ALAN L. MILLER
Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

The Woman Who Married a Horse: Five Ways of Looking at a Chinese Folktale

Abstract

This tale, first encountered in the fourth-century collection *Sou-shen chi*, contains motifs from several disparate geo-cultural sources, but appears to have originated in China in response to a particular historical and religio-cultural situation. The tale is compared to the Swan-maiden folktale, the Dema-deity myth, and archaic hunting-culture containment tales that feature magical transformations by means of containment in an animal hide or feather-cloak. Multiple approaches are employed, including history of religions, literary-historical school of folklore, literary context, structuralist, and Freudian. It is argued that all approaches point to a process of tale formation that begins with a feminine/bird symbolism and ends with a masculine/horse symbolism as the means whereby the sacred transformation is accomplished. In addition, the tale functions as an etiological myth for the origin of the silkworm goddess and cult in China, and as a buttress for the patriarchal bias of Confucian-dominated Chinese culture.

Key words: silkworm — Swan-maiden — animal-human marriage— containment symbolism

Asian Folklore Studies, Volume 54, 1995: 275–305

THIS article is a self-conscious exercise in what has been called the "toolbox approach to the study of myth" (O'FLAHERTY 1980, 5), or the "polymethodic" approach as opposed to the "methodologically sectarian" approach (SHARPE 1987, 88). It attempts to take seriously both text and subtext, both surface meaning and profound intent. It proceeds in the expectation that the results of what might be called the layers of meaning in a folktale are not necessarily a chaotic collection of disparate claims for supremacy but a converging series that culminates in a complex but coherent whole. Just as in the realm of literary aesthetics it is commonplace to argue that all works of lasting significance possess a complex structure of different but related levels of meaning, so it is asserted here that folktales and myths display a similar complexity and richness. This indeed is their glory and not their shame.

THE TALE

There is a Chinese folktale that turns up from time to time in collections of oral tales, and for which Wolfram EBERHARD (1937, 79–80) provides the following paradigm:

1. A man goes off to war, leaving his household.
2. His wife, after enduring her own feelings of loneliness, finally promises that whoever should bring back her husband will have her daughter as a wife.
3. A horse goes and fetches the husband.
4. The horse is killed because it wants to marry the daughter.
5. The hide is spread out to dry.
6. As the daughter passes by, the hide flies up, wraps itself around her, and flies up into a tree.
7. In this way silkworms are produced.

Eberhard lists this tale as *Die Seidenraupe* [The silkworm], while SEKI

Keigo, in his systematic treatment of Japanese folktales, entitles its Japanese versions "Kaiko-gami to uma" 蚕神と馬 [The silkworm deity and the horse] (1953, 102). IKEDA Hiroko's index acknowledges Seki's title but assigns the tale the English title "Origin of the Silkworm" (1971, 104). I myself call it "The Woman Who Married a Horse" (hereinafter WMH).

What, we might ask, is in a name? Rather a lot in this case. Since the older Chinese versions of the tale have no title the modern scholar is forced by editorial expectations to supply one, and the one chosen presumably reflects much of what the scholar thinks is most important about the tale. Hence my audacity in coming up with a new title of my own.

Ordinarily the Aarne-Thompson classification system provides both a comparative perspective on a tale and a useful paradigm. For reasons shortly to be discussed, however, this is not the case here, and I thus turned to Eberhard for the paradigm above.

CLASSIFICATION: TALE TYPE

Classification of the folktale presents even more of a problem than naming it. Eberhard gives it a prominent position as an independent tale, assigning it number 45 in his index. Nai-tung TING ignores it completely (1978). IKEDA, unlike Ting, acknowledges the Chinese origins of the tale and assigns it to Thompson's motif B611.3, "horse paramour" (1971, 299), although THOMPSON himself cites only Hindu, Japanese, and North American Indian examples of this particular motif (1955, I, 463). Ikeda is also the only folklorist to attempt to situate WMH in the tale-type system of AARNE and THOMPSON (1964), which has become by default the orthodoxy of Western folklore. Noting that numbers 400 through 424 in the Aarne-Thompson system concern supernatural- or enchanted-wife tales, IKEDA categorizes WHM as no. 411E, though here it is the husband who seems supernatural rather than the wife (1971, 104–105).[1]

However, when we actually examine AARNE and THOMPSON's 411 ("The King and the Lamia" [1964, 138], a tale attested to only in India), we find problems in this categorization. The paradigm begins with a king who falls in love with a girl that is really a snake; we have a beginning here, though a strained one, if we get rid of the snake and substitute a horse for the king. After that, however, the whole enterprise collapses under the weight of its own absurdity: the rest of the 411 paradigm revolves around discovering the true form of the woman and then destroying her. To be sure, a treasure is found as a result of her destruction, but this seems an inadequate coincidence upon which to base a classification. One is reminded of the evil stepsisters trying to force

their feet into Cinderella's slipper.

AARNE and THOMPSON 413, "Marriage by Stealing Clothing" (1964, 139), would seem to offer a more fruitful comparison, since it could be argued that the clothes (hide) of the horse are stolen when he is flayed. However, in 413 — which is in fact the Swan-maiden motif treated as a tale — it is the need of the bird-formed maiden to retrieve her feather clothing that makes it possible for the thief to coerce her into marriage. No such plot can be found in WMH, although comparison to the Swan-maiden does yield some interesting results (see below).

So how are we to place this tale within the larger context of folktale research and its comparative apparatus, the motif and type indices? At present we must admit that this is one tale/motif that has fallen through the cracks of the Euro/Indo-centric system of contemporary research, leaving us with the impression that the tale is uniquely Chinese (since the Japanese versions are, as we shall see, obviously derivative). With the exception of the badly outdated work of Eberhard, there is little to rely on when pursuing a comparative perspective on WMH.

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TALE

Three major aspects of WMH are of particular interest, each aspect suggesting several related questions:

1. The motif of magical transformation through covering or containment.[2]
   a. What connection, if any, does WMH have to the Swan-maiden tale, a divine-wife tale and one that gives central importance to the containment motif?
   b. What is the connection of WMH to the Taoist transformation symbolism that can be seen both in philosophical texts like the *Chuang tzu* 莊子 and in popular Taoist tale literature?
2. Animal-human marriage; this is almost always understood to mean deity-human marriage, and is used by folklorists as a key to classifying what they call divine-husband and divine-wife tales (a common subset of which has the divine wife take the form of a bird, as in the Swan-maiden tale).
   a. But why a horse? That is, does the horse have some special significance, or is the choice arbitrary? And what, if any, is the symbolic connection between the horse and the bird?
   b. Why a divine husband and not a divine wife? Is the sex of the human partner significant or is it arbitrary?
3. The female gender of the central character, which differentiates the tale from many others of its type.

a. Is this what A. K. RAMANUJAN (1991, xxv) calls a woman-centered tale, in the sense that it portrays women from a woman's point of view?[3]
b. Or is this a male image of woman, objectified and either idolized or denigrated according to the male uses she is put to?

FIRST ANALYSIS: TEXT AND CONTEXT

Certain of these questions can be answered, and certain of the tale's less problematic aspects clarified, through an examination of the tale's specifically Chinese historical and religious context as revealed in the literary evidence. We are fortunate in that the tale has a literary history that extends back at least 1,700 years. Its oldest literary provenance is the fourth-century text known as the *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 [Records of researches into spirits].[4] The story is retold in a number of T'ang-dynasty texts; one, the tenth century *Chung-hua ku-kin chu* 中華古今註 contains a version remarkably true to the *Sou-shen chi* version.[5] Variations are also found in oral folktale collections (EBERHARD 1937, 79; SEKI 1953, 102).

Here is my translation of the entire *Sou-shen chi* version, generally held to be the oldest.

> There is an old story that a very long time ago a great man left his family to go on a distant military campaign. There remained only a girl and a stallion. The girl cared for the stallion herself, as she was poor and in wretched circumstances. Thinking of her father, she jokingly said to the horse, "If you can find and bring back my father to me, I promise to marry you."
>
> The horse responded to this speech by breaking out and galloping away. He came to where the father was. The father was surprised and happy to see the horse, so he caught and mounted him. The horse, looking in the direction from which he had come, whinnied ceaselessly. The father said, "This horse, being loose like this, the reason must be that all is not well at home." He hastily rode the horse home.
>
> Because the beast was unusual the father was affectionate toward it, and consequently gave it generous amounts of hay. [But] the horse would not eat, [and] each time he caught a glimpse of the girl he would suddenly and passionately rear up and strike out, which happened many times. The father, suspicious, questioned his daughter in secret. The girl told him the entire truth about what must have been the cause of the horse's behavior. The father said,

"Do not speak of this, lest you disgrace the family, and do not let the horse see you."

Then, lying in ambush, he shot and killed [the horse] with an arrow. He then spread the hide out to dry in the courtyard and went away. The girl gave the hide to a neighbor girl and, stamping it with her feet, joked, "You are a beast, and yet you want a human being for your wife?" [The neighbor] took the hide, dressed it, and scraped it — but to what purpose?

The purpose was not yet divulged: the horsehide seemed to creep along, then rose up, wrapped itself around the daughter, and went away. The neighbor became frightened, and, not daring to [attempt a] rescue, went and told the [first girl's] father. The father searched for his daughter, asking everywhere, but he could not find her. After many days he came to a great tree. In its branches his daughter and the horsehide, both transformed into silkworms, were spinning [their cocoons].

The larvae spun thread continuously and in great abundance, unlike ordinary silkworms. The neighbor girl took them and cared for them, and their number increased greatly. Because of this the tree is called the mulberry; the mulberry tree is contained within them.[6] For this reason the farmers all compete to plant it and to this day cultivate it.

So-called "mulberry silkworms" are different from the silkworms of ancient times. When in early morning the horse star rises in the constellation T'ien-kuan 天官 (the heavenly official) according to the official reckoning, and, as the *Book of Silkworms* 蠶書 says, "When the moon occupies the constellation Da-huo 大火 (great fire), then wash the seeds [= eggs?]." This is because silkworms are present in horses; they are of the same essence [*chi* 氣]. The *Chou li* 周禮 [Book of rites] says, "They taught the people to manage the original silkworms properly." A commentary says, "Each of two things cannot be dominant; the original silkworms were restrained because they cause injury to horses." During Han times the empress herself performed a ritual in which she gathered mulberry [leaves] and made sacrifices to the Silkworm Deities, saying, "Lady Wan-yin, Princess Yin!" "Princess" is of course a term of respect for a woman; Lady Wan-yin was the first [to care for] silkworms. (YANG 1974, 101–107; KAN 1922)

Kan Pao (fl. 290–320), the author of the original *Sou-shen chi*, appears to have been a literatus serving the court of Chin (or Western

Chin, 266–316). Those were troubled times: the Han social and political system were in ruins; Confucianism, held partly responsible for the fall of the Han, was in increasing disrepute; refeudalization accompanied the split of the Han territories into three kingdoms, each claiming to be the legitimate ruler of all China; and the mounted warriors of the barbarian Hiung-nu, who had already occupied portions of Chinese territory in the north, were pressing on Chin with ever-increasing ferocity. Kan himself lived through the sacking of the Chin capital at Loyang in 311 and of the subsequent capital at Ch'ang-an in 316. Amidst this instability, slaughter, and ruin, it is hardly surprising that Kan sometimes turned for consolation to popular tales of the strange and miraculous.

Kan was a good friend of Ko Hung 葛洪 (283–364), author of the *Shen-hsien chuan* 神仙傳 [Biographies of the holy immortals] and the Neo-Taoist *Pao-p'u tzu* 抱朴子 [The philosopher who grasps the essence], and clearly shared with him the intellectual pleasures of contemplation and the wondrous transformations that intercourse with the spirit world make possible. But whereas Ko supported his views with straightforward hagiography and a Confucian-Taoist mix of philosophical argument and alchemical formulae, Kan, as official court historian, had more of an antiquarian and literary outlook (DEWOSKIN 1974, 36–39).

Our understanding of the nature of his outlook can be refined if we heed the suggestion of Karl S. KAO, who argues for the literary as well as the historical contextualization of folktales (1985, 27). It can be of great value to examine the other tales with which a particular item is associated in an anthology, provided that the anthology was compiled at a time close to that of the first appearance of the item. For reasons to be given below, there is good reason to suppose that the elements making up WMH coalesced in China not long before the appearance of the *Sou-shen chi*. We will thus employ Kao's suggestion, seeking to discover what patterns of meaning might emerge from an examination of the collection of the nineteen tales that constitute chapter 14 of the *Sou-shen chi*. In this way we can not only further our understanding of WMH but also, perhaps, glimpse the mind of Kan Pao himself.

Sou-shen chi, in 20 chapters (YANG 1974, 101–107)
Synopsis of chapter 14:

Tale 1 [= SSC 340]: Siamese twins are nurtured by a spirit-bird.

Tale 2 [= SSC 341]: A king promises his daughter's hand to anyone who can kill an enemy general and bring back his head. P'an-hu, a mysterious dog, accomplishes the task. The princess makes the king keep his promise and marries the dog. A new race of

people (an ethnic minority) is thus begun.

Tale 3 [= SSC 342]: A child is conceived by a vapor (*ch'i* 氣) in the form of a bird.

Tale 4 [= SSC 343]: A woman gives birth to an egg, from which a child is eventually born; this child later becomes a ruler.

Tale 5 [= SSC 344]: An illegitimate child is born, then abandoned on a mountain, but does not die.

Tale 6 [= SSC 345]: The child of a concubine is suckled by a fox and sheltered by a hawk.

Tale 7 [= SSC 346]: An obstinate servant runs away and is pursued to a cave. His pursuer tries to kill him by setting a fire, but what emerges from the smoke is a spirit-tiger.

Tale 8 [= SSC 347]: A snake-child is born to a woman.

Tale 9 [= SSC 348]: A man finds a large egg in a moor, and a child is born from it. Eventually it is transformed into a snake.

Tale 10 [= SSC 349]: A bird-woman has her feather-garment stolen by a man who forces her to marry him. She gives birth to a snake-child.

Tale 11 [= SSC 350]: The Woman Who Married a Horse.

Tale 12 [= SSC 351]: A woman named Ch'ang-o steals the elixir of immortality from Hsiwang Mu, then flees to the moon where she is transformed into a toad.

Tale 13 [= SSC 352]: A woman dies and is transformed into a strange herb, which in olden times was used to make clothing.

Tale 14 [= SSC 353]: A husband and wife dwell hidden for one hundred years and are transformed into a pair of cranes. Suddenly one morning one crane becomes a human being again.

Tale 15 [= SSC 354]: The Swan-maiden: A young man sees birds in the form of naked women. He steals the feather-garment of one, who thus cannot fly away. He forces her to marry him and three children are born. She finds her feather-garment and flies away again.

Tale 16 [= SSC 355]: During the reign of Emperor Ling-ti (r. 168–188 AD), a certain woman was bathing in a tub of water and, unable to rise, she turned into a sea turtle.

Tale 17 [= SSC 356]: Seeking voyeuristic pleasure, a man peeps through a hole in a wall at a woman bathing, but sees instead a large sea turtle.

Tale 18 [= SSC 357]: A woman changes while bathing into a sea-turtle.

Tale 19 [= SSC 358]: A strange earthenware jar emits a rumbling

sound, and an abundance of food mysteriously appears in its owner's house. Although he is a bad person, he is able, by beating the jar with a staff, to exact the gift of one hundred years of life for himself.

We can see from the above plot synopses that strange or supernatural conception or birth is a popular motif, occurring in seven of the nineteen stories (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10) and implied in two others (11, 15), for a total of 47%. In three tales supernatural nurturings take place (1, 5, 6; 16%). Nine tales (7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18; 47%) contain the motif of strange or supernatural transformations other than births. Tale 19 is the only one that does not display any of these motifs. If we combine conception, birth, and nurturing to create the motif of strange events involving children, then nine tales fit (47%). If we move to a still higher level of generality and check for strange changes of state (that is, transformations), we find that they occur in sixteen of the tales (all but 5, 6, and 19), or 84% of the total.

From this it appears that the intention of Kan Pao, or at least of the T'ang-dynasty redactor (see note 4), was to assemble a chapter of "researches into spirits," which he might have entitled "strange transformations." WMH probably recommended itself to Kan because it centered around this very subject. This interest was no doubt informed by the attitude of Chuang-tzu, who elevated the process of transformation (or change) to a cosmic principle, the very essence of Tao. Thus when Taoist Master Lai lay dying, Master Li admonished his mourners not to disturb the process of "change." He gloried in transformation: "What is [the Tao] going to make out of you next? Will it make of you a rat's liver? Will it make of you a bug's leg?"[7] In the *Chuang tzu* these transformations are not only part of the wonder of existence, they serve to alter our awareness and behavior from an egocentric perspective to a cosmocentric one, the perspective of the Tao itself. Ko Hung's *Pao-p'u tzu*, in contrast, located the power of transformation in the attainment of immortality, that is, in becoming a *hsien* 仙.

Although I will supplement this point with historical evidence below, what we already know of Kan Pao suggests that his version of WMH had an oral tradition behind it, which means, of course, that though he may have modified the tale he did not invent it. DEWOSKIN notes that Kan showed considerable interest in the folk tradition:

Stories of rulers and high officials being bested by spirits, the wealthy losing their wealth and the poor finding sudden wealth, the

> personal lives of high and low alike, the sexual fantasies of the emperors and empresses, the wisdom of the common man triumphing over that of the scholar: many of these were introduced from outside the literary tradition. They were not completely unknown prior to Kan Pao, but no author whose work is known today collected them as methodically as did Kan Pao. This contact with the folk tradition energized the *Sou-shen chi* and made it attractive to a large audience. (1974, 295)

Moreover, it appears likely that Kan Pao cast off the usual literati mantle in the *Sou-shen chi*; rather than seizing upon the folk tradition as an opportunity for moralizing as was the wont of more orthodox Confucians, he seems to have been genuinely interested in the tales as he received them from the common folk (DEWOSKIN 1974, 302). Thus, while he undoubtedly gave the tales some stylistic polish, it seems probable that he did not modify their structure or basic meaning. Remarkably, this same structure is preserved in contemporary Japanese oral versions (MILLER 1993).

IMPLICATION OF THE TRANSFORMATION MOTIF

Tracing the motif of transformation, we can identify in the *Sou-shen chi* version of WMH the following: 1) the transformation of horsehide and woman into silkworms, 2) the transformation of mulberry leaves into silken thread, and 3) the implied transformation of silkworms into moths. The transformation motif is reinforced in Kan's closing editorial comments: "Because of this the tree is called the mulberry. The mulberry tree is contained within them." Kan sees the similarity of pronunciation of the words *mulberry* (*sang* 桑) and *silkworm* (*ts'an* 蠶) as indicating a mysterious correspondence to the physical relationship that results when the silkworms eat (take within themselves) the mulberry leaves.[8] After the leaves are contained within the silkworms they are transformed into silk thread.

The final paragraph — which I suggest is a later addition to the tale by a different editor — strongly reinforces the association of silkworms and horses and at the same time of transformation and its agent, containment: "Silkworms are present in horses; they are of the same essence." It reiterates this connection with the comment that "each of two things cannot be dominant; the original silkworms are restrained because they cause injury to horses." I take this comment about dominance to refer to the two special, sacred worms that resulted from the magical transformation told of in WMH. The author of the last paragraph

is obviously puzzled by the comments in the earlier part of the story (presumably edited by Kao himself) and seems to feels a need to explain the obsolete titles of the Silkworm Deities, Lady Wan-yin and Princess Yin; it is because of this that I suspect the passage to be a later addition.[9]

There is another tale in which Kan associates transformation with the containment and sacrifice of a woman: tale 13 [= SSC 352].

> Emperor She-ta Shan-ti's wife died. She was transformed into a strange herb (*kuai-ts'ao* 怪草). Its leaves were dense and luxuriant. Its flowers were yellow in color. Its fruit was like yarn [spun from] rabbit [fur]. Of old the strange herb was used to make clothing, which constantly benefited the people.

In this tale the woman is transformed into a magical herb, a notion no doubt influenced by the Taoist idea of the herb of immortality. Here the woman provides from her own substance the fiber for life-prolonging and health-giving garments. Through her sacrifice she produces magical containers for other people.

The tale of She-ta Shan-ti's wife cannot be mapped directly onto WMH, however, since the agent of transformation is not mentioned and the containment motif does not appear until the end of the narrative. In WMH so much emphasis is put on the horsehide, the agent of transformation, that the editor(s) of the *Sou-shen chi* apparently seem to have felt it needed explanation, as we have seen. However curious the choice of agent, though, it admirably suits the covering/containing function apparently required. It contains the woman while the mysterious transformation occurs, just as the silkworm contains the mulberry leaves while they are being transformed into silk thread. The silk thread, in turn, is formed into a container (the cocoon) that covers the transformation of the silkworm into a moth. Further, through the industry of the human hand the silk thread can be fashioned into clothing to cover the bodies of other people, as with the yarn from the herb in the tale of She-ta Shan-ti's wife.

Of the sets of transformations inherent in the tale, the one that the editorial wordplay seeks to lay bare can be expressed in a simple ratio, namely, H : W :: S : M ("Horsehide is to Woman as Silkworm is to Mulberry"). Woman and mulberry comprise a kind of mysterious essence out of which come gifts of the spirit world, substances of tremendous value. Yet these substances cannot be released without the catalyst of the covering, the outer, containing devices of hide and worm. WMH also presents what appears to be a redundancy by doubling the symbolism of containment or covering, since woman herself is the container par excellence, the

mysterious giver of life through her womb. Thus, just as horse and silkworm have a symbolic affinity, so do horse and woman: it is as if woman-as-container (which I take to be the more ancient and universal symbol) has permitted the attachment of horsehide-as-container.

The role of woman in this formula becomes clearer when compared to the classic structuralist view of the relation of woman and nature. Sherry ORTNER (1974) follows the Lévi-Straussian view that, at a deep symbolic level, culture is almost universally viewed as the transformation (or transcendence) of nature. Culture is the "cooked" while nature is the "raw." But she argues further that many cultures tend to view woman as the mediator between these two polar opposites. Of course, like all structural mediators woman partakes of both realms somewhat: because within her the two meet and mingle, she is herself of a blend of culture and nature. In this context we might recall that the silkworm is significant only because of its cultural importance. The production of silk by the silkworm (nature) is made possible by the collecting and feeding of the worms, and given meaning by the unwinding, washing, and weaving of the thread (culture). If the horse seems an arbitrary addition, so too would woman seem irrelevant to the origin of the silk industry were it not for this ancient symbolism (and the fact that in ancient China sericulture was "woman's work").

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that this view has been criticized by certain feminist scholars, who see in it a dangerous perpetuation of patriarchal stereotypes of women (LIPPARD 1983, 44). This is not to say that the characterization of woman as cultural symbol is descriptively inaccurate, inasmuch as Chinese culture in the early centuries of the common era — and, for that matter, the Indo-European cultures that appear to have influenced it — were strongly patriarchal. For some feminists, however, the characterization is normatively unacceptable. It also becomes descriptively inaccurate if presented as a form of biological determinism in which it is claimed that this patriarchal characterization is the only one possible.

SECOND ANALYSIS: THE STRUCTURE OF THE TALE

In an earlier study I analyzed a number of Japanese and Chinese tales using the morphology of the Swan-maiden tale (MILLER 1987a). It seems especially appropriate to compare WMH to the Swan-maiden tale, inasmuch as Kan himself includes two versions of the latter as companions of WMH in chapter 14 of the *Sou-shen chi*. The two versions are translated below:

Tale 10 (= SSC 349): [The Swan-maiden Snake Child]
During the Yung-ch'ang era [322 CE] of the reign of Emperor Yün-ti, a man who was plowing a valley field stopped to rest beneath a tree. Suddenly there appeared a woman wearing a feather-garment. [He] debauched her, and she followed him to an unknown part of the valley. After some months she became pregnant. Just as she was giving birth, someone returned the feather-garment [to her]. In it [lay her] power. She put it on and secretly departed. Her son, who had [the form of] a snake, eventually left the valley and became a powerful eunuch in the imperial city. His personal memoirs can still be found in the palace there.

Tale 15 (= SSC 354): [The Swan-maiden]
As he was making ready for his morning's work, a young man of the Hsin-yin District saw in a field six or seven women. All were naked, and he perceived that they were birds. He got down and crawled towards them and, coming to where one woman was, untied her feather-garment, took it, and hid it. Then he departed. The birds flew away, but one could not leave. The young man took [the garment] in order to get a wife. She gave birth to three girls. Their mother later sent the girls to find out from their father the location of the garment. It was under a pile of rice. [She] was able to [put] it [on] and fly away. Afterwards she repeatedly returned to meet the girls and then would fly away again.

The Swan-maiden tale (S-M) can be divided into the following five sequential elements, or "motifemes" (DUNDES 1964):

S-M motifemes	Events in S-M	Events in WMH	WMH motifemes
1. Lack	Poverty, lack of wife (S-M flies down, removes garment)	Poverty, lack of father (Promise, father returns)	1. Lack
2. Treachery	Garment stolen	Horse killed (Horse flayed; hide hung up)	2. Treachery
3. Unstable marriage	S-M forced to marry thief (temporarily)	Hide wraps girl, carries her off (she is transformed = dies)	3. Unstable marriage
3a. Fruits of marriage	(Children born)		———
4. Struggle	Husband seeks wife (Husband finds and rewins wife in the sky)	Father seeks daughter (Father finds mulberry tree and discovers daughter	4. Struggle

		transformed into silkworms)	
———		Wealth gained, girl becomes silkworm deity	3a. Fruits of marriage
5. Stable marriage	Husband and wife live happily together		———

Although the two tales differ at the level of the paradigm, the above tabulation reveals that structurally they are more closely related. Clearly they both belong to the genus of "divine spouse" folktales, although the Swan-maiden tale has a divine wife whose husband is eventually apotheosized while the WMH tale has a divine husband whose wife is eventually seen to be a goddess. Thus we have a tale in which the active role is taken by the woman (making the promise, caring for the horse) in the beginning of the tale and by the father (killing the horse) in the middle of the tale. This is the reverse of the Swan-maiden tale, where the man takes the active role in the first part (theft of the feather-garment, forcing marriage), and the woman takes it in the middle (rediscovery of the garment, flying off into the sky). Both reserve the struggle of the search for the lost woman (spouse or daughter) to the man.

The fact that in both tales the man does the final seeking regardless of which marriage partner is divine raises a new set of questions. In our tale it is the woman's father, not her husband, who loses and then seeks her after the marriage. This means that it is not only the marriage that is unstable but also, and perhaps more importantly, the father-daughter relationship. This prompts us to ask whether the main concern of WMH at the motifeme level might not be the father-daughter relationship, a possibility that invites Freudian interpretations, to be considered below.

There is also the matter of the location, in the structure, of the principal symbolic elements. In the case of the Swan-maiden these elements are the feather-garment, the bird herself, and the weaving motif. The functionally parallel symbols of WMH are the horsehide, the horse, and the weaving motif. We can represent the situation thus:

S-M Motifemes	Symbols in S-M	Symbols in WMH	WMH Motifemes
1. Lack	X	X	1. Lack
2. Treachery	X B, G	X H, G	2. Treachery
3. Unstable marriage	X –G	X +G	3. Unstable marriage
3a. Fruits of marriage	X	—	———
4. Struggle	X (W), B, G	X	4. Struggle
———	—	X (W)	3a. Fruits of marriage
5. Stable marriage	X		———

In this table "X" means the motifeme is found in the tale, "B" means that a bird appears at that point in the narrative, "G" means that the garment appears (–G indicates the lack of the garment), "H" means that a horse appears, "W" indicates that the weaving motif is present, and "(W)" means that the weaving motif is implied but not explicitly stated.

The above table reinforces the impression given by the motifeme analysis, namely that the two tales share a common structure (motifemes 1–3) at first, but then diverge (motifemes 3a–5). The appearances of the symbols is exactly the same for the first three motifemes (allowing for the substitution of horse for bird and horsehide for feather-garment). After that, correlation is slight. For S-M, the fruits of marriage (motifeme 3a) come before the struggle that results in a reuniting of the couple (stable marriage, motifeme 5), while for WMH, the fruits of marriage (the silkworms) come only after the struggle, which merely results in the discovery of the miraculous transformation. This combination of structural similarity and difference seems to confirm the suspicion noted above that WMH is both structurally and symbolically a remake of S-M, perhaps for the more comfortable transmission of certain cultural values involving the relative positions of men and women, but also as a means of promoting the transformation motif so dear to the heart of popular Taoism in the post-Han period.

Third Analysis: Myth and Ritual Aspects According to the History of Religions School

This tale, on the face of it, would seem to function as an etiological myth supporting the religious significance of the silk industry. Generalizing, it appears to show a mythic worldview founded upon what Mircea Eliade calls the prestige of origins, that is, a worldview that sees some, perhaps all, wealth and creative, productive power as having their source in archetypal events. Thus we are quick to note that the worldview represented here is hardly confined to China; indeed, it is found in the folk and mythic traditions of diverse peoples throughout the world. And, if our tale is not part of a cosmogony, as Eliade would have preferred, it nonetheless tells of a hierophantic event that brings into existence a new and wonderful thing, the silkworm. In such a worldview, creativity is heterogeneous, discontinuous, and thus fundamentally sacred. Moreover, as I will attempt to demonstrate, the silkworm so divinely produced is also richly symbolic.

Consulting our repertory of myths from around the world, we can delineate within WMH at least two major mythic elements. First is the motif in which a deity, specifically a goddess, is killed and from her body

parts come a variety of species-gifts, such as the food plants vital to human survival (JENSEN 1963, 88–115). Although this motif has an echo in the Japanese myth of the killing of the food goddess Uke-mochi 保食 by the impetuous Susano-o 須佐能男, no memory of its repetition in bloody sacrifice remains in the Japanese records, overlaid as they are with the curiously impoverished mythic justification for flooded-field rice cultivation. In China too, while a tradition remains of sacrificing a sheep and pig to Hsien Ts'an 先蠶 (first [cultivator of] silkworms) just prior to the ceremonial feeding of the imperial silkworms in spring, there is no record that these rites were associated with WMH.[10] The strongest ritual celebration of the Dema myth is found in the East Indies, where it functions as the basis for important rites of animal sacrifice, involving especially the pig. The sacrificial animal takes the place of the goddess and the primordial murder is repeated. Thus is the gift of food repeated and the prosperity of the coming year assured. According to JENSEN,

> the [Dema-] deity is killed by the Dema, an event with which the primal era ends and today's world begins. The Dema become men, mortal and propagating — this is the main point; the deity henceforth exists in the realm of the dead or transforms itself into the house of death. From the body of the deity originate crop plants so that the eating of the plants is, in fact, an eating of the deity. Its [ritual] repetition means no less to mankind than a constant remembrance of the divine act which stands at the beginning and from which all things stem. (1963, 167)

The Dema myth is an origin myth associated with archaic tropical cultures whose economy and religious cults center on the cultivation of tubers (JENSEN 1963, 89, 166–68). Its most probable route to China would be via Southeast Asia.[11] Its ability to survive out of its tuber-growing culture is already apparent from the Japanese example; by the time it appears in China it has already been adapted to serve the needs of sericulture, with silk production being substituted for food production; the mythic murder is kept but the murder itself is not recapitulated in ritual animal sacrifice. In China the Dema myth, rather than relating the primordial events through which the world was radically altered to its present form, recounts in the form of WMH the sacred origin of the silkworm, thus giving the silk industry religious meaning and ontological status.

The second mythic motif embedded in WMH, namely the animal or celestial spouse and the associated transformation by means of contain-

ment in the animal-god's pelt, appears to have originated to the north and west of China. Here, in the area from Central Asia through Mongolia and much of Siberia, is the home of myths built on these elements and of aboriginal religions centered on the figure of the shaman. In these areas, where agriculture was not practiced, remnants of an archaic hunting culture continue to survive to the present. In these cultures the killing of animals was a way of life, so that every successful hunt resulted in the death of animals who were conceived of as sacred beings. The common worldview held that the bodies of all animals contain souls, that is life essences, which return to a land of animal souls at death, there to await reincarnation. Human rituals can aid the process of reincarnation and thus help to replenish the supply of game. The soul was somehow associated with the skull, long bones, and hide of the animal. A well-known example of such beliefs is the bear cult found throughout aboriginal Siberia but perhaps best known from its Ainu version, still observed in the twentieth century on the Japanese island of Hokkaido (KITAGAWA 1961). In the bear cults a representative animal was raised in captivity, treated especially well, then slain so that its soul could return to the land of souls, there to tell all — including perhaps a divine "Master of Animals" — how well humans treat their prey. This would make other animals eager to be taken in the hunt.

When this process goes wrong — that is, when the rituals fail to ensure an adequate hunt — shamans are called in to discover the reason for the failure. They do this by means of their ability to go, in trance, on a "spirit journey" to the land of the gods and spirits, usually located in the sky. This journey is usually thought of as a flight, which explains both the prevalence of bird symbols (such as feather robes in the shamanic costume) and the myths of descent from birds (MILLER 1987b, 74). These tales of divine wives often make use of the Swan-maiden motif to establish a marriage with a bird-formed deity; the semidivine children of such marriages establish the lineage of shamans. In WMH the use of the slain animal's hide, especially when coupled to the motif of magical flight as expressed in Eberhard's paradigm and implied in the *Sou-shen chi* version, strongly suggests a survival of the archaic hunting worldview.

Shamans were known in ancient China, although the Chinese shaman may have used trance more to achieve a state of possession than one of projection (journeying); the *Shih ching* 詩經 tells of the impersonator in the autumn ancestral rites who appears to have been possessed by the honored dead. There is a suggestion of both shamanic journeying and possession in the *Ch'u tz'u* 楚辭.[12] Numerous shamanic *wu* 巫, usually

women employed in rainmaking and fertility rituals (SCHAFER 1951, 149, 155, 167), were active in the fifth century CE, although their influence is thought to have declined after the triumph of Confucianism in the Former Han (NEEDHAM 1956, 137). The *wu* were largely absorbed into the overwhelmingly male ranks of the popular Taoist practitioners, such as the *tao shih* 道師 (masters of tao) and the more elusive *hsien*, or immortals (though the shamanic past of the latter can still be seen in the fact that they are often pictured in feather robes [NEEDHAM 1956, 141]).

The fact that the slain animal in WMH is a horse rather than the commonly hunted bird, deer, or bear strongly suggests a northwest Asian and possibly ultimately an Indo-European influence as well. In China this cultural layer was transmitted by the Scythians and other horse-mounted nomadic peoples on the northern and western periphery of the empire. Although little is known of Scythian religion, it has been established that their most commonly sacrificed animal was the horse. Further, an important annual ritual involved a horse whose path on a day's ride established a symbolic kingdom, thereby renewing the power and sovereignty of the actual king (RAEVSKII 1987, 147). Related to this are ritual horse sacrifices and associated myths found among other Indo-European peoples, including the ancient Irish, Romans, Greeks, Iranians, and Indians (O'FLAHERTY 1980; 1987). Certainly the most detailed account of a horse sacrifice now known comes from the Vedic texts of India. This is an Aśvameda ritual whose name can be understood as a conflation of *horse* and *medhu* (cognate to English *mead* and thus an intoxicating drink, referring perhaps to the sacred blood of the sacrificed horse). In this rite a horse was ritually killed, and after draping the ensemble with a linen cloth (*kampīla*), the queen (*mahiṣī*) lay down beside the stallion and mimed copulation (DUMONT 1927, 275–77). All the while the priests and others in attendance engaged in a kind of word magic, making ribald remarks that until recently translators have refused to render into English (KEITH 1967, 615–16).[13] The horse was addressed as "O Blessed One! O thou who art clothed in the *kampīla*!" Moreover, the harvest resulting from this ritual copulation specifically included food, wealth, and sons (DUMONT 1927, 277). Presumably the queen was sanctified by the ritual process, that is, transformed by the ritual containment into a goddess of cosmic fecundity and renewal; she married the horse, whose power was appropriated by the king whom it ritually replaced.

Sacrifice in China as elsewhere is a ritual form that admits of multiple functions as well as multiple interpretations. Fortunately it is not necessary for us to solve the enigma of sacrifice, which some scholars obscure as much as illumine in their search for a single essence, meaning,

or origin. One eminent scholar has developed a classificatory system of five groups into which the twenty-one Han dynasty official ritual observances can conveniently be grouped: 1) sacrificial/propitiatory, 2) exorcistic/purificatory, 3) fertilistic, 4) cosmological, and 5) ceremonial (BODDE 1975, 388). It is interesting that examples of the killing of animals and the offering of plant and animal gifts can be found in each of the categories. It can be argued that the archetypal sacrificial ritual in Chinese culture is the ancestral rite of spring and autumn, which is in structure and intent a rite of hospitality. Whether the sacred powers that are invited, entertained, and fed be ancestors, the spirits of natural phenomena, or euhemerized human exemplars, they are usually treated as honored guests at a family gathering. None of the dimensions of such a gathering is lost in the sacred rite: the sacrifice is itself a gift to these powers, partly to honor them, partly to pay a debt, and with the hope of gifts in return. It is not clear whether at some remote time a great emphasis was put upon the killing of animal victims or upon the blood that was spilled, as in some traditions. However, analysis of the characters used to write the various words for sacrifice indicates elements meaning food (饗 *hsiang*), sheep (羹 *hsiang*), bird (醮 *chiao/tsiao*), meat (祭 *chi/tsi*, 胙 *tsu*), the vessels used to hold the gifts (豐 *li*, 器 *ch'i*), and the process of roasting or burning (醮 *chiao/tsiao*).

Nancy JAY (1992) has recently offered a new interpretation of certain types of sacrifice that connects them to kinship lineages. Her thesis is that these sacrifices were invented by men in order to compensate for the fact that they were born of women. Men, in other words, attempted to buttress patrilineal notions of descent by establishing cult groups that perpetuated a male-dominated ideology. These restricted descent to those belonging to the group and its central mystery, namely, the ability to sacrifice. Thus because women can do something that men cannot — give birth — men invent something that they can do and women cannot: sacrifice.

Extending this argument in ways that Jay did not, it seems reasonable to claim that a certain symbolic symmetry is at work here as well. Women, who create life, spill blood during both menses and the birth process. The spilling of blood is thus the symbolic key to the production of life. What can men do to counter this? What have they of their own? If they cannot give life by means of the blood mystery they can at least take life by the spilling of blood. And what women do biologically and thus by nature, men can undo ritually and thus by culture; what is more, they can make it their exclusive prerogative. This is most clearly seen in Jay's comments upon the precolonial Hawaiian religious system,

which exhibited a clear "opposition between the genealogical and sacrificial systems'" that reflects and in turn is reflected by an opposition between men and women:

> Men's childbearing is superior to women's childbearing, that is, sacrificial reproduction of social and political order is considered superior to sexual reproduction of individuals. The inferior genealogical system, in which the sexes are joined, is impure; the sacrificial system, in which the sexes are separate, is pure. (JAY 1992, 77)

In suggesting application of this theory to China I do not propose to indulge in a detailed discussion of Chinese kinship structure. It is sufficient to point out that in historic times China has been a strongly patriarchal society in which kinship is exclusively reckoned in the male line; women, adopted into the husband's lineage at marriage, are required to revere their husbands' ancestors and not their own. Nor do women preside at sacrifices, although the rites dedicated to Hsien Ts'an may have been an exception. As we begin to reweave the various strands within WMH we will have occasion to return to the subject of male-female rivalry, to which Jay has sensitized us.

To summarize, we have three apparently disparate religious elements that seem to have come together in WMH. First is the endemic Chinese silkworm cult, which involved spring rituals conducted by the women who tended the silkworms, feeding them and ultimately unwinding their cocoons. The rites began with a sacrifice to Hsien Ts'an, whose generic name strongly suggests that the rituals were latecomers without a supporting myth.[14] The religious symbolic milieu of these rites must have carried with it an awed respect for the transformative power of the worm that spun out the container within which it metamorphosed into a moth. At the same time the sacred worm converts mulberry leaves into valuable silk thread, a commodity of great economic as well as religious significance.

The second element is that labeled Dema: the creation through fragmentation of wonderful, sacred gifts, gifts which seem originally to have been seen as the product of the murder and dismemberment of a deity. This too, be it noted, is a kind of mysterious transformation, yielding, like the transformation of the silkworm, valuable and even archetypal divine objects of culture- and life-transforming value.

Third is the archaic hunting layer, associated with divine-spouse myths, shamanic flight, the ritual killing of animals, and the power of animal hides as agents of transformation and rejuvenation. Related to this

layer, or at least attached to it, is the horse, whose function and symbolic meaning remain problematic. If, as seems most likely since it has been reinforced at every stage of our analysis, the basic meaning of WMH is divine or divinely assisted transformation, we now must ask what contribution the horse makes to this meaning. What is transformative about a horse? And how does the horse become associated with the silkworm?

Fourth Analysis: Symbolic Content

Why a Horse?

We now are in a position to enquire into the symbolic function of the horse in Chinese culture up to the fourth century CE, when the *Sou-shen chi* was compiled. We find that horses were known to the Chinese as far back as the Shang dynasty, where they were used by the nobility to draw chariots in war and the hunt. However, it was not until conflict with horse-mounted nomads in the west and north worsened that the horse came to take on significant religious dimensions. Our evidence for this comes from the famous series of expeditions undertaken by Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty at the end of the second century BCE, the object of which was to procure from Fergana (a kingdom in west-central Asia) what the emperor called "heavenly horses." Although horses were increasingly needed by the Chinese for their mounted campaigns against the nomads, these particular horses seem to have had a ritual significance, as among the Scythians of whom Herodotus wrote, and as among other Central Asian nomads, the ancient Iranians, and the ancient Indians.

Arthur Waley has translated a Chinese hymn celebrating the return of the successful expedition in 101 BCE:

> The Heavenly Horses are coming,
> Coming from the Far West.
> They crossed the Flowing Sands,
> For the barbarians are conquered.
> The Heavenly Horses are coming
> That issued from the waters of a pool.
> Two of them have tiger backs:
> They can transform themselves like spirits . . .
> The Heavenly Horses are coming;
> Jupiter is in the Dragon.
> Should they choose to soar aloft,
> Who could keep pace with them?
> They will draw me up and carry me
> To the Holy Mountain of K'un-lun.

The Heavenly Horses have come
And the Dragon will follow in their wake.
(WALEY 1955, 96–97)

Waley also alludes to numerous legends of horses emerging from water — a river or the sea — and of kings being carried to heaven upon the backs of sacred horses. India may have been the source of such legends,[15] since possession of the sacred horse Valaha (Cloud) was one of the marks of the Cakravartin, or universal monarch. Valaha came from the sea and acted as a sort of psychopomp, carrying the soul of the monarch to its heavenly reward (WALEY 1955, 99). So much was this idea en vogue in China that an instance is recorded in 113 BCE of someone who, wishing to present a "horse of strange appearance" to the Chinese court, pretended that it had emerged from the river where it was found drinking (WALEY 1955, 98).

Certainly in the above-quoted hymn the association of horse and water is explicit; it is reinforced powerfully by the association of the horses with a dragon, the water-spirit par excellence who dwells both in surface water (pools, rivers, lakes, the sea) and in the clouds and rain. The dragon represents the power of life, of fecundity or renewal, and thus of immortality (DE VISSER 1913, 35–42). In the above hymn the horse is clearly seen as a disguised dragon; the Central Asian/Indian notion of the sacred horse has probably been assimilated to the Chinese dragon. The earliest mention of a "dragon-horse" (龍馬 *lung-ma*) in Chinese literature appears to be in the writings of H'ung An-kuo 孔安國(140–85 BCE):

> The dragon-horse is the vital essence (*ch'i* 氣) of heaven and earth. Its body has the shape of a horse but with a dragon's scales. Thus it is called a dragon-horse. It is eight ch'ih and five ts'un in height. At its side there are wings; it walks upon water without sinking. When a holy-man sits upon the throne it emerges from the middle of the Ming River bearing a map upon its back. (DE VISSER 1913, 58, n. 4).

That such a notion was still current in Kan's time is confirmed by the report of Wang Chia (fourth century CE) of a "swift dragon-horse" (龍之駿 *lung-chih-chün*) with wings that pulled the emperor's carriage (SYT, III, 1a). The *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽, compiled in 983, records that in 741 a dragon-horse was born to an ordinary mare who had been impregnated by drinking river water (DE VISSER 1913, 59).

The planet Jupiter alluded to in the hymn is in China the "year

star," whose movements through the zodiac on a twelve-year cycle associate the planet with a given year. It was of course especially auspicious that the horses arrived in the Year of the Dragon. The "Holy Mountain of K'un-lun" is an earthly paradise believed to be the abode of the immortals, whom Emperor Wu passionately wished to join.

Horse and Bird

All of this suggests that in WMH it is not the horse's royal associations that are relevant, or even its connection with water. What is relevant is the horse's role as fecundator and its power of flight — that is, its association with heaven, the source of archetypal patterns and the sacred power of transformation. That in Vedic texts the horse often possesses the bird-like power of flight is intriguing, although as a direction for further exploration it is too tangential for our present purposes. Suffice it to say that, according to one respected scholar of things Indo-European, a flying horse is not really a horse with wings but simply a very strange sort of bird (O'FLAHERTY 1992). This view reinforces my own notion that the bird is the more ancient motif, in WMH at least. Thus the horse rides upon the bird, as it were, and not vice versa. It is of some interest that the famous Kansu horse, excavated from an Eastern Han Dynasty tomb (second century CE), represents a gracefully pacing horse with three feet treading only air and the fourth resting upon the back of a flying bird. The effect is unmistakable: the horse "flies" upon the back of the bird (SULLIVAN 1984, 65).

Following up this train of thought, then, let me suggest that the Swan-maiden tale might have provided the fundamental symbolic pattern for WMH. The long-established pattern is: The Swan-maiden flies down from the sky to earth in the form of a waterbird — a swan or sometimes a goose. She is thus associated with the fecundating waters, the mysterious source of life. She transforms herself into a woman by removing her feather-cloak, that is, her bird form. As she bathes in the water her feather-cloak is stolen by a man, who forces her to marry him and bear him children. Her body and the water in which it is immersed have the power of life; as a waterbird she contains within herself the essence of both the sky world and the water world — as does the Chinese dragon, which combines the power of the celestial waters and the terrestrial waters, of the rain, mist, and clouds as well as the lakes, rivers, and springs. The transformation of the Swan-maiden is also double: she changes her form from the divine bird to the human woman, but she also produces children. In this context children must be seen as the result of the transformation of the male principle by the woman. She takes into

herself — contains — the male and out of that makes a child.

In our tale the horse is symbolically male, and as a male he has usurped the power of the bird, which I would argue is symbolically female. He has usurped the bird's female power of flight, usurped her divine status, and even partly usurped her power of transforming containment by means of his hide. This is a reversal, a symbolic conquest: he takes the woman into himself and thereby brings about the transformation. The children are the silkworms, a tremendously important source of wealth in ancient China. Thus, despite the Indo-European pattern of horse sacrifice and despite the masculine power of the horse (regardless of its actual sex), our Chinese story originally is and irreducibly remains a tale about a symbolically feminine power, clumsily appropriated by the stallion.

Our analysis of WMH so far seems to have uncovered a sexual rivalry, with the tale reflecting, at one level, men's jealousy of women. Women's power always seems superior, perhaps because symbolically speaking women can give life while men can only take it. Worse, women's power is hidden, mysterious, creative, and forever beyond the grasp of men. But men keep trying, and turning a bird into a horse is a neat trick if you can do it convincingly. How to do it? Since the best lie is the smallest lie, why not take an old pattern that celebrates feminine transformative power and substitute a male for the female?

FIFTH ANALYSIS: FREUDIAN INTERPRETATIONS

Judith DE LUCE (1993) has noted the Freudian implications of the rivalry between the girl's father and the horse, and of the girl's "joking" promise to marry the horse. In this view the promise would represent the girl's sexual desire for the animal.[16]

This seems to require some assignment of symbolic representation to the horse: For what would it stand? Children, FREUD assures us, often displace their fears upon animals, using them symbolically to avoid the too direct consciousness of their real fear (1950, 128). Our first assumption, then, is that the girl's sexual attraction for her father has made her fear retaliation from her mother, her rival. The horse would then symbolize the vengeful mother. Yet for several reasons this seems impossible. First, we seek in vain to find the mother represented as a rival or even as a counterforce; in those versions where she appears she seems an altogether sympathetic character who is concerned for the well-being of her daughter. She initiates the action, then retires from the drama. Second, the male sexuality of the horse is necessary for the "marriage" to occur.

If the horse is not the Electra-mother, then perhaps it is an aspect of the Electra-father: the father is the desired, but at the same time the feared, object of the girl's affection. She wants his exclusive love but knows that she is not ready for the full expression of that love. She thus splits the father into two aspects, seeing him consciously as good, kind, protecting, and desirable, and unconsciously (i.e., symbolically) as bad, threatening, beastly, intimidating, and unknown (BETTELHEIM 1976, 75). But then the death of the horse at the father's hands becomes problematic. We must assume that it somehow represents the good father's rejection of the incestuous advances of the girl, so that in effect the good father "kills" the bad father. We would then have an adolescent fantasy in which the child fails to move beyond the Electra stage of development, having been unrealistically successful in gaining the undivided love of the father. What then to make of the flaying of the horse and the hide wrapping around the girl as an act of sexual consummation? It must symbolize the adolescent fear of sex. Freud also argues that children often think of actual, physical sex as an act of violence (as witness the probable etymology of the Anglo-Saxon word for the sex act, from a term meaning "to strike"). That the girl dies (or at least is borne away, never to be seen again) would fit this childhood fear. But, again, why the horse? The horse dies but somehow doesn't die. Moreover, the covering and containment are for Freudians strong feminine symbols of the womb and gestation, symbolic functions they fulfill given the outcome of the "birth" of the silkworms.

But what of the silkworms, the ostensible "work" of the tale? They would presumably be the fruit of the marriage, that is, of the incestuous relationship with the horse/father. Then the message of the tale becomes that forbidden acts, if performed with or by a divine being (the divine horse-husband), yield precious gifts. We are left with an antimoral tale in which the Freudian program of overcoming the Electra state of development is negated and its opposite lauded.

Of course, if one argues that the silkworm portion is a later addition, then one must posit a primordial tale that tells of the incestuous relations in a more straightforward way. Such a tale would presumably have a cautionary ending in which both horse and girl die without producing silkworms or anything else of value. This possibility, in conjunction with the above-mentioned difficulties in applying a Freudian interpretation, suggest that the Freudian associations may be accidental and secondary. They may have lent piquancy to the tale and thus aided its long-term survival, but they may have no connection with its primary, or original, meaning.

Before giving up on Freud, however, let us attempt another way of applying his insights to the tale. Let us assume that WMH portrays not an early Electra stage of the child's development but a late one, namely, the stage in which the girl is transferring libidinous energy from the father to a separate object, a young man with whom marriage and sexual relations are realistically possible and socially sanctioned. This situation is represented in Freudian literature as a variant of the well-known folktale "Beauty and the Beast" (B & B). Thus both tales become narratives of the replacement of the father's love and protection by those of a young man. That the young man is here represented in the guise of a beast, the horse, again indicates the girl's fear of the unknown, but now projected onto the young man and not the father. He is bestial in his threatening power: sex is an act of violence from which one might not survive. While in B & B the transfer of libido is accomplished without bloodshed through the gradual winning of the woman's affection (the beast languishes and threatens to die of love), in WMH the process of female maturation is reversed when the father intervenes (a regression to Electra fantasies). This is not a lasting solution, though, since the beast has his way in the end. Moreover, the beast in WMH remains a beast, and no psychological resolution or growth is indicated. Sex *is* an act of violence; the girl *does* die (as does the beast). And out of this comes a great treasure. We are left with the possibility that WMH is an expression of a culture in which a woman experiences her husband's love not as kindness, protection, mutual pleasure, and esteem, but only as violence, however important and good the product (children) might be. The story tells a young woman that sex is terrible but necessary; thus, from a Freudian point of view, it keeps her in a psychologically immature stage of development.

This psychological analysis yields a more satisfactory interpretation than does the early Electra-stage version, since it is consistent with the view of traditional China as a strongly patriarchal society in which women were given no public status or power and women's psychological needs were ignored. In this regard it reinforces suggestions made from other points of view. However, our Freudian analysis has added nothing to our understanding of the symbolism of the horsehide and its containment of the girl.

CONCLUSIONS

We have approached WMH in an unapologetic spirit of methodological pluralism. First we used the motif and tale-type indices in an attempt to find the place of WMH in the comprehensive arena of world folktale litera-

ture, and discovered that this tale is peculiar to China and its satellite East Asian cultures. We then explored the literary context of WMH through an examination of the anthology in which it was included, presumably in the fourth century CE; this yielded a strong emphasis upon the transformation motif. We then explored the transformation motif within the history of horse narratives and rituals as well as in Taoist philosophy. Consideration of the horse and bird symbols suggested that the horse may have been a later addition to a tale built around bird symbolism, an addition that may have been motivated by a desire to reinforce the dominant position of men in the society. We compared WMH and S-M using structuralist techniques of narrative analysis, an approach that yielded significant commonality of symbolic and motifeme content but that reinforced our suspicion that the tale is a composite of earlier and formerly independent elements. Next we attempted to delineate the mythic elements, working from the viewpoint of Mircea Eliade's history of religions school; this yielded the insight that WMH combines Dema-agricultural elements and horse-sacrifice elements, and also pointed us toward the containment motif. Finally we applied a Freudian psychological analysis utilizing the dynamics of the "family romance," which further reinforced the notion that WMH presents a feminine theme (the archetypal transformation of a woman into silkworms through magical containment) which has been rather artificially fitted into a masculine-dominated psychodrama, namely the Electra complex, in which a young girl is dominated (that is, marginalized) first by her father and then by the father-substitute, the husband.

Thus the various approaches have not yielded contradictory results; indeed, they have reinforced one another at a number of points. They suggest that "because it accesses sacred power, marginalization results in benefit," a conclusion that I reached in an earlier study (MILLER 1993, 367) but that applies equally to the religious message of WMH. Now, however, we can more specifically identify the resulting benefit as transformation. There is also a psychological message: "A woman should not grow up into an autonomous self, but should always stay dependent on men." Finally we might identify a cultural message, "See what happens when a little girl is thoughtless and disobedient," which is the moral lesson that many Chinese children are still taught today by means of this tale (HUANG 1993).

NOTES

1. Ikeda also makes a place in 411, if an uneasy one, for many Japanese animal-wife tales (though no. 413, "Marriage by Stealing Clothing" [AARNE and THOMPSON 1964, 139] also collects not a few).

2. I have written much on this element as seen in the Japanese context (MILLER 1987a; 1987b; 1991; 1993).

3. The one who is active is the protagonist; thus a tale in which the man is active is most likely a tale told by or at least for males, while one in which a woman plays the active role is probably a "woman's tale" (RAMANUJAN 1991, xxiv–xxvi).

4. The story is found in the fourteenth chapter of the twenty-chapter *Sou-shen chi*, attributed to Kan Pao, the official historiographer of the Chin dynasty. Numbering from the first story in chapter 1, it is tale no. 350. Unfortunately there are three other texts that bear the same name and from which our text must be distinguished. They vary in content, and none contains this particular story. It has been suggested that the original *Sou-shen chi*, consisting of thirty chapters, was lost and then reconstituted by T'ang collectors in several shorter versions (DEWOSKIN 1974). While this textual history clouds somewhat the literary provenance of WMH, it still shows that the present version of the text can be dated to no later than the early seventh century.

5. For a translation see DE GROOT (1901, 244–45). KONNO (1966, 145–49) reproduces Japanese translations of versions from two other Chinese sources, the *T'ai-ku ts'an-ma chi* 太古蠶馬記 [Ancient silkworm and horse record], attributed to Chang Yen 張儼 of the Three Kingdoms period, and the *Shen-nü ch'uan* 神女傳 [Sacred woman chronicle] from the T'ang period. KONNO observes that the former is identical to the *Sou-shen chi* (1966, 145), which it appears to be, as far as one can judge from the Japanese (although Konno does not reproduce the later editorial comments attached to the *Sou-shen chi*).

6. This line is explained below, page 284.

7. The translation is based on that in WATSON (1964, 127).

8. There are two previous English translations of WMH, both of which attempt to make sense of this passage with rather unsatisfactory renditions that miss its religious significance: "So the tree was named *sang* or mulberry, which means 'lost'" (YANG and YANG 1958, 31); "In consequence, the tree was named (mulberry) [homophonous with the word for] 'mourning'" (KAO 1985, 82).

9. An alternative reading, favored by KAO, has it:

> "They taught the people to manage the first [crop of] silkworms properly." A commentary says: "Each of two things cannot be dominant; [unless] the first [crop of] silkworms is restrained, they will cause injury to horses." (1985, 88)

This reading seems to require a great deal of interpolation beyond the obvious meaning of the text. By assuming that the "two things" are the two types of silkworms rather than the silkworms and the horses, the meaning of the text becomes much more straightforward.

10. There is in the austere Confucian accounts of these rites no mention of the events narrated in WMH nor of any other supporting myth. See *Li chi*, book 21 in LEGGE (1967, 223–24) and BODDE (1975, 263–72). The first record of a name being given to Hsien Ts'an is from the Sui dynasty (late sixth century) where she is identified with Lei-tsu, the first consort of Huang Ti, the legendary Yellow Emperor (BODDE 1975, 270).

11. EBERHARD's location of the origin of WMH in Szechuan in southwest China is consistent with my view of the connection with tropical agriculture (1942, 335).

12. This anthology (HAWKES 1959), dating from about 350 to 100 BCE, tends to see the shaman's (or poet's) relationship to the divine figures as an erotic one. The longing, loss,

and sense of ecstatic pleasure in the company of the deity is couched in terms of human romantic love. This certainly resonates with the theme of our story, regardless of whether the horse and woman are depicted as enthusiastic lovers or simply as sexual partners.

13. RAMANUJAN (1991, 95) records a contemporary oral tale, entitled by him "Bring Me Four," in which the same kind of ribald remarks are expected of wedding guests.

14. BODDE (1975, 272) is of the opinion that the rituals honoring the First Sericulturalist were invented in the Former Han dynasty under the influence of the increasingly influential yin/yang ideology to balance the emperor's ritual plowing and sacrificing to the First Husbandman. Agriculture was man's work and thus yang; there needed to be a symbolic expression of woman's work so that yin could be equally represented. The first record of a sacrifice to Hsien Ts'an is 167 BCE.

15. RAMANUJAN (1991, 47–51) relates a Bengali oral tale, entitled by him "A Parrot Called Hiraman," in which a *pakshiraj*, or winged horse, is used as a mount for a king. He flies on its back to a faraway land, where he finds and eventually weds the princess of his dreams.

16. Note that the agent of the promise of the daughter in marriage varies from version to version. Many versions of WMH present the mother as the one who promises the daughter to whomever might bring her husband back to her, a situation that might reflect the fact that in times of extreme poverty Chinese parents sometimes sold their daughters to brothels as prostitutes or to wealthy men as concubines. The paradigm given by Eberhard has the mother as agent. The *Sou-shen chi* version, as well as many others, however, make the daughter herself the source of the promise. This would appear to be crucial only to the Freudian interpretation, however.

REFERENCES CITED

AARNE, Antti and Stith THOMPSON
1964 *The types of the folktale*. FF Communications 184. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

BETTELHEIM, Bruno
1976 *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York: Knopf.

BODDE, Derk
1975 *Festivals in classical China: New Year and other annual observances during the Han dynasty*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

DE GROOT, J. J. M.
1901 *The religious system of China*, vol. 4. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

DE LUCE, Judith
1993 Oral communication at the Miami University Department of Religion colloquium of 21 January.

DE VISSER, M. W.
1913 *The dragon in China and Japan*. Amsterdam: Johannes Müller.

DEWOSKIN, Kenneth J.
1974 The "Sou-shen-chi" and the "Chih-kuai" tradition. Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University.

DUMONT, Paul Émile
1927 *L'Aśvamedha d'après le Yajurveda Noir*. Paris: Paul Geuthner.

DUNDES, Alan
1964 *The morphology of North American Indian folktales*. FF Communications 195. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
1989 Interpreting "Little Red Riding Hood" psychoanalytically. In *Little Red Riding Hood: A casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes, 192–336. Madison: University of Wiscon-

sin Press.
1991 Bruno Bettelheim's uses of enchantment and abuses of scholarship. *American Folklore* 104: 74–83.

EBERHARD, Wolfram
1937 *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen.* FF Communications 120. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
1942 *Lokalkulturen im alten China*, vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

FREUD, Sigmund
1950 *Totem and taboo.* Trans. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton.

HAWKES, David, trans.
1959 *Ch'u Tz'u: The songs of the south.* Boston: Beacon Press.

HUANG Ping
1993 Personal communication based on recollections of her own childhood.

IKEDA, Hiroko
1971 *A type and motif index of Japanese folk-literature.* FF Communications 209. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

JAY, Nancy
1992 *Throughout your generations forever: Sacrifice, religion, and paternity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

JENSEN, Adolf E.
1963 *Myth and cult among primitive peoples.* Trans. M. T. Childin and W. Weissleder. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

KAN Pao 干寶
1922 *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記. Shanghai: Sao-yeh-shan-fang.

KAO, Karl S.
1985 *Classical Chinese tales of the supernatural and the fantastic.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

KEITH, Arthur Berriedale, trans.
1967 *The Veda of the Black Yajus school entitled Taittiriya Sanhita*, part 2. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

KITAGAWA, Joseph M.
1961 Ainu bear festival (Iyomante). *History of Religions* 1: 95–151.

KONNO Ensuke 今野圓輔
1966 *Barō kon'in tan* 馬娘婚姻譚 [Treatise on horse-woman marriage]. Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsusha.

LEGGE, James, trans.
1967 *Li chi*, book 21. New Hyde Park: University Books, vol. 2. Reprint.

LIPPARD, Lucy
1983 *Overlay: Contemporary art and the art of prehistory.* New York: Pantheon.

MILLER, Alan L.
1987a Of weavers and birds: Structure and symbol in Japanese myth and folktale. *History of Religions* 26: 309–27.
1987b The Swan-maiden revisited: Religious significance of "divine-wife" folktales with special reference to Japan. *Asian Folklore Studies* 46: 55–86.
1991 The garments of the gods in Japanese ritual. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5/2: 33–53.
1993 Myth and gender in Japanese shamanism: The *itako* of Tohoku. *History of Religions* 32: 343–67.

NEEDHAM, Joseph
1956 *Science and civilisation in China*, vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'FLAHERTY, Wendy Doniger (DONIGER, Wendy)
1980 *Women, androgynes, and other mythical beasts.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

1987 Horses. *Encyclopedia of religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 6, 463–68. New York: Macmillan.

1992 Personal communication, during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Francisco.

ORTNER, Sherry

1974 Is female to male as nature is to culture? In *Woman, culture, and society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, 67–88. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

RAEVSKII, D. S.

1987 Scythian religion. *Encyclopedia of religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 13, 145–48. New York: Macmillan.

RAMANUJAN, A. K.

1991 *Folktales of India: A selection of oral tales from twenty languages*. New York: Pantheon.

SCHAFER, Edward H.

1951 Ritual exposure in ancient China. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 14: 130–84.

SEKI Keigo 関　敬吾

1953 *Nihon mukashibanashi shūsei* 日本昔話集成 [Compilation of Japanese folktales], vol. 2. Tokyo: Hodokawa Shoten.

SHARPE, Eric J.

1987 Study of religion: Methodological issues. *Encyclopedia of religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 14, 83–88. New York: Macmillan.

SNC

Shen-nü ch'uan 神女傳 [Sacred woman chronicle] from the T'ang period. Quoted in KONNO 1966.

SULLIVAN, Michael

1984 *The arts of China*, third edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

SYT

Shui-ying-t'u 端應圖 [Compilation of auspicious correspondences], attributed to Sun Jeu-chi 孫柔之 who lived prior to the Ch'en dynasty (557–89). Quoted in the Ming dynasty *T'ien-chung chi*, ch. 55.

THOMPSON, Stith

1955–58 *Motif-index of folk-literature*, 6 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

TKTMC

T'ai-ku ts'an-ma chi 太古蠶馬記 [Ancient silkworm and horse record], attributed to Chang Yen 張儼, a literatus of the state of Wu during the Three Kingdoms period (third century). Quoted in KONNO 1966 (145–49).

TING, Nai-tung

1978 *A type index of Chinese folktales*. FF Communications 223. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

TPYL

1960 *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 [Imperial observations of the T'ai-p'ing period], 4 vols. Original published in 983 under the direction of Li Fang 李昉. Reprinted Beijing: Chung-hua Shu-chü.

WALEY, Arthur

1955 The heavenly horses of Ferghana: A new view. *History Today* 5: 95–103.

WATSON, Burton, trans.

1964 *Chuang tzu: Basic writings*. New York: Columbia University Press.

YANG Chia-lo 楊家駱, ed.

1974 *Pi-chi hsiao-shuo ming-chu* 筆記小說名著 [Famous literary tales]. T'aipei: Shih-chiai Shu-chü.

YANG, Hsien-yi and Gladys YANG, trans.

1958 *The man who sold a ghost*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.