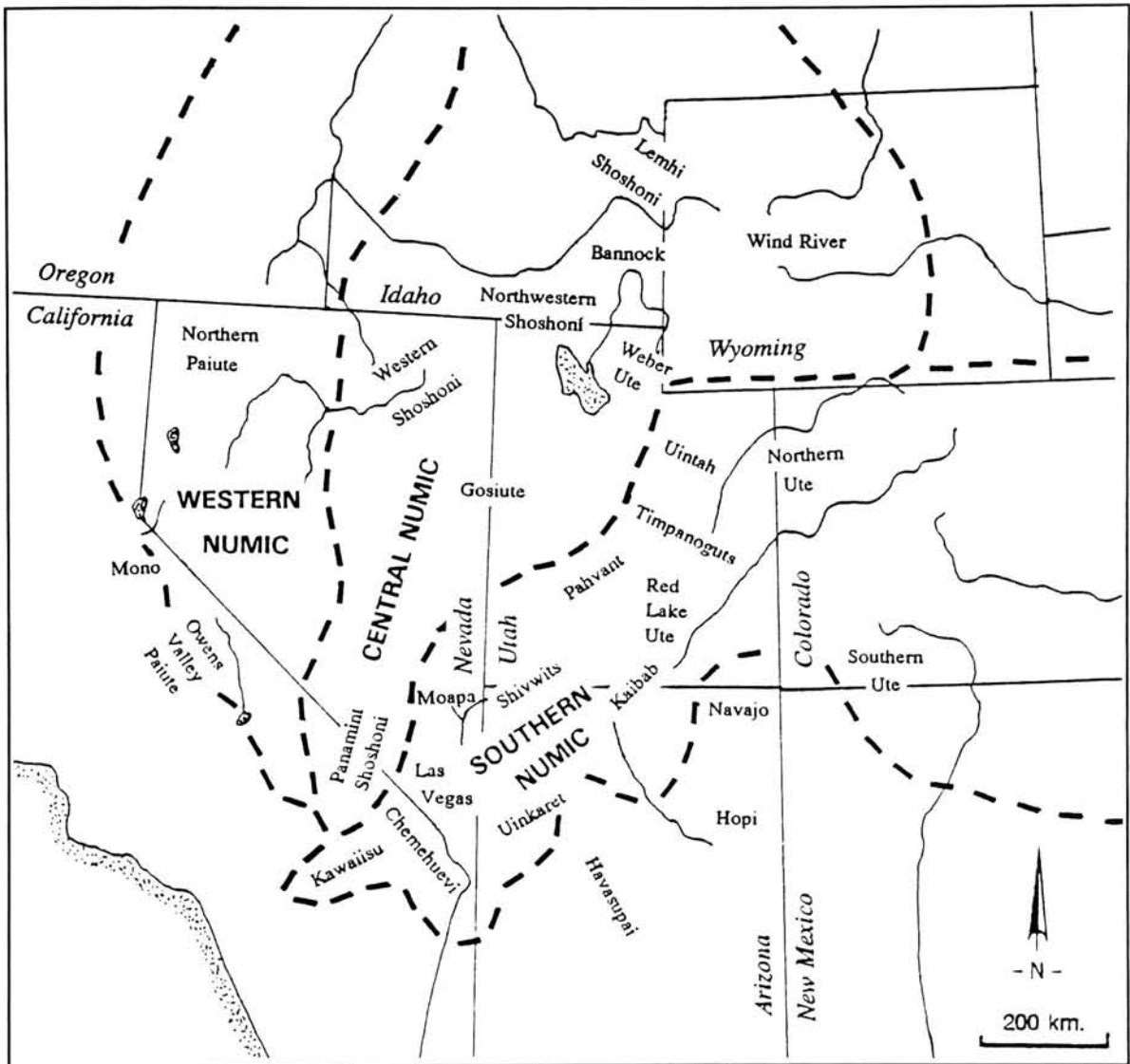


Fig. 1. Locations of various Numic groups and linguistic divisions (adapted from Fowler and Fowler 1971:6).

sion. Since these behavioral repertoires require an in-depth knowledge of the environment, they take on a role of extreme importance. For in charting such characteristics and behaviors, a formula develops by which social relationships of the animal groups, and hence man, can be expressed through myth.

For the Numic people, these often empirical observations and reflections are used to indicate

the characteristics of the various biotic (animal) elements in the environment (e.g., Chamberlin 1911:36; Gilmore 1953:148). In the case of Numic mythology, this is accomplished in one of two ways. In the first, specific physiological or morphological characteristics and behavioral or social patterns associated with the various animals serve to reflect and influence certain characteristics and behaviors of the characters in the

myths. In the second, the characters in the myths (Coyote, Wolf, Mountain Sheep, Deer) tend to reflect and influence the observations of the culture that created them. In this sense, then, the animals in the Great Basin environment serve as instructional guides. They are potential sources of information relating to various biotic elements within the Great Basin environment, and provide a data source for attempting to delineate the conceptualizations and symbolic processes expressed in Numic mythology.

An analysis of the animals in the Great Basin region and their respective symbolizations requires an in-depth study of animal ethology on the one hand, and Numic culture on the other. Utilizing material from the study of animal ethology is necessary in order to enlist as many data on the specific animal as possible. These empirical offerings serve as a control and a basis for a Numic natural history, as well as providing an accurate account of the animal characteristics from a scientific perspective. At the same time, an in-depth knowledge of Numic beliefs, values, and attitudes is necessary to comprehend a natural history from the native point of view.

While a number of animals play various roles in the mythology of the Numic people, this article focuses on three distinct scientific orders in the Numic origin myths: Carnivora (carnivores), Artiodactyla (even-toed ungulates), and Rodentia (rodents). Specifically, they include coyote (*Canis latrans*), wolf (*C. lupus*), mountain sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), beaver (*Castor canadensis*), gopher (*Thomomys* spp.), and wood rat (*Neotoma cinerea*). These animals are selected for reasons that have to do with their integral roles in the origin myths. Carnivores, ungulates, and rodents represent major biotic elements in the Great Basin and major animal categories in the minds of the Numic peoples. The physiological and morphological characteristics, as well as behavioral and social patterns, associated with these animals are very

important in understanding the order in which the Numic people classify their environment.

ANALYSIS OF THE ORIGIN MYTHS

After more than a hundred years of collection, the myths of the Numic people are still one of the lesser known aspects of Numic culture. While other cultural forms have been studied and restudied (material culture, social organization, shamanism), Numic mythology has been sorely neglected (but see Hultkrantz 1986; Liljeblad 1986). The available ethnographic data by which the following myths can be understood are scattered, only sometimes permitting adequate explanation. This makes little difference in the long run—as myth, by its very nature, provides only brief excursions into its significant relationships (Levi-Strauss 1963:206-231).¹

Series I: The Origin of People, Key Variant (M1)²

The analysis herein assumes that a myth consists of all its variants (Levi-Strauss 1963:217). The key myth (M1) below, which forms the initial focus of the analysis, is interesting in that it is relatively simple and basically straightforward. This tale was chosen because it is neither more representative nor more distinctive than other available variants.

A long time ago there were no people living except one woman in California and her daughter. She sent her daughter out to look for Indians here, but she found no one except Coyote. "He is the only one I have seen," she reported. "If you can't find anyone else, why don't you bring him with you? When you meet him again, bring him here." When she saw Coyote again, she thought to herself, "I wish he would think about possessing me." Then Coyote asked her to let him have his will of her. She said, "All right, make your camp down there. Then you may do it." Coyote went about one mile, camped, lay down and was waiting for her. Instead of coming to him, she floated down stream and said, "Make another camp down there." He did so, but again she floated downstream and continued till she reached her home. That evening she said to him, "Don't

lie with me now, wait, till tomorrow. If you sleep with me now, my vagina will kill you."

The following morning he started for the mountains, killed two mountain-sheep and carried them back. He took the neck part of the sheep. The young woman and her mother put the flesh under their skirts and their genitalia ground up the sheep, bones and all. The next day Coyote went hunting and killed two big bucks. Again the teeth ground them up with the bones. Coyote heard the grinding sound and was afraid. He caught sight of a sackful of something. "What kind of food is that?" he thought. The next day he started for the level desert and killed a big antelope. The women did the same as before. The following morning he went towards the mountains as on the first day and killed a very young male sheep. He went home with it. This time a chewing and cracking noise was not heard. He pulled out the sheep in the form in which the woman had put it in, and all their teeth were pulled out with it. Now Coyote was no longer afraid and had his will with the daughter. The next morning she said to him, "You did not come here for fun take that sack with you. Carry it, but don't open it, even if you hear a noise within, until you get to your own country." The next morning he took the sack with him. He heard some singing and said, "I wish I might open it and see the people singing inside." He untied the sack one string after another. At last he had it open and all sorts of people rushed out. He was frightened and ran to one side. When the sack was almost emptied, he retied it and packed it again. Then he heard no singing except that of birds. He opened his sack halfway at Moapa so that some of the remainder got out, singing bird songs, then he retied the bag and carried it here. Then he heard only magic songs, no pretty ones. When he opened the sack in the Shivwits country they came out with oak bows. He retied it and went to the Kaibab country, where he emptied the bag near Buckskin mountain. These people had sinew-backed bows they came out. He went back to the Shivwits country, where as he had lived before and whence he had started. The other tribes came out first, they were tall and husky; the three remaining ones were not very good (Lowie 1924a:103).

The Analysis

Collected by Lowie in 1915 from Buffalo Bill, a male Southern Paiute informant, this vari-

ant sets the basic elements that characterize all the variants of the Series I origin myth.³ The daughter, who lives with and does the bidding of her mother, travels in search of Indians (males). In many of the variants (M1, M4, M7, M9, M14, M15), the daughter is travelling from west to east. In the key variant (M1), the mother dominates by sending her daughter into the world. As it specifically states, no one is left and she finds only Coyote. Having found him, she entices him to follow using her sexual-self as bait. In the key variant, she thinks about Coyote possessing her. By trickery, the daughter persuades Coyote to make a camp downstream from her. Thus, they go through a series of repetitive actions; she floats downstream deceiving him, for a unspecified number of times, before they reach her home. Other than this trickery, however, there is no overt antagonism or hostility between the two, as she gives ample warning of the danger she presents to Coyote in terms of her *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina).

Among the most fundamental factors to arise from the initial sequence is the dichotomy between male and female. This dichotomy occurs in all cultures, but in Numic culture is expressed in a unique way. Female relationships are characterized by a generational distinction (i.e., mother and daughter) which connotes, among other things, descent or lineality (Powers 1977: 33-42; cf., Levi-Strauss 1967, 1969a, 1969b). This points to and is characteristic of an all-powerful bond between a mother (or grandmother) and daughter (or granddaughter) among the Numic people. Mothers (or grandmothers) perform a variety of duties to educate and guide their daughters. Particularly in ritual life, the mother (or grandmother) instructs and guides the daughter in the affairs of birth, puberty, and death. The mother also takes part in the marriage ceremony, giving guidance and assurance to the bride. Needless to say, in everyday pursuits, the mother (or grandmother) is there to educate, direct, and manage the daughter's cares

and concerns (Lowie 1924b; Kelly 1932, 1964; Steward 1933, 1941, 1943a; Harris 1938, 1940; Stewart 1941, 1942).

At the same time, a lateral relationship is found between the males. While not explicit in the above variant, Coyote is the younger brother of Wolf (Lowie 1909:232; Steward 1933:306; cf., Powers 1977). In one version, when the women tell Coyote to leave, they start out with, "Maybe your brother, Wolf, is lonesome for you" (M9). In a Northern Paiute version, it starts off with, "Coyote and Wolf had a stone house" (M12). This lateral relationship dominates both within the larger group of Numic, and within numerous cultural institutions of the Numic people. It is evident in the prescribed custom of brother-sister exchange among the Numic people, as well as in residential distribution where the ideal or preferred situation involves two brothers establishing an independent camp (Lowie 1924b; Kelly 1932, 1964; Steward 1933, 1941, 1943a; Harris 1940; Stewart 1941, 1942; Whiting 1950). While not essential to the telling of this tale, the existence of Wolf as the elder brother is explicit in other Numic myths, and is indicative of the perceived importance of lateral male kin.

Similarly, the male and female juxtapose types of locality and residence. The Old Woman and daughter signify, in its simplest form, matrilineal residence (Levi-Strauss 1967:11), while Coyote and Wolf (implicitly) signify patrilineal residence. Ideally, then, the mother and daughter represent the most basic unit of reproduction expressed by matrilineal descent. The mother, in a sense, represents already realized fertility, while the daughter is potentially fertile. Similarly, brothers (elder and younger) represent, in the male category, the ideal basic unit of reproduction. Their lateral, fraternal relationship sets up the preferred system of the exchange of women. They are ideal representations in the origin myth world that posit the existence, but not yet the persistence, of the

Numa. Both systems, male and female, represent the potential for human sexual reproduction.

The myth also conveys certain primary concepts and assumptions that the Numic people employ in describing their universe. Predominant among these are the notions of water and land. According to Powell (Fowler and Fowler 1971:73-75), the Numic people accept as fact that land and water are separate and unalterable, noting that "They have no term for, and seem to have no conception of, the earth as composed of land and sea." Both land and water are immutable and constant features of the Numic environment. Perhaps this is best demonstrated in another Series I variant (M2), in which the Old Woman makes all the animals of mud, a substance made of two opposing elements.

The distinction is further strengthened by a number of references linking the women to water. In some variants, the mother is called *Si-chom-pa Ka-gon* (Old Woman of the Sea) (M5)⁴ or *Tsutsip maa'puts* (Ocean, Old Woman) (M9). In fact, all but two of the variants (M3, M10), posit an explicit, positive association between women (mother and daughter) and water. This is further strengthened by Coyote's opposition to it. In the key variant (M1), the daughter entices Coyote with the promise of sexual intercourse. Following her as she floats downstream, Coyote makes a number of camps and, lying down at each camp, awaits the daughter. In many versions (M7, M9, M12, M13, M14, M15), Coyote pursues the daughter, as in a hunt, and finally catches up to her at the edge of a large body of water. In other versions, the home of the women is on an island surrounded by water or across a body of water from Coyote (M2, M4, M7, M9, M11, M12, M13, M14, M15). Water in opposition to Coyote (a land animal) is also shown in some myth variants by his need to change into a water skate or water skipper in order to cross the water.

Female Maturation. The Numic people, who have been characterized by their lack of

ritualized behavior, have always been recognized as having a stringent set of beliefs and taboos associated with male puberty and female menstruation and reproduction (Lowie 1924b; Kelly 1932, 1964; Steward 1933, 1941, 1943a; Harris 1940; Stewart 1941, 1942; Whiting 1950). For women, the ritual beliefs and behaviors associated with female puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy form the first theme in Series I.

The taboos, prohibitions, ritual activities, and events that made up these occasions established them as highly formal and rigid periods of time for Numic women. During menstruation and childbirth, women lived in a hut north of the camp or village, and did not eat meat or grease. They ate only roots and seeds, and gathered their own wood and water. The seclusion time for a menstruating woman was a minimum of five days, "two days allowed after the theoretical three days of menstruation" (Steward 1933: 293). In most cases, parturient women, as well as girls experiencing their first menses, were secluded for about one month. Parturient females remained isolated in a hut constructed just for that purpose. The seclusion period was concluded with a ritual cleansing of water (Lowie 1924b:265, 269, 272, 274; Kelly 1932:160-163, 1964; Steward 1933:289-293, 1941, 1943a; Driver 1941; Whiting 1950).

With these facts in mind, it is possible to demonstrate the symbolic meaning of the myth sequence as it logically corresponds to Numic beliefs and behaviors associated with menstruation and birth. Like menstruation, the hunting episode exhibits its cyclic nature. Each day of the hunt, Coyote proceeds to a different area in which he kills a particular variety of game. The hunted cycle is completed on the fourth day with Coyote returning to the mountains. Similarly, the specifics of the hunt (i.e., the killing of five animals in three days) correspond inversely to the Numic belief in a "theoretical three days of menstruation and the five ritual days" (Steward 1933:293). In other words, Coyote kills five

animals, one for each of the five ritual days during which women may not eat meat, in three days.

A second correspondence between myth and reality occurs with respect to the northern location of the menstrual or birth hut. Although few data are available, Kelly (1932:163) recorded the explanation for this northern location as ". . . it [menstruation] comes from the north." In conjunction with this, Lowie (1909: 214) mentioned in passing that the origins of menstruation and the menstrual hut were attributable to Coyote. This being the case, it is logical that Coyote, as originator, is conceived as coming from the north. Significantly, the Numic terms for "north" and "south" are the same terms used for "up" and "down" (Kelly 1964:134; Fowler and Fowler 1971:38; cf., Goss 1972:123). It is suggested that in the hunting sequence, Coyote's movement from the mountain (up) to the desert (down) and back to the mountain (up) signifies the association of Coyote and north, as well as that of the cyclic nature of that movement. Although subtle, the correspondence appears to be very close.

The tools by which the *vagina dentata* are removed are significant as symbols of Coyote's attempt to copulate with the women. There are at least seven variants in which he uses a vertebra of the neck of a mountain sheep or deer to break the *vagina dentata*. Both mountain sheep and deer have a characteristic swelling of the neck during the rutting season. Both perform similar rituals in the rutting season, the best known of which is performed by mountain sheep. When two male mountain sheep (rams) rut, they go through a series of dominance displays in competition for access to females. They conduct a clashing exercise during which they ram their heads together. Bucks do the same, although the act is not as spectacular as that of rams (Einarsen 1956:365). Both animals have extremely strong and powerful necks and are characterized as such in Numic oral tradition

(M8). These observed elements of mountain sheep and deer physiology, behavior, and social characteristics create, in the mountain sheep and the deer neck bone, the perfect tool of male sexual dominance to use in the breaking of the women's *vagina dentata*.

In the Western Numic variants, Coyote uses a stick and a stone to rid the women of their *vagina dentata* (M12, M13, M15). These are formal aspects of land, diametrically opposed to women and water, and are therefore appropriate tools for conquering female dominance. The actions of the women, and their reactions to Coyote, provide for the events leading up to the removal of the *vagina dentata*. In the majority of the variants (M1, M6, M7, M8, M9, M11, M12, M13, M15), Coyote removes the *vagina dentata* of both the mother and daughter. And in some variants (M7, M8, M9, M11, M15), Coyote impregnates not only the girl, but her mother as well. This corresponds to the custom of one man marrying a woman and her mother (Harris 1940:50; Whiting 1950:100). In some cases, Coyote goes to each of the women and removes the *vagina dentata*. The variances of detail all point to the fact that for Coyote and the women, the rights and rules for marriage span the continuum from submissive to dominant. This continuum changes with the sex of the dominant characters. At first, the earth is covered with water and so the women play a dominant role. When Coyote breaks the *vagina dentata*, the roles shift and it is Coyote and land that are dominant.

A final correspondence can be found in the association of certain elements with the mythic characters and Numic reality. In one variant, the daughter is introduced as *Pabon'posiants* or "Tan Louse" (M6); she is a parasite, nonproductive. The explicitly stated requirement that menstruating or pregnant woman use a "scratching stick" on their lice further strengthens the symbolic connection between lice and menstruating or nonproductive females.

In the majority of variants, prior to the extraction of the *vagina dentata*, the women are repeatedly associated with meat and water (presumably cold water, since it is natural). In the hunting episode, the association between meat and females is emphasized by the women's (over) consumption of meat, through both their mouths and vaginas. Similarly, the daughter is associated with water just before the hunt, and the Old Woman or mother is surrounded by water in her camp. This association occurs in every version considered and, although inverted, corresponds with the avoidance of meat and cold water during menstruation and birth. These inversions occur throughout the feminine myth theme. Finally, the association between water and women—prior to the removal of the *vagina dentata* when the daughter swims—inversely correlates with the final cleansing ritual after childbirth. Coyote finally "swims" too, just as fathers bathe after childbirth.

Male Maturation. Pubescent Numic boys went through personal ritual involving themselves and their father or grandfather. They would run several miles each day and stack sagebrush every day for five days. Unlike the quarry of small boys, which included rabbits and other small game, pubescence boys had to kill either a mountain sheep, deer, or pronghorn with a sinew-backed bow (Steward 1941:256; cf., Hopkins 1883). This puberty rite culminated in the kill, after which the father or grandfather would cut the flesh from the ribs, secure it in a loop, and lower it over the boy. During this ritual time period (five days) the boy could not eat meat, but afterwards he could resume eating meat and begin smoking. In the Northern Paiute ritual, the boy would reside in the sweatlodge with the men. Although informal and highly individualistic, a boy's success as a hunter or good provider marked his change in status to maturity.

Various symbolic elements within the myth express this theme of male sexual maturation.

In many variants, Coyote is introduced as a hunter of rabbits or as a maker of rabbit-skin blankets, rabbits being the quarry of immature boys. He is symbolically prepubescent. In one variant (M7), the daughter is nude and wears a rabbit tail on her buttocks, signifying Coyote's quarry. Other symbolic representations of immaturity are present in other versions. In one (M9), a "white hair" on Coyote's tail reminds him that he is just like a little boy. In yet another (M7), prepubescence is exemplified by Coyote's hunting with a bow that is backed not with sinew, but with a "green, stringy stuff" taken from the water.

Immaturity gives way to maturity as Coyote begins the sequence of killing five "big game" animals in three days. Mountain sheep, deer (bucks), and pronghorn are all hunted in their specific habitats. In the case of the mountain sheep and pronghorn, their locations are explicit. The former were killed in the mountains, the latter in the desert. While no specific reference is made to the area in which the bucks are killed, it can be assumed that it is an area intermediate to the mountains and the desert. This area corresponds to the ridge tops on which winter encampments were sometimes situated and where deer were habitually hunted (Steward 1938a, 1941, 1943a). Coyote's successful hunting of two mountain sheep, two deer, and one pronghorn epitomizes this change in status, particularly since he kills all three varieties of game (the killing of any one animal is considered sufficient to mark puberty).

His killing of a variety of game and the women's consumption of them make Coyote a good provider and, at the same time, exemplify the stages of the male life cycles. Having successfully demonstrated reaching maturity, Coyote is now able to remove the *vagina dentata* and copulate with the woman (women), which further emphasizes his new role.

In all cases, Coyote is unaware of the *vagina dentata* and is either told, surprised by, acci-

dentally discovers, or deduces the fact. In other variants, the one-time existence of previous Indian males is indicated by a number of bows and arrows hanging on the walls of the women's lodge (M6, M7, M12, M13), the implication being that the women have castrated and/or eaten them. The metaphor was explicitly recognized by Lowie (1909) when he discovered the fact that among the Numic languages the term *pakan* (-a") refers to both arrow and penis (also see Crapo 1976:106). In a few variants, after Coyote has arrived at the island, he is presented with a feast of duck eggs. In certain of the dialects in central and southern Numic languages, the term *tawiih* (-a") stands for both eggs and testicles (Crapo 1976:185). These terms and their use as symbols indicate male reproductive elements.

The actions of Coyote, as he attempts to rid the women of their *vagina dentata*, are a further step toward Coyote's efforts to acquire dominance over the women. After a few unsuccessful attempts, Coyote's use of the neck bone tools provides him with the means by which to remove the *vagina dentata*, and therefore to successfully mate with the girl and her mother. This is the turning point for the characters in the myth. Prior to the extraction of the *vagina dentata*, the women, as cannibals, show a dominance over the males and land by devouring anyone or anything that came to the island, as well as representing a nonreproductive state of being. After the removal of the *vagina dentata*, the women reproduce at a tremendous rate and consumption is normal.

After Coyote is able to extract the *vagina dentata* and copulate with the woman or women, in a majority of versions, conception follows immediately. In some variants, he is asked to leave or the women demand that he leave (M2, M4, M7, M8, M9, M11, M12). The women tell Coyote to go home, or they remind him that "his brother, Wolf, is lonesome for him" (M9). Only in the Northern Paiute versions does the

daughter accompany Coyote on the journey. And only in these variants does the daughter have the children on the way. This requires that Coyote get some water, but while he plays, the girl has multiple births and allows all the children to escape. When Coyote returns, he is left with only the last children (M12, M13, M14, M15).

In the Southern Paiute and Shoshoni variants, Coyote is alone, with the babies in a water jug on his back. Following the directions given by the women, he goes from place to place releasing the babies, or he releases them before he gets to the center of the world. In all cases, Coyote's involuntary release of the children (or the daughter's voluntary release of the children) results in the creation of distinct kin units. The involuntary release of the babies and their subsequent dispersal provide the basis for the origin of specific, socially (exogamous) reproductive people.

Series II: The Creation of Indians, Key Variant (M16)⁵

The key variant (M16) was collected by Kelly (1938:365-368) in 1930 from Billy Steve, a member of the Sucker-eaters (*kuiyui'tikadū*) band, who lived at Pyramid Lake.

Some kind of man happened after the water dried. He was called Numuzoho or cannibal (*numu-* people, paiute; *zoho*-pound). He was a big man who ate other men. He had a big kettle of rock, and in it he ground all the Indians that he killed. He ground them just like sausage; he put in a whole Indian and mashed him. In those days they had a big tule camp. There were lots of Indians playing the hand game, but there was just one woman who had a camp off by herself. She was not with the others. Then that woman heard someone calling. He was saying, "wi, moho, moho, moho. . . ." that meant there was someone coming from the south eating all the Indians. It was that cannibal himself making that sound. Then that woman in the other camp heard him. That woman ran over to the gamblers and told what she heard. That woman had some kind of a hole where she kept seeds for the

winter. She hid there and covered herself with a basket tray. She covered herself in that hole.

Numuzoho was still making that song when he got to the gamblers. When he came to the door, he said, "Pss, Pss, Pss." They all looked up. Then cannibal said, "Shut your eyes dry." (footnote: obscure, my interpreter said, "It must be just a part of the magic.") They all sat still without closing their eyes. Cannibal just looked and went away. He killed them just by looking at them, but he didn't eat them. One woman was sitting there with her baby asleep on the ground at her back. That cannibal didn't see that baby. He went away. Then that baby woke up and was crawling over those dead Indians. And that woman was safe in her hole. She came out and got the baby, and those two were saved.

There was a big mountain southeast from Fallon, and one man was living on that mountain. That woman thought of him and thought that she should marry him. She packed that little baby on her back and set out toward Mission valley. She went in search of roots; she was hungry. She came towards that valley. Then another one of those cannibals found her, and he asked, "Why are you here alone?" She had fear. She had left her baby at her fireplace. She told cannibal that she left man at her camp with the baby and that he better go over and talk with him. That cannibal went over and found that baby alone and ate that baby.

Then he came back to the woman. She pulled out sagebrush and got in the hole. Cannibal looked for her; he thought she was buried where she had dug roots. He looked for her in the dirt with his hands. It was late in the evening, and he said, "I shall come back tomorrow and find her."

In those days Beaver was an Indian. That woman came to Beaver. She stayed one night with her. Beaver gave the woman fish to eat, because that is what beavers eat. She told that woman, "you had better eat right away and then hide yourself." Those cannibals lived with Beaver; that's why she fed the woman before the cannibals came home. When those cannibals were coming home, they found the woman's track. Then they asked Beaver about her. Beaver told them that the woman had put on cannibals' shoes to deceive them and that she was still out in the sagebrush. But she was really hiding right there, and she was wearing her own shoes.

Every night when those cannibals came back they brought Indians for food. Beaver never ate with them; she didn't eat what they did (footnote: my interpreter here remarked that it was strange

that cannibal didn't eat Beaver if she was an Indian.) Early in the morning they started out again to hunt. They carried fire in the tips of their fingers (footnote: obscure). When all those cannibals had gone away, Beaver told the woman, I am going to throw you with a long stick. I shall throw you where they can't find you."

Beaver had a sister, Gopher. When she threw the woman over the mountain, that woman stayed one night with that sister. Gopher asked her to stay one day. She fixed lots of foods for her to pack on her trip. She gave her some roots; she gave her many. Then that woman went on her way to find the man she was going to marry.

When she left, Gopher said to her, "There's a head lying on the road. Pass it by, don't bother it. On the other side of that head is a winnowing basket. It's on the road too, that basket. Don't touch it." When the woman came to the head, she kicked it; she rolled it around. She didn't believe what Gopher had told her. When she came to the basket, she took a stick and turned it over. Then both the head and the basket started to follow her.

Rat was the brother of Beaver and Gopher. He had a house on that woman's road. Rat could hear the head. It went "Hu" every time it hit the ground. Rat knew what was coming; he knew that the head was following the woman. That basket was going in front of the head. "Tsai a tsa," that's the basket's noise. When Rat heard them coming, he painted his house. This Rat was the woman's uncle. That's why he painted his house; he wanted to save her in there. She stayed one night with him.

When that basket was coming ahead of the skull, it hit against Rat's house. That house was painted hard, and that basket broke into little pieces. When that skull which was coming behind hit the man's house, it broke into pieces--just like a cup. That was the last of those two things. Rat gathered up the basket and the skull and took them back where they belonged. The woman stayed there all night and left the next morning. Her uncle told her, "That's all of those bad things on the road." The next day she came to the man's house. When she reached there, she sat down outside. That man had some food, and he threw some outside. The woman was hungry, and she took some of that food to eat. Then the man asked her to come in. He said, "What kind of a tribe do you belong to? Don't eat that food out there; there is nothing

good there. Come in and eat with me." So the woman went inside. She sat down by the door; she didn't go way in. That man had mountain sheep meat, and he cooked it and gave her some to eat. Then she went outside to get the food she had packed. She was going to give him some.

That night she slept by the door, right where she had been sitting. Every night she moved a little closer to the man. I don't know how many nights before she reached him. Then they lay together and were married.

They were the only Indians living. The rest were all killed by those cannibals. The man went hunting the day after he was married. He came back bringing either mountain sheep or deer. When he came home he saw two children playing outside his house--a boy and a girl. They were his children. Then the next day he came back with game, and that time there were four children playing outside the house. That many children he had, just four.

One brother and one sister were Paiutes; the other two were Pit Rivers. They never stayed home. Outside, those boys threw rocks at each other, and those girls, they took sticks and hit each other. They fought all the time and never stopped.

After a while they grew up. They went off and fought and fought. They stayed away all night and never came home. That was because they were different tribes; that's why they did that. The father and mother tried to stop them, but they wouldn't quit. The father said, "Stop, don't do that; you are brothers and sisters." But they didn't stop; they wouldn't mind him at all. The father said, "If you won't stop, I'm going to the other side of the clouds." Then he went to the other side of the clouds. When people die, they go over there where he is.

That's the end of that. That's where the Paiute and Pit Rivers started. I don't know what kind of tribe the father was; I think he was a wolf. I don't know what the mother was, but she belonged on the south side somewhere.

The Analysis

This variant recounts the adventures of a woman as she proceeds through a number of ordeals and visitations to reach a man's camp on the summit of a mountain. In the key variant (M16), the woman is off by herself, as the other Indians are in the big tule camp. She is secluded from them while they are gambling (M17,

M18, M20). The woman hears a cannibal calling and tries to warn the Indians of the impending danger. The men pay no attention to her warning and continue to gamble. She hides under a basket, and the cannibal comes to the Indian camp where he proceeds to kill, but not eat the Indians. The woman finds a baby, escapes, and is headed for a man's camp, when another cannibal finds them, kills the baby, and searches for the woman. That night the woman escapes again, and travels to Beaver's hut.

Unlike Series I, which has a simple dichotomy between males and females, this myth is particularly interesting because it relies on a more general relationship between individuals and groups. Unlike the relationship between Coyote and the mother and daughter (between the sexes), this myth expresses the relationship between the woman, who is isolated, and the men and women of the group. This is explicit in the key variant (M16), which says that the woman has a camp off by herself. In other variants, a woman is outside with her baby (M18, M20), or she is put up in a lodge, then sits outside as the men gamble inside (M17). In Series I, the women are isolated from men by water. The fact that the woman's warnings are not heard (M16, M17, M18, M20) suggests that she is in a totally noncommunicative state, such as that during menstruation or parturition. A menstruating woman is not to interact in secular activities such as gambling or healing rituals unless ritually cleansed (Kelly 1932; Steward 1933; Whiting 1950).

In the key variant (M16), a woman hears a cannibal calling. In other variants, it is Crazy-Bear, who beats the woman, or a big owl, who kills the group of noisy gamblers (M17) (see also Lowie 1924b:202-204), or an ogre (M18), or cannibals (M19, M20), who kill the larger group of gamblers. At the same time, the woman finds a pit (M16, M17, M18), or transforms herself into a rat and hides under rocks (M19). In one variant (M20), she and a baby hide under

a basket. All three situations indicate that she is in a special state of seclusion, like menstruation. When the cannibal leaves, she has found (M20) or finds a baby (M16, M17, M18, M19); in one variant (M18) the child is a boy, in all other completed variants, the sex is unspecified (M16, M17, M19, M20). The woman then runs away and searches for food—specifically roots (M16, M18, M20), one of the items that a woman can eat while menstruating. Another cannibal (or ogre) pursues her and the baby (M16, M17, M18, M20). In the rest of the completed versions, the woman has a conversation with the cannibal and instructs him to go to her camp. The cannibal goes to her camp, pinches the baby, and then eats it. The woman pulls up a sagebrush and hides in the hole (M16, M17, M18), or she turns herself into Rat (M19) and hides under rocks (M19, M20). Her transformation into a rat and the reference to her hiding under rocks is confirmed both by the ethnographic record, as well as the literature pertaining to wood rat behavior. The cannibal searches for her until dark and then he goes home. The woman, having lost the baby, is isolated again.

Since the woman is secluded from the group and her comments fall on deaf ears, it signifies that even though apart from the larger group, she is definitely belongs to that group. The baby she has acquired reinforces her state of potential reproduction. As in Series I, where the mother and daughter form the basic unit of the group, the woman and the group from which she is isolated forms the basic kin unit group of Series II. The fact that the cannibal eats only the baby, in contrast to killing but not eating the mature adults, reinforces this idea. Here, cannibalism demonstrates the idea that breeding inside one's own group is wrong.

The movements and actions of the cannibal are but a prelude to the sequence of visitations that the woman has on her way to the man's camp. In the key variant (M16), the woman visits three camps. In the first instance, she es-

capas from the cannibal and journeys to Beaver's lodge, where she stays for one night. However, Beaver is not alone. She has a group of cannibals staying with her (see also M20). In one variant, she stays with an old woman and her cannibal grandchildren (M18). In another variant (M19), it is a mother and a group of men with nets. And in yet another variant, the woman first stops at Gopher's house, where Gopher has fishermen staying with her. In variant (M17), Gopher says to the woman, "Those are bad men (fishermen), they kill anything they see." For the group of fishermen (M17, M19), the association with water is implicit and, like Series I, means death to the Indians (as well as Coyote). By trickery, Beaver (or mother, or old woman, or Gopher) is able to hide the woman from the cannibals, grandchildren, or fishermen. This is done with Beaver hiding the woman under her legs (M16, M20), or by the old woman putting the woman in a hole and covering it with willows (M17, M18). The variants of this myth equate hiding (as when the woman escapes the cannibals or in the first camp she visits) with the seclusion period.

In the key variant (M16), Beaver gives the woman fish and tells her to go to her sister, Gopher, and throws the woman over the mountain using a stick. In this variant, Beaver is eating fish, while the cannibals eat Indians. In reality, beavers are herbivores, not carnivores; they eat bark and twigs, not fish. A review of the literature on beavers suggests that the regular stay at a lodge is two or three years. They then move upstream to get away from the lack of oxygen in the water and high quantity of silt produced by their own activities. This creates an intolerable condition for fish, and they also leave the dam area and go upstream. The fact that both the beavers and fishes "migrate" upstream together to avoid a lack of oxygen and heavy siltation draws a close association between the two, and in a mythic context, suggests to the Numic that beavers "eat" fish (Hall 1946:482-484; Morgan

1986). In another version (M17), the character is changed from Beaver to Gopher, but Gopher lives with the fishermen, who gave Gopher fish to eat. As fish are aquatic, the correspondence between women and water is again exemplified.

After visiting Beaver, the woman spends one night with Gopher. Before she goes, Gopher gives her roots (M16, M17) and warns her about the skull and winnowing basket that she will find in the road. The woman ignores the warning, and proceeds to kick the skull and turn the basket over. In other variants, Gopher tells the woman about a skull in the road and the woman rolls it and the skull pursues her (M17), or the old woman tells her that there are "plenty of bad things on the road" (M18), advising her not to touch the skull. In every instance, the skull pursues the woman.

In the key variant, the skull and basket follow the woman to the camp of Rat, brother of Beaver and Gopher. Before they reach the camp, Rat paints his house *hard* or urinates on his house. When both the winnowing basket and skull hit the house, they break up, and Rat (or the woman) is able to take them back where they belong. In the key variant (M16), Rat "paints his house hard." Bushy-tailed wood rats (*Neotoma cinerea*), as all wood rats of the genera, urinate on their mounds. The urine turns hard and is the color of amber (Bailey 1936:172; Hall 1946:535).

As explicitly stated, the two sisters, Beaver and Gopher, and the brother, Rat, are three siblings of the first ascending collateral relatives. As the key variant says, "Rat is the woman's uncle." The three siblings are of the female descent group or matriline. In a sense, they play the same role as the three type of animals in Series I. The key myth in Series I is explicit in stating that Coyote killed three species of ungulates (i.e., mountain sheep, deer, and pronghorn); whereas in the key myth of Series II, three species of rodent (i.e., beaver, gopher, and rat) shared their houses and food with the wom-

an. In Series I, the ungulates are free to roam over great expanses of territory; whereas in Series II, the two sisters and the brother are confined to a restricted home range. Each of the ungulates represents three broad levels of habitat or regions within the environment. Mountain sheep correspond to the tops of mountains, deer correspond to the slopes, and pronghorn correspond to the desert. Similarly, the same may be said of the animals in Series II, in that each corresponds to restricted habitats. The habitat of Beaver corresponds to the riparian habitat, which is the lowest, and in this sense represents the desert. Gopher is traditionally found at the shadscale and sagebrush level and corresponds to the slope of mountains. Rat corresponds to the boreal regions of mountains. This scenario can be shown as:

Types of Habitat	Series I	Series II
mountain top; boreal	mountain sheep	rat
slope; shadscale, sagebrush	deer	gopher
desert; riparian	pronghorn	beaver

In addition to indicating specific habitats in the Great Basin, the animals also represent directions in which the characters travel. But this is inverted as well. In Series I, Coyote kills mountain sheep, deer, and pronghorn, respectively, in order to get from top to bottom or from high to low. In Series II, the woman visits beaver, gopher, and rat in order to get from bottom to top or from low to high.

In the key variant (M16), the number of ordeals and visits in the woman's adventure is also significant. The woman encounters two cannibals and visits three characters (i.e., Beaver, Gopher, and Rat). The cannibals obviously represent death to the woman, as well as to the gamblers. The three characters she visits are related to her (her descent group) and, while amiable to her, both Beaver and Gopher hide her or warn her of certain dangers, specifically cannibals, the skull, and the winnowing basket. Like Series I, the relevance of the numbers three and

five is important to Numic cosmogony. Homologous to the Series I myth, the three visits and the encounters with the two cannibals represent the menstrual cycle, in an implicit form.

The three first ascending collateral relatives and the two cannibals represent the theoretical three days of menstruation and the five-day ritual period. The cannibals represent the two extended days. While they kill everyone else, the woman survives. The three relatives in the woman's descent group provide the woman with food (e.g., fish and roots) and shelter. This five-day ritual period is inverted; the three days of menstruation come after the encounter with cannibals, while in reality, menstruation comes before the extra two days.

The forms of lodges and dens are indicative of the direction taken by the woman. She goes from camp to camp on the way to the top of the mountain. The first camp is that of Beaver. Beavers reside in dome-shaped dens surrounded by water. Gopher's camp is a subterranean den. The third visit is to Rat's house. Individual wood rats make dome-shaped dens above the ground using a bunch of sticks or branches. The fourth visit is to the man's camp on top of a mountain. For Series II, this can be shown as:

Species	House Types	Habitats
human	lodge (dome-shaped)	top of mountain
rat	hut (dome-shaped)	boreal
gopher	subterranean den	sagebrush
beaver	den (water lodge)	water

The journey ends when the woman gets to the man's camp. There, the man gives food to the woman (M16, M19), or the woman marks the fire with her foot (M17, M20, M24), or she is asked to fix his moccasins (M18, M25). The man and the woman enter into a marriage ceremony, which is inverted—the woman comes to the man. In the reality of the Numic, it is the man who comes to the woman's hut and her mother or grandmother who protects her. This ritual takes five nights; each night the man gets

a little closer. On the fifth night, they agree to be married if the man kills game the next day. If he does not, the entire ceremony will have to be repeated (Fowler and Fowler 1971:215). This is reversed in the Series II myth. Instead of the man coming to the woman, the woman comes to the man. Each night, the woman comes a little nearer to the man's bed. Some variants (M18, M19, M21) specify that it is five nights. Each night, the man gives the woman meat to eat and she, in turn, gives the man food that she has brought (M16, M18, M19), or prepares food that he has brought back after the hunt (M24).

Corresponding to the breaking of the *vagina dentata* in Series I, the marriage ceremony, although inverted, has the same significance. After they are married, they have four children. In every variant of this myth, the four children continually fight; boy against boy, girl against girl. The children always fought outside and never came home at night (M20). This made the father angry, so he artificially separated the two couples from each other. In the key variant (M16) and one other (M19), the two couples are the ancestors of the Paiute and Pit River (Achumawi) Indians. They fight, it is said, because they are of different tribes. In some variants, the couples are sent to specific locations. In the key variant (M16), the Paiute were sent to Doyle, while the Pit River ancestors were sent to Humboldt. In other variants, one couple was sent to Fallon, where they made fire first, and the other couple was sent to an unspecified place (M17). One variant says that the Paviotso were the elder couple and was sent to Stillwater, and the other two were sent to Lovelock (M18). In another variant (M24), the Paviotso went to Walker Lake, and the rest (i.e., Ute, Shoshoni, and Pit River) went to other localities. This artificial separation, created by giving them names of tribes or specific locations, translates into distinct groups. Therefore, both Series I and Series II, although very different in content, end up with the division of people into distinct groups.

DISCUSSION

Lowie (1923) and Smith (1940:132) noted that the mythological character of Coyote represents a "culture hero" to the Numic people. Unlike these scholars and the diffusionist paradigm that they represent, the reasons for recognizing Coyote as culture hero are quite different. Coyote represents a culture hero not because he is responsible for many of the manifest acts, events, or activities in the mythological corpus, as Lowie and Smith believed, but because of the unique position Coyote holds in Numic culture. No other animal has quite the same symbolic significance as Coyote.

In terms of the origin myths, Coyote plays a preeminent role. In the wider context of the entire mythological corpus, however, Coyote is offset by the image of Wolf, another preeminent element in Numic cosmology (Lowie 1909:233-236; Steward 1933:306). The fact that both Coyote and/or Wolf are credited with the creation of people is borne out in the origin myths, although the former is represented much more than the latter. In addition, this is at variance with the statement by Willis (1974:8) about one animal being at the apex "of a hierarchy of symbolically significant animals." The occurrence of both Coyote and Wolf as preeminent elements in the symbolic process appears to have ramifications that go beyond the simple hierarchical arrangement of other cultures.

In this regard, scholars such as Lowie (1909:233-236) and Steward (1933:306) have found it difficult to arrive at any definitive conclusions about the roles of Coyote and Wolf as culture heroes. Both suggest that either can be used to fill the culture hero niche. While there is little conclusive data on this subject, from the standpoint of the physiological, morphological, behavioral, and social characteristics which constitute a knowledge of these two animals, some features become prominent and are sufficient to allow for cultural elaboration.

As a species, coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are about one-third the size of wolves (*C. lupus*), which weigh an average of 90 pounds. In contrast to coyotes, wolves are "elusive, secretive creatures" (Mech 1974:5; Lopez 1978:65) by nature. Coyotes occupy an array of habitats from desert to mountain. In their eating habits, coyotes are true omnivores, while wolves are, in general, carnivores. While females of both species have a gestation period of approximately 60 to 63 days, coyotes have a slightly larger litter (seven as compared to five). But perhaps the most obvious contrast between the two species is that, whereas wolves have an interfamilial social structure and social organization based on the pack, coyotes have only a familial structure and organization (Young and Jackson 1951; Scott 1967:373).

This last difference between *Canis latrans* and *C. lupus* has the greatest consequences for Numic cosmology, worldview, and culture. The Numic people have a dual system of social organization revolving around the difference in habitat sites, i.e., village and camp. The division of interfamilial and familial structure and organization among the two species of *Canis* corresponds to this distinction and also has implications for other aspects of Numic social structure and social organization. Seen in this way, the question of either Coyote or Wolf dominating as "culture hero" ought to be dismissed as deceptive and misleading. Instead of a predominant mythological figure, there are actually two; which one has importance depends upon the symbolism of the myths themselves. In the Numic case, these two animals are different aspects of the same thing. Both Coyote and Wolf are held in an exalted position, and which one dominates depends on both the symbolism, as well as the context, of the myth.

CONCLUSION

As has been argued throughout this analysis of the Numic origin myths, the most significant

role of animals is reflected in the symbolic process. The overtness of this symbolism is indicative of the close and intimate nature of the Numic to the animals in their environment. Such an intimacy suggests an empirical knowledge of the physiological, morphological, behavioral, and social characteristics of these animals that are unique to the Numic. In fact, such knowledge requires a keen understanding and observational skills of not only animals, but the abiotic and biotic factors of the environment as a whole.

Numic myth, since it is oral in nature, acts as a repository of this knowledge. It provides a context and content by which to place any or all known environmental data pertaining to the existence and persistence of the Numic people. As a repository of knowledge, the system serves to hold certain environmental data. It also represents a body of thought and knowledge from which assumptions can be expressed. One of the fundamental ways it does this is through the symbolic process. The various animals in the mythology may be seen as shared examples or exemplars in a mythic context.

One of the most significant mythological characters is Coyote. As a shared exemplar, Coyote's interactions with the human and/or animal characters in the origin myths (e.g., women, mountain sheep, deer, pronghorn) demonstrates a wide variety of specific relationships within the origin myths, as well as Numic reality. More importantly though, his acts serve as models for social relations. These acts are expressed in negative terms in the myths, and yet, have positive implications for the listening audience. The basis for this preeminent position is unquestionably due to the empirical knowledge, either objective or subjective, that the Numic have acquired through observation and reflection about the characteristics and habits of coyotes, in general. In this sense, Coyote represents the optimum role for the Numic to emulate, as well as to conceptualize and symbolize. One of the main reasons why Coyote is so paramount to

this understanding of Numic culture is because of Coyote's unique role in the Great Basin environment and the perception that the Numic have of him. By attributing human characteristics to Coyote, the Numic people have made Coyote both human and animal and not human and not animal at the same time. In a way, he mediates between human beings and all other animals.

Animal symbolism reflects a body of knowledge that is essentially empirical in content and form. But because Numa knowledge of the natural world is related through myth, its empirical basis has often been dismissed as the stories of savages or the culturally impoverished. It is more profitable to approach Numic myth as an alternative mode of acquiring knowledge (Levi-Strauss 1966:13).⁶

NOTES

1. The origin myths, of which there are 25 variants (Lowie 1924a; Sapir 1931; Steward 1936, 1943b; Kelly 1938; Fowler and Fowler 1971), are divided into two series. Tentatively, a series may be defined as having one or more predominant themes. Series I occurs in all three segments of Numic culture (i.e., Southern Paiute, Western Shoshoni, Northern Paiute) and Series II occurs in the Western Numic or Northern Paiute.

2. Of the Southern Numic (Southern Paiute) variants in Series I, five were collected (Lowie 1924a: 103-104 [M1], 157-159 [M2], 104 [M3]; Sapir 1930: 358-359 [M4]; Fowler and Fowler 1971:78 [M5]). For the Central Numic (Western Shoshoni), six variants were recorded (Steward 1943b:261-262 [M6], 262-263 [M7], 263-265 [M8], 265-266 [M9], 266-267 [M10], 267-268 [11]). In contrast to the Southern and Central Numic variants, the Western Numic (Northern Paiute) variants are more elaborate in terms of content (Lowie 1924a:209-212 [M12]; Kelly 1938:372-375 [M13]; Steward 1936:365-366 [M14], 366-368 [M15]).

3. Variant numbers in parenthesis (e.g., M1, M4, M7) refer to variants analysis for this paper and are tentative.

4. Native words or phrases in italics are specific to their respective variants; the individual variants should be consulted for specific orthographies.

5. Series II has ten variants, of which four are complete and six are either first or last episodes (Kelly 1938:365-368 [M16], 367-370 [M17], 370-371 [M18], 371-372 [M19], 372 [M20]; Lowie 1924a:

202-204 [M21], 205-209 [M22], 201-202 [M23], 200 [M24], 204-205 [M25]).

6. This is not to say that the Numic people were the only people who had or used such a knowledge. Levi-Strauss (1966) dealt with a host of Indian peoples with such a knowledge. But in the context of Great Basin anthropology and the negativity that many scholars have seem to attached to the Numic people (e.g., savages, gastric society, culturally impoverished), the existence of this knowledge needs to be shown (Myers 1987, 1988).

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