CHAPTER I

Myths and Ceremonies

Myths and ceremonies abound in almost all human cultures. While it is difficult to pin down the specific functions of myth, it helps us understand the inexplicable ways of God to man. It is idle to speculate how myths came about, but there can be no denying the intimate relationship between myth and religion. Myths have always been bound up with ceremonies. In fact, one does not know whether myths sprang from ceremonies or ceremonies created myths. Whenever man has tried to explain the connection between philosophical truths and religious beliefs, myths have come in handy, for they reveal naturalistic and moral truths.

Myths have been used variously. Indeed, they play such a necessary part in human existence that they have often been used as basic tools in exploring the mystery of life. Nowhere have the myths been so much exploited as in man's literary expression of life's realities.

One of the basic approaches to the study of myth in fiction (especially Native American fiction) is to understand the mythic idiom of the text. When the myths linger in the text as echoes and glimpses of the oral lore of certain
tragedies, they often remain unrecognizable and incomprehensible. The reader, in a situation like this, as John Bierhorst would suggest, "may take note of its peculiarities: (i) mythic narrative is self-reiterating, (ii) mythic characters have a tendency to be 'split' or 'de-composed', (iii) myth is 'geometrical', expressing movement in terms of step-like increments and metaphor in terms of discreet symbols that remain uncombined" (The Red Swan 9).

Perhaps no other fiction is so pervasively mythopoeic in inspiration as the fiction of the Native Americans. Myths and ceremonies to these writers are not mere ethnological records, for they represent deeper truths. In the narratives of the four contemporary Native American novelists under study, one marks that their fictional imagination is essentially myth inspired. What makes their fictions so very fascinating is the fusion of mythic and ceremonial cycles in their techniques of narration. There is a necessary and close connection between these two basic elements in Native American fiction. Paula Gunn Allen holds that, "ceremony is ritual enactment of a specialized perception of a cosmic relationship, while myth is a prose record of that relationship" (Studies 9).

This chapter makes a critical survey of the different ways myth and ceremony have been interpreted by mythologists, anthropologists and
sociologists over the years. The survey is by no means comprehensive, nor does it claim to be definitive. It is meant to be a general introduction to the novels I seek to examine; for, such a background, I feel, is necessary for the study of these novels. The chapter progresses in three phases—myth and ceremony in general, myths and ceremonies with particular reference to Native American culture, and myths and ceremonies as the underpinnings in the process of the protagonist's renewal through ritual as he responds to the challenges of life.

I

Gordon Marshall's *Concise Dictionary of Sociology* defines myth as "a sacred or religious tale whose content is concerned with the origins or creation of natural, supernatural or cultural phenomena. [...] Myths have been studied as fractured sources of oral history, as clues to the society's dominant values, as a 'social charter', and (by Claude Levi-Strauss) for their universal structures" (346).

Bierhorst, in his study of the myths and tales of American Indians says: "A myth is an unverifiable and typically fantastic story that is nevertheless felt to be true and that deals, moreover, with a theme of importance to the believer" (*The Red Swan* 3). He is of the opinion that it is
possible to catch echoes of myths even in a common tale told for the sake of entertainment only.

Myths and ceremonies are inter-related and inter-dependent, especially so in the American Indian culture. Here, ceremonies are not designed for purposes of worship. Ruth Underhill holds that the ceremony "can be thought of as the renewing of a partnership between man and the super-naturals, to the benefit of both" (*Red Man's Religion* 4).

A brief account of myth, its nature and significance, its relation to other forms, and its study over the years forms an essential pre-requisite to the study of fiction, particularly Native American fiction, which is culturally inflected. In the following pages, I intend to touch upon these aspects.

Ordinarily, myth is viewed as "one kind of symbolic communication"; such a communication is essentially a part of religious experience. But myth does not operate in the sacred realm only, its secular manifestations are noticed as some kind of "human experience". But the religious overtones of the myths are rather strongly marked. To the extent that myths assume extraordinary dimensions as they present incredible events, they are sometimes dismissed as figments of imagination. Yet another fallacy lies in confusedly associating them with fable.
Culturally inflected as they are, myths pervade all traditions. In fact, certain myths are so popular in the collective imagination of some cultures that it is possible to collect such popular myths and match it up with actual personalities. Sacred or secular, myths dominate and shape the everyday life of the common man. "The world of myth is a continuous source of the knowledge needed for crucial problems in man's existence, war and peace, life and death, truth and falsehood, good and evil" (Britannica 794).

There are two distinct ways in which myth is examined--the philosopher's and the folklorist's. While the philosopher concentrates on a unified thought associated with myth, the folklorist offers diversified ramifications of myth.

Paul Ricoeur, the philosopher, believes that we must transcend the modern perception of myth as 'false explanation' to a sense of its "exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding". He emphasizes the "symbolic function" of myth, its power of discovery and revelation: "[M]yth may imply a hierarchy, but it also implies a horizon: it is 'a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world’ "(Ricoeur qtd. in Coupe 8). Myth may be symbolic, even paradigmatic but it also embraces "a social and cosmic order [...] it also carries with it a promise of another mode of
existence entirely, to be realized beyond the present time and place” (Coupe 8-9).

Commenting on the paradigmatic aspect of myth, Don Cupitt in The World to Come says:

So we may say that a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often liked with a ritual; that it tells of the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time in primal or eschatological [i.e. last, ultimate] time or in the supernatural world, or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history; that the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic [i.e. humanly formed] ways, although their powers are more than human and often the story is not naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams; that the whole body of a people's mythology is often prolix [i.e. lengthy, wordy], extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies, and finally that the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate. We can add that myth-making is evidently a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more or less unified
vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and the meaning of the individual's life. Both for society at large and for the individual, this story-generating function seems irreplaceable. The individual finds meaning in his life by making of his life a story set within a larger social and cosmic story.

There have been attempts to de-mythologize the myth. While modernity sought to de-mythologize it, modernism popularized it. Ricoeur, a stout defender of myth, believes that there can be no mythlessness. Apart from the champions of modernity, who tried to promote the process of "de-mythologization", there were the aggressive rationalists who attacked myth as being irrational. Myth originally implied "speech" or "word", later on the Greeks used the word *mythos*, which was believed to be inferior to *logos*. While mythos signified fantasy, logos stood for rational argument. But myth survived the onslaught of the inspired rationalists. It was Bultmann who not only repudiated myths in the name of logos but he attempted to update it, "in order that the Logos, the word of God is not obscured" (*Coupe* 11).

Philip Larkin, as Coupe points out, uses the language of modernity and favours "the authenticity of pure individual experience, which he opposes to a cultural legacy equated with mere convention and even obfuscation" (11). He argues that in Larkin's poetry too there is subtle evocation of myths. Thus
the "arrogant" view of an emerging state of mythlessness has been proved wrong again and again.

In this context, David Sidney's observation seems convincing. He thinks that myth is a form of symbolism which "supervenes upon the symbolism of ritual in order to validate and perpetuate it. [...] In any event, myth is not a conscious creation or invention of individuals but is rather a product of man's spontaneous expression of emotion and feeling of unity with nature as a whole" (14).

One of the principal means of perpetuation of myth is its artistic evocation in literature. Here it is necessary to differentiate mythical imagination from mythopoeic imagination. While in the former it entails a belief in the "reality of its object," the latter does not "regard myth merely as a symbolic expression or representation of some independent reality, the mythic symbols are identical with reality" (14).

Now I shall take a look at the different types of myths. Scholars have established that myths all over the world evince a definite pattern. Implications and interpretations may vary, but the types remain essentially the same because myths focus on man's preoccupation with certain issues that are universally true. Cosmogenic and origin myths abound in almost all cultures. These myths focus on the origin and growth of the world.
Cosmogony, it is believed, is basic to other myths. Origin myths derive inspiration from cosmogenic myths for "the cosmos is man's world, the origin of man is immediately linked to the cosmogony" (Britannica 799). Origin myths emphasize the essential harmony between man and other forms of nature.

There are also myths of destruction, the end, being "the opposite of the cosmogony [...] the end of the world" (Britannica 799). Naturally, these myths concern themselves with the idea of the origin of death. In many pre-literate cultures one comes across the myth of the culture hero, one who is responsible for all the developments in the aftermath of creation. Thus, he brings culture to man. Messianic myths touch upon new hopes for a better world. In such myths the hero not only returns but he also takes upon himself the task of fighting a battle against the evil forces.

There are also myths of memory and forgetting. These myths are common among the American Indian tribes. But they are also found in other cultures. Buddha is believed to have remembered his previous existences, "the veil of Maya (illusion) in many Indian stories prevents a man from remembering his true origin and goal" (Britannica 801).
Stories concerning transformation dwell upon the cosmic changes that take place at the end of primordial times. The much discussed "rites of passages" signify transformation of man's being.

There are many myths that have not been included here for reasons of space, but they are by no means less important. Before I proceed to define and establish the link between myth and ceremony, I shall discuss what ceremony really means.

Ceremony is almost always connected with certain rites. Ceremonial and ritual practices are a means of "maintaining communication between the sacred (the transcendent or supernatural realm) and the profane (the realm of time, space and cause and effect)" (Britannica 1174). It is difficult to say whether myth follows ceremony or ceremony follows myth. But there is an intimate relationship between the two. Lord Raglan offers a simple example to illustrate the difference between the two:

Let us take a simple example. In Leviticus we are told how Aaron performed a sacrifice: 'his sons handed him the blood, which he splashed on the altar all round [...] the fat he burned on the altar'. In chapter XVII, in a later passage, we are told that 'the priest must splash the blood on the altar [...] burning the fat as a soothing odour for the Eternal'.

These are two descriptions of the same rite, but whereas the latter is in the form of simple instruction, the former is a myth, that is to say an account of the rite told as a narrative of what somebody once did. (122)

Hooke analyzes the complementary relationship between myth and ritual. He says: "the essential truth of myth lies in the fact that it embodies a situation of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent, and which calls for the repetition of the ritual which deals with the situation and satisfies the need evoked by it" (qtd. in Raglan 123).

Thus, ceremonies/rituals concern themselves with the application of instruction embodied in a myth. Myth is therefore not only "a narrative associated with a rite, but a narrative which, with or without its associated rite, is believed to confer life" (124).

Myths, to remain focused, require ceremonies and rituals. True, there are rituals that have nothing to do with myths, but when they come together, they act like mutual flames, each enlivening and empowering the other. Without the recurrent ritual practices myths would wither away. In the same way, without the power of myth, rituals would become inactive.
A brief survey of ritual practices of different cultures points towards the practice of sacrifice as one of the fundamental principles of ritual. W. Robertson thinks that, "Sacrifice was motivated by the desire for communion between members of a primitive group and their God" (Britannica 863). The growth and development of the ritual practices among different cultures have not followed a regular pattern, but some of the important elements are totemism, purification, gift giving, expiatory rites, and sacrificial rites. Durkheim believes that totemism engendered the original form of ritual and the division of the two distinct experiences —the sacred and the profane.

Whatever may be the culture, the importance of the natural elements in ceremonial/ritualistic practices can hardly be overemphasized. The natural elements that figure prominently in different ceremonies are mountains, trees, stones and water. Different cultures prefer different places for the performance of rituals. There are also items of sacred furniture and related objects associated with ceremony. In fact, the whole design of the place where ceremonies are performed is predetermined. For example, the sacred space in the temple of Srirangam in South India has seven concentric enclosures. The reason for delimiting the holy place is to preserve the element of mystery associated with it, even canopies and parasols are considered markers of sacredness.
In the ritualistic and ceremonial observances, light, aroma, perfumes, incense, sound devices do have specific functions. Among the ceremonials, purification rites, initiation rites and ordination rites are the most practiced ones.

Ceremonies and rituals, over the years have held a very important place in different cultures. Every culture has its codified and structured forms and styles of ritualistic observances. However, the popularity of the ceremonial is related to the sacred power it holds.

The crucial point about ceremony is its effect on the psyche of the performer, for during the period of the observance of the ceremony the mortal is supposed to be in communication with the god. This is a revivifying moment when the participant experiences spiritual ecstasy.

In some cultures the individual is believed to be possessed, he is even deified. Certainly ceremonies affect the individual's psyche in such a way that he emerges out of them a different person. Ceremonies also affect the collective unconscious. Jung says:

[T]he primary image [...] which I have termed archetype, is always collective, i.e. common to at least whole peoples or periods of history. The chief mythological motifs of all times and races are
very probably of this order; for example in the dreams and fantasies of neurotics of pure Negroes stock I have been able to identify a series of motifs of Greek mythology.

The primary image [...] is a memory deposit, and engram, derived from a condensation of innumerable similar experiences [...] a psychic expression of an anatomically, physiologically determined natural tendency. (qtd. in Campbell 32)

Jung's idea, as Campbell says, is a development of the theory of Adolf Bastian who discovered a certain degree of uniformity among the places he travelled which he termed the "elementary ideas" of mankind. He however, qualified it further by saying that different provinces of human culture articulate these ideas differently which he called "ethnic ideas" representing the "local manifestations of the universal forms."

Echoes of Bastian's concept of ethnic ideas are found in Radcliffe-Brown's work on *The Andaman Islanders*. Campbell, quoting from Radcliffe-Brown's book makes the point clear that local conditions like climate, geography, social forces contribute to the shaping of "the ideas, ideals, fantasies and emotions by which men live... [affect] the innate structures and capacities of the psyche" (33).
To clinch his argument, Campbell uses the following words of Radcliffe-Brown:

A society depends for its existence on the presence in the minds of its members of a certain system of sentiments by which the conduct of the individual is regulated in conformity with the needs of the society. Every feature of the social system itself and every event or object that in any way affects the well-being or the cohesion of the society becomes an object of this system of sentiments. *In human society the sentiments in question are not innate but are developed in the individual by the action of the society upon him* [italics mine]. The ceremonial customs of a society are a means by which the sentiments in question are given collective expression on appropriate occasions. The ceremonial (i.e. collective) expression of any sentiment serves both to maintain it at the requisite degree of intensity in the mind of the individual and to transmit it from one generation to another. Without such expression the sentiments involved could not exist.

(qtd. in Campbell 33-34)

It is evident from these observations that ceremonials and mythologies are locally conditioned and locally constructed. Therefore, there are certain
myths and ceremonies that are peculiar to certain geographical regions and tribal affiliations.

II

I shall now try to give a broad overview of the different myths and ceremonies of the American Indians, drawing principally on Andrew Wiget’s and John Bierhorst’s findings. In his book, *The Mythology of North America*, Bierhorst outlines the most important myths and describes their representative gods and heroes and themes of eleven regions from the Arctic to the Southwest. Before we go into the specific myths it is necessary that we touch upon the significant aspects in the oral lore of the American Indians from which spring the myths, legends, ceremonies and rituals.

The earliest of the American Indians articulated their philosophy of life inspired by their dreams and visions. Subsequently, their articulation took the shape of myth, legend and other forms of oral narratives. It has been pointed out by ethnologists and anthropologists that myths to the Native Americans, represented the eternal verities. Andrew Wiget, providing a systematic overview of the oral narrative, focuses on their orally narrated past. He says:
In some cultures the most remotely conceptualized being is an Asexual Spiritual Being like the Aztec Ometeotl, whose dynamic self-reflection creates through thought emanation either two Sky Parents Proper (sun father, moon mother) or Displaced (Sky father, Earth mother). Their intercourse creates two worlds (Mountain, Water, East, West, Zenith, Nadir) requiring reconciliation. This movement of mediation can be envisioned either as an Ascent (Emergence) or Descent (Earth-Diver).

The next phase is that of the Transformation Period. The dominant figure here is that of the Trickster/Transformer who has the power to transform itself into any of the polar opposites. All these transformations are different manifestations of the trickster figure. He can be Rival Twins, Flint (Hunting) and Sprout (Agriculture), or the Monster-Slayer (Active, Warrior) and Born-for-Water (Passive, Shaman). The end of the transformation period marks the appearance of the first real men and the beginning of the social structure.

The myth that has a wide distribution all through North America is the myth of the Earth-Diver. Gladys Reichard offers a neat summary of the myth:

A flood occurs—either a primeval flood or a deluge with various causes given. A few animals survive, usually on a raft on the
surface of the waters. They feel the necessity for having land. A number of them dive for it, but come to the surface dead. A final attempt is made, often by Muskrat, and the successful animal appears exhausted but carrying mud in mouth, ears, nails, paws, and armpits. The dirt magically becomes larger until the whole earth is restored. The increased size is often brought about by running round and round the bit of land. (qtd. in Wiget 6)

The different manifestations of this myth are Raven the trickster, crow the trickster etc. Wiget narrates how when mud was brought up by Muskrat, Crow thrust his cane through it, planting it and that is how the earth began to form itself.

The Earth-Diver story is very popular among the Algonkian peoples. According to the popular belief the flood results from the desire of Mannabozo, the trickster who avenges the death of his brother at the hands of underground spiritual beings. In the course of events that follow, Muskrat brings up the mud and the world is created anew. Thus, the Earth-Diver story comes under the general rubric of creation myth. Clifford Geertz views it both as a "model of" and a "model for" the world, reflecting both metaphysical and ethical principles (The Interpretation of Cultures 46-47).
Wiget points out the essential principles involved in Indian myths. He says: "[I]n Indian myths three cosmic zones—the Sky-World, the Earth-Surface World and the Underworld are imaged" (9). The passage from one world to another world creates epoch both in terms of time and space which are convertible. The Earth Diver myth embraces a whole lot of beliefs—marvelous births, inner voices, Sky Parents, even practices like boreal Shamanism and man-animal transformations come within its ambit.

The other significant myth complex in the oral lore is the Emergence myths. As the name implies, emergence suggests ascent. Wheeler Voegelin summarizes the leading features of the myth as follows:

Following ascent by natural or artificial means, the people and/or supernaturals (all living things) come from a hole in the ground after preparation of the earth for their habitation (or a scout’s discovery of it as inhabitable). The hole is thought to be pre-existing or to be a cave or to have been bored by an animal, a series of animals or the culture hero(es). The means of ascent is either a vine, a stripling plant, a tree or mountain, or a combination of two or more of these. The emergence is actuated by the coming or subsidence of a flood (the termination of some other catastrophe)—in which case the emergence people are refugees—or by the desire
This myth is most common among the Hopis, Zunis and Navajos. In Zuni myth, the Sky or Sun Father and Earth Mother emanate from the mind of an asexual creator. As the sun father passes on his daily journey, he sends his two sons deep inside the fourth womb of the earth. They find themselves in total darkness for a long time. Ultimately when they emerge out of it, they notice certain deformities in them. To help them out the Spider Woman empowers an old man to use the medicine bundles effectively and to fix the ritual calendar. He thus becomes the first priest and the intermediary between the Zunis and the Supernaturals.

The myth emphasizes the interrelationship between the physical and the metaphysical realms. Wiget holds that in a "world so structured and charged with the power to affect human life dramatically, it is important to know for instance, that medical problems have a metaphysical as well as a physical cause, and to seek out not only a physician but a medicine man" (13-14). There are of course different variants of this myth. The myth is significant in that it acts as a crucial metaphor in the process of renewal through ritual. I shall now use the words of Wiget to explicate the
significance of the myth, for it buttresses my thesis of self-renewal and psychic integration:

[Through effective use of myth] [...] man is remade, becomes perfected, and this establishes the myth's power as a metaphor for integration of all kinds. Since this disruption of the "logico-aesthetic" order of the world is at the root of all mental and physical illness, social disruption, agricultural failure, natural disasters, and other historical events, one must return through ritual, either individually or communally, to the place and time of Emergence, when the earth was young and men were "raw", and there begin anew the process of reforming self, society, or cosmos according to the prototypical pattern. (14-15)

The Emergence myth has varied connotations and implications, but the most important one would be its emphasis on man's ability to bring about and maintain the essential harmony among all the elements of creation through ritual. The myth, notwithstanding its varied implications, is free from any ambiguity. If there is any myth in the American Indian culture that is most ambiguous, it is the figure of the Trickster.
The nature and manner of the trickster pose insuperable difficulties even to the authorities in the trickster lore. The figure is so amorphous and so enigmatic and yet so fascinating that it has become unignorable in the study of Native American culture. Joseph Campbell in his study of primitive mythology has the following to say about the trickster figure:

This ambiguous, curiously fascinating figure of the trickster appears to have been the chief mythological character of the paleolithic world of story. A fool, and a cruel, lecherous cheat, an epitome of the principle of disorder, he is nevertheless the culture-bringer also. And he appeared under many guises, both animal and human. Among the North American Plains Indians his usual form was coyote. Among the woodland tribes of the north and east, he was the Great Hare, the Master Rabbit, some of whose deeds were assimilated by the Negroes of America to an African rabbit-trickster whom we know in the folk tales of Br’er Rabbit. The tribes of the Northwest Coast knew him as Raven. Blue Jay is another of his forms. In Europe he is known as Reynard the Fox; but also, on a more serious plane, he appears as the devil. (273)
view of this enigmatic figure. That the trickster also represents certain nobler and even divine aspects is totally ignored by Jung here. Andrew Wiget encapsulates three distinct roles of the trickster; the culture hero who is also a monster-slayer, the benevolent Promethean hero and "the bumbling, overreaching Trickster" (16).

In appearance the trickster is anthropomorphic but that is only a facade, for it can assume just about any form. It becomes a human, an animal, a man, and a woman, in the form of a human it can behave like an animal, in the form of an animal, it can behave like a human. Perhaps the best known trickster is the trickster in the Winnebago tales.

The figure embraces all the wit and wisdom of a man or a superman. Ruth Underhill portrays the Trickster-Transformer as follows:

> In size and general behaviour this Being ranges all the way from the greedy little mink of the plateau to the noble Nanabojho of the Great Lakes who was Longfellow's model for Hiawatha. [...] In the Northeast, that meant mink, raven or bluejay, in the Plains, coyote or Oldman Spider, in the Northeast, the white Arctic hare. (35)

Tricksters are used for satirical purposes. The figure is used to subvert the establishment. It has all the elements of a Bakhtinian carnival. The activities
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of the trickster can be so absurd and yet so mirthful, its dimensions can be so huge, its appetites can be so ravenous, and its size can be so enormous that its parallel can be found only in Rabelais' world. In terms of ribaldry and scatological tirade too there are few to challenge his might.

The most popular trickster form is trickster as a human being. This is mostly found in Winnebago literature. The subversive design of the trickster is most effective when it exposes the selfish motives of the invading peoples. Wiget gives the example of how in the trickster tale of the Cree tribe, the trickster went "furtrapping":

After mixing up some poison and fat into little cakes, he gathered all the furbearing animals together and began to preach to them and concluded his remarks by offering them this "communion". With their skin he settled his debts at the post. The tale is a stinging attack on the perceived relation between Catholic priests and the French fur trade, historically documented as a matter of policy, which bound a man's body and the labors of this life to a credit system at the trading post and the efforts of his spiritual life to a postponed reward beyond the grave. (18)
This human figure of the trickster is found among the cultures of Southern Asia, Indonesia, India, Africa, its echoes are found in Aesop's fables. The mythical figure is currently available in a sophisticated form in the literary works, but the best specimen in the most vivid form is found in the Native American primitive mythology.

The future of trickster is immense. The unique feature about it is that it outlives the Creator. It has attracted serious attention of the psychologists and anthropologists all over the world. It would be a rewarding study if the figure is considered not merely as a bad tempered devil but one who is generally benevolent.

Jung's study of the psychology of the trickster figure is an insightful work of how the mythical figure can be related to inner psychic experiences. Its startling similarities are found in the area of parapsychology. In the Native American context it best corresponds to the character of the shaman and medicine man, "for he, too, often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured" (qtd. in Radin 196).

He is often approximated to the figure of a savior, like the shaman he is also a healer. Sometimes he is a sufferer who takes away suffering.
Joseph Campbell in his illuminating study of shamanism relates the shaman to the trickster figure. At this juncture it becomes rather difficult to differentiate myth from ceremony. When the shaman enters in the drama of the ritual enactment of the myth, the whole process takes on the atmosphere of ceremony. The ceremonial spell comes from the voice and gestures of the shaman and the elaborate preparations that go into the conduct of his action. Even songs are sung in the shamanistic practice. The spirits, it is believed, gave the songs to the shaman. The songs, like every act in the ceremony, are part of the spell.

In his analysis of shamanism, Campbell focuses on the religious life of the Indians who seek visions. Their visions determine the career of the person who quests for it. As he seeks these visions, the person (usually a boy of twelve or thirteen) is aided by the shaman. Campbell makes an interesting distinction between the priest and the shaman. He says:

The priest is the socially initiated, ceremonially inducted member of a religious organization, where he holds a certain rank and functions as the tenant of an office that was held by others before him, while the Shaman is one who, as a consequence of a personal psychological, crisis, has gained a certain power of his own. The spiritual visitants who came to him in vision had never been seen
before by any other, they were his particular familiars and protectors. The masked gods of the Pueblos, on the other hand, the corn-gods and the cloud-gods, served by societies of strictly organized and very orderly priests, are well known patrons of the entire village and have been prayed to and represented in the ceremonial dances since time out of mind. (231)

Thus, whether it is a ghost dance, or a sun dance, the role of the priest-shaman in Native American ceremonialism cannot be over-emphasized. The shaman is the chief motivator in the trance-inducing exercise. When he deals with individuals, his role is that of a guide, and when he is required to deal with the community at large he assumes the role of a conductor. The trance achieved by the participant reminds us of the "Hindu deity Vishnu [...] sleeping on the coils of the cosmic serpent, floating on the cosmic sea and dreaming the lotus dream of the universe, of which we all are a part" (Campbell 234). My observation here is one with that of Campbell and Underhill who hold that in certain ceremonial practices we have a "remote cognate" (234) of the Indian forms, for the Native American ceremonies are not entirely "original inventions" (Underhill 153).
If the shaman is able to charm the audience, it is all because of the power he derives from "Wakan Tanka", the Great Mystery. Campbell found that in certain cultures, women too became shamans. This is particularly evident in the Eskimo community. They too, like men wielded great spiritual authority.

The shaman having some power over nature can use it to harm or to benefit his fellowmen. He need not necessarily appear in a human form, although it has been found among many tribes that the shaman is invariably a grandfather figure.

It has been found that most shamanhood is validatory. Shamanism in certain cultures is so popular that fathers shamanize with their children and prepare them for a vocation. It has been observed that shamanism is ardently practiced in primitive societies rather than in the higher societies. A career in magical practices is achieved through art. Myth and ceremony are the two essential elements of the shamanistic make-up. Yet another way followed by the shaman is "an imitation or presentation in the field of time and space of the visionary world of his spiritual 'seizure'" (Campbell 265).

Alexeyev Ivan declared "the spirit of an exceptional shaman is born again after his death. They say great shamans are re-born three times " (qtd.
in Campbell 267)—an illustration of which is noticed in the figure of Yellow Calf in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*.

Campbell, in his book *Primitive Mythology* includes tricksters in the chapter "Shamanism", where he addresses the trickster figure as "The Fire-Bringer". He, however, says that it is improper to call such a figure a god. The hero trickster can at best be called a super-shaman, a Promethean Titan.

III

Native American myths and ceremonies are known for their bewildering variety. I have briefly surveyed some of the important myths and myth-related ceremonies. A lot many of them have not been included for reasons of space. But the myths not mentioned here are by no means less important. I shall now show how myths find literary expression in Native American fiction with particular reference to the few novels chosen for study.

Before I examine the application of certain myths in fiction, I must mention here that the novelists under study are basically artists and not mythographers in the sense that Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes are.

Myths have found artistic expression by such illustrious craftsmen as Yeats, Eliot and James Joyce, to name only three of them. Myth is "the
spoken part of ritual; the story which the ritual enacts”. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren say that “in a wider sense, myth comes to mean any anonymously composed storytelling of origins and destinies: the explanations a society offers its young of why the world is and why we do as we do, its pedagogic images of the nature and destiny of man” (191).

When the artist uses myth in his imaginative work, he has a definite purpose. As Yeats uses Celtic mythology while mythicizing his Irish dream terrain, he too had a specific purpose—to invigorate Irish nationalism. Similarly, the four novelists, I examine here have made use of myths and ceremonies for artistic and cultural purposes. I maintain that in their handling myths and ceremonies the difference between antiquity and contemporaneity is blurred.

Eliot in his essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth", shows how much Joyce depends on *Odyssey* in his writing of *Ulysses*. He explains that Joyce uses the myth not as an act of re-telling, not even an act of imitation, but it is a feat of re-creation to suit the modern times. As Eliot says; "it is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (qtd. in Ellmann 681). The four novelists under study have also followed the Eliotian suggestion of imposing an order to the alienated, assimilated,
troubled reservation life of the American Indians. In depiction of reservation life, these novelists go back to myths again and again, but they are no slavish imitators of the myths they recreate in their fiction.

John Updike, hailed as the chronicler of American life, himself a myth-maker, reacts to Eliot’s observations in the following manner: “Does he mean that we are ourselves so depleted of psychic energy, of spiritual and primitive force, that we can do little but retell old stories?” (qtd. in Schiff 12). Updike does not seem to be quite clear about the mythical method but he certainly favours it as a structural and a formal device in the craft of fiction. Myth therefore, should provide an order to impose upon, a body to dwell in and a form to spring from. With such a supportive framework, the imaginative writers find ample opportunities to re-invent themselves. As John B. Vickery says, the myth “dares him [the writer] to tell the same story differently, conveying his own attitude toward it and exemplifying his own solutions to the problems of technique in the tale” (28). Vickery, when he suggests this idea, perhaps has in mind such Euro-American followers of mythical method as Faulkner, Lawrence, Yeats, Mann and others for whom myth is mostly a matter of technique, a mode of telling the story. But for such Native American writers as Momaday, Welch, Silko and Erdrich, to name just the four of them, myth is not merely a mode of narration, it
encompasses their way of life. That is the reason why these writers have adopted myths and ceremonies as themes and techniques of the narratives.

A close study of the novels shows that the characters in the novel do not directly correspond to the mythic characters. I shall show in my analysis of the four Native American novels how certain changes do take place as the myth is dramatized in a novel.

Drawing on the ideas of John Updike, James A. Schiff explains certain techniques of mythical representation:

[T]here is not always a “persistent, one-to-one relationship” between the prefigurative myth and the mythological novel: prefigurations often occur in “more complex patterns and in greater numbers”. This sense of “distortions” is best discussed by utilizing two terms initially applied to patterns of distortion found in dreams: fragmentation and condensation. Fragmentation occurs when a single mythical character is fragmented into or refracted across a number of contemporary characters, leading those contemporary characters into playing varying aspects of a single mythic type. (14)
The Native American novelists discussed here are sensitive to the different nuances of every myth and ceremony. To them every myth and ceremony is an experience, almost a firsthand experience—they have lived through it. Every one of them is an artist and therefore the myths and ceremonies are artistically portrayed—they are not faithfully reproduced. I shall touch upon certain dominant myths and ceremonies dramatized in these fictions, and shall show how different writers have handled myths and ceremonies differently.

Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* focuses principally on the Night Chant Ceremony. Linda Hogan says, "the author, like the oral poet/singer is he 'who puts together' a disconnected life through a step-by-step process of visualization" (qtd. in Owens 94). True, the Night Chant Ceremony forms the centerpiece of the novel but it is handled by Momaday in such a way that other events flow out of and merge into the ceremony, giving the novel the impressions of cinematic shots. The novel begins with the Night Chant and parallels the progress of the protagonist towards re-integration and ends with a Night Chant. Momaday so fashions his fiction that he adopts the traditional ceremony in order to understand the contemporary situation. The approach followed by Momaday is that of the ritual view of the mythic mode. The myth is integrated in the ceremony and is altered in terms of the textual configuration keeping in mind the social function of the myth. Stanley Edgar
Hyman's observations are similar to the "dream work" followed by Momaday in his fiction. It entails "splitting, displacement, multiplication, projection, rationalization, secondary elaboration [...] interpretation [and] [...] completion" (Hyman 139).

Critics often ascribe this "dream work" to Momaday's style of modernism. It has perhaps something to do with modernism, but it speaks of Momaday's ritualistic view of the myth. Thus in his hands myth is treated in terms of its relevance to the on and off Reservation Life of the Native Americans today. Momaday is acutely conscious of the authorial responsibility to the tribe. He knows that the Native Americans need to be ceremonially charged in order to survive the onslaught of the forces alien to their tradition. I hold that Abel, the protagonist is portrayed as a survivor and the fiction is an adapted form of Native ceremonialism.

Similarly, the pre-figurative myth/ceremony in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* is about the vision quest and shamanism. Welch too, as I shall show in my chapter on *Winter in the Blood*, does not slavishly re-tell the traditional myth. The myth undergoes a semantic change in his narrative. Philip Wheelwright in his study of the semantic approach to myth explains the ideas as follows:
*Meta-phora* connotes motion—i.e., what may be figuratively conceived as a semantic motion, or the production of meaning—away from the already settled meaning: as when a man of filthy habits is called a pig. But such metaphoric transfer is possible only where certain terms with already settled meanings are available as starting-points; it is, therefore, more characteristic of the romantic phase of myth than of the primitive. There is a prior semantic movement, which operates, often pre-consciously, by bringing raw elements of experience—qualities, capabilities, emotionally charged suggestibilities, and whatever else—into the specious unity of being represented by a certain symbol. Such primitive meanings are formed by a kind of semantic "motion" (*phora*) through (*dia*) a number of experimental elements, related in the first instance, no doubt, by a sort of vague but highly charged and tribally infectious emotive congruity and then gradually formalized into a tribal tradition. Such a semantic motion seems to be indicated for instance, by the Sioux Chief Standing Bear's explanation of the multiple yet unified significance of the pipe for his people: "The pipe was a tangible, visible link that joined man to Wakan Tanka and every puff of smoke that ascended in prayer unfailingly reached His presence. With it faith was upheld, ceremony
sanctified, and the being consecrated. All the meanings of moral
duty, ethics, religious and spiritual conceptions were symbolized in
the pipe. It signified brotherhood, peace and the perfection of
Wakan Tanka, and to the Lakota [Dakota ?] the pipe stood for that
which the Bible, Church, State and Flag, all combined,
represented in the mind of the white man. (158-59)

Wheelwright here suggests how myths can be creatively altered. James
Welch addresses certain urgent issues faced by acculturated/semi-
acculturated American Indians. He finds the answer in going back to the
tribal tradition. As he seeks to effect a renewal, a self-renewal, in the
protagonist of his fiction, he prepares him for a transformative ritual. In the
dramatization of this ritual, Welch exercises ample creative freedom.

Silko's *Ceremony* is an important landmark in the history of American
Indian letters. In this ambitious work, she dramatizes the essential philosophy
of Native Americans. *Ceremony* is about ceremonies. Here she tries to
approximate the performative aspect of “native” narration. Storytelling is
presented as a ceremony. The book offers a number of rituals which are read
as ceremonies. Even such a ritualistic practice like sand painting is treated as a ceremony. She achieves all these things through her employment of pluriform discourse.

Paula Gunn Allen says, “after Tayo completes the first steps of the ceremony, he is ready to enter into the central rituals connected with a ceremony of cosmic significance, for only a cosmic ceremony can simultaneously heal a wounded man, a stricken landscape and a disorganized, discouraged society” (131). Silko's narrative charm consists in her deft manipulation of different voices in different ceremonies. The book is an organization of different genres--poetry, prayer, song, talks and chants.

In her fictional adaptation of the oral lore, she synthesizes the diverse elements into a single unified whole. Her polyphony evokes immediate response of the readers. Like others of her ilk, Silko too adapts conventional lore in such a way that it perfectly suits the contemporary conditions.

Ceremonialism pervades the pages of Silko's book. She brings about a sense of wholeness, a sense of holiness and a sense of balance between man and other objects, sacred or profane. If polyphony is a matter of technique for Silko, hierophany is a matter of philosophy she adopts in her attempt to bridge the gap between "isolate human being and lonely landscape" (Allen 128). Mircea Eliade, in Patterns in Comparative Religion points out this
aspect in the following manner: "The sacred is qualitatively different from the profane, yet it may manifest itself no matter how or where in the profane world because of its power of turning any natural object into a paradox by means of hierophany [i.e. manifestation of the sacred]" (qtd. in Coupe 59). The novel is so much imbued with ceremonialism that everything turns ceremonial. Silko even makes the readers conscious of the ceremonial nature of man and woman.

Silko's professional rival, Louise Erdrich, in many ways complements her. In *Tracks* she comprehensively deals with myth as Silko does it with ceremony. One of the intriguing hero-myths in Native American oral lore that has been transcribed and collected by mythographers is the trickster figure. This figure bears the traditional attributes in most of the tales collected. Among the important texts are: (i) "Winnebago Hare Cycle" (Paul Radin), (ii) Grinnell's "Old Man Stories", and (iii) E.Deloria's Dakota Texts. The trickster figure, with its bewildering arrays, appears almost in its raw form in these texts.

Welch, Silko and Michael Dorris, to name some of the few, have novelized the myth. All these novelists have touched only certain aspects of the myth. This does not give us a complete picture of this redoubtable, unignorable myth. It is only when Erdrich incorporates it in her tetralogy
beginning with *Love Medicine* that the myth receives serious artistic attention.

What Erdrich is trying to do in her fiction is to adapt it to the contemporary situation. The myth is artistically presented in her books. Early on, I had mentioned White's idea of "fragmentation" and "condensation" as two of the devices followed by artists in their portrayal of the elusive figure. Erdrich, offers two distinct narrative voices in *Tracks*. I have argued that these two are the perfect foils of each other. The method she has followed in her fictional treatment of the myth is that of "fragmentation". Such a treatment of the trickster helps her portray different facets of the hero-myth. Moreover, the application of the myth to the contemporary situation makes it quite convincing.

In the following chapters, I shall examine how mythic figures and ceremonial practices contribute to the reconfiguration of myths and ceremonies in the text and how the protagonists achieve self-renewal through his renewed acquaintance with the myths and ceremonies.