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**Author**

King, William R.

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# Dionysos Among the Mesas: The Water Serpent Puppet Play of the Hopi Indians

WILLIAM R. KING

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The scholar undertaking a study of the origins of drama among the world's peoples is drawn, by the magnet of cultural conditioning, through the lineage of Western theater to its historic emergence among the Ancient Athenians—only to be confronted by a maze of theories concerning the nature of ritual, catharsis, and Dionysos. These essential issues may seem remote and even irrelevant in the context of a worldly, industrialized culture. The notion of origins too often is presumed to imply an evolutionary development from a crude original form to something more sophisticated or effective. Any such assumption separates us from our ability to understand the potency of earlier theater forms by attributing their vitality to a stage of human development in which people were more easily deluded. The search for beginnings also too often leads to a close scrutiny of localized historical-political factors, which overlooks the more constant factors of the human psyche, which this author believes to be the true source of the power of the art of drama.

A cross-cultural approach, which examines performance forms which are clearly on the dividing edge between ritual and drama, can be of use to clear the air. The Water Serpent puppet plays of the Hopi Indians provide such an example. Moreover, these plays concern a central character demonstrating numerous striking and significant cross-cultural parallels to the Greek Dionysos, the founding deity of Athenian theatre.

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William King is an independent scholar, currently doing freelance design work in Southern California.

The Hopi have been remarkably resilient in preserving their world view against the corrosive influences of European-American culture. One important source for this endurance—apart from simple physical isolation—is this very world view. The Hopi have never separated the arts and the life of the spirit from the other aspects of daily life. Such a holistic outlook gives great strength to a culture, since it provides a unified belief system into which all experience can be integrated. It provides an open channel by which the nourishing resources of the spirit can be made accessible to the immediate needs of the community and the individual. It is the chief characteristic of what Antonin Artaud has called an “authentic culture.” Artaud’s comments describing Mexico apply with equal force to these natives of the American Southwest:

In Mexico . . . there is no art: things are made for use. And the world is in perpetual exaltation.

To our disinterested and inert ideas of art an authentic culture opposes a violently egoistic and magical, i.e., interested idea. For the Mexicans seek contact with the *Manas*, forces latent in every form, unreleased by contemplation of the forms for themselves, but springing to life by magic identification with these forms.<sup>1</sup>

The Hopi are especially renowned for the elegant abstractions found in their visual arts. It is the power of abstraction to make the forms of nature into symbols which speak directly to the unconscious, linking us to the eternal realm of the archetypes. This is what Artaud describes as contact with the “*manas*”—the forces underlying visible forms. It is the source of the spiritual power and vitality evident in Hopi art. The abstract experiments made by artists of the Western European tradition began as attempts to recapture this same power, which these artists found in the arts of peoples they regarded as primitives.

Hopi abstraction is seen in the physical metaphors through which they express their interaction with the spiritual and natural world. Prayer may be expressed in clouds of smoke rising from a pipe to join the clouds above, or by long hair falling against the shoulders like rain, just as effectively as it can through chanting, song, or dance. Feathers, hanging loosely by cotton strings from prayer sticks, can carry silent prayers to the heavens just as they carry birds through the air.

Nature itself seems to speak through this symbolic language of abstraction in the monumental, simple shapes that characterize the northeastern corner of Arizona inhabited by the Hopi. The terraced mesas and massed clouds are echoed by the terraced house-forms of their traditional architecture. Very similar pictorial symbols are used in Hopi art to represent the houses of humans and the mountain and cloud houses of the gods. In many such metaphoric ways Hopi culture expresses the importance it attaches to the continuity of human, spiritual, and natural reality and the need for maintaining this harmony and balance in all things. As Patricia Broder observes in her work on Hopi Painting:

Universal harmony, fertility, and regeneration have always been and still are the dominant themes of Hopi painting, for artistic expression is but one aspect of Hopi life and it must be an integral part of the Hopi world. In the Hopi world it is impossible to separate the activities of daily life, religious observance, and artistic creation.<sup>2</sup>

The history of the Hopi shows that this vision of harmony has not always been realized, but structures have been built into their society which express and encourage it.

The foundation of Hopi life is the complex patterning of their communities as tightly-knit, interlocking networks of clans, societies, priesthoods, chieftaincies, and sexual roles—which insures that temporal and spiritual duties, ownership, and authority are dispersed, rather than concentrated in any single group or individual. The numerous festivals presented by men's and women's societies throughout the year are an equally important unifying force.

Among the most celebrated of these festivals are the elaborate masked performances of the Kachina cult. In these, forces of nature are portrayed as joint celebrants—as members of the community, rather than impersonal objects of worship—demonstrating the relationship between man and nature that the Hopi feel is necessary to ensure nature's vital balance. They have a legend that at one time the Kachinas actually came in person to dance in the villages, but their power was so strong that someone would inevitably die with each visit. In order to avoid such tragedies, the Kachinas taught men to impersonate them, so that they can join the villagers in the festivals at least in spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Kachinas appear in the villages during the critical time between the winter solstice and summer solstice, when their influence is most needed to prepare the earth for seed and to guard over the young crops. Kachina performances are traditionally made up of choral songs and dances, varied with dramatic or comic material provided by interaction between choruses or with individual characters. Each performance is organized by a sponsor who, much like the *choregus* of ancient Athens, arranges permission from his chief and recruits performers for the event. He also has to recruit a composer, since the Hopi dislike reusing old songs.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that, while these are ritual performances in the truest sense, creativity and variation is encouraged—although individual achievement receives no special notice because of the secrecy that surrounds the production process.

Palulukonti, the festival of Palulukon, the Horned Water Serpent, is one of the major festivals of the Hopi year. It takes place in March, about the time when snakes begin to emerge from their winter's sleep beneath the earth. Its central feature is a variety show evening of Kachina dances, burlesques, and puppet plays, presented in the men's ceremonial lodges, or Kivas, to an audience composed mostly of women and children. The program varies from year to year, and consists of numerous acts, each produced by a different Kiva group. Inevitably, at least one of the groups will present a version of the Water Serpent puppet play. Frederick Dockstader noted that, although they involve Kachina characters and are the central feature of a Kachina festival, the Hopi do not consider these puppet plays to be true Kachina ceremonies. Instead, they are regarded as the Snake Dance of the Kachinas, paralleling the Summer Snake Dance of the non-Kachina Snake and Antelope Fraternities.<sup>5</sup>

Palulukon the Water Serpent has power over lightning, flood, and earthquake, and is known as the pet animal of cloud, or collectively as the Kachina flocks. The Serpent rules over all the underground waters, believed to be a single interconnected system. Offerings to the Water Serpent are made at springs which are the gateways into its subterranean realm. Its aid is invoked at such springs prior to the snake-catching for the Summer Snake Dance to insure that the rattlesnakes will be pacified and that rain will come. Tales are told of women being mysteriously impregnated at these springs.<sup>6</sup>

The Water Serpent's influence over the cycle of waters makes it a figure of great importance. Because of the aridity of his environment, the Hopi farmer is vitally dependent upon the earth's capacity to receive and contain moisture. He must watch closely as pools left by rains and melting snows dwindle into snake-like streams and sink into the earth, and he plants his seed accordingly. The Serpent's shape is a physical metaphor for the water-bringing forces of nature, dramatically reflected in the Southwestern landscape by the twisting gorges of the Rio Grande and Colorado rivers, as well as in the flicking tongues of lightning and the twisting bodies of tornadoes. Earthquakes, which originate from beneath the earth, shake its surface like a diamond-back shaking its rattles.

The tremendous importance that the Hopi attach to the cycle of waters which the Water Serpent guards can be seen in a statement made by traditional Hopi religious leaders in 1971. The occasion was a lawsuit filed against mining operations which involve the removal of water from under Hopi land at the rate of 2500 gallons per minute, to be mixed with coal to make a slurry for easier transport through pipelines. The Hopi leaders argued:

Everything depends upon the proper balance being maintained. The water under the ground acts like a magnet attracting rain from the clouds; and the rain in the clouds also acts as a magnet raising the water table under the ground to the roots of our crops and plants. Drawing huge amounts of water from beneath Black Mesa in connection with the strip-mining will destroy the harmony, throw everything out of kilter. Should this happen, our lands will shake like the Hopi rattle; land will sink, land will dry up. Rains will be barred by unseen forces because we Hopi have failed to protect the land given us, as we were instructed.<sup>7</sup>

These men have no doubt that if the natural balance is upset, the power of nature will withdraw its gifts and turn destructive.

Palulukon presides over the "proper balance" of society, just as it does over the balanced cycle of waters. Youkeoma, a Hopi leader, referred to this power in explaining his people's resistance to the ways of the Bohannas or White Man. Youkeoma told reservation agent Leo Crane:

You see . . . I am doing this as much for you as for my own people. Suppose I should not protest your orders—suppose I should willingly accept the ways of the Bohannas. Immediately the Great Snake would turn over, and the Sea would rush in, and we would all be drowned. You too. I am therefore protecting you.<sup>8</sup>

This power to defend the traditional cultural balance is further illustrated in the story of Palatkwapi, a legendary city which had fallen prey to decadent ways.

An elder of the city, who has been wronged by the evil ways of its citizens, seeks revenge. He convinces his nephew to dress as a ghost, wearing four masks, the outermost being the face of Masau'u, the God of Death and giver of fire. For four nights, the young man runs around the outskirts of the city, setting fire to surrounding forests with his breath, made fiery by medicine his uncle gave him. Returning to the city, he sits on the highest rooftop, grinding corn and singing. Finally, he is captured. His captors remove the four masks, but leave a single horn and crown of feathers on his head. They bury him alive with the horn and one hand projecting from the earth.

Four days later, the earth begins to shake, and water pours from all the fireplaces, as a giant Water Serpent rises from the youth's grave site. The city is inundated. The survivors choose a young boy and his sister to send to appease the monster. Each child carries a ball of ground turquoise, a hardening substance intended to prevent the earth from turning back into primordial mud. The boy walks up to the Serpent and embraces it. Then, both children are pulled down into the earth, where Palulukon teaches them its wisdom and songs, which they are to take back to their people. Afterwards, they are returned to the earth's surface, which swiftly dries. The city is never rebuilt.<sup>9</sup>

The association of the opposing elements of water and fire, suggested by the inundating waters that pour from the fireplaces of Palatkwapi, reflects the association of lightning with rain. A similar association is implied by the connection made in the story between Palulukon and Masau'u, the fire-breathing God of Death. Masau'u is the patron deity of the Kwan or Warrior Society, whose chief carries a wooden effigy of the Water Serpent, and whose members wear the Water Serpent's single horn in

honor of the wisdom given at Palatkwapi. Members of this society can look upon the God of Death without fear, and serve as guides into the land of the dead.

Although Masau'u does not appear in the Palulukonti puppet plays, his Kachina can be seen going around to each of the village Kivas on the afternoon before their performance. Standing on the rooftop hatchway, he beats on the ladder with a bush or bundle of sticks.<sup>10</sup> His is the only Kachina who may appear at any time of the year, outside the regular Kachina season.<sup>11</sup> Masau'u's impersonator wears a woman's dress and a necklace of human bones. He is smeared with rabbit's blood, and carries a leather club filled with seeds. Linking life and death, his deity is associated with all of the metamorphoses of nature. According to legend, he was the only being to be found dwelling on the earth when humans first emerged from the underworld. They found him nurturing a small paradise of vegetation on solid earth within a ring of fire, at a time when the rest of the planet's surface was muddy, soft, and unformed. By his permission, they were allowed to populate this world.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the considerable variation found in the Water Serpent puppet plays, there is a general repertory of established features and characters. Most important among the cast of characters are Haihaiwuqti, the Kachina Mother, who plays the role of the Serpent's nurse, and the Mudhead Clowns, who provide a comic chorus and antagonist. These personages also appear in the festivals of the Zuni Indians. The Hopi acknowledge the Mudhead chorus to be of Zuni origin. Hopi and Zuni lore concerning the Water Serpent is so closely related as to constitute a common vocabulary, and there is considerable interchange between the two peoples. Observers at the turn of the century noted that some puppets had been made by a Hopi living at Zuni, and that a Zuni, who spoke no Hopi, participated in preparations for one of the puppet plays.<sup>13</sup>

Haihaiwuqti is known as the mother or grandmother of the Kachinas, and also as the mother of monsters. The Hopi believe that Kachinas originally emerged from the underworld just as humans had. Haihaiwuqti was the first to come up, followed by four of her sons, each of whom carried a Water Serpent. The other Kachinas followed in single file, each carrying other pets of various species.<sup>14</sup> Haihaiwuqti is well known to Hopi children,



since the first Kachina doll given to an infant and hung on its cradle to protect it from harm represents her.<sup>15</sup> She is also familiar to them from the terrifying Halloween-like visits she makes to their homes during the festival of Powamu, held in February at the time when young boys and girls are initiated into the Kachina Cult.

Accompanying Haihaiwuqti on her Powamu visits are the Natackas, her monstrous children. The Natackas have long snouts, saw-like teeth and bulging eyes, paired horns and feathered crests. They walk with a prancing step, roaring and hooting as they go. In their blood-smeared hands they carry saws, which they drag along the rough walls of the houses. Once, the Natackas lived in caves in the San Francisco Mountains and preyed on small children. Whenever they caught one, they cut its throat and carried its corpse to some pool, which they would drink dry before feasting on the dead child's flesh. One of the Twin War Gods destroyed them with lightning, but they can be called on to return whenever there is a need to punish unruly children.<sup>16</sup> The offended elder who engineered the punishment of Palatkwapi caused one such monster to visit the city as a warning to the people before he called upon the Water Serpent.

Accompanied by these terrifying creatures, Haihaiwuqti goes from house to house to visit the children, chattering continually in her eerie hollow falsetto. On her first visit, she distributes corn grains and animal snares to the children, telling them that she will return for bread and game. About a week later, following the initiations, she returns, demanding her food. This pattern of distribution and collection parallels the agricultural pattern of planting and harvest. After visiting the children, the group goes on to the Kivas, where they repeat their demands for food. Lively, comic negotiations are held with the Kiva chiefs about the quality or quantity of the food being offered. At times these become fiercely realistic and intense, with men being dragged out of an offending Kiva and thrown down on the roof with their heads hanging over the edge, as the Natackas prepare to saw through their necks. Women and children watching from the house tops scream and shout, while the children cry in terror as they recognize their fathers, brothers, and uncles among the victims. Invariably, the Kiva chief comes up with an acceptable offering, and no heads are ever actually lost.<sup>17</sup>

Haihaiwuqti's Kachina is represented in shabby clothing and with her hair only partly done up. Her unkempt appearance is explained in an alternative version of the story of the fall of Palatkwapi, according to which the city was the center of great wisdom, and had been planned by the Kachinas who were then living among humans. In this version, the city is attacked by evil people who have been refused admittance to it. When the attack comes, Haihaiwuqti has just gotten out of bed and is putting up her hair. Hastily she throws on her clothes, grabs her bow and arrows, and goes out to defend the city. It is for this reason that she is so untidy. Eventually the city falls, and Kachinas never again dwell among humans, except in memories kept alive by the masked ceremonies.<sup>18</sup>

Among the Zuni, this character's appearance is explained differently. Called Ahe'a because of her plaintive cry, and known as the great-great-grandmother of the Kachinas, she is regarded as the bringer of longevity. As such, she is the only one among the Kachinas to age—hence her shabbiness as well as her habit of talking to herself. She cooks for the rest of the gods, and is known to possess an extremely good nature. She always forgives the other Kachinas, even when they play tricks on her or get mad and kick her for making mistakes in the dances.<sup>19</sup>

The Mudhead Clowns, their bodies covered with mud from a sacred spring, and their face masks misshapen by irregularly placed seed-filled lumps, present a study in opposites. They are impotent fertility spirits and are at once supremely silly and divinely wise. Mudhead humor is truly Aristophanic, consisting almost entirely of social and religious satire. Their clowning freely ridicules the most sacred and personal areas of life, without regard to propriety or the violation of taboos. This very freedom to ridicule is used as a tool to enforce social discipline. The Mudheads are considered to be the most dangerous of the Kachinas, and merely touching one can cause madness.<sup>20</sup> As has been mentioned, the Hopi acknowledge the Zuni origin of the Mudheads. In some Hopi festivals, these clowns make a point of speaking in Zuni, or of singing Zuni songs, and they carry a unique Zuni-style drumstick with which they beat their magic drum.<sup>21</sup> This drum is known to contain a sacred butterfly, which causes anyone who hears the drum to follow—and anyone who follows to go crazy. By some accounts, it is an irresistible love charm.<sup>22</sup>

According to Zuni legend, the Mudheads are the children of incest. A brother and sister, sent out to "find the center," in the days when the earth is still soft and formative, are overwhelmed by sexual desire for one another. In their struggle to resist this passion, a mountain is split in two, and a river pours from its midst. The first child of their union is an hermaphrodite, the remainder Mudheads.<sup>23</sup> In marked contrast to the phallic Satyr chorus that accompanied Dionysos, the Mudheads are anti-phallic. Unlike other Kachinas, they wear no breechcloth beneath their kilt, and indeed, often appear naked. A cotton string tied around the penis prevents erection, and symbolizes their impotence.<sup>24</sup>

The Kivas in which the Hopi present these puppet plays are rectangular in shape, windowless, and built down into the earth. A ladder leading through a hatchway in the center of the roof is the only access to the world above. In the floor, directly below this entrance, is the sipapu or world navel, an orifice which represents the point of entry to the underworld. In its physical form, the Kiva is an ideogram of the path of human emergence into the present Fourth World, up out of the previous three, which are conceived as being nested within one another. Its location within the earth is extremely important, as John Lansa, a Hopi leader, explains:

We sit here in the Kiva which is the womb in the Earth. This Kiva is our church and our school. Here in the Kiva is where our leaders work. In here we have our ceremonials, here in the Earth so that Nature will work in harmony with people. When we have ceremonials, this keeps the natural forces together.<sup>25</sup>

While the houses and fields above the earth's surface are the property of the Clan Mothers, the subterranean Kiva is a male precinct and the focus of ceremonial life among the Hopi.

On arriving for the Palulukonti performances, each newcomer, clambering in turn through the rooftop hatch and down the ladder, is greeted by the Kiva Chief and the other spectators. The Chief smokes as he tends his greasewood fire. The chamber's dim interior is hot in contrast to the winter chill outside, and thick with the smell of the fire. The eastern half of the Kiva's floor is raised above the western half, and the audience, numbering perhaps fifty or sixty, fills the upraised portion, the lower section being reserved for the performances.

Performers travel from Kiva to Kiva and village to village with their presentations, announcing their arrival with a hoot or loud cry at the hatchway, and sometimes by throwing a ball of meal or handful of seeds down into the Kiva as well. The audience invites each group in with great enthusiasm. A genuine theatricality is shown in these performances, especially in the case of the Water Serpent plays. Lanterns are suddenly dimmed, and a blanket held over the fire plunges the chamber into darkness. When light is restored, the western half of the Kiva is discovered to have been transformed, as if by magic, by the setting for the action. A second such blackout conceals the removal of the setting and exit of performers at the end of the presentation.

The audience, composed almost exclusively of women and children, is characteristically boisterous. Jesse Fewkes, who was most sensitive to the ritual aspect of the play, has described them excitedly praying, shouting, and throwing corn meal blessings on the puppets during the performance.<sup>26</sup> Leo Crane, who felt the play was primarily for the entertainment of the children, has recorded their shrills of delight, gasps, and audible sighs of anticipation, as well as their laughter at other presentations during the evening.<sup>27</sup> The play is accompanied by the continuous blasting of gourd trumpets, representing the Serpent's voice, or "water talk." The noise of the crowd and the blaring trumpets, together with the sounds of drum, song, rattle, and earth-pounding, rhythmic dance, combine into an impressive aural tapestry within the small chamber.

Performers of the puppet plays do not need to belong to any particular clan or society, and a presentation is never made by the same Kiva society two years in a row.<sup>28</sup> Both the Hopi and the Tewa Indians, who have a village on First Mesa, have their own versions of the plays; and, as previously noted, Zunis occasionally take part in the preparations. Consequently, there is a good deal of variation in their performance. The puppet plays are directed primarily at the children in the audience, as Crane suspected, and rules of secrecy about backstage operations are especially strict as a result. Despite these facts, which seem discordant with Western preconceptions about the nature of sacred ritual, the puppets are treated strictly as sacred objects. These very same figures are used in the solemn adult ritual of Soyoluna, at the winter solstice.

When not in use, the Serpent puppets are kept in sealed jars

in the Clan Houses. When they are taken out for use, honey or sugar water is squirted on them, and a "heart" of volcanic glass is placed within each body. Before their first performance, a troupe goes down to a sacred spring in ritual procession. The group is led by an elder and the Kachina Mother impersonator. Each carries a tray of corn meal. Next come the puppeteers bearing their puppets and the trumpet players with their gourd trumpets. After a ritual of smoking, the trumpeters step into the spring, blowing into the water with their horns; then the puppeteers dip the heads of their Serpents into the water. Following this, the troupe returns to the village, with shouts and trumpets blaring, ready for the evening's first performance.<sup>29</sup>

Looking at once ferocious and strangely comic, the Water Serpent puppet has round bulging eyes, a crazily lolling red tongue, and saw-like teeth, often painted red. The head is made from a gourd or carved from cottonwood. It bears a single curved green wooden horn, and a crown of hawk feathers. Eyes (and udders in the case of the Mother Serpent) are packed with seeds. The body is an accordion-like tube of cloth or buckskin, measuring up to five feet in length, and sewn to a series of willow rings. The top of the body is painted black, the underside white. Markings along the body are the same as those seen on the kilts of the Summer Snake Dancers, and represent frog and bird tracks. The figures may be rigged to be manipulated as rod puppets, glove puppets, or marionettes.

Despite the considerable variation found in these plays, a small number of basic scenarios emerges from the accounts. Each is associated with a different style of puppet manipulation. In each of these scenarios, there is one invariable scenic element: a miniature field of corn, living corn shoots which have been germinated in a Kiva prior to the performance and mounted into cones of clay. Set out in regular rows, complete with furrows marked out in the sand floor, these are normally knocked over by the Serpents some time during the course of the play. After the play, the corn shoots are distributed among the audience as luck-bringing blessings to be placed in the fields.

The marionette form of the Serpent is manipulated by strings attached to rattles held by the puppeteers. The strings are run over ceiling beams to give a greater range of movement. The Serpents are made to emerge from water jars decorated with tadpole

and raincloud motifs. Four cloth flaps, fastened around the jar's rim, form a cover which represents the rain clouds of the four directions. Accounts of the early migrations of the Hopi clans mention similar water jars, containing small Serpents, which could be planted in any location where it was desired that a spring should flow.<sup>30</sup> One tradition relates that, when the Tewa Indians first came to settle among the Hopi on First Mesa, they deposited two such Water Serpents in a spring outside their village. Later, when quarrels arose between the tribes, the Hopi would have driven the Tewa out, had it not been for their fear that their Water Serpents would have retaliated by bringing on earthquakes.<sup>31</sup>

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### SCENARIO I: THE MAGIC WATER JARS

As seen by Alexander Stephen at Walpi, 1893; similar performances mentioned by Stephen at Walpi, 1892, and by Jesse Fewkes (the only mention of the episode with the Mudhead wrestler).

1. The darkness in which the scenery is set up is preceded by a procession of Mudhead Clowns, led by Haihaiwuqti to the beat of the Mudheads' drum.
2. Suddenly the Kiva is plunged into darkness, and when the light returns two water jars are discovered, sitting on a bed of pine boughs, with the miniature corn rows arrayed in front of them. The Mudheads sit in a semi-circle behind the vases.
3. As the Mudheads begin to sing, a Serpent emerges from each vase, and dances to the movements of their rattles.
4. One Serpent extends itself to full length toward the ceiling; and a Mudhead gets up to wrestle it, but is inevitably overcome.
5. As the song reaches its climax, the Serpents lunge out and scatter the miniature cornfield.
6. As the song ends, they intertwine, and return into their water jars.<sup>32</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*



Plate I B. Mudhead with Serpent, Scenario I.

The rod puppet is a more common manipulation type. The rod, or "backbone," runs through the body to the head. The puppet is operated from behind a decorated screen of cloth or wood. This screen serves as a backdrop to the action, as well as a masking for the manipulator, and is known as the Water Serpent's "house." The cloth type may be rigged so that it can be raised dramatically by means of ropes, strung over the ceiling beams. Images painted on the screens may include rain cloud, lightning, bird, and frog motifs, as well as a number of Kachina deities. Hinged disks, ringed by plaited corn husks or turkey feathers, represent the Sun or Moon; and cover the openings through which the puppets make their explosive entrances.

\* \* \* \* \*

## SCENARIO II: THE BATTLING MUDHEADS

As seen by Fewkes at Walpi, 1900; similar performance seen by Paul Coze at Second Mesa, 1971.

1. A chorus of ten Mudhead Clowns enter and dance to the beat of their drum.
2. The Kiva is darkened and the set-up made in darkness. The screen is an open framework. Two disks, representing the Sun, are hung from the frame. The remaining space is filled in with evergreen boughs. Along the top of the frame is a row of cloud symbols of different colors, each containing a frog or bird motif. In front of the screen are the miniature corn field and the Mudhead chorus.
3. When the trumpeting begins from behind the screen, the Mudheads begin dancing vigorously.
4. The disks in the screen suddenly swing open, and the Serpents emerge, swaying and darting at one another and at the audience. In one move, the field of corn is overturned, and the two Serpents intertwine.
5. Mudheads approach, one by one, to wrestle with the Serpents; each, in turn, is thrown. One young Mudhead mounts a Serpent and rides it like a bucking horse.
6. With a final roar, the Serpents depart.<sup>33</sup>

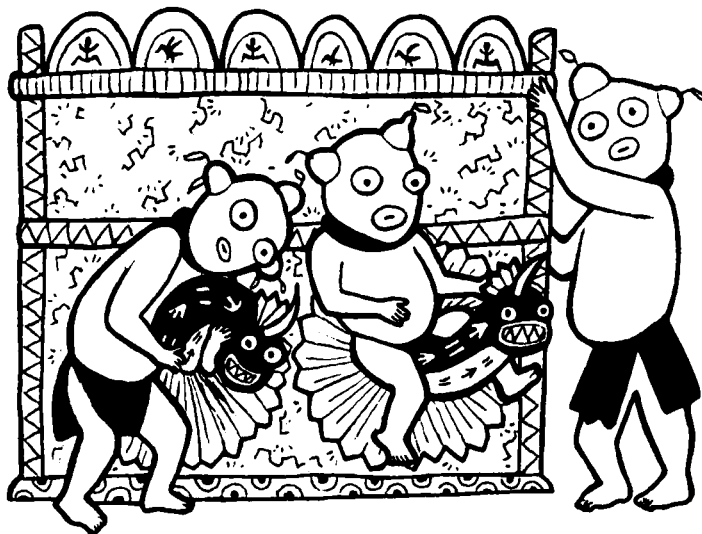


Plate II C. Battling Mudheads, Scenario II.



\* \* \* \* \*

The glove puppet version fits over the puppeteer's arm. A short rod inside the body of the puppet extends his reach. A false arm is worn by the puppeteer to complete the illusion that the Serpent is a separate being. The puppeteer impersonates Macibol, the Corn Man, who is identified with the Sun, and adapted from the familiar Zuni Shaliko Kachina. The puppet is called the "Struggler," since it appears to struggle with its handler. Its struggles are referred to as its dancing, and the manipulator is seen as trying to restrain its excitement. Jesse Fewkes thought its dance portrayed the Sky God wielding his lightning.

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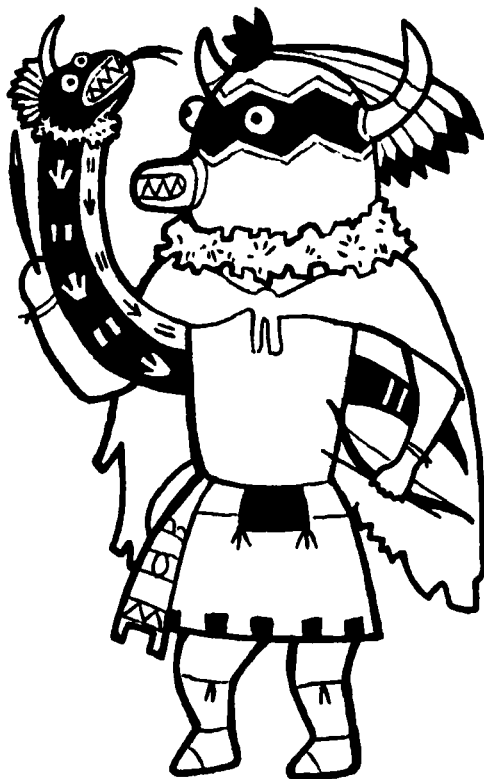


Plate II B. Shaliko, the "Corn Man," with the "Struggler."

### SCENARIO III: THE SUCKLING

As seen by Stephen at Walpi, 1893; similar performances described by Fewkes at Walpi in 1900, and Stephen in 1892.

1. The painted screen, set up in darkness, has two small disk openings, representing the Moon, and four large disks, representing the Sun. It is further decorated with paintings of Shotokunungwa, the Star God, and the Shalako Mana, or Corn Maidens. The miniature corn field is laid out in front.
2. As the trumpeting begins from behind the screen, a low growling comes from those in front. A line of five mixed Kachinas (Navajo, Duck, etc.) sing and dance in place at either side of the screen. Their song makes an appeal to the Clouds and Lightning to come and bring rain to the plants.
3. As the song begins, the disks swing open and Serpents are thrust through the openings. They move in unison, in time to the music, sometimes darting at one another and embracing.

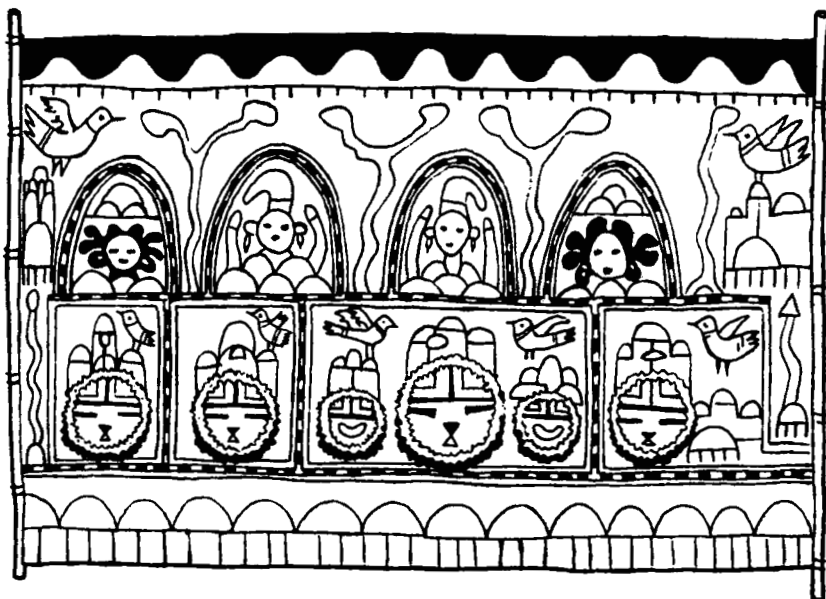


Plate I A. Screen for Scenario III.

4. One large puppet (the Mother), in the central Sun disk opening, her udders packed with seeds, suckles the small Serpents (her Children) at either side of her in the smaller Moon disk openings.
5. Macibol, the Corn Man, dances in front of the screen, holding the Struggler, which tries to escape his control to embrace the other Serpents.
6. Haihaiwuqti, the Kachina Mother, passes in front of the screen, giving each Serpent, in turn, her breast to suck.
7. She passes by a second time, feeding each of them from a tray of corn meal, and blessing them in her weird falsetto voice.
8. Meanwhile, the music builds in intensity, changing to a faster tempo. Suddenly, the Serpents dart their heads across the floor, knocking down the miniature corn rows.
9. The song diminishes in volume, and the Serpents slowly withdraw. With a final roar from the trumpets, the room is plunged back into silent darkness.<sup>34</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*



Plate I C. Haihaiwuqti, the Kachina Mother.

A regular feature of the Palulukonti evening is a display of corn grinding, performed by a pair of Maidens, perhaps in reference to the corn grinding by the young nephew in the legend of Palatkwapi. This corn grinding is repeated the next day in the plazas. Most often, the Maidens are portrayed by live performers, but they may also be represented in the Kiva performances by puppets. The Corn Maiden puppets have conical bodies of cloth sewn to willow rings, in the same manner that the Serpent bodies are constructed. They are manipulated from behind by sticks connected to their heads. Their jointed arms are controlled by strings, which pass up and out through the back of their elaborate head-dresses. They always appear in pairs, displayed in door-like openings in a decorated screen.

As in the Water Serpent plays, a miniature corn field is laid out in front; but in no recorded instance of the scenario is it knocked over—it is only threatened. Even so, the corn shoots are distributed to the audience at the end of the play, together with the corn meal supposedly ground by the puppets. A bird puppet, representing a long-billed water bird (a snipe or sandpiper), regularly appears with the Corn Maidens. It is manipulated simply, on a single rod. The Water Serpent may—but does not always—appear with them.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### SCENARIO IV: THE CORN GRINDING

As seen by Leo Crane on First Mesa, 1910; similar performances, but without the Water Serpent, described by Hopi informants to Fewkes, and seen by Stephen at Walpi in 1894, by Elsie Parsons at Hano in 1921, and by Mischia Titiev at Hotevilla in 1934.

1. A mixed group of Kachinas arrives. In an episode of comic action, one of them (He'e'e) offers a drink to the fire tender and to another Chief, tipping the gourd when they try to drink, so that they are doused with water. He later rewards them with cakes.
2. The Kachinas give the order to dim the lights. In the darkness, they begin to sing to the accompaniment of flutes and shell rattles. They punctuate the song with their individual hoots and cries, creating an eerie cacaphony.

3. When the lights are restored, a painted screen consisting of several panels is discovered. The only Kachinas still in sight are two He'hes, crouched to either side of the screen. The screen is decorated with rain cloud and falling rain motifs. The two Corn Maiden puppets are set into openings in the central panels, their grinding stones before them on the floor. A miniature cornfield is arrayed in front of their stones.
4. A song begins, and the Corn Maidens, standing upright, move their arms in time to the music, appearing to dance.
5. As a second song begins, they bend down to grind their corn, raising their hands at intervals to their faces.
6. The bird puppet flutters back and forth along the top of the screen, piping and whistling.
7. A Water Serpent comes twisting out of a side panel in the screen and darts among the corn rows, then retreats back into the screen.
8. At the end of the second song, a tiny broom is placed in the hand of each Corn Maiden, and they pretend to sweep the corn meal they have ground onto a little tray. Meal from the tray and corn shoots from the miniature field are distributed to the audience as blessings.<sup>35</sup>

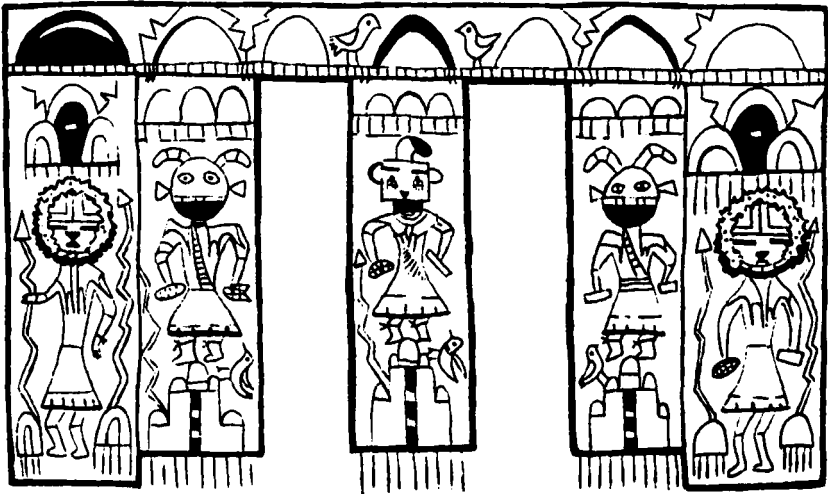


Plate III B. Screen for Scenario IV. Open spaces are for Corn Maidens, Sun Face disks open for entrance of Water Serpents.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the Palulukonti festival attended by Mischia Titiev in 1934, the Water Serpent did not appear in any of the presentations. Titiev concluded that the absence of the Serpent puppets indicated that they were being displaced by the Corn Maidens, although he did note that Water Serpent themes were maintained in the songs that were used. During the Corn Grinding play that he saw, the Water Serpent's characteristically explosive action was emulated by a Kachina representing Shotokunungwa, the Star God. He would pop up from behind the screen, twirling a bull-roarer and shooting a lightning frame (an expanding lattice device) at the miniature corn field.<sup>36</sup>

The Star God is among the Kachinas frequently depicted on the Water Serpent screens, as are the Corn Maidens. Shotokunungwa is known as the "heart of the sky god." He too, like

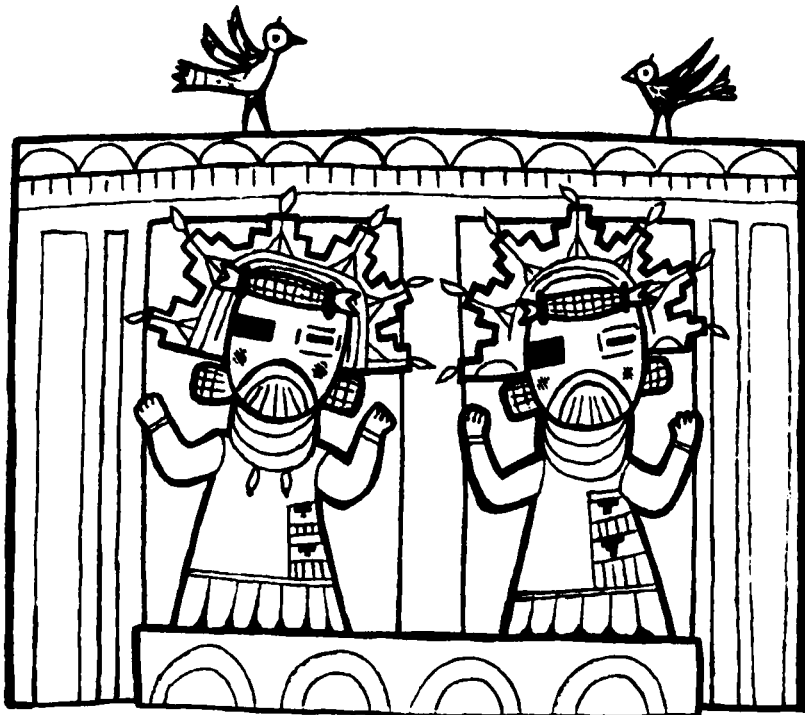


Plate III A. The Corn Maidens.



Plate II A. Shotokunungwa, the "Heart of the Sky" God, with his lightning frame.

Masau'u, is a patron deity of the Kwan Warrior Society. According to legend, he is the Earth's husband; and when they have intercourse, it rains—the rain being his semen.<sup>37</sup> Like the Water Serpent, Shotokunungwa wears a single horn, which is said to represent his "male Lightning."<sup>38</sup> Clearly, the Water Serpent's place was taken by the star God's lightning, a substitution which confirms the phallic association implicit in the Serpent's shape.

A frank eroticism characterizes many of the Palulukonti presentations. The two He'hea Kachinas mentioned in the Corn Grinding Scenario are potently erotic Kachinas, whose bodies are

decorated with phallic motifs. The He'hea are also closely associated with Haihaiwuqti, and accompany her on her Powamu food-gathering visits. One example of their sexual by-play was recorded by Jesse Fewkes on the occasion of a Powamu visit to the Kivas. A group of men, impersonating girls, came out of their Kiva to dance; only to be rudely thrown over and assaulted by the lust-filled He'hea's.<sup>39</sup> At Palulukonti, they regularly assist the Corn Grinding Maidens by carrying their grinding stones, in both the live and puppet versions, in the Kivas and in the Plaza performances on the next day.

The Water Serpent, with his nurse Ahe'a (the Zuni version of Haihaiwuqti), is known to the Zuni Indians from its appearance in a festival held in late March, at the time when young boys are initiated into the Kachina Cult. The Serpent, known to the Zuni as Kolowisi, enters the village in a procession together with the Initiating Kachinas at sunset of the day before the initiations. The puppet, virtually identical to the Hopi version, is operated by a spinal rod. Its head is projected through a wooden tablet decorated with cloud patterns. Two bearers carrying spruce trees mask the puppeteer, who blows his shell horn continuously as he operates the puppet with one hand. A whistling bird puppet, like that which appears in the Hopi Corn Grinding Scenario, follows the Serpent.

The Water Serpent spends the night in a Kiva, where the shell horn is blown continuously. With him are the Initiating Kachinas. He is also joined there by Ahe'a, who lies with him and suckles him all night long, as if she were his mother. According to legend, the other Kachinas try to keep Ahe'a from attending the initiations because they are ashamed of her aged appearance, her tangled hair, and her ugly clothes. Some believe that their real reason for wanting her to stay behind is so that she can cook for them. She slips away from them anyway, because she can not bear to be separated from the Water Serpent. This explains her later arrival, and the fact that she begins to suckle him from the moment that she catches up with him.

This suckling motif, which has also been encountered in the Hopi plays, suggests an irresistible association with the nursing Maenads of Dionysos, as described by Euripides in *The Bacchae*:

. . . Breasts swollen with milk, new mothers who had left their babies behind at home nestled gazelles and young wolves in their arms, suckling them.<sup>41</sup>



The passage goes on to describe the Maenads' magical abilities to produce water, wine, milk and honey out of the earth. The nursing of the infant Dionysos played an important role in his cult.

The suckling of the Water Serpent is repeated the next morning outside the Kiva. The puppet's head is thrust through the Kiva wall, while the Kachinas dance for him in the plaza. It must be explained that, although Zuni Kivas have the same type of rooftop entrances, they are not built down into the earth like those of the Hopi. Because of this, they may have windows. The Serpent's rain cloud tablet is attached to the wall of the Kiva, covering such a window opening. The puppet's head is then thrust through the tablet. Ahe'a dances up to the wall, and offers her breast, which the Serpent licks and sucks with obvious pleasure. She carries spruce branches in her hands, and as she dances she tells the people she is praying for them to have happy and long lives.

Later in the afternoon, or in the early evening following the initiations, the Serpent is taken, in what must be seen as a phallic procession, to visit the Kivas where the initiates are. At each of these he disgorges fertilizing talismans down upon the novices. It is said that he vomits his bounty because he has so gorged himself on Ahe'a's milk. His arrival is announced by the whistling bird puppet, which is made to run up and down along a pole thrust into the Kiva through the hatch. Then, the Serpent puppet is thrust inside and water, collected at a sacred hot-spring, is poured through the tube of its body into bowls held by the initiates below. The water is followed by grains of corn, then bunches of fresh grasses gathered from the spring. The water is drunk by the boy and his family, and sprinkled on their store of corn. The grasses are likewise stored with the family's corn, while the corn grains are saved to be planted in a special part of the family's field.<sup>42</sup>

As mentioned previously, the Water Serpent puppet plays a significant role in the unquestionably sacred rituals of Soyaluna, the Hopi winter solstice observance, which begins the Kachina season for each year. According to Jesse Fewkes, Soyaluna belongs principally to the Kwan Warrior Society, which, as we have seen, is strongly associated with the Water Serpent. Soyaluna Kiva rites have both a public and a private portion.

The public portion is enacted before an all-male audience. An

alter made of stacked corn is erected against the western wall of the Kiva, with artificial shrubbery arranged to either side, and in front. A light framework, with closely bunched artificial flowers attached to it, extends from the top of the corn pile to the ceiling. The flowers may be of many colors, with dark red and white predominating. A large gourd lies in the midst of the shrubbery, with a Water Serpent puppet protruding from a hole in it. One Chief approaches and casts a handful of meal toward the puppet, then says a short prayer. At the end of his prayer, the head of the Serpent rises slowly, and four roaring blasts are sounded from a conch horn as the head quivers and waves, then lowers to rest back on the edge of the gourd shell. This is followed by the sound of a scapula being drawn six times across a notched stick. After each of the Chiefs present has repeated this action, the spectators leave.

A frenzied shield dance follows. One group after another enters down the ladder, one of their number bearing a sun shield ringed with radiating eagle feathers. This individual takes his place on a plank placed over the sipapu hole, which acts as a natural drum. Energetically and repeatedly, he jumps outward toward the rest, who have divided into two opposing lines. He brandishes his shield against them, but each of his advances is repelled, and he is forced to return to the sipapu plank. Each group dances until their shield bearer becomes exhausted and has to be helped back up the ladder.<sup>43</sup> Alexander Stephen interpreted the Soyaluna shield dance as a representation of the Sun, hesitating whether or not to travel over Hopi territory at the beginning of its annual journey. As Stephen saw it, the two rows battle to constrain it to its path.<sup>44</sup> This seems likely, since the action represented is one of containment, not of combat.

The Serpent arising from the gourd clearly represents a new hatchling emerging from its egg, a metaphor for the rebirth of the generative powers of nature, signaled by the turning of the sun. The shield dance that follows strongly suggests the armed dance of the Kouretes of Ancient Greek legend, who, according to Orphic tradition, were the guardians of the infant Dionysos (mystically identified with the infant Zeus).<sup>45</sup> The Hopi warriors' pounding dance upon the drum-like sipapu plank insistently echoes the drum that accompanied the Kouretes' dance, as described by Euripides:

And I praise the holies of Crete,  
the caves of the dancing Curetes,  
there where Zeus was born,  
where helmed in triple tier  
around the primal drum  
the Corybantes danced. They,  
they were the first of all  
whose whirling feet kept time  
to the strict beat of the taut hide  
and the squeal of the wailing flute.  
Then from them to Rhea's hands  
the holy drum was handed down;  
but, stolen by the raving Satyrs,  
fell at last to me and now  
accompanies the dance . . .<sup>46</sup>

A further parallel can be drawn between this drum, which the "raving Satyrs" stole, and the magic drum carried by the Mudheads.

More important cross-cultural parallels clearly exist between the Hopi Water Serpent and the Greek Dionysos, a deity whom C. Kerényi identifies with the principle of Zöe, the indestructible spirit or essence of life.<sup>47</sup> The central distinction between the two figures, reflecting the condition of their respective cultures, is that the Water Serpent exemplifies the continuity of Zöe, and Dionysos its fragmentation. The relationship to natural forces that each represents is reflected in the contrast between the Serpent's animal form and Dionysos' usual human manifestation.

At Soyaluna, the elders greet the life-force in the cave-like womb of the Kiva as it re-emerges from the egg state of winter. The shield dancers guard and channel the infant force, struggling to keep it aligned with the powerful center of origin, represented by the drum-like sipapu. In the Palulukonti plays, the Mother nourishes this spirit, renewing its contact with the source. Although the foolish Mudheads may battle against the Serpent, they pose no real threat to the continuity it represents.

The infant Dionysos was torn from his mother and hidden in a cave that reverberated to the heart-like beating of the Kouretes' drum. Then, he was lured away from his heavily-armed protectors and torn to pieces by mud-smearing Titans who, in turn, were slain by the thunderbolts of Zeus.<sup>48</sup> The sacred drum

became the property of the Satyrs, who followed a reborn, madness-inspiring Dionysos. Separated from its origins (the Mother), the force of Zöe fragments and becomes a source of insanity. This myth betrays the condition of a culture badly out of balance, a condition further reflected in its belief in the subjugation of the chthonian gods by the Olympians.

Western European culture continues to make a careful separation between chthonic and luminary forces; the underworld versus the heavens; divinely-inspired consciousness versus the demonically-inspired unconscious. Serpent mythology and ritual have been a source of abhorrence and guilty fascination within the Western Cultural tradition from its inception. The defeat of the Serpent or Dragon by the Solar Hero is a central motif throughout Western mythology. The Hopi Summer Snake Dance, in which the celebrants dance holding live serpents in their mouths, was once viewed as a notorious example of savage practices. Gallegos, the first European to write of the Water Serpent puppets, which he saw used in ceremonials among the Pueblos of central and southern New Mexico in 1581, concluded that the puppet was the Devil, who held the Indians enslaved.<sup>49</sup> This tendency to automatically interpret the mythology of other peoples in terms of a cosmic battle between forces of dark and light reflects a cultural prejudice which only obscures the true meaning of imagery such as that under discussion.

The Hopi Water Serpent embodies a unifying principle which brings heaven and earth together in an unbroken cyclic whole, through the visible medium of lightning—which is, itself, a union of the opposing elements of fire and water. Such a joining of opposites is also the focus of Western alchemy, which Carl Jung found to be a rich treasury of archetypal imagery, expressed in exceptionally direct and clear terms. In alchemy, this unifying factor is also represented by a Serpent, the Ourobourous or Hermetic Dragon.

The "alchemy" the Water Serpent presides over is that concerned with the agricultural cycle of dormancy, germination, and growth (the unblocked flow of Zöe). The very use of puppets, brought forth from buried storage jars, like life newly emerging from the seed or egg, is symbolic of the animation of natural forces, seen in the springtime revival of dormant life. The elements of fire and water, brought together by the Serpent, provide the heat and moisture necessary for germination. These

conditions are produced artificially in the Kivas in order to sprout the corn shoots used in the puppet plays out of their natural growing season. The association of the Water Serpent and his Nurse with the initiation of children also relates to this principle of germination and growth, which is essential to insure the continuity, growth, and balance of the community.

A further alchemical association is seen in the embracing and intertwining of the Serpents, which recurs in the puppet plays. This suggests the double-helix serpent staff of Hermes, the god of the Alchemists. It is a motif which leads, in turn, back to the Dionysos of Orphic tradition, since, as C. Kerényi relates:

. . . Zeus pursued his mother Rhea and when she turned into a serpent he did likewise, entwining her in a so-called Herakleatic knot, entered into union with her. The sign of this form of union is the staff of Hermes. Afterward he entered into union with their daughter Persephone . . . by taking the form of a serpent and raping her. She bore him Dionysos.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, Hermes was the guide to the land of the dead, which is also the responsibility of the Kwan Society members, who wear the Serpent's single horn.

Dionysos' mother, Persephone, is another connective figure, linking the world above with the world below in her role as queen of Hades. She spent half of the year in each realm. Haihaiwuqti presides over a similar annual cycle, as mother of the Kachinas—among whom are included spirits of the Hopi dead.<sup>51</sup> The Kachinas visit the villages for half the year, then return to their spirit world on the San Francisco peaks.

Semele, the alternate—mortal—mother assigned by Greek mythology to Dionysos, was consigned to the land of death by Zeus' lightning, and was worshipped at her tomb. The infant god had a first birth from his mother's corpse; then, removed like a seed from a piece of fruit, he was planted and germinated in the male womb of his father's thigh.

Persephone, Semele, Haihaiwuqti—all are Great Mother figures. Their relationship to the spirit world of ancestors points to their key position in the unconscious, and their dominion over the archetypes. As described by Frank Waters, Haihaiwuqti's children are clearly expressions of the "Manas":

The kachinas . . . are the inner forms, the spiritual components of the outer physical forms of life, which may be invoked to manifest their benign powers . . . They are the invisible force of life . . . <sup>52</sup>

In her role as the mother of the Kachinas, who bring good things, and the mother of the monsters, who enforce social discipline, Haihaiwuqti exemplifies the dual aspect of the Great Mother: nurturer and destroyer. The Corn Maidens bring an additional nurturing maternal influence, which, in these plays, effectively protects the crop from the threat of destruction. Continual nourishment by the Mother insures the continuity of Zöe, in the case of the Water Serpent; just as separation from the Mother led to a disruption of Zöe, in the case of Dionysos. This condition is further reflected in the matrilineal structure of Hopi society and the patriarchal structure of ancient Greek society.

The theme of incest, encountered in the conception myths of both the Mudheads and Dionysos, also has bearing upon germination. Claude Levi-Strauss has interpreted such incestuous unions found in myth as originating in the urge toward an eternal summer of vegetation; which, if realized, could only bring corruption—in the same way that eternal winter could only bring sterility.<sup>53</sup> As the fruit of uncontrolled desire, the Mudheads are like seeds sown in muddy earth that cannot germinate, but must rot from the over-abundant moisture. In battling with the Mudheads, and even in overturning the corn field which has been grown out of season, the Water Serpent is clearly acting as defender of the natural cycle. The sexuality implicit in the visual image of the young Mudhead attempting to ride the phallic Serpent in Scenario II is highly relevant to this context. The Mudheads display a comic hubris in trying to control or overcome a force they do not possess and cannot comprehend. By their opposition, their own impotence stimulates the potency of the world around them.

Hopi legend frequently alludes to the primordial muddy condition of the earth, and the danger of its return to mud. An analogy can be made to a muddy, or pre-civilized, state of human society. The rules of civilized behavior (which the Mudheads freely violate) exist to prevent society from returning to this formless and ultimately sterile condition. The Water Serpent is thus

put in the position of culture hero, defending the balance of society, as well as of nature. This role is further emphasized by the importance placed upon the teachings given by the Serpent of Palatkwapi to the two children, since, as has been previously noted, the education of children is of fundamental importance to the continuity of a civilization—the Zöe of a society.

The hermaphrodite is an alchemical symbol of great potency. Mischa Titiev sees in this figure a fundamental acknowledgement that the mingling of the sexes into a unity is the necessary basis of agriculture.<sup>54</sup> The hermaphroditic sibling of the Mudheads was the first fruit of an irresistible union, which caused the division of the waters from the earth, putting an end of the planet's unformed muddy state, and making it receptive to seed. In producing corn shoots out of season, the Kiva becomes a male womb, which, like incest, violates the laws of nature. In this context, the Kiva, like the male womb of Zeus' thigh, is an Hermetic Vessel. Bisexualism in the representation of female figures by males, or as seen in characters such as Masau'u, who combine male and female attributes, is an important feature of the Kachina Cult.

The play of the Horned Water Serpent asserts the primacy of the established cycle of nature, acknowledging its power over human life without hesitation. Because it is expressed in dramatic terms, it makes a forceful, participatory affirmation of the process. There is implicit the acknowledgement of the overwhelmingly destructive potential power, which can be unleashed whenever the natural balance is threatened.

Ritual drama, by enacting the archetypes, puts them into action. It has no need to tell a story; it only needs to perform an action. It operates from the instinctual knowledge that the same laws that govern nature govern the human psyche. A society dramatizes that which it finds to be its most persistent source of anxiety or joy. In these plays, we see a vocabulary of symbolic elements at work, assembled into an action which portrays the Hopi's emotionally charged relationship with nature. The principle of catharsis, in the sense of a release or feeling of freedom, that comes from empathetically viewing the worst which life can deliver, is, no doubt, in operation in the depiction of the destruction—or threatened destruction—of an essential crop.

The origins of theater are ever-present in the human psyche. Dionysos and the Water Serpent are both representations of the

archetype presiding over the cathartic release of emotional energies, which is necessary to relieve any blockage in the flow of Zöe. They are present within us all, at all times and places. Taking different forms according to societal needs, the psychic factor they represent brings forth drama under the appropriate conditions.

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54. Mischa Titiev, *The Hopi Indians of Old Oraibi*, 153.

### ILLUSTRATIONS

Line drawings by William R. King are based on the following sources:

PLATE I A: Alexander Stephen, *Hopi Journal I*, Plate X.

PLATE I B: Jesse Fewkes, *Hopi Katsinas*, Plate XXVI; "A Theatrical Performance at Walpi," Plate XXXIV.

PLATE I C: Jesse Fewkes, *Hopi Katsinas*, Plate VII.

PLATE II A: *Ibid.*, Plate LVII.

PLATE II B: *Ibid.*, Plate XXVI.

PLATE II C: Jesse Fewkes, "A Theatrical Performance at Walpi," Plate XXXIII.

PLATE III A: Jesse Fewkes, *Hopi Katsinas*, Plate XXVII.

PLATE III B: Alexander Stephen, *Hopi Journal I*, Plate XI.