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Myth, Memory, and the Oral Tradition: Cicero in the Trobriands

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In nonliterate societies, myths are often linked to specific geographical locations. Using Malinowski's Trobriand material and taking a lead from Cicero's De oratore, *it is argued that spatial location functions (1) as a mnemonic device for the recall of a corpus of myth, (2) as a structural marker dividing a corpus into separate thinkable units, and (3) as a means of restricting social change at least temporarily to specific institutions. Malinowski's instrumental theory of myth is contrasted with the cognitive theory advanced by LéviStrauss, and certain didactic functions of myth are also discussed.* [myth, memory, oral tradition, social space, Trobriands]

PROLOGUE

AS A CHILD I remember being impressed by a memory trick which my father often performed. A random list of 18 words would be read to him slowly which he would commit to memory as they were spoken, and which hours later he could recite forward and backward, or retrieve any word when given its number in the series. The secret, which he later revealed to me, was to mentally place images suggested by the nouns on an 18-hole golf course well known to him. For example, he might envision a brown (Bron-) slavic (-slaw) skier (-ski) lying sick (Mal-) near a sand trap on the third green. When asked to recall the third word in the series he would envision this familiar third green with its associated image and, with luck, come up with the name Bronislaw Malinowski.

As it turns out, and unbeknownst to either of us, this memory technique of recall by a sequence of locations has a hoary tradition in the Western world (Crovitz 1970; Yates 1966) which can be dated at least from the time of classical Greek rhetoric. Moreover, the Greek mnemonic of location may be a residual form of an *aide mémoire* which serves to structure the myths and legends of nonliterate societies in all parts of the globe. Furthermore, I contend that the mnemonic device not only serves as a remembrance of things past, but is also a source of living tradition which informs, modifies, and is modified by systems of ongoing social relations. That is to say, location as a structural marker has both cognitive and instrumental functions.

Two quotations to set the scene may be of use here:

> Persons desiring to train the faculty [of memory] must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts . . . [Cicero 1942:lxxxvi, 353-354]

> The mythical world receives its substance in rock and hill, in the changes in the land and sea. The pierced sea passages, the cleft boulders, the petrified human beings, all these bring the mythological world close to the natives, make it tangible and permanent [Malinowski 1922:330].

PARADIGMS AND PUZZLES

Thomas S. Kuhn, in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, defines "normal

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science" as being contingent upon acceptance by the scientific community of a paradigm which he defines as "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions for a community of practitioners" (1962:x). In anthropological parlance, these paradigms might be termed the dominant *world view* of a culture, a subculture (e.g., the scientific community), or an epoch. In the Western tradition such paradigms range from the Medieval notion of the "great chain of being" to Einstein's "theory of relativity." Given the acceptance of a paradigm, the development of "normal science" unfolds through the solution of puzzles generated by the dominant paradigm. That is to say, development consists of ordering perceptions or "facts" about the world in accordance with a set of puzzles generated by the paradigm. Such puzzles, according to Kuhn, fall into three domains, the "determination of significant fact, matching facts with theory, and articulation of theory" (1962:33).

This paper is an attempt to solve two puzzles, one having to do with a map I once drew plotting the locations of a series of Trobriand myths. The pattern which emerged falls under the class of problems designated by Kuhn as the "determination of significant facts," the puzzle being, what is the significance, if any, of the precise geographical place names which occur with such frequency in Trobriand mythology? The second puzzle, stemming in part from the first, involves "articulation of theory," the problem being to attempt a synthesis of the social functional approach to myth as propounded by Malinowski and the cognitive approach to myth stemming from the French school of anthropology, most powerfully and persuasively presented by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In trying to solve two puzzles at once, I take heart from Freud's maxim in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which he claims that just as it is easier to crack two nuts together than either one alone, two problems are easier to solve than either one alone.

MYTHS AS CHARTERS FOR SOCIAL ACTION

Malinowski's signal contribution to the study of myth derives from his concept of the interrelation between myth and social organization. For him myths were to be viewed as charters for social institutions. This formulation turns on two concepts—that of myth as a charter and that of an institution as an ethnographic category. He notes, for example, that for the Trobrianders

> The sacred tradition, the myths, enters into their pursuits, and strongly controls their moral and social behaviour. In other words . . . an intimate connection exists between the world, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities on the other [1948:96].

As one of the first practitioners of long term and systematic fieldwork among nonliterate societies, Malinowski was in a position to appreciate firsthand the way in which myth is embedded within a functioning social system. He soon came to perceive that myth was "not merely a story told but a reality lived" (1948:100). It was this novel point of view that took the study of myth out of the hands of armchair students of mythology such as Leo Frobenius, Max Muller, and Sir James Frazer and gave it a central position in modern ethnography.

Procedurally, Malinowski advocated the segmentation of a society into institutions, "the concrete isolates of organized behaviour," such as gardening, fishing, trading, etc. According to Audrey Richards:

> As early as 1929 [Malinowski] was describing basic institutions as consisting of [social] groups attached to certain parts of the environment and endowed with material equipment, linguistic usages enabling them cooperate, rules and laws governing their behavior and a body of beliefs and values shared in common [1957:23].

One component of an institution is the mythical charter itself which stands as a sacred

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precedent giving the stamp of legitimacy to the organized activity for each institution. Malinowski concentrates on the linkage between a particular institution and the mythical charter which gives it validation. He does not, however, concern himself with the linkages between the various mythical charters themselves. The lack of interest in pursuing the linkages between sets of mythical charters, an interest which has been neglected not only by Malinowski but by an entire generation of British anthropologists, may be traced to Malinowski himself who steered inquiry away from this area by his famous dictum, "study the ritual, not the belief." The type of ethnology produced by this dictum emphasizes social organization at the expense of the cognitive or intellectual ordering of a society. In Malinowski's view:

> Myth fulfills in primitive cultures an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficacy of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but an active force; *it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter* of primitive faith and moral wisdom [1948:101; emphasis added].

Thus, for Malinowski the meaning of a myth is to be equated with its use; it is not what members of a culture *say* about a myth, but what they *do* with it which is important.

Malinowski's fieldwork procedure consisted of drawing up a list of institutions such as gardening, fishing, and the kula trade. He was then faced with the problem of articulating the relations between these institutions, and solved the puzzle by introducing the theoretical framework of functionalism in which every institution is seen as being linked with and supportive of every other institution in a reverberating ring, such that a change in any one institution sets off a wave of repercussions affecting all other institutions. Malinowski, however, neglected to indicate the mechanisms by which the institutions are perceived, distinguished, and linked together in the minds of the Trobrianders themselves. It is at this point that the cognitive aspects of mythological charters come into play.

Myth is of a different order from the other institutional components with which Malinoswski was concerned. Whereas institutional components such as kinship, family, rank, and technology interpenetrate and impinge on one another on more or less an equal basis, it would seem that myth overarches these social and technological components and is itself of a different order. Myths stand behind the social order as charters, and give to social institutions an aura of rightness. That is to say, myths codify and sanction a set of activities, a set which Malinowski terms an institution. I maintain that these institutions are linked together not only by pragmatic considerations but by a coherent conceptual system marked by certain structural components common to all Trobriand myths. Furthermore these structural devices are used by a significant number of other nonliterate societies. I am tempted to go further and say that the tradition of the artificial memory in the Western world, from our earliest extant treatment of this device by Cicero in *De oratore*, is but an outgrowth and modification of a wider pattern.

But to return to the matter at hand, Malinowski's theory of the relation between mythical charters and institutions is given in Figure 1. The weakness of Malinowski's formulation of the uses of myth is that he stresses the vertical axis of the diagram. He relates specific myths to specific institutions, and does not concern himself with the horizontal linkages between the various mythic charters taken as components in the corpus of Trobriand mythology, how they are distinguished and demarcated one from the other, and the principles by which the charters are structurally related.

AXIS OF SPACE AND TIME AS POSSIBLE DEMARCATIONS BETWEEN MYTHS

Given the premise that each mythical charter is tied to an institution and that it is myth itself which serves to demarcate the boundaries between one institution and another, the

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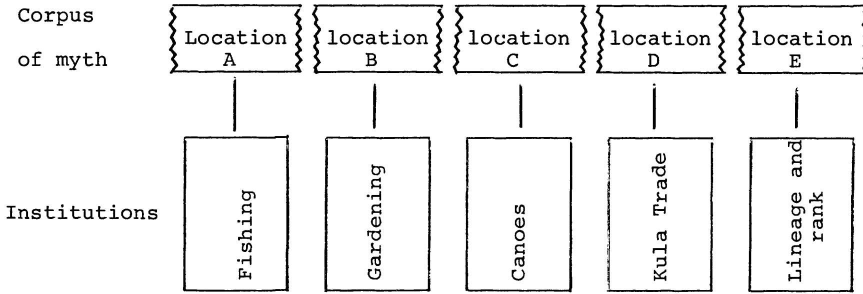

Fig. 1. Malinowski's theory of the relationship between mythical charters and institutions.

puzzle arises as to the means by which the myths are kept separate so as to prevent the boundaries of the myths from blurring, and to keep myths from running together and coalescing. The mechanisms must be found which divides a corpus of myth into separate thinkable units.

The axes of time and space are two possible markers which might conceivably be used to distinguish units within a corpus. The assumption is that by dividing time into epochs one can distinguish say, within the tradition of French history, between the period of the French revolution and the Napoleonic era. In the same way, by using the spatial axis, something called the history of France can be kept separate from something called the history of Germany. By using these two methods the flow of history can be divided into manageable units. It remains to be seen whether Trobriand myths are ranged along either of these two axes.

Malinowski in scattered references discusses both the spatial and temporal attributes of Trobriand mythology. His discussion of the temporal axis in Trobriand thought is relevant to many nonliterate societies which lack a means for recording time depth. According to Malinowski:

> The natives do not possess any historical perspective, they do not range events—except of course, those of the of the most recent decades—into any successive stages. They also do not classify their myths into any divisions with regard to their antiquity [1922:304].
>
> In judging the remoteness of traditional events, they cannot use the co-ordinates of a social setting constantly in change and divided into epochs [1922:301].

As can be seen from these quotations, there is a shallow historical depth reaching back at most three or four generations. Beyond this reach of memory lies the realm of mythical happenings. The line of demarcation between the world of myth and that of present time is, according to Malinowski's interpretation of Trobriand thought, that, "... in the former things happened which never occur nowadays" (1922:302). In other words, the distinction between myth and reality is made in terms of the logic of events (ordinary versus extradordinary) rather than a distinction in terms of a historical sequence.

Because Trobriand myths occur in a historical vacuum, historical time cannot be used as a series producer. What is apparent, however, is that certain myths logically precede others. A story concerning the first emergence of the four Trobriand clans is logically prior to a story of the culture hero, Tudava, who was himself a member of one of these clans.

By using the concept of logical precedence, three categories of Trobriand myth can be established. In the first category are myths dealing with the origin of man, and of the general ordering of society, especially the myth of the first emergence of the four clans, which serves as the charter for rank, for chieftainship, and for the major totemic divisions.

The second category concerns myths of death and of the recurrent cycle of life and death. These consist of three main narratives. The first describes the origin of human

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mortality, and tells how humans lost the ability to slough off their skins like reptiles, and so must die. The second concerns the banishment of the spirits of the dead to the island of Tuma. Formerly ancestral spirits remained in their native villages, but through human oversight they left the mainland, and now only return during the *milamala* harvest festival. The third category recounts the origin of witchcraft and the power it has over life and death.

The third category includes what Malinowski has termed "kultur myths." These are stories about culture heroes and ogres, and about human beings who establish definite customs and cultural features. Here belong the myths of Tudava, the culture hero, who discouraged the custom of cannibalism and spread the knowledge of agriculture throughout the Trobriands. The Tudava myths also give an explanation of the variations in fertility to be found in the islands, based on the degree of hospitality accorded to Tudava on his journeys. This category contains myths featuring human beings, although these beings are endowed with extraordinary magical powers. These myths refer to the origin, not of whole aspects of culture, such as creation and death, but to definite institutions or definite forms of magic. Such myths are the origin of love magic, the myth of the flying canoe, and finally the several Kula myths.

The ranking of myths by logical precedence gives the following sequence: (a) first emergence and the origin of man; (b) loss of immortality, the cycle of death and rebirth, the origin of witchcraft; (c) the origin of agriculture and the Kula trade, various types of magic, etc.

THE SPATIAL COORDINATE

In reading the Trobriand myths one feature is particularly striking. Each mythical event is closely associated with a particular location, or a series of locations, in the Trobriand area. By plotting these locations, it is possible to construct a mythical geography of the Trobriands (see Fig. 2).

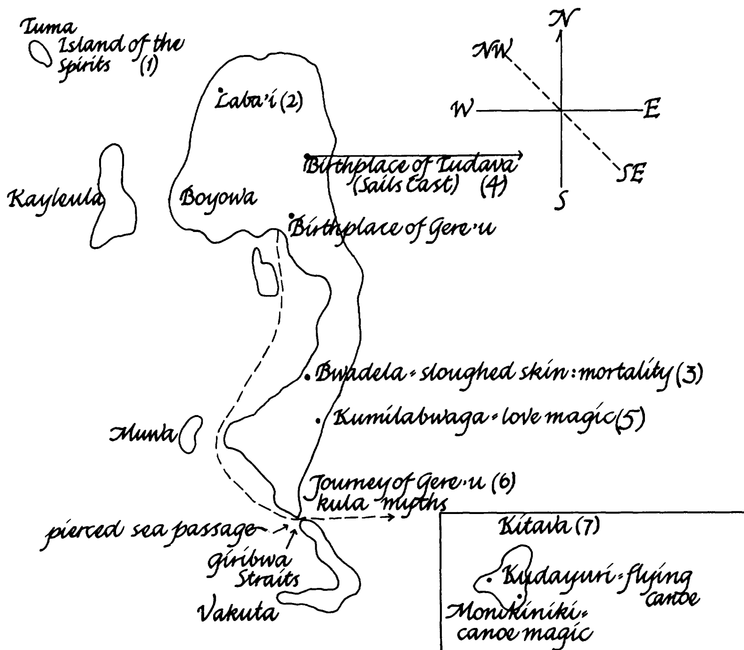

Fig. 2. A geography of Trobriand myth (after J. Maxwell).

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Malinowski speaks of the

> . . . enlivening influence of myth upon the landscape. Here it must be noted also that the mythically changed features of the landscape bear testimony in the natives' mind to the truth of the myth. The mythical world receives its substance in rock and hill, in the changes in land and sea. The pierced sea passages, the cleft boulders, the petrified human beings, all these bring the mythological world close to the natives, make it tangible and permanent. On the other hand, the story thus powerfully illustrated reacts on the landscape, fills it with dramatic happenings, which fixed there forever, give it definite meaning [1922:330].

The association with a locality as a prerequisite for the validity of a myth is brought out clearly in Malinowski's description of the difficulties which missionaries encountered in introducing Christianity to the Trobriands. The reaction of one native was reported as follows:

> If you go to Laba'i you can see the cave in which Tudava was born; you can see the beach where he played as a boy; you can see his foot mark at a place in the Raybwag. But where are the traces of Jesu Kerisu? Whoever saw any signs of the tales told by the misinari? Indeed they are not lili'u [sacred myths] [1922:302].

Linking myths to particular localities would appear to be one means of dividing a corpus of myth into cognitively distinct segments. This mnemonic of location ties each portion of the corpus to a separate node on a geographic grid. Thus modifications or elaborations of one mythical charter tend to be prevented from setting up repercussions in other mythical charters and their linked social institutions.

Plotting the location of various myths on a map of the Trobriands reveals an interesting integrative dimension. By taking the sequence of logical priorities already discussed and showing their distribution on a map, a pattern emerges in which myths appear to fall along an axis from the northwest to the southeast, a pattern which mirrors almost exactly the logical sequence previously devised (Fig. 3). Two references from Malinowski support this

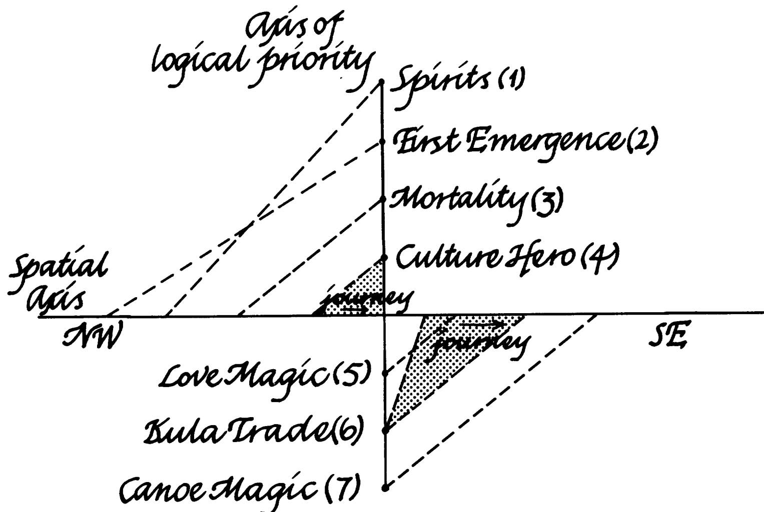

Fig. 3. Structural coordinates (after J. Maxwell).

finding. He says of the Tubala subclan, the most powerful of the Malasi clans, that

> The first ancestor of this sub-clan came out of the ground in the grove of Obukula near Laba'i [the location of the emergence of the four clans]. This village lies characteristically on the northwest shore of the island, for all beliefs in ancestral spirits as well as most of

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the legends of first things point towards the northwest, from which cultural and sociological spread has a tendency to take place from northwest to southeast [1922:365].

In speaking of the Kula myths, which fall in the final category of logical priority, he mentions that:

No Kula stories associated with any villages in the northern half of Boyowa [the main Trobriand island] exist, nor does any of the mythical heroes of the other stories ever come to the northern or western provinces of the Trobriands [1922:306].

The puzzle in this instance, then, is to work out a theory which might possibly account for the attachment of various myths to separate geographic localities which replicates the ordering of myth in terms of a logical sequence of precedence. Two possible solutions to the puzzle spring to mind. By analogy with rosary beads, it might be said that the localities constitute beads on a geographic chain. By telling these beads, one can run through the mythological sequence. The second suggestion is based on the observation that the Kula trading voyages are made from northwest to southeast. These voyages might then be assumed to be a ritual reenactment of the mythological corpus; a pilgrimage replicating the sequence of sacred geography. An analogy could be drawn to the stations of the cross. This theory of ritual reenactment modifies the recent emphasis given to economic interpretations of the Kula trade (Uberoi 1962).

RECAPITULATION AND EXTENSION OF MALINOWSKI'S THEORY

Malinowski was perhaps the first anthropologist to emphasize the close relationship between myths and social institutions, a relationship which is analyzed in terms of its pragmatic effect on social organization. For instance, in the myth of the flying canoe:

If for each word [in the myth] describing the stages of canoe-building we insert a full description of the processes for which these words stand—we would have in this myth an almost complete, ethnographic account of canoe-building. We would see the canoe pieced together, lashed, caulked, painted, rigged out, provided with a sail, till it lies ready to be launched. Besides the successive enumeration of technical stages, we have in this myth a clear picture of the role played by the headman, who is the nominal owner of the canoe . . . and at the same time directs its building [1948:101].

The myth of the flying canoe contains, as it were, a recipe for the materials, technology, procedure, and social organization needed for the production of a canoe; it functions as a mnemonic for a process. Therein lies the force of Malinowski's statement that myth is "not merely a story told but a reality lived" (1948:100).

The premise advanced in the previous section states that a myth such as that of the magical flying canoe which occurred at Monikiniki on the island of Kitava is thus bracketed by its locale and kept cognitively distinct from the other mythical charters occurring at other locations. I maintain, however, that this spatial bracketing has cognitive as well as pragmatic functions. Myths are not stable over time (as has sometimes been assumed by natives and anthropologists alike) handed down through countless generations verbatim. However tenaciously the natives and some anthropologists insist on the literal transmission through time, myths are forever changing. According to Vansina, the narrator's art "consists not so much on learning through repetition the time-worn formulas as on the ability to compose and recompose the phrases for the idea of the moment on the pattern established by the basic formula" (1965:5).

An improvement in canoe technology will in all probability be re-presented in the mythical charter in a way similar to which improvements in a recipe for apple pie will be touted as "just like mother used to make." However, what if the technological improvements in canoe building, or more importantly, revolutions in the social groups involved in canoe construction occur, such as a change from obligations of kinship to wage

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labor? Repercussions from such a shift might rapidly feed back upon such other key institutions as the family, subsistence gardening, and the Kula trade. All kinship obligations might be rapidly transformed into ones involving a cash nexus. The Trobriand design for living as Malinowski knew it would probably collapse.

This indeed was the view held by an earlier generation of anthropologists, especially in its most radical application of the theory by the British functionalist school, which held that a change in one institution set shock waves through the entire society (see Malinowski 1945). Primitive societies were envisioned as frail and fragile creations disintegrating at the merest contact with Western civilization. Theories of this sort were often used by British anthropologists during the colonial period to give a "scientific" rationale to the British policy of "indirect rule." More recently, economic and social development experts have come up against the hard facts that so-called "primitive societies" (read "underdeveloped") are frustratingly tenacious and recalcitrant to directed change.

The Malinowskian view of functionalism especially as it was extended and developed by Radcliffe-Brown (1952) should perhaps be modified in the light of the underlying conservatism of many of the world's more simple societies. The most thorough-going critique of Malinowski's theory of myths as charters for social action, that is to say, his formulation that myths and other items in the cultural repertoire function to provide for the social, psychological, and biological needs of a society, is given by Lévi-Strauss in his book *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962) or in its English translation given the unfelicitous title, *The Savage Mind* (1966). Lévi-Strauss categorically rejects the theory of needs as an adequate statement of the development of a mythological tradition. He insists that the "universe is an object of thought at least as much as it is a means of satisfying needs" (1966:3). He argues that we must not repeat the mistake "that Malinowski made when he claimed that primitive peoples' interest in totemic plants and animals was inspired by nothing but the rumbling of their stomaches" (1966:3). The accumulation of knowledge in both simple and complex societies according to Lévi-Strauss is not instrumental; "Its main purpose is not a practical one. It meets intellectual requirements rather than or instead of satisfying needs" (1966:9).

Despite Lévi-Strauss' cognitive approach to myth, he shares, although to a somewhat more limited extent, the Malinowskian view of cataclysmic change as when he quotes with approval the famous statement by Boas that:

> It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up, only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments [Boas 1898:18].

Lévi-Strauss depicts the myth-maker as an individual who is at play with the elements of myth, constantly recombining old elements into new forms:

> . . . the decision as to what to put in each place . . . depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made *will involve a complete reorganization of the structure*, which will never be the same as the one vaguely imagined nor as some other which might have been preferred to it [1966:19; emphasis added].

Both theories of myth give precedence to the cataclysmic view of culture change, and both assign on the important role of myth as an instigator of change. While I concur with the view that myth is an important factor in change, I have reservations about the rather apocalyptic nature of the change itself. Myth, I maintain, has built-in stabilizing mechanisms which prevent dramatic upheavals at least in the majority of instances. One mechanism, that of bracketing a myth and its associated social practices by tying it to a specific location, serves to insulate a myth from the rest of the corpus. Changes rung on the structural possibilities of any one myth are constrained from having a domino effect upon other myths, but they allow for a more gentle osmosis in which the mythical corpus and its associated social correlates move toward coherence through a long term process of accommodation. Vansina gives support to this position when he states that:

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The very fact that the practice of oral narrative song has endured so long is proof enough that it can absorb new ideas and construct new formulas. But the process of building formulas is so quiet and unspectacular and so slow that it is almost imperceptible. Since the patterns of thought and the rhythm of presentation remain unchanged, the new words in the formula are not noticed except when the ideas behind them are in striking contrast to the surroundings in which they occur [Vansina 1965:43].

SUMMING UP AND SUPPORTING EXAMPLES

So far I have attempted to demonstrate that what seems to the Western reader a mere gratuitous insistence on a precise location for Trobriand myths is in reality an indispensable structural marker which serves at least three functions identified so far. Location segments the corpus of myth into separate cognitive units and it also serves as a mnemonic for recall of portions of the corpus. Secondly, a precise set of locations may serve as a series producer which organizes the totality of a Trobriand mythology along a temporal axis of logical precedence which is coextensive with the spatial axis of the sequence of locations. Thus the Trobriand narrator and his audience listening to the myth of the origin of mortality may be induced to recall the myth of first emergence which precedes it and the journeys of Tudava, the culture hero, which follow it. This might be analogous to a recital of the episode of Odysseus' dalliance with Calypso which would evoke the episodes of Scylla and Charybdis and the sojourn with Nausicaa which lie on either side of the Calypso story. For the listener well versed in his tradition, his mind would be speeded through the whole gamut of his culture from first things to last things aided by the positioning of each section of the narrative in one of a series of locales of a sacred geography. Conversely, we in the Western world emphasize temporality as our predominant mode of series producing. An account of the Napoleonic era is colored and informed by its position between the French Revolution and the Restoration—an observation which is strengthened by the insistence that Western fairy tales fall between two references to temporality, "Once upon a time . . . and they lived happily ever after." A satisfying Melanesian tale by contrast would fall between statements such as, "She set out from X . . . and finally arrived at Y."

The first two functions of location in myths, as segmentors and series producers, remain on the level of the oral tradition itself, its ordering and recall. A third point to be made about myth involves the relation of myth to the social order in which myth is seen to be constantly in flux rather than static. Thus, myth may through manipulation contain recipes for social change. However, the change induced by the reformulation and recombination of elements in one myth is prevented from having a shattering effect on the corpus and the culture as a whole by encapsulating each specific myth within specific geographical boundaries.

Three functions for a mnemonic of location have been made with reference to Trobriand mythology; it remains to be determined if they have a more general application.

The first example is taken from Zuni mythology of the southwestern United States. Matilda Coxe Stevenson, one of the first anthropologists to record the Zuni origin myth which is recited annually during the Shalako ceremony, was prepared for an informative recital of mythological occurrences from her Zuni informants. Instead she was rewarded with lengthy lists of place names almost devoid of elaboration. A brief excerpt from the myth reads as follows:

We come to Corn mountain, here we get up and move on.
We come to the spring at the base of the mesa; here we get up and move on.
We come to the ant-entering place; here we get up and move on.
We come to vulva spring; here we get up and move on.
We come to the Middle place.

. . . In a short time my fathers, whom I have there, will meet you on the road. You will meet together. They will come, and will give to all your children more of the great breath of A'wonawil:oha: the breath of the light of day [Stevenson 1904:87-88].

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This somewhat disappointing myth is, according to Dennis Tedlock (personal communication), an elaborate sacred geography. The place names given in the myth are familiar locations in the Zuni area which lie along a southwesterly to northeasterly transit. Recent archaeological evidence points to an *east to west* direction for Zuni migration, thus the origin myth bears little resemblance to the archaeological sequence. From his researches among the Zuni, Tedlock is convinced that each location recited in the Stevenson myth has, in most if not all cases, a well-known subsidiary myth telling of the mythical characters and occurrences associated with each location. The origin myth can thus be seen as a template which functions as a series producer and serves as a mnemonic device for the recall of the more extended myths which stem out from the main branch preserved in the Stevenson version of the origin myth.

The second example of the intimate relations found between geography and the mythical tradition in nonliterate societies is taken from accounts of Australian aborigines, where, in the absence of a written tradition, place names arranged in series take the place of chronology as a means of locating man within an ordered cosmos. Over most of Australia, aboriginal populations were organized into complex social organizations composed of sections, subsections, and moieties. Many of the groups so formed were entrusted with the ritual maintenance of their particular totems. Such rituals were carried out at sacred totemic sites, and were accompanied by elaborate mythologies. Elkin, among others, has noted the importance of place names on these myths:

> The portion of mythology and ritual and the sacred sites entrusted to such a cult group are determined by mythological history. It is basically the mythology which records the travels and actions of the tribal heroes in its subdivision of the tribal territory. The country of each local group is crossed by paths or tracks, usually unmarked, along which there are a number of special sites where a hero performed some action which is recorded in myth . . . [Elkin 1964:151].

The Zuni and Australian use of locations as templates or mnemonic devices for the storage and retrieval of information to be used in extended treatments of particular myths is a fascinating and complex study in itself. Only the barest outline of the systems is given above.

A third example can be found among the Luapula, a group of Interlacustrine Bantu in East Africa, in which an extensive repertoire of traditional tales is tied to specific features of the landscape, tales which apparently are told only when passing these locations. Another form of narrative consists of narrations of the wanderings of groups now settled along the Luapula River. These tales consist in large measure of recitals of named places encountered in the migrations (Cunnison 1951). Narratives of this type are common to oral traditions of African tribes and are designated as "wandersagen" by Vansina (1965). It is a type well known in the West from Biblical descriptions of the wandering tribes of Israel.

Thus it can be seen that the use of locations as mnemonic devices for the ordering of an oral tradition can be shown to have a worldwide distribution. Examples have here been cited from Melanesia, the American southwest, Australia, and Africa. Can traces of these mnemonic systems be found in the Western world?

CICERO AND THE ARTIFICIAL MEMORY

Cicero in his treatise *De oratore* describes for his friends the theories and practices of Greek rhetoric. This work, together with the anonymous work *Ad Herennium* (circa 86-82 B.C.) are the most extensive accounts of the technique of memory which forms the last of the five parts of Greek rhetoric. It is to these brief Latin fragments on the art of memory that scholars of the Middle Ages and Renaissance turned for guidance in developing artificial memory systems from Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas in Medieval times to more mystical systems such as the memory theatre of Guilio Camillo, Ramon Lull's wheels, and

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the mysterious *De umbris idearum* of Giordano Bruno (Yates 1966). A more recent, and perhaps independent use of the principles of artificial memory is contained in Luria's account of the Russian mnemonist, Vygotsky, who used Gorky street in Moscow for his mnemonic of location.

> Transforming material to be remembered into images, and attaching the images to locations on an accessible map, allowed the recall of a great deal of information, in any sequence required—for sequence had become transformed into location on the mental map of that street [Crovitz 1970:37].

To return to Cicero, who in his *De oratore* recounts that Simonides of Ceos, the imputed inventor of the Greek artificial memory, said that "the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement." Furthermore, this order is more perfectly established through the use of the faculty of vision rather than through the auditory faculty, thereby striking a blow at the McLuhanites whose adulation of the auditory facility among nonliterates is, I suspect, overrated. For according to Cicero:

> It has been sagaciously discerned by Simonides or else discovered by some other person, that the most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently our perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the medium of the eyes, with the result that things not seen and not lying within the field of discernment are earmarked by a sort of outline and image and shape so that we keep hold as if it were by an act of sight things that we can scarcely embrace by an act of thought. But these forms and bodies, like *all the things that come under our view require an abode, inasmuch as a material object without a locality is inconceivable* [Cicero 1942:lxxxvii, 357-358, emphasis added].

Cicero gives practical advice for the acquisition of a good memory which he himself found indispensable when pleading law cases and delivering orations, both of which he accomplished without the aid of written notes or reminders:

> . . . persons desiring to train this faculty [of memory] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store these images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it [Cicero 1942:lxxxvi, 351-354].

In a following passage, Cicero gives even more precise rules of thumb for the development of an artificial memory through the use of mnemonic techniques involving places (*loci*) and visual pictures (*images*):

> Consequently (in order that I may not be prolix and tedious on a subject which is well known and familiar) one must employ a large number of places which must be well lighted, clearly set out in order, at moderate intervals apart; and images which are active, sharply defined, unusual, and which have the power of speedily encountering and penetrating the psyche [Cicero 1942:lxxxvii, 358].

In *Ad Herenium* the author suggests that the place chosen for the storage of images should be easily grasped by the memory, and might consist of a well-known building of many rooms in which the objects to be remembered are to be mentally placed. It is also advised that the building stand in a remote locale as "crowds of passing people tend to weaken the impressions" (Yates 1966:7). This observation tallies with locations used in Trobriand mythology for they also are unfrequented places or if close to human habitation they are left to grow up to thick bush. However, the Trobriand case differs from the Greek system of mnemonics in that the *loci* used by Trobrianders form part of a shared heritage whereas in the Greek case the *loci* chosen are based on strictly personal preference.

MYTH, MONSTERS AND PEDAGOGY

The mnemonic rules specified by the Greek rhetoricians for the fixing of images on a

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mental map are perhaps even more intriguing. The *Ad Herenium* suggests the following:

> When we see in ordinary life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvelous . . . We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active (imagines agentes); if we assign to them exeptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily [Anon. 1954:III, xxii].

Yates informs us of her uneasiness at this choice of images which she finds so foreign to the Greek temperament.

> These human figures are active and dramatic, strikingly beautiful or grotesque. They remind one more of figures in some Gothic cathedral than of classical art proper. They appear completely amoral, their function being solely to give an emotional impetus to memory by their personal idiosyncracy or strangeness [1966:16-17].

In the very grotesqueries which so offend Yates' sensibility may be found a clue to one of the most puzzling questions posed for students of myth. Why are the characters in such tales universally monstrous? Why do they reject normal human forms in favor of the non-, super-, or subhuman? Why the ogres, giants, the disfigured, and the deformed? Why the quasi-human mermaids, satyrs, sphinxes and gorgons each of which partake of qualities of both human and beast? One answer, and that ably and convincingly given by proponents of the artificial memory, is that such forms being "active and dramatic, strikingly beautiful or grotesque" have the power imputed by Cicero of "speedily encountering and penetrating the psyche." That is to say, they adhere to the memory, and the very forcefulness of the image ensures rapid recall.

A further explanation may be given for the grotesque, namely, the didactic function of myth. This function has been so ably presented by Victor Turner in his book, *The Forest of Symbols*, that I can do no better than quote extensively from this work. But first a minor digression.

Plato apparently had grave reservations about the use of the artificial memory which Yates believes to have been central to the teachings of the sophists (1966:37). Plato in both the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* propounds a radically different theory of memory. Far from being a faculty to be trained and developed by artificial means, e.g., something resembling X can be remembered by something resembling Y, memory is for Plato the faculty for the perception of eternal truth through the recollection of the realities or ideas which stand behind the buzzing, booming confusion of everyday life. True rhetoric for Plato constitutes re-search for lost times and places. The technique consists of recalling to mind through the exercise of memory those innate ideas which supposedly lie buried in the soul.

The artificial memory described by Cicero is "memory for," an instrumental tool used to achieve desired ends. For Plato and the Renaissance mystics, the aim was to attain "memory of," a technique for the contemplation of the eternal structure which lies behind the mundanity of worldly events.

It is at this point that my previous attempt to equate techniques of a mythical tradition with the Greek rhetorical device of artificial memory begins to fall apart. Myths, whether perceived as legitimizing social action *à la* Malinowski, or as intellectual games *à la* Lévi-Strauss, both fall short of the mark. Mythical systems are, I believe, attempts to order intellect and action into systematic wholes which represent on the human plane the "givenness" of the supernatural, or at least the supernatural as perceived by each culture.

Myth achieves this end by forcing perception out of the grooves of the commonplace through the introduction of anomalies which nudge the mind to take as subjects for

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contemplation objects which are otherwise perceived as "things in themselves." The devices employed are as various as parable, analogy, metaphor, myth, and monsters.

Monsters are good examples of the mythical technique of consciousness raising which, as often as not, are built into the curriculum of initiation rites with pedagogic intent. And here is where Victor Turner comes in:

> . . . monsters are manufactured precisely to teach neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality, as it is conceived in their culture. Here, I think, William James' so-called "law of dissociation" may help us to clarify the problem of monsters. It may be stated as follows: when *a* and *b* occurred together as parts of the same total object, without being discriminated, the occurrence of one of these, *a*, in a new combination *ax* favors the discrimination of *a*, *b*, and *x* from one another [1967:105].

An example of the way in which the dissociation of concomitant parts can cause an item to become an object of abstract contemplation can be seen in man's preoccupation with the image of the mermaid in which a beast, female above and fish below, becomes a fantasy figure for the sexually unobtainable woman. James and Turner notwithstanding, the reverse, a beast with the properties of fish above and female below has never, so far as I know, excited the imagination of man, and thereby hangs a tale.

But to return to Turner:

> . . . monster- or fantasy-making focuses attention on the components . . . which are so radically ill-assorted that they stand out and can be thought about. The monstrosity of the configuration throws its elements into relief. Put a man's head on a lion's body and you think about the human head in the abstract. Perhaps it becomes for you, as a member of a given culture and with the appropriate guidance, an emblem of chieftainship; or it may be explained as representing the soul as against the body; or intellect as contrasted with brute force, or innumerable other things. There could be less encouragement to reflect on heads or headship if that same head were firmly ensconced on its familiar, its all too familiar, human body. The man-lion monster also encourages the observer to think about lions, their habits, qualities, metaphorical properties, religious significance, and so on. More important than these, the relation between man and lion, empirical and metaphorical, may be speculated upon, and new ideas developed on this topic. Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation. . . . Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence. As in the works of Rabelais, there is a promiscuous inter-mingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge, with pedagogic intent [Turner 1967:105-106].

Instruction in the *sacra* during initiation rites following James' "law of dissociation by varying concomitants" (1918:506) would no doubt appeal to Plato whose premise that the Ideas which are prefigured in the mind led him to develop a theory of pedagogy which should aim to elicit recollection of these ideas. Additional support for this contention derives from Plato's acknowledged debt to the initiation rites of the Eleusinian and Orphic cults of Attica (Turner 1967:97). Images or Ideas, therefore, have a double function in myth; they serve as mnemonic devices but also as didactic devices. By these means, monsters are tamed to the uses of a cultural tradition.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made to describe and substantiate a number of techniques used by a variety of oral traditions to locate mythical events and to give them meaning. Two axes for the organization of cultural materials have been mentioned—the spatial and the temporal. It would appear that a spatial axis predominates in nonliterate cultures whereas a temporal, that is to say historical, axis takes precedence in literate cultures.

It is argued that the precise geographical locations given with such frequency in the myths of nonliterate societies are not mere embellishments, but play a significant role as mnemonic devices for the recall of the mythical corpus. These locations also function as structural

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markers dividing a corpus into separate cognitive units. Furthermore, the discontinuity produced in the corpus by tying individual myths to specific locations has the pragmatic effect of restricting change if only temporarily to specific myths and their linked social institutions.

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