

The Swan-Maiden Revisited: Religious Significance of “Divine-Wife” Folktales with Special Reference to Japan

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PART I:

THE SWAN-MAIDEN IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

The swan-maiden folktale or motif enjoyed a certain vogue in the study of folklore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has now fallen on hard times, having dropped out of most popular folktale anthologies, and enjoys only the most cursory mention in more serious scholarly works. It is accorded only parenthetical mention in Antti Aarne's tale type index (Aarne 1910), where under the general rubric no. 400, Supernatural or Magical Husbands (Wives), it is referred to as “often [serving] as an introduction” to stories in which a husband searches for a wife who has disappeared. Yet Stith Thompson in his *Motif Index* (Thompson 1932–1936) devotes to the swan-maiden a substantial paragraph of citations designated D361.1 under the general rubric of “magic.” Even more significantly he supplies extensive cross references to no fewer than ten other motifs under six other rubrics. Among indices of East Asian tale traditions both Ting (Ting 1978) and Ikeda (Ikeda 1971) follow the Aarne model and either ignore the tale (Ting) altogether or so atomize it that it essentially disappears (Ikeda).¹ Only Seki (Seki 1950–1958 and 1966), working independently of these dominant Western indices, has given it a secure place. Clearly in neither type nor motif classification has the swan-maiden been able to find a secure place in Western scholarship: either it is virtually ignored (types) or it crosses so many lines of demarcation between categories (motifs) that it calls into question the usefulness of the system itself. At the same time this is evidence of the extraordinary age and enduring power of the swan-maiden as well as its tendency to attract or be attracted by

other motifs and symbolic elements.

My intention here is to suggest a reconsideration of the swan-maiden, one which goes beyond classification to a consideration of what I believe to be the intrinsic logic of the motif. The key to understanding this logic has been the discovery of a religious meaning and a religious symbolic structure. To present this thesis I will begin by reviewing the way in which the swan-maiden has been handled in scholarly writings in the West; then I will subject it to recent analytical techniques which loosely can be described as "structural"; finally and out of this structural study I will suggest a more specific meaning for the swan-maiden within the Japanese cultural and historical context.

In 1919 Helge Holmström published a detailed study of the swan-maiden folktale or folkloric motif entitled *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet i Volundarkvida och annorstädes*. In this work it was documented for the first time that the swan-maiden was of world-wide distribution, although it was not until 1937 that Holmström's East Asian citations were shown to have been but the barest hint of the riches to be had from Japanese, Korean, and Chinese sources. In that year Fritz Rumpf published an article entitled *Über das japanische Märchen Hagoromo (das Federkleid)* and also Wolfram Eberhard brought out his *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen*. And it was not until 1950–1958 that a reasonably full and accessible account of the Japanese materials was made available in Seki Keigo's *Nihon mukashi-banashi shūsei*. To this day, however, Holmström's remains the only major work devoted entirely to this subject.

Since, so far as I have been able to determine this work has never been translated from the original Swedish, I will summarize Holmström's approach: He begins the process of definition of the swan-maiden in the title of chapter two: "The swan-guise in literature: the folktales about marriage to a supernatural feminine being who disappears." After a preliminary discussion he presents succinctly what the pure swan-maiden motif is which controls the subsequent discussion:

A man steals the guise [*hamnen*] from a usually bathing swan-maiden and forces the woman to marry him. After some time the wife is successful in recovering the feather-guise [*fjäderhamnen*] and then immediately disappears. In the legendary forms [*sägenartade formerna*] the tale usually ends here; in folktales [*sagorna*] the man, after the wife's disappearance, sets out to find her and before he rediscovers her he has a series of strange adventures to undergo. (Holmström 1919: 11)²

The remainder of this chapter revolves around considerations of five slightly different swan-maiden paradigms, the most important from the collection of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm entitled *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, that is KHM 193, "Der Trommler." Others from that same collection were KHM 92, 93, and 113. The paradigms themselves come from the 1912 edition of the *Anmerkungen* to this collection edited by Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka. The last paradigm comes from the Aarne type index, where it is no. 400.

It is perhaps indicative of the times or perhaps of careful scholarly caution that neither Holmström nor the subsequent contributors previously mentioned sought to go much beyond presentation of data and its classification. To the extent that both Holmström and Eberhard asked the question of cultural or religious meaning of the motif, they cast their enquiries within the frame-work of a quest for historical origins. For example, Eberhard was able to distinguish the swan-maiden motif in China as an independent tale in the third century of the common era, before its later "contamination" by Taoist-inspired celestial symbolism. Holmström, on the other hand, devoted much space to the Finnish school's techniques for determining geographical point of diffusion, and concluded upon what today can only be described as insufficient evidence that the swan-maiden folktale originated either in India or in Central Asia.

To the extent that he did go beyond the quest for historical origins, Holmström was very cautious, and seemed to be feeling his way, as the following indicates:

In the search for the possible homeland of the swan-maiden motif, we must also therefore keep in mind that from the same region from which there are swan-maiden tales which obviously ought to be thought of as standing in literary association with one another, there are also incomplete swan-maiden tales or attempts at the swan-maiden motif. These latter are tales which concern feather-guises in other context or tales which concern women who in one way or another have some bird species in their being. Such tales, because of their use of the transformation motif and the possibility it thereby affords for a swan-maiden motif occasionally to grow independently therefrom, could render the belief in the entire question at issue concerning a definite homeland for the swan-maiden motif to be illegitimate and a mistake. (Holmström 1919: 106-107)

It seems that what he is searching for in the above prolixity is a cultural context in which the swan-maiden motif makes sense, and, of necessity

therefore also, a way of making sense of the swan-maiden. Indeed he was led into this mental quagmire by a simple-sounding question:

The question at issue can be formulated thus: Where is really the home of this swan-maiden motif and does one have the right to assume that in the region where it grew up there were ever any folk-beliefs about the swan-maiden, that is to say, feminine beings who could change themselves into swans or other birds? (Holmström 1919: 106)

Part of the difficulty which Holmström got himself into was a result of too great an allegiance to methodological purity, that is, in restricting himself to keeping within the somewhat artificial boundaries of folklore studies as then understood, rather than, as his question ought naturally have led him, to cross the barriers which separate folklore from anthropology or from the study of religion. Had he done so, and had he also had the benefit of a good deal of scholarly research and field work done after he published, he might well have turned from a questionable attempt to discover the original form of the swan-maiden motif (*de egentliga svanjungfruberättelserna*), to a serious consideration of the meaning or meanings of the swan-maiden which alone presumably can have resulted in its survival and great proliferation over many thousands of years.³

But it is in asking the question of the cultural and religious context out of which the swan maiden motif might have arisen that Holmström comes closest to direct examination of the religious meaning of the phenomenon. And in this he is content for the most part to let other scholars make the presentation. He cites briefly J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* and E. S. Hartland's *The Science of Fairy Tales*, but devotes most space and praise to J. A. Macculloch's *The Childhood of Fiction: a Study of Folk Tales and Primitive Thought* (Macculloch 1905). Of the last he has this to say:

Macculloch distinguishes between the large group of primitive tales which deal with marriage where it unites contracting parties who were originally animals and the true swan-maiden tales where the marriage occurs in such a way that the man steals a feather-guise [*fjäderhamn*] or cloth garment [*klädesplagg*] from the supernatural woman and by this means forces her to marriage. As far as the former group is concerned Macculloch wishes most closely to ascribe to it a totemistic origin which has in all cases arisen under the cultural condition where the boundary between animal and human was so vague and imperceptible that the totemic way of looking at things

was, so to speak, in the air. But then in order to come to the pure swan-maiden tales Macculloch introduces a new element into the explanation. He proceeds from the large group of tales where marriage is dissolved because the man or wife break a tabu. And in these different tabus Macculloch sees the remains of primitive mores and primitive ideas. And one of these ideas which should lie behind the tabu is the old idea about clothing being a part of one's personality: everything that one wears and which one comes into contact with becomes filled with one's life-force, and if one comes into possession of hair, clothing or such things which stand in life-force relation [*livkraftsförhaollande*] with any other human, one gets by that means power over him. But finally such beliefs have resulted in a contamination of two ideas and two tale groups. The tabued cloth garment, through whose theft one could get power over a woman, has been displaced by the animal-guise from the group of tales which deals with animal marriage. It was through stealing the guise that one forced a swan-maiden into marriage, and as soon as she was successful in regaining it she disappeared immediately in her original form. By means of this limiting of the exposition to the pure swan-maiden group only and by combining it with the idea of clothing as the bearer of life-force, Macculloch's treatment of the material has won much in plausibility and depth. (Holmström 1919: 79-80)

There is much in this handling of the problem which can withstand the test of time, especially as Holmström points out the designation as the swan-maiden tale group those tales which contain the theft theme. But perhaps the most dated phrase in the above discussion is "the cultural condition where the boundary between animal and human was so vague and imperceptible." Of course the old culture-stage theory of totemism has been thoroughly discredited now, although the term totemism still has legitimacy in a restricted sense. But even here, following Eliade, I must point out that the "mystical participation" of human beings in the animal essence rather than making the boundary between these groups vague, absolutely requires that boundary as sacred requires profane. It is not that human and animal have run together as two colors of wet paint might do but that the human has been sacralized by contact with the sacred animal. The assumption behind such animal descent myths is that the animals are sacred beings whose status, power, and value are greater than mere humans in their ordinary state can boast.

Both from Holmström's epitome of Macculloch's argument and from the original itself, it is difficult to see how the introduction of the

tabu theme helps to solve any problems as to the meaning of the swan-maiden. If any tabu is broken here it is only an implied one, and one moreover which has nothing directly to do with the clothing of the sacred being. Rather, the implied tabu, as suggested in another context by Ōbayashi (1977), is the violation of species boundaries implied in the miscegenation of divine-human marriage. Yet even here this is no absolute boundary, since in at least the folktale version (as distinct from legends in Holmström's usage) the marriage is ultimately given divine sanction.

The most curious thing about Holmström's work is its historical obscurity. True, it apparently was never translated; also, it was only published in a pressrun of 440 copies. Yet it is cited by such notables as C. von Sydow (1965) and F. von der Leyen (1954) in their German language publications,⁴ as well as by English-speaking authors. Of these last, it is noted by A. Krappe (1930),⁵ N. Penzer (1924-1928; VIII),⁶ and S. Thompson (1946; 88). These citations show that the impact of Holmström's work has been very slight and confined almost entirely to two items: First, to buttress those who wish to "prove" the hypothesis of the Indian origin of all or most folktales; and second, to give to the swan-maiden motif or tale a tenuous and minute place in survey discussions of folktales. For this last the following is a typical example:

Auch der germanische Mythos von der Schwanenjungfrau gehört hierher, *der in so manchen Märchen enthalten ist.* (Obenauer 1959: 136)

The above is excerpted from a long chapter on animal symbols within a substantial work on the folktale. I have supplied the italics to emphasize my amazement that a motif "which is found in so many folktales" should nonetheless merit exactly one sentence in a rather thick volume on the subject. I will let pass the attribution of the swan-maiden as a "Germanic myth."

Evidence shortly to be cited has suggested to me that Holmström's work has shared the fate of the swan-maiden motif itself, and not because the former is flawed as a work of scholarship nor because it is written in a somewhat obscure language, but because modern scholars have not known what to do with the swan-maiden. The vogue in questing for historical origins whether of folktales or of ethnological elements has passed, and it has passed in part at least because of the elusiveness of the goal and probably in part also because acceptance of such buttressing theories as totemism and animism waned with more careful and extensive work within specific cultures as field work tended to displace literary

pursuits among anthropologists.⁷ More specifically and before taking up my own analysis of the swan-maiden, it seems important to ask several questions: First, what major methods of enquiry have replaced this old quest in the study of folklore which have or logically ought to have taken up the task of understanding the swan-maiden? And second, is there a connection between these newer approaches and the almost total obscurity of the swan-maiden in scholarship in the last half century?

In my view there are two especially important methodological stances which have been or might be brought to bear upon folk literature: First is depth psychology as represented by the schools of Freud and Jung, both of which focus upon the mechanics of the individual human psyche as the locus of meaning for human cultural creations, including of course the folktale. Second is structuralism, more difficult to characterize but which broadly speaking seeks for the meaning of folktales and other cultural creations within a collective rather than individual psychology, and one which moreover is concerned with literary analyses rather than psychological mechanisms. While neither of these two trends in modern scholarship has seriously taken up the swan-maiden, the literature of depth psychology will be surveyed in what immediately follows as it contains some revealing if tangential references to that tale/motif, while the question of possible structuralist applications will be reserved for Part II.

Both Freudian and Jungian writings exist in some abundance which attempt to deal with folklore and more specifically with folktales. Among the Freudian works Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975) is highly regarded. This work, although free of much of the technical language of Freudianism, is nonetheless typical of that genre in the difficulty it displays in dealing with the feminine psyche and with feminine symbols. To be sure the author makes some effort to maintain an even hand as where he insists that

Even when a girl is depicted as turning inward in her struggle to become herself, and a boy is aggressively dealing with the external world, these two *together* symbolize the two ways in which one has to gain selfhood. . . . In this sense the male and female heroes are again projections onto two different figures of two (artificially) separated aspects of one and the same process which *everybody* has to undergo in growing up. (Bettelheim 1975: 226)

Bettelheim even pairs "The Sleeping Beauty" with "Cupid and

Psyche ” to show that hero and heroine can play comparable roles. Yet, as the old German proverb goes, “ the devil lurks in the details,” for in the book a major category, the “Animal-Groom ” cycle, is not in fact paired with “Animal-Bride ” tales as the data clearly warrant. In fact only in the concluding paragraph of the Animal-Groom discussion does the author include even the briefest of mentions of the feminine side of things:

There are also Western fairy tales in which the female has been bewitched into animal form, and then it is she who must be disenchanted by the love and determined courage of a male. But in practically all examples of animal brides there is nothing dangerous or repugnant in their animal form; on the contrary, they are lovely. “The Raven ” has already been mentioned. In another Brothers Grimm tale, “The Drummer,” the girl has been changed into a swan. Thus, it seems that while fairy tales suggest that sex without love and devotion is animal-like, at least in the Western tradition its animal aspects are nonthreatening or even charming, as far as the female is concerned; only the male aspects of sex are beastly. (Bettelheim 1975: 285)

It should be noted that “The Drummer ” cited above is the tale from which paradigm KHM 193 is derived, that is, the classical swan-maiden motif in Western literature, and that this is the only mention of either animal brides or of swan-maidens in the entire volume. What emerges from the omission of serious consideration not only of the swan-maiden but also of the whole category of tales to which it belongs is for me a clear if tacit admission that the Freudian family romance and its centerpiece the Oedipal conflict is not an adequate basis for understanding this important tale group.⁸

The Jungian counterpart of Bettelheim’s work is probably Hedwig von Beit’s *Das Märchen: Sein Ort in der geistigen Entwicklung* (1965). In this work the crucial paradigm KHM 193 is not referred to at all, while the swan-maiden merits but a single notice, this in a section structured by Lutz Röhrich’s explanation of what he considers an archaic sense of “shared being ” (*gleichgestellten Wesens*) between animal and human. This understanding has its proper origin according to Röhrich in hunting cultures in which “the animal is a mystic being ” and is expressed in rituals presented on behalf of the animals killed in the hunt:

The sorcerer clothes himself in an animal garment by means of which a *transformation into the animal* was believed possible. This

belief was only possible because it was felt still very keenly that human and animal were a unity, a feeling which many people continue to have today. (von Beit 1965: 152)

This is by now a familiar theme, since I objected to it while quoting Holmström. On the contrary, I argue, if this so-called unity were in fact a dominant part of the belief structure of such peoples, then the transformations, the defining motif in this tale group, would have little or no significance. Yet these transformations are not easily achieved, as both the tales and the shamanic rituals clearly indicate; and being extraordinary occurrences these transformations also bring about remarkable conditions, which is to say that the "work" of the tales is accomplished largely through the transformations.

Unfortunately for the swan-maiden devotee, while the importance of the transformation itself is recognized to a degree by von Beit in spite of her approval of Röhrich's views, characteristically the tale type which focuses upon it most prominently, namely the swan-maiden, is largely dismissed as a mere "transitional form" in the great Jungian scheme of psychic development. By this reasoning the swan-maiden, because of its focus on the "animal-garment," is neither a pure type of animal transformation tale, whose roots would perforce be in archaic hunting ritual, nor a pure type of "magical marriage" tale, which von Beit assigns to "developed primitive peoples and European folktales." I of course applaud the rejection of the swan-maiden as a pure form of animal transformation tale, given the interpretation which von Beit/Röhrich puts on this type of tale, that is its embodiment of the animal-human unity. Unfortunately the label "transitional" carries with it the tacit label "insignificant" as well. The presentation of the swan-maiden motif itself—unlabelled as such—is brought in by the back door in the following:

Even in the pure "magical marriage" tale motif the relationship between animal and human is not so close when the animal-husband or animal-wife first must take on human form and second when this is forced by the human partner who steals the animal garb. The more the transformation is bound up with the garment, the more does it permit a change of focus toward rational thought to reveal itself. (von Beit 1965: 155)

If we turn from *Das Märchen* to the much larger and more complete *Symbolik des Märchens* (1952–1957), references to both the swan-maiden and to swan symbols become much more frequent. Von Beit has here

much to say about the swan as a symbol:

In archaic belief the swan is an escort on the journey to heaven, and in Germanic myth it is a symbol of ecstasis [*Entrückung*]. It embodies as it were the yearning for immortality. (von Beit 1952–1957: I, 524)

In Indian mythology, however, the swan symbol has a culture-specific meaning as the Sanskrit etymology, derived from priestly word-mysticism, shows:

It is a symbol of the breath of the All-god whose song “hamsa” (“I am he”) and the word “hamsa” both mean swan. The homeless swan is the representation of the metaphysical transcendent aspect of the soul. (von Beit 1965: 153)

Moving from swan to swan-maiden, von Beit moves from a more generalized symbol of transcendence and divine mystery to a representation—more properly a projection—which is uniquely feminine, namely, the Jungian *anima*. This can be stated baldly as in “Also in Germanic mythology the swan as swan-maiden is a symbol of the anima” (von Beit 1952–1957: I, 523). In general, von Beit strongly tends to see the swan—as distinct from the swan-maiden—as a masculine transcendence symbol, which she labels “Spirit” (*Geist*), while the swan-maiden is a feminine symbol readily recognizable as the anima, particularly in its negative aspect: the “swan as the demonic aspect of the anima, as its chthonic, creative-demonic spiritual essence” (von Beit 1952–1957: II, 141). Now strictly speaking the anima and animus are symmetrical, if opposite, concepts: the anima is the coalescence of feminine traits within the male psyche (projected upon the world in fantasy of course), while the animus is the coalescence of masculine traits within the female psyche. But the tales themselves lay a trap for this schema as applied to the swan symbol as the following discussion of the Russian tale “The Frost Princess” (which von Beit believes to be mirrored in KHM 63, “The Three Feathers”) shows. It starts off well enough:

The swan is, as was worked out in vol. I, 523 f, often a representation of the anima (swan-maiden motif) or also the spirit of the wild (as the hamsa in India). (von Beit 1952–1957: II, 136)

But then we are ambushed by tales which combine both elements:

Insofar as the swan also has a masculine meaning and as a bird rep-

resents a spiritual principle already alluded to . . . , it is not only a personification of the anima, but, strictly formulated, of the animus of the anima, and therefore means the actual spirit acting within the anima. (von Beit 1952–1958: II, 137)

Whatever else one might be able to make of this discussion, one thing is clear: the swan-maiden herself has become little more than a typical representation of the anima, while the swan-maiden as a motif is never considered seriously at all. Even where, in *Symbolik des Märchens*, von Beit does take up the Glass Mountain symbol (which is a part of KHM 193), in the paradigm-tale of the swan-maiden motif in Germanic folklore, the swan-maiden merits only parenthetical reference:

Usually the swan-maiden, after recovery of the feather garment, disappears upon or within the Glass Mountain, and her human husband, who had once forced her to marry him through the theft of the swan-guise, must fetch her back in a long journey filled with trials. This shows that the removal to the Glass Mountain is analogous to the notion of the distance and impenetrability of the anima in its swan-maiden aspect, which for itself symbolizes [the anima's] incomprehensible and spiritual fleeting nature. (von Beit 1952–1957: II, 147)

My intention in reviewing this Jungian approach to the swan-maiden is not to disparage Jungian psychology as a theoretical schema for the study of folktales or folklore. Indeed such studies are richly suggestive and useful in many ways.⁹ But I believe that von Beit here offers us a typical example of a Jungian who has violated one of the master's own often repeated warnings, namely that the investigator must look at the *whole* story and see its parts in context. To be sure this maxim was most often issued with respect to the interpretation of dreams where presumably the amount of unique individual material would be greater than in a clearly collective creation such as a folktale. Yet the warning still stands, and it points me at least to an approach which emphatically seeks to take seriously the narrative aspect of folktales, that is, structuralism. It is to this method and to the specifically Japanese folktales that I now turn.

PART II:

STRUCTURAL STUDY OF THE SWAN-MAIDEN IN JAPAN

The following analysis owes its inspiration to the work of two scholars:

Mircea Eliade, with whom I had the privilege of studying, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Eliade employed the sacred/profane dichotomy of Durkheim in what can be called a generically structural way to the phenomenon of religion; it was for him the key to understanding the meaning of all religious thought and action and a diagnostic characteristic of religion wherever found. Despite the profound effect of Eliade's work on the study of religion, his principles of analysis have not been used in the study of folktales and folklore in general. The present study is an attempt to show that Eliadean analysis may be the key to understanding at least one folktale type, one which moreover has been especially troublesome to scholars for generations. As his analytical approach is used here, Lévi-Strauss extends and completes the work of Eliade. This is done in the full knowledge that neither Lévi-Strauss himself nor his dedicated followers will likely approve of playing such a subordinate role. I can only hope that a pragmatic criterion will be applied to this effort, that the value of this procedure will be justified by the results obtained. Thus it should be noted at the outset that I will not attempt here to prove as an historical proposition my controlling assumption, namely that the swan-maiden tale is structurally a religious phenomenon and that it therefore probably had its origin in religious ideas and attitudes. I hope that those who cannot readily accept the Eliadean context will approach this study as an experiment whose purpose is to see what meaning or meanings the swan-maiden might yield when the religious hypothesis is applied. To do this I propose to turn the reader's attention to the Far East, especially to Japan, where folk culture, with the possible exception of the present century, has never been radically separated from official culture. To be sure status hierarchies have existed in Japan from as far back as history and archaeology can trace human societies there, with the Confucian dominated Tokugawa period (1600-1868) being only the latest. But status hierarchies do not necessarily mean radical cultural division, with the result in Japan at least that folk elements and attitudes have for the most part not been banished from the minds and daily activities of the elite of society. This has meant that folktales and myths have circulated freely among all levels of society; it has also meant that formal distinctions between myth, folktale, and legend, which many folklorists and anthropologists take for granted, are difficult to apply to Japan and indeed to East Asia in general.

As a semi-official spokesman for the usual view I have selected the Swedish folklorist C. von Sydow, who splits off folktale from legend because legends are taken more seriously by those who tell them:

We reckon as the province of folktale [*sagan*] the more selfconscious

literature which is told primarily for the purpose of entertainment, without regard to whether or not its content is true. (von Sydow 1931: 199)

But the road between theory and application is sometimes both long and winding. At the same time such a pioneer as Yanagita Kunio in Japan was attempting to put such a distinction into practice it was being called, however tentatively, into question in the West by none other than Helge Holmström:

We on the whole have more true folk legends from Europe than from Asia, partly because they have been collected more diligently here, but also partly because among some Asiatic peoples as among more primitive peoples in general there is not found any marked difference between tales [*sagor*] and legends [*sägner*]. (Holmström 1919: 107)

Forty-four years later we find much the same point being made, this time specifically with respect to Japan, where the traditional terms *mukashi-banashi* 昔話 (folktale) and *densetsu* 伝説 (legend) have become more or less standardized in their meanings:

Frequently, the same plot outline appears in both forms [that is in *mukashi-banashi* and *densetsu*]. While the vestiges of supernatural and magical beliefs can plainly be seen in the *Kinder-und Hausmaerchen*, their hearers do not accept the malice of witches and ogres or the jealousies of talking animals as real. In the Japanese tales, however, the sense of fiction and fantasy is much less pronounced. (Dorson 1963: xiii)

For Holmström this curious difference between East and West was a problem never solved and thus an ambiguity which prevented the full realization of his goals. For the second writer it is simply an interesting fact, primarily useful as a criterion of classification. To me it is a fact whose significance is that it provides the key link between “mere” folktale and stories which exhibit and preserve religious ideas, attitudes, and expectations. That is to say, in Japan even now, as in Europe some centuries ago, what we call folktales carry religiously significant meanings, either as still-living bearers of religious tradition or as fossils of once-living ones.

Japan is today often described in travel brochures and popular guides as the “land of the kami,” and so it is in a far profounder sense

than can be intended in such literature. Not only is Japan a land made sacred by a divine cosmogony, it also from time immemorial has been believed to be inhabited by sacred beings almost without number and of many sizes and shapes. In classical times the Chinese compound *kuei shen* 鬼神 was taken over as *kishin*, "demons and gods," further to delineate the attitude of the people toward this plethora of powers, now classified as either malevolent or benevolent. Japan is, as Joyce wrote of Ireland, a place where "every hollow holds a hallow." The Japanese then have traditionally believed themselves to dwell among the kami (to return to the older and morally neutral term), among them foxes, bears, swans, crows, carp, catfish, and snakes, not to mention numerous "mythological" beasties as dragons, phoenixes, *oni* 鬼 and *tengu* 天狗, which for the most part, as befits sacred beings, tend to dwell in remote places like the sea, deep gorges, and mountain wastes, but whose interaction with humans, if not a matter of common experience, is a matter of common knowledge. And this common knowledge is contained in and reinforced by the folktales and legends (henceforth I will use only the term folktale) which so richly abound there.

The swan-maiden motif is very old in Japan. Indeed, with the exception of China, Japanese provenance is the oldest in Asia, since the *Fudoki* 風土記, or records of local traditions, dates from the early eighth century of the common era. The clearest, and from the point of view of the paradigms of the swan-maiden in Western scholarship, the purest, example of this motif from Japan is as follows:

South of the village Yogo-no-sato in the district of Ika-no-kori, province of Ōmi, there is a small lake. Eight heavenly maidens once flew down on earth as swans [*shiratori* 白鳥] to bathe at the lakeshore, when Ikatomi, from the mountaintop in the west, happened to see their mysterious figures in the distance. Coming near, he saw that they were heavenly maidens and, enchanted by their beauty, he could not leave the place. He quietly sent out his white dog who stole the heavenly feather garment [*ama-no-hagoromo* 天の羽衣] of the youngest, which he then concealed. The seven elder sisters in alarm at the intrusion flew off to the sky, but the youngest, prevented by the loss of her feather garment from returning, became an earth-bound human being. Ikatomi built a house in that place, which because of these events came to be known as Kami-no-ura, and he lived there with the younger sister of the heavenly maidens. And eventually two boys and two girls were born to them. . . . Later, the mother found her feather garment, and, putting it on, flew back up to heaven. (NKBT 1958: II, 47-49)¹⁰

Several points stand out in this version of the swan-maiden motif: First, the story describes the union of a mortal with an immortal, of a human with a divine being. The “heavenly maiden” is explicitly called “kami”, as indeed the modifier *ama*, heavenly, already indicates. Second, born of this union are children who remain behind on earth when the divine wife returns to the realm of the gods. Both these important points are almost invariably ignored by the paradigm-makers, apparently because of their dedication to the formalistic definition of the folktale / Märchen / *mukashi-banashi* type as presented above. Third, the quest by the husband to recover his wife which ends in a reunion or second marriage in heaven is missing from this early Japanese version. Indeed this episode is often missing from European versions as well as—much less frequently—from modern Japanese versions. In fact the story without this final episode can conveniently be referred to as the swan-maiden *motif*, while the story with this episode may be termed the swan-maiden *tale*. It is interesting to note here also that in the hands of many tellers of folktales, this final episode—which often is a complex weaving together of other independent motifs—makes up the bulk of the tale. In “Der Trommler” (KHN 193) for example the swan-maiden motif makes up only about 10% of the text, such that the motif is all but reduced to a frame story, although a better characterization might be that the motif functions as an introduction, that is, as a way of anchoring the variable portions of the tale—which admit of individual virtuoso manipulation—to the fixed motif, which is hallowed by tradition and therefore does not admit of such manipulation on the part of individual story tellers.

I now offer what I claim to be a structural analysis of the swan-maiden motif and tale, which analysis displays not only the complexity of the narrative but also suggests some of the religious meanings promised above.¹¹

MOVE 1: LACK

Elements: Earthly male [Me]

Environment: Earth [E]

Situation: Me at E without completion (lacks mate)

MOVE 2: APPEARANCE OF MEDIATING ELEMENT

Element: Heavenly female [Fh]

Environment: Heaven [H]

Situation: Fh appears at E and thus provides opportunity.

Note: The lake / pond / shore is itself a mediating element, half-way between earth (solid) and heaven (air) since it is a liquid. This is but the first of a series of secondary mediators

in this motif.

MOVE 3: THEFT AND LACK REMOVED

Situation: Female and male are joined, but only by means of another secondary mediating element, namely the feather-cloak (*hagoromo*).

Note: This allows an at least temporary joining also of heaven and earth, that is, of sacred and profane.

MOVE 4: CHILDREN AS PERMANENT BONDING OF SACRED AND PROFANE

Situation: Children are produced who are half divine and half human.

Note: Here in the modern Japanese versions considerable variation is found. Occasionally the children are taken back to heaven by the fleeing swan-maiden, while sometimes some are taken back and some are left.

MOVE 5: SECONDARY MEDIATING ELEMENT WITHDRAWN

Situation: Feather-cloak is rediscovered, taken from its hiding place, and put back on by the swan-maiden.

Note: The feather-cloak is sometimes said to have been hidden in the ground, making another level of juxtaposition of heaven earth.

MOVE 6: PRIMARY MEDIATING ELEMENT WITHDRAWN: LACK RE-INSTITUTED

Situation: Swan-maiden flies away back to heaven.

Note: Situation as before in move 1, except for the children who almost always are left behind. Thus this secondary mediating element is not withdrawn. The heavenly female has returned to her natural (and proper?) environment.

END OF SWAN-MAIDEN MOTIF

MOVE 7: PURSUIT AND STRUGGLE

Situation: Me seeks and usually finds Fh after many hardships, tasks and dangers.

Note: This move is often the bulk of many tale versions.

MOVE 8: REUNION: LACK REMOVED

Situation: Me is reunited with Fh in a second and permanent marriage.

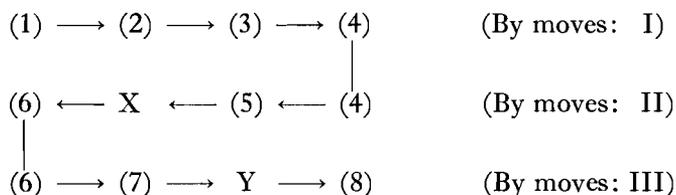
Note: Me is translated to H where he dwells thereafter. By the structure of the story this has to mean that Me is in fact transformed into a heavenly male [Mh], that is, he is somehow granted divine status, since only in this way is a permanent union possible.

END OF SWAN-MAIDEN TALE

Before commenting further the reader should be warned that the above is but a first approximation, one which will be modified by the subsequent analysis. As an aid to further reflection upon the structure presented it will be useful to translate the above analysis into the formula which Lévi-Strauss presented in his *Structural Anthropology* (1963).¹² I suggest the following notation:

$$E(\text{Me}): H(\text{Fh}):: E(\text{Fh}): E(\text{Me}+\text{Fh}) \quad (\text{By formula: I})$$

But this is not the whole narrative since a comparison to the moves will readily show that the terms in the formula correspond only to moves one through four. Clearly the swan-maiden narrative is more complex than a straightforward application of the formula can comprehend. If we arrange the move sequence as suggested by the formula and establishing columns of like meaning and function in the story, the full narrative structure can be represented by moves in this way:



In the above graphic representation, moves in parallel vertical columns are equivalent, although in some cases opposite, in meaning.

Thus move 5, "Secondary mediating element withdrawn," is the opposite of move 3, "Theft and lack removed." At the same time the columnar categories set up by the formula seem to require a new move which I have labelled X since it did not appear in the initial structural analysis of the tale. It is a dividend of the method inasmuch as it represents a level of logic more subtle than that employed at the outset. The new move X required by logic of the table is the opposite of move 2 (which heads its column), and thus I will call it "Disappearance of mediating element." Again, move 6 and move 1 have the same meaning, that is, "Lack," although their position in the narrative is different. Notice that when the narrative proceeds from right to left in the above tabulation (that is, for moves 4 through 6), interior moves (here 5 and X) are opposites or negatives of their corresponding moves when narration proceeds in the initial direction from left to right. Again, move 7, "Pursuit and struggle," from its columnar position seems to function

with the meaning of mediation, since it is associated with moves 2 and X, that is, appearance and disappearance of mediating elements. For this reason I will interpret the pursuit and struggle sequences in the swan-maiden tale as "Struggles for mediation." Move Y seems required in that the husband and wife again come together, this time in heaven, which could be represented by H(Fh), while move 8, the second marriage, clearly corresponds to move 4 in the initial sequence.

It now can be seen more clearly that the formula, in order completely to represent the story, must be repeated. For example the last line by moves could be represented by formula as:

E(Me): H(Me):: H(Fh): H(Me+Fh) (By formula: II)

This needs to be read from right to left in order properly to reflect the sequence of the story.

The reader will also notice that I have distinguished between the motif and the tale, where the motif is only moves 1 through 6 and the tale, which includes the motif, is moves 1 through 8. Thus lines I and II by moves is the motif only, which itself requires that the formula be run twice, once forward and once backward. The full tale adds line III by moves and runs the formula a third time. For convenience at this point the following graphic representation of the fully developed structure is offered:

MOVE 1: LACK
 MOVE 2: APPEARANCE OF MEDIATING ELEMENTS
 MOVE 3: THEFT AND LACK REMOVED
 MOVE 4: MARRIAGE (with production of children)
 MOVE 5: THEFT NEGATED (feather-cloak returned)
 MOVE X: DISAPPEARANCE OF MEDIATING ELEMENT
 MOVE 6: LACK REINSTITUTED (primary mediating element withdrawn)
 MOVE 7: PURSUIT AND STRUGGLE FOR MEDIATION
 MOVE Y: LACK REMOVED (reunion)
 MOVE 8: SECOND MARRIAGE

Of course all of this would be pointless unless some "work" were being accomplished with these repetitions. The question is then, what new situation has been brought about by this narrative?

Already by use of the term mediation I have set up the basic problem with which both motif and tale deal, namely, the paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum* of heaven and earth, of sacred and profane, of divine

and human. But the addition of the last two moves which constitute the added material which swells the motif into the tale suggests that the solution of the presumably older motif was not satisfactory to many narrators and their audiences. Further, it now can be seen that the struggles of the earthly husband, which on the level of overt meaning are intended to recover his wife, are the means whereby a significant transformation is made possible, namely his transformation from earthly to heavenly status, or in traditional language his apotheosis. The tale then has a final resolution to the problem of mixture of sacred and profane in the transformation of profane into sacred, while the motif in its minimal statement must content itself with the production of a permanently mixed type in the half sacred and half profane children. In the motif it is sexual generation which is offered as a solution to the structural problem posed by the intimate contact of sacred and profane, a solution be it noted which at least hints of continued tension in a steady-state world of ambiguity.

Several further observations need to be made at this point. First, the motif and tale are related as basic chord and harmonic, that is, they together are somewhat redundant. The motif solves the problem at some permanent cost, while the tale continues the story in such a way that by running through the moves again the permanent cost is removed, and indeed a further gain is realized. Second, the sequence of the tale is strongly reminiscent of rituals of transformation of state, especially rites of passage. This formula is especially clear in the second forward sequence (line III by moves), that is, in $6 \rightarrow 7 \rightarrow Y \rightarrow 8$, where the struggle theme is dominant. One is easily reminded of puberty rites in which death/rebirth symbolism is prominent as well as of hero myths in which the hero must slay a monster (chaos) in order to save the community (cosmos) from destruction. Whether the hero is himself transformed by his actions is not always clear of course since these stories seem primarily concerned with cultural and indeed cosmic transformations. But whether the hero wins divine status in his struggles or has it already, these stories establish and rationalize cults in which the hero is revered and his deeds celebrated.

But there is reason to believe that the earlier version of the swan-maiden was the motif alone, that is, that the heroic elements are later additions which in my usage have in many cases made the motif into the tale. The earliest hints of the swan-maiden in Northern Europe are found in the Icelandic Edda, although a clear statement of it cannot be proven before the *Volundarkvida* (Holmström 1919: 183-188; Penzer 1924-1928: appendix I). Here, as in the Japanese *Fudoki* and as is supported by more recently collected Siberian versions, the earliest literary

provenance is of the motif only. If, as the Siberian data suggest, the motif was originally a myth with strong cultic connections, we must reckon with the possibility that not one but two separate religious uses have been made of the swan-maiden. In the motif the focus is on the bird-goddess herself, on her mystery, transcendence, and the divine gift which she bestows upon a mere human. The proof of her gift and the on-going presence of the goddess is provided in the children of the marriage. This also provides a continuing link between sacred and profane, heaven and earth, which is the *sine qua non* of all religious cults. In the tale, however, the hero-husband takes center stage in his quest for his lost wife,¹³ the sacred being. In seeking her, he perforce seeks the land of the gods, heaven, and to seek heaven is to seek transformation from human to divine status.

Support for this cultic view of the swan-maiden motif may be found in its correspondence to myths and cultic structures in North and East Asia. In aboriginal Siberia, in Korea, and in Japan, myths of similar structure for centuries have been told in part to buttress the claims of socio-religious elites—ruling clans or hereditary religious “orders” of priests—to their special positions within society. The clearest example of this comes from Siberia where the swan-maiden motif itself is used in association with native shamanism. Among the Buriats is found the myth in which a swan-goddess is forced to marry a man by the theft of her feathered wings or of her entire feather garment (Findeisen 1970: 126–128). The children which are produced before the wings/garment is rediscovered and the swan-goddess flies away again are the central message. Here the motif functions as a myth, for not only is the swan a goddess, but the offspring are the first members of a hereditary clan of shamans. The Yakuts have a similar origin myth for several families or clans, while the Goldi tell the story of a mysterious bird alighting on a tree, shaking its feathers, and transforming its wing-feathers into a shaman costume, which alone makes it possible for the shaman who wears it to perform the feat of soul-projection and flight to the land of the gods by which he carries out his priestly functions (Holmberg 1964: 503, 519; Harva 1938; Eliade 1964; Findeisen 1957).

The Korean myths I will not rehearse here (München-Helfen 1936; Song 1974). I will only note that Korea too has a strong and ancient tradition of shamanism with which bird symbolism is associated. In Korea as in Japan the earliest traditions record myths in which a divine or semi-divine couple—either king and queen or the archetypes of later earthly sovereign couples—become founders not only of earthly clans but also of whole nations. In Japan the story of Himiko and her brother/husband is famous. She was the shaman-priestess, the sacred

being, while her consort was the practical statesman and mouthpiece for her. The pattern of association of the female with heaven—the sacred aspect—and of the male with the earth—the profane aspect—which the swan-maiden motif embodies is strongly maintained here as well. The *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, which contains along with the *Kojiki* 古事記 the earliest Japanese myths, records several vivid accounts of empress-shamans whose husbands functioned as interpreters of their wives' oracular utterances (Aston 1956: 221–222, 225–226). And of course it must not be forgotten that the founder of the Tenno (imperial) clan in Japan was none other than Amaterasu, the Great Goddess and “Heavenly Shining One.”

The cultic aspects of Japanese mythology regarding Amaterasu I have discussed at some length in another place (Miller 1984a). Rather than recapitulate that material I will return to the question of the meaning of the swan-maiden tale as distinct from the motif. When, as is so common both in Europe and Japan, the motif functions as a frame story or an introduction to an elaborated tale of heroic struggle, reconstruction of a possible cultic context for the tale would seem to be the logical next step. But this proves to be much more difficult. In Japan hero cults have appeared from time to time, but these all seem to be late, probably with Buddhist influences. Thus such figures as *sramanas*, bodhisattvas 菩薩 (*bosatsu*) as well as generic “saints” called *hijiri* 聖 or *shōnin* 聖人 abound in Japanese hagiography as well as in cultic centers, both Shinto and Buddhist (Miller 1964b; Hori 1953–1955: II, 12–56).¹⁴ But the pre-Buddhist status of such figures which may generally be classified as *hitogami* 人神, literally, “man-gods”, is obscure as far as specific cult activity is concerned (Hori 1963 and 1968). The literary record, however, is more straightforward, since in the myth/legend collections (*Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*), there is an abundance of such figures. Prominent among them are Susano-o, the impetuous brother of Amaterasu and slayer of the eight-headed serpent, Jimmu, the first “earthly” emperor who conquered the land of Yamato whither the imperial court removed, and Yamato-takeru (“the hero of Yamato”) whose exploits against the barbarians and his death in that cause (Morris 1975) earned him a place in the hearts of Japanese for more than a millenium.

The essence of the hero is struggle (Henderson 1964; Campbell 1968). Whether he is victorious or only tragic, he must enter into a strange environment where various trials, either physical or mental, await the application of his particular personality or luck. The hero is one necessarily and characteristically at risk, both for himself and for his cause if such an abstraction as a cause properly can be derived from a given hero tale. As is well known, heroes are not necessarily admirable

people: their methods may be underhanded or bumbling, their courage may come from a pill or bottle, their weapons may be magical gifts of some mysterious donor. Thus folk heroes are often not very "heroic" in the modern sense of that word. Pure strength and courage rarely win the struggle probably because most humans feel acutely their own vulnerability and helplessness before overwhelming cosmic and historical forces. Folk heroes are interested in winning rather than being noble, and so by and large are flesh and blood human beings everywhere. This means that here as so often the struggle sequences provide drama, entertainment, and excitement to the hearers of the tales but structurally function only to add distance between earth and heaven. The tale is saying that, while the swan-maiden regained heaven as her natural environment the husband somehow had to earn it; otherwise it becomes impossible to explain why it is that everyone has not gone to such a desirable place.

If the deeper meaning is not to be found in the process by which the hero obtains his goal, then it might be found by examining the forces at work in the struggle. But the Japanese swan-maiden tales themselves do not support the conclusion that the struggle sequences reflect any cosmic forces. In the Susano-o myth the hero clearly represents in part a cosmic principle, namely, chaotic, undisciplined power as suggested in the natural phenomenon of the storm. Even Jimmu wrought great historical changes by establishing the imperial sovereignty in its rightful place in Yamato. But the dauntless husband in the swan-maiden tale on the overt level seeks only to reestablish his marital relationship. He does this in most versions by planting a seed given him by the swan-maiden before her flight. The seed grows into a bamboo plant which the husband climbs, but, as it proves too short, the last part of the journey characteristically requires further intervention by the swan-maiden:

The heavenly woman, while weaving at her loom as was her custom, looked down out of the window and saw a golden bamboo plant thrusting its way to heaven. All at once the top branches began to sway in the wind. Looking more closely she saw clinging to the top of the bamboo a man no bigger than a mustard seed. The heavenly woman joyfully picked up the shuttle from the loom and dangled it down toward [Mikeran's] head. He took hold of the end of it and pulled himself up to heaven. (Seki 1952-1958, II/1: 175)¹⁵

A series of trials follows in which the husband must match wits with the swan-maiden's father to regain her. The religious dimension, if present, is not here the struggle of order vs. chaos, or of good vs. evil;

it is not a struggle at all but a cognitive dissonance, a structural contradiction between mortal/human/profane and immortal/divine/sacred. The second layer of religious meaning which the tale adds therefore is in the apotheosis of the husband. It represents a purely individual (also heroic?) effort to transmute human into divine status. It is this struggle which so often has captured the imagination of the story-tellers and which admits of so much elaboration and variation within a much more conservative framework.

Despite the existence of these culturally sanctioned means of apotheosis, the unique features of the swan-maiden tale are not suggested by any of them. These transmutations from human to divine are accomplished by a kind of inner, inherent power, a charisma, or, as the Japanese would put it, by *tamashii* 魂, the concentration of the kami-ness within a given person. Further, with some Buddhist and Taoist inspired exceptions, these heroes become cultically significant only after death: it is death which accomplishes their apotheosis. Conspicuously absent in these cult stories is any hint of a divine intervention in the process of apotheosis itself. For example, the *Kojiki* relates that at the death of Yamato-takeru he was transformed into a giant white bird who flew away. Tombs were built wherein he was enshrined in two places where this bird was seen to alight (Philippi 1968: 250–252). Also absent is the appearance of a divine helper such as a goddess, or of a mediating object such as the feather-cloak.

From Japan does come a folktale, *Kakure mino* 隠れ蓑 (“the hiding-straw-cloak”), which exhibits a superficial similarity to the swan-maiden (Yanagita 1951: 254–255; Seki 1952–1958, III/1, 352–364). In this tale a clever lad manages to outwit a *tengu* (a sort of demon-figure) so as to gain possession of its invisibility-conferring straw cloak. Here it is the garment itself which is sought; clearly the garment’s powers are transferable to any owner. That this never occurs to the husband in the swan-maiden tale is remarkable by itself and is doubly remarkable in a culture which also contains such a tale as the straw cloak. It must be that the husband does not seek to make direct use of the feather-cloak because in the motif at least he does not seek direct, personal gain. He seeks precisely a wife, and a divine wife at that; he seeks a wife in order to produce children which are the mediating elements in the final phase of the motif. In short he seeks to accomplish the “work” of the motif which is to provide a permanent mediation between heaven and earth. Even in the swan-maiden tale the apotheosis is accomplished only through the wife’s intervention and has reunion with the wife as its immediate goal. On the other hand the lad uses the straw cloak for all kinds of interesting ends, some of which provide him with material gain, but

which accomplish nothing of cosmic or cultic significance.

PART III:

BEYOND THE SWAN-MAIDEN

In what follows I will suggest a wider context in which it may be possible to situate the swan-maiden motif, this time on the basis of the symbolism of cloth and clothing which the swan-maiden motif shares with other mythic and folkloric elements in Japan. In the article already mentioned (Miller 1984a) I stressed the religious symbolism of the cosmic weaver as a peculiarly feminine mode of world-building and world-maintenance in the person of Amaterasu, herself the divine weaver *par excellence*. Also suggested there was the connection between the weaving symbol and the bird symbol in these myths, and especially as found in the appearance of the *hagoromo* (feather-cloak) in the imperial enthronement ceremony or *Daijosai* 大嘗祭.¹⁶

Searching further within the literature of the early eighth century, one can find fragmentary evidence from the *Kojiki* of a tendency to associate cloth and clothing with the bird as a symbol of the human maiden. In the first seven songs of this collection of early Japanese traditions (Philippi 1968: ch. 20, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34)¹⁷ such references are frequent. A single example may suffice here. In song four an often repeated refrain spoken by the maiden herself is:

Now when I look down at my breast,
Like a bird of the sea,
Flapping its wings,
This garment will do. (Philippi 1968: 109)

Unfortunately the question of whether this association of the cloth (and weaving) symbol with the bird symbol, and more specifically with the swan-maiden motif, is a superficial one or whether it touches the very heart of the meaning of the motif, is too broad to examine here in any detail. And I have treated this subject more fully elsewhere (Miller 1984c). For the present I will examine only one additional folktale from Japan which has the divine-wife structure in common with the swan-maiden and which also contains as central focus the bird/maiden/garment combination of symbolism.

A modern Japanese folktale called by Seki (1950–1958) the Crane Wife (*Tsuru-nyōbō* 鶴女房) offers what appears to be a link between bird and weaving symbols in another divine-wife type of tale. This is almost as popular in Japan as the Hagoromo tale, and is especially reminiscent of the cultic scene in the early myths in which Amaterasu is depicted

sitting in the Pure Weaving Hall weaving the garments of the gods. I will give here only a translation of the paradigm provided by Seki in his *kata* section:

- A. A young man rescues a crane (mountain bird, pheasant, wild goose, wild duck) who was injured or about to be killed. Later a beautiful woman visits him and becomes his wife.
- B. The woman weaves in the weaving-hall (*hataya* 織屋). The young man promises not to look at her while she is weaving.
- C. The cloth is sold for a high price. The man a second time asks that she weave cloth.
- D. The husband peeks into the weaving-hall and sees that the crane is weaving by pulling out her feathers.
- E. The wife departs because her true form has been discovered. (Seki 1952–1958, III/2: 847)

One addition seems necessary to this paradigm since Seki has characteristically failed to include the fact that almost always the couple produce children; sometimes it is a child who precipitates the breaking of the tabu against the discovery of the true identity of the mother as the rescued crane.

Although the initial episode of rescuing or freeing an animal suggests a popular Buddhist deed of building merit or good karma (such acts were referred to often in diaries of the Heian period), the mysterious spouse motif is certainly not an invention of Buddhism. Indeed the breaking of the tabu is not needed in the Buddhist scheme of things, since the good karma which led to the appearance of the bird-wife was finite and thus would run out in its own good time in any case. This points to a Buddhist overlay upon an older or at least extra-Buddhist source.

On the other hand, this tale resonates remarkably with the central events in the Plain of High Heaven in Japanese myth where Amaterasu and her brother Susano-o produce children; where the brother/husband breaks a tabu by desecrating the Pure Weaving Hall—in fact by disrupting the sacred weaving ritual—; and where the wife (Amaterasu) also flees (and hides herself in a rock-cave, presumably since the action already is taking place in heaven).

Comparing the Crane Wife tale to the swan-maiden motif it can be seen that there are both similarities and differences. Both contain prominent bird and garment symbols, both involve mysterious and it may be divine wives and mortal husbands, and in both the wife is lost after children are produced. Differences include the fact that the weaving

symbol is not a part of the classical swan-maiden paradigm, although in Japanese tales it is often a part of the Hagaromo tale. Further, the crane-wife does not actually wear the garment or cloth which she has woven; but of course she had worn and even grown the feathers from which it was produced. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the feathers/garment/cloth is not stolen from the crane-wife; it is rather her free gift, her tangible gratitude. Yet curiously the result is the same: the bird-wife flees the husband.

The tabu-breaking motif is well established in folklore studies although its relationship to the swan-maiden is problematic.¹⁸ Yet when two tales of different types show great similarities of structure and at the same time exhibit virtually identical symbolic combinations, one must reckon with the possibility of a relationship which transcends or challenges the established typology. In any case I claim such an intimate relationship between the *hagaromo* and the crane-wife tale took the tabu-breaking motif from an already well-established group of tales which used it as their central episode, and used it as a tool to slightly rearrange the swan-maiden material. Why this might have been done in Japan can be explained by assuming an especially prestigious status for the weaving-tabu combination at a certain time in Japanese history. Thus the mythic paradigm contained in the Amaterasu-Susano-o episodes at a certain point became the official mythology in support of the claims of the Tenno clan to its paramount role in both religion and government in proto-historical Japan. Such a situation might well have been sufficient grounds for story-tellers to compromise the integrity of the ancient swan-maiden motif.¹⁹

In conclusion then let me raise again the question of the relative ages of the symbolic elements associated with the swan-maiden motif and tale. I have suggested above a possible connection with shamanism, especially as practiced in aboriginal Siberia, as a cultic context and the association of bird symbol with sacred or magical garment as basic to the meaning of the motif and by implication at least also very early. This does not directly address the much larger question of bird symbolism in general (Armstrong 1958), nor of cloth/weaving symbolism in general. But if the above analysis is correct it is at least plausible that weaving as a creative process became attached to the swan-maiden motif for no other reason than that this process millennia ago became the usual method for producing clothing throughout the world. That is, the emphasis of the motif on the transforming power of the garment/animal-costume had as it were a natural affinity with what became the ubiquitous means by which humans produced their own garments. Of course another reason for this affinity is the fact that in the great majority

of cultures weaving is the work of women, and further in every case of which I am aware it is the work of women so long as weaving remains a domestic craft.²⁰

Finally I may perhaps be forgiven for touching briefly upon a still larger issue: Does not the foregoing analysis suggest a substratum buried deeply in Asian cultures of a religious insight into the feminine sacred? The bird form strongly tends in North Asia to be seen as feminine. Bird figures are goddesses here. Further, as female they are the originators of life and hence the means whereby significant life, that is, life touched by the sacred, is produced. They are thus foundresses of dynasties, of cults, of races, of priesthoods. Preeminently they are the embodiments of the sacred as source, with all the mystery and transcendence which this implies. If, as seems probable, the weaving symbolism became attached to these feminine bird deities somewhat later than the first formulation of the swan-maiden idea, this symbol only enhances the earlier insight. In Japan the sacred weaver takes on cosmic, even cosmogonic dimensions in the mythic figure of Amaterasu. In the folktales a more humble and even domestic scene is portrayed, but the vision of the mysterious, even magical power of the female as creator still is strongly preserved in these more popular narrative forms.

NOTES

1. It is curious that Eberhard's granting the swan-maiden an independent type status is ignored by Ting.

2. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

3. In fact a useful step in this interdisciplinary direction was taken in Hatto (1961). Written by a specialist in medieval Germanic literature, this article is particularly significant because, while it too restricts itself to questions of historical origins, it goes far toward answering Holmström's question by focusing upon ethnographic materials, especially Siberian, and ornithological data, that is observations on migratory patterns and behaviors of large water birds of North Eurasia.

4. But Jan de Vries (1964), perhaps significantly, does not cite Holmström, even though he deals extensively with the *Volundarkvida*.

5. "The swan-maiden type . . . has been proven to be of Indian origin" (Krappe 1930: 14-15).

6. NB Appendix I, pp. 213-228. Penzer is here commenting on the *Katha sarit sahana* of Somadeva Bhatta (11th century).

7. There are of course exceptions to this generalization. An interesting, if unconvincing case in point is C. von Sydow's attempt to link two important tales, namely "magic flight" (Aarne no. 313) and the swan-maiden (given as Aarne no. 400) to megalithic culture. Characteristically however, considerable space is devoted to magic flight while the swan-maiden seems thrown in as an afterthought (C. von Sydow 1948: 189-219).

8. To be sure the group "Animal Brides" does not necessarily coincide precisely

with the category which Seki and Japanese folklorists use for the swan-maiden, namely, "Divine-Wife." Even so there is evidence both in Europe and in East Asia that the animal form was in archaic societies almost always viewed as sacred. And Freudians are by no means the only scholars who have difficulty in accommodating the feminine side of things; on this note Lundell (1983).

9. Another important Jungian study which touches on the swan-maiden symbol is von Franz (1972).

10. I am indebted to Manabu Waida, upon whose partial translation this rendering is based. See Waida (1976).

11. This version of structuralism I owe in part to Vladimir Propp (1968), in part to Alan Dundes (1964), and in part to Claude Lévi-Strauss. Perhaps by spreading the blame no one of them will be greatly offended. Knowledgeable readers will recognize especially much borrowing from Dundes' article cited.

12. For an elaboration of this formula and one far clearer than the original, see Kōngās and Miranda (1962).

13. This is the element featured in Aarne no. 400.

14. From the Buddhist-dominated Heian period the *hito-gami* phenomenon was much influenced by the *goryō-shin* 御霊神 idea by which once-human power could draw to itself cultic institutionalization. Most famous is the case of Sugawara Michizane, whose tragic life and strong personality led not only to a martyr's death in exile but also to his transformation into a disaster demon. The Kitano Jinja, erected to placate his angry spirit, is one of the larger Shinto shrines today within the city of Kyoto.

15. Seki lists fifty-three variants from twenty-seven locations of the "Heavenly wife" tale type, which is his general rubric for the swan-maiden in Japan, also more popularly known as the *Hagoromo* tale. The tale he reproduces in full is the famous "Mikeran" tale from Amami-Ōshima.

16. See also the excellent article by Naumann (1983) which, from a different point of view, provides a wealth of historical information on the subject of the weaving goddess.

17. In songs two through eight, if C=cloth / clothing, T=thread / cord / rope, and B=bird, then the sequence and frequency of these symbols may be tabulated thus:

Song 2: T T C B B B B B B;

Song 3: B B B;

Song 4: T;

Song 5: C C B B C; C C B B B C; C C B B C; B B;

Song 6: C C C T;

Song 7: T W;

Song 8: T B B.

18. Macculloch (1905) clearly considers the swan-maiden to be a sub-type of the larger group of tabu-breaking tales, as noted above. Rumpf (1937), however, is most emphatic when he differentiates between the "pure" swan-maiden and the "animal-wife" type which for him centers upon the tabu (221-222). In Aarne (1910: 16) the description of type 400 reads: "The husband in search of his lost wife: magical opposition or animal as helper (the swan-maiden often serves as an introduction." Here as in Aarne no. 465, which again obliquely refers to the swan-maiden, the breaking of a tabu is not a central theme.

19. Comparisons to other tales, including European tales, must await another occasion. However, it should be noted that among the tales in the Grimm collection, the "Six Swans" (KHM 49) also combines bird and weaving motifs.

20. For example, in Egypt the oldest evidence confirms this (Clark, 1944).

Although Herodotus' report seems to be contradictory, in fact he refers to a late period in which a factory system of weavers was in effect in which woven cloth was an important trade article. The situation among the various Pueblo Indians of the southwestern United States is similar in that weaving constituted a major means of livelihood.

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