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Shoshone Tales. Collected by Anne M. Smith, assisted by Alden Hayes, foreword by Catherine S. Fowler, with an afterword by Beverly Crum. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993, xxxv + 188 pp., \$29.95 (hard cover).

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With the publication of this volume, and a companion one of Ute stories also collected by Anne Smith, the literary study of Great Basin mythology is ready to begin in earnest. The present work contains 113 stories from 15 narrators. The stories are wisely arranged by narrator, each of whom becomes a literary personality; that is, equivalent to authors in publishing and in literature classes.

Thus, each narrator presents a version of an ever-changing oral "book" which I call a *mythology*; that is, it is a single narrator's full, complete set of traditional tales that are believed to be true, deal with ancient, originating events, and are nearly impossible to prove or disprove. Such a mythology, or book, never would be told completely in one sitting. And, being memorized by a sequence of episodes rather than by sentence (as in chants) or by syllable (as in songs), each story in a mythology is told in slightly different words on each telling, even by the same narrator. Hence the mythologies' ever-changing nature, albeit within strict parameters.

Smith and other myth collectors throughout the tribal world have been able to approach myth narrators, and with hours of hard work and good fortune, take down the highlights of the narrators' work. This is analogous to obtaining

chapter sketches from the author of an unfinished novel (one thinks of Tom Wolfe), but in the case of the tribal mythologies, there is the additional step of translating the chapter sketches into another language.

The most booklike mythology in the collection is a set of 17 stories, totaling 33 pages, obtained from Commodore, a Gosiute man. The set lacks a creation-of-humans myth (others of Smith's narrators provided this), but it provides myths on the origin of human death (the first text in Commodore's set), of human reproduction and birth (as opposed to the abnormal or supernatural creation of the first humans, as in the first creation of humans), and of fire. Then Commodore relates several longer stories containing characters who might be described as "human-animals," that is, humanlike creatures who carry the name and some of the physical, and perhaps the perceived, moral traits of present-day animals; for example, Coyote, Cottontail, Bat, Bear, Chicken Hawk, and Sun (a human-animal-cosmic body). It is as if the earlier group of human origin stories, "Part 1" let us say, leads to a long interlude when humans are no longer at the center of or even involved in the action. The topics of this "Part 2" appear to be marital life prior to or outside of the institution of marriage as known by humans (Gosiutes and Shoshones), family life prior to normal human family life, and passions prior to or beyond the human pale. In short, the topics pertain to something akin to Western philosophers' idea of a state of nature, but represented here by deliberately, yet ambiguously, marked zoomorphs, or "anthropozoos," on the analogy of the word "hermaphrodite." Hermaphrodites fuse genders, hence the word roots "Hermes" and "Aphrodite," while these

anthropozoos fuse humans with other species. The stories of this part of the mythology have variants in other works of Smith's narrators.

"Part 3" is a rarity in North American (not only Basin) mythologies, namely, two stories which assimilate whites and their cultural items to established regional plots. One story runs from thievery to warfare and features two brothers (the anthropozoos Coyote and Wolf), while the other story deals with gambling. Commodore does not stop there, but I cannot see a unifying theme or progression in the fourth "part," his final run of stories.

The final word on authorial organization in multi-myth mythologies, in effect the existence of a level of literary construction beyond the single myth, is best left for collections made under more intimate and relaxed circumstances. Smith and Commodore, for example, had only a few days in which to get acquainted and to set down the myths, while a few years (in the manner of Franz Boas) would certainly have been better. Ideally, of course, the native mythologists would write their own books. This has not often come about in Native American literature, but the dissemination of books such as this one, organized by native author-narrators, may bring full authorship closer.

What aggregate impression emerges from these 113 stories? My answer, formed mainly by the most numerous texts in the collections—stories corresponding to the second group told by Commodore—is that the myths give a Hobbesian impression of the ancient past, in which life was nasty, brutish, and short. Here are some examples, not chosen at random, but backed by many episodes like them.

Nasty: "The old woman told him he would come to a place where there were lots of genital parts of women. These parts ran all over at night. If they saw anyone the labia would just clamp on all over the body everywhere, and smother the person to death. The old woman told him he must get there before night came and make himself a tunnel, a hole underground, and cover the mouth

of it with sagebrush to disguise it. She said he would hear those genitals making a clapping, slapping sound. He made his tunnel and got in. He heard the vulvae slapping all night" [from "Cannibal Bird" by Anna Premo, pp. 54].

Brutish: "Coyote asked Bear if he wasn't afraid to travel on that road. Bear asked Coyote the same question. Coyote asked Bear to vomit so he could see how many people he had eaten. Coyote told him to shut his eyes and vomit it out. As soon as Bear vomited, Coyote ate some of it.

Then it was Coyote's turn to vomit. Coyote vomited and vomited fresh meat. He vomited more than Bear. They weren't afraid to travel on that road, for they were both cannibals" [from "Coyote and Bear" by Commodore, pp. 17-18].

Short: "They knew that the baby was Little Bat [reborn] when he started talking. The oldest sister told the youngest sister to kill the baby. The youngest sister killed the oldest sister instead of the baby. She didn't want to kill the baby. The baby was hard to kill. The youngest sister jumped like a frog and the baby could not catch her. The two girls killed a lot of people. Little Bat chased the girl home and killed her" [from "Bat" by Commodore, pp. 36].

That the Shoshones took a Hobbesian view of the ancient past does not mean that they advocated such conduct among themselves. Indeed, as noted above, the characters in these myths are notable for not being human. Even the first group of Commodore's myths, and the other narrators' counterparts to them, are not really about humans. Rather, the stories are about anthropozoos planning and determining what the human era will be like for the Shoshones and Gosiutes. Thus, not only does a Hobbesian view of the past distinguish Shoshonean myths from those of other native North American regions, but also the Shoshoneans tend to lack central characters who are fully human rather than anthropozoos. Of course, these matters are better discussed relative to multi-myth mythology "books" than to individual myths, and I would add that animal or animal-like characters are surely common throughout New World mythologies. It is just that the animals' presence

is relatively unleavened by full humans in the myths of Shoshone and other Basin peoples. (A good discussion of this is in Bierhorst [1985], the only recent book comparing the mythological literatures of the continent.)

Now, if the above reading is roughly correct, we can see the importance of treating myths as imaginative literature rather than as ethnography, that is, descriptions of how Shoshones actually lived. We should be chary of all attempts to read current or recent past ethnography—food practices, marital customs, habits of government—from myth. Accordingly, a literary attitude is not merely a high-toned option to bring to myth study, but an imperative. This is not to say that a people's mythology has nothing to do with their present circumstances. Thus, these Basin Hobbesians might receive an extraliterary explanation. My point is simply that mythologies should not be taken as straight ethnography. They should be taken as straight literature, and like all literature they may be explainable by secular, extraliterary factors such as how the people, including the authors, actually lived.

Turning now from interpretation to practical and documentary matters, Smith's collection was made before the era of tape recorders and without the opportunity or means to write down the native language originals. As such, the collection is rather good for questions of plot (the issues treated above), but not good for questions of performance or verbal art (sound, poetics, word choice, etc.). This is not a complaint, but a documentary fact, and it is for the era of tape recorders and native peoples' writing programs to make up for that lack. Thus, Wick Miller (1972) has published 14 stories, including several from Gosiute narrators. Commodore was not mentioned in this collection, probably because he was no longer living, although Miller and some of his sources must certainly have known of him. My concern with multi-myth mythologies is not broached by Miller, but he more than compensates by pro-

viding Gosiute and Shoshone language texts, and by tying his English translations sentence by sentence, in fact phrase by phrase, to the native language originals. Finally, at the end of the Smith book is a Shoshone language text written by Beverly Crum, the daughter of Anna Premo, a narrator recorded by Smith. Crum gives her own English translation for the text "Coyote and Mouse," which her mother had told to Smith.

Missing from the Smith, Miller, and Crum translations is the feel and style of what is called "Red English," that is, the form or forms of English spoken by Shoshones in 1939, 1970, and 1990. I miss this as an art unto itself, but I grant that Red English is not a *written* literary form, and that Smith, Miller, and Crum are correct in writing their translations "properly," that is, with a grammar and a diction that are at home in a school (or in a cemetery, on tombstones). I wish, however, first, that native interpreters' Red English would *sometimes* be published, so we could see in the future how people actually told these stories in English; and second, that Red English would someday be written as vernacular literature.

To conclude: Great Basin literature takes a solid step forward in this volume, and there is much travel ahead.

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