THE ETHICS OF HEROISM IN MEDIEVAL AND AMERICAN INDIAN TALES

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Introduction

Sharing roots common to all oral-traditional stories, medieval romances (12th-15th centuries) and tales of American Indian origin draw from a stock of familiar plots, character portrayals, and storytelling techniques.[1] Theorists and scholars of oral-traditional mentalities recognize within such stories the pervasive themes of heroic confrontation and reconciliation and the psychological symbolism of heroic journeys.[2] Young, strong, and eager protagonists, whether brave knights or Indian braves, become exiled from their community (or exile themselves) in order to seek worlds peopled by monsters and foes. Their journeys, laced with the unexpected and fraught with danger, awaken the heroes' cleverness and provide for the educative experiences marking their growth. Through the knight's repeated encounters with dragons, witches, ogres, magical swords and fountains, pagans, and wild forest beasts, and through the Indian hero's similar experiences with half-breed animals, magical and medicinal feathers, shapeshifters, rolling heads, headless bodies, and wizened soothsayers, the protagonists--humbled in the face of danger but ever the wiser--bring back to their communities a broader knowledge of the world, and their place in it.[3]

Medieval romances and American Indian tales share an interest in detailing the growth of their heroes as they embark on solitary journeys and encounter strange beings in unfamiliar landscapes. The nature and quality of these heroes' quests, however, suggest some profound differences in the social and ethical foundations of their journeys,[4] and of the manner in which each group of tales has broadly conceived of their heroes' representation: the heroes' perceptions of "self" and their confrontations with non-self or "other." A brief look at the world views underlying these groups of tales will set these differences in order.

The ethical stance of many medieval romances, especially those of an edifying or didactic nature, draws upon the Judeo-Christian dualism of good and evil. They also draw upon relational hierarchies where Christian knights occupy the top of the socio-religious ladder, and pagans (and peasants) occupy the bottom. As Kavolis (1984, p. 24) notes, "in the medieval and early modern European tradition, ever-present polar opposites to which the qualities of good and evil are unambiguously attached either battle energetically until the final solution, the outcome of which is predetermined (the God-Satan model) *or* are mutually interdependent in a

static hierarchic relationship that it is quite possible but wholly impermissible to challenge." Authors of medieval romance adapt this kind of dualistic hierarchy to suit their didactic intentions, and show their heroes partaking in clearly delineated struggles between the polarized forces of good and evil.[5] Such struggles may take place symbolically within the family (where an evil father figure may take the form of a monster or dragon; Bychowski, 1968, p. 20), in the political arena (where evil tyrants are placed in opposition to well-ruling kings), in the realm of religious belief (where righteous Christians struggle against heathens), or in the bedroom (where an untoward maiden asks sexual favors from a venturesome but chaste knight). But the basic dualistic nature of good and evil in these romances is never questioned or altered, either by the hero or by his audience. Separated from his aristocratic community, the medieval hero places himself in isolation from, and in opposition to, the world around him, and perceives all that is non-self with suspicion or aggression. Such a perception is, as Becker (1975, p. 11) notes, characteristic of Western thought; Western man "expand[s] his self-feeling" not only by "overcoming obstacles and incorporating other organisms" but by demonstrating "any kind of triumph . . . of his own excellence . . . [i.e.,] boasting about his achievements, taunting and humiliating his adversaries, or torturing and killing them." A medieval knight competes with or diminishes the worth of the "other" in order to reaffirm his identity. To the medieval knight, "other" is alien, dangerous, and most often evil, something to be subdued or annihilated but never assimilated.

The knight brings back to his special community the body of values cherished by it: manly resolve, courage, self-reliance, and such human virtues as honesty and loyalty. How the knight learns about these values requires his repeated and antagonistic encounters with those unlike himself,[6] encounters set in an often unfriendly environment where such clashes between "self" and "other" are both necessary and justified. Having thus proved himself heroic to peers (and an audience) who have already expected such heroism from him, and having shown the victory of good over evil (the meanings for which have already been assigned by his Christian aristocratic community), the medieval knight returns to his kingdom in a kind of formal, symbolic gesture of his maturity. By doing so, he reinforces the already existing values of that kingdom, but not for the purpose of teaching his community about them.

This absence of "communication" between a knight's public life and his private journey, other than on a symbolic level, points to one fundamental difference between heroism in medieval romance and that in American Indian tales. Like medieval romances American Indian tales often conclude with the Indian hero's reintegration into his tribal community. American Indian tales also clearly uphold certain behavioral norms set by that tribal community, and use the Indian hero's actions as the vehicle for demonstrating them. However, unlike the medieval knight, the Indian hero is expected--even obliged--to convey to his society the wisdom acquired on his solitary journey. American Indian tales teach us that no one is beyond

learning about goodness, how tenuous it can be, and how tenacious its counterpart often is. Unlike the medieval knight, an Indian hero's reintegration into his tribe does not involve a quantified retelling of dragons slain and kingdoms conquered, but rather includes the sharing of ethical knowledge required for the maintenance of a harmonious community. Such knowledge might include practical advice about existential needs, or admonishments to protect the fragile balance between "self" and "other."

What this "other" is or may become is a matter of great interest to American Indian storytellers, and cannot be clearly pigeonholed according to oppositional contrasts which the Western mind is fond of grasping (Krupat, 1987, p. 120). Indian heroes, armed with tremendous self-reliance and curiosity and with the remembered wisdom of their fathers, mothers, or grandparents, often encounter the "other" not as something evil, hostile, or fearful, but as a special power to learn from, assimilate, and ultimately respect. A brave struggles with ever-transforming forces that incorporate both good and evil qualities, that take on human and non-human characteristics alike, and that may well continue to exist despite whatever feats of prowess the brave may show. Unnamed powers in Nature can place demands upon the Indian hero beyond his control (and that of his community's), and he must learn the art of cooperation and resourcefulness before these powers (whether good or evil) can be subdued, or, more correctly, harnassed and maintained. Where the medieval knight achieves unity by eliminating diversity--slaying others or demanding the "other's" likeness to "self"--the American Indian hero achieves unity by respecting diversity, or by assuming some of the useful traits of the "other." The ethical stance articulated through the Indian hero's struggles does not incorporate the dualism of good vs. evil so common to Western thought, but rather embodies the notion of "appropriateness vs. inappropriateness," where "appropriateness" conveys a sense of relational or interpersonal balance and harmony.[7]

A selection of tales will illustrate these important differences in medieval and American Indian ethics. A discussion of medieval tales will include: Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* (Benson, 1986); *Sir Isumbras* (Mills, 1982); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Davis, 1967); Chretien's *Yvain* (Troyes, 1977); *Havelok the Dane* (Loomis & Hibbard, 1957); *King Horn* (Hall, 1901); and Malory's *The Tale of Sir Gareth* (Cowen, 1975). A discussion of American Indian tales will include: *The Life and Death of Sweet Medicine* (Northern Cheyenne); *Son of Light Kills the Monster* (Hopi); *The Flying Head* (Iroquois);[8] *The Arrow Thrower* (Sioux); *The Hunter Who Was Saved By Eagles* (Sioux); *The Leap of Hawk-Dreamer* (Sioux);[9] *The Boy Who Lived with the Bears* (Iroquois); *The Gifts of the Little People* (Iroquois); *Skunny-Wundy and the Stone Giant* (Iroquois); *The Two-Headed Snake* (Iroquois); *Workers of Evil* (Iroquois);[10] *Origin of the Evil Spirit* (Acoma); *White Buffalo Calf Pipe* (Sioux);[11] and *The Four Worlds and the Emergence* (Hopi).[13]

Good and Bad Blood in Medieval Romances

The world of the medieval romance is, for the most part, both masculine and aristocratic.[14] In some but not all romances, especially those of French origin, an elaborate code of conduct between knights and their beloveds elevates the status of its female protagonists as well, subverting traditional social hierarchies between men and women, and dictating that knights submit to the whims of their lovers by performing feats of prowess on their behalf. Despite the presence of a courtly love sentiment in many romances, their singular focus on the hero's (not heroine's) actions offers to the audience a decidedly male fantasy, through subject matter appealing to his desire for knightly combat, victory, status, and wealth.

The martial, aristocratic world of the protagonists shapes their perceptions of both good and evil. In the medieval romance, human values and virtues are codified within the framework of chivalry: a knight must show his loyalty and honesty by fighting for his king, pairing boastful words with brave deeds, and defending vows (made to king or maiden) or knightly honor through hand-to-hand combat with unknown assailants. "Good" actions for the hero of medieval romance are those actions that uphold the noble, virtuous, and aristocratic tenants of knightly behavior: truthfulness, generosity, honesty, bravery, courtesy, good speech, humility, and even patience. Many of these aspects also define good Christian behavior, with the knight beholden not only to his temporal but also heavenly king.[15] King Horn, for example, is a good hero precisely because he does "nu that [he] er of spake" (i.e., does now what he had earlier spoken of; l. 535). The noble Arveragus in the *Franklin's Tale* exhibits all the humility and prowess expected of him as knight and lord (*passim*), and Sir Gareth in Malory's tale, patient in the face of his damsel's rebukes, offers her courteous service so that she recognizes his noble birth (p. 249).

Kingdoms, war booty, and lovely maidens are the fruits of the hero's labor, and are marks of his goodness as well as his heroic stature. A medieval knight achieves glory through his acquisitions and shares his wealth with the members of his kingdom in an act of generosity hearkening back to the *comitatus* of Old English epic. Havelok the Dane honors his cook's previous generosity to him when Havelok was a disinherited young boy, and transforms the cook's destitute state into a prosperous one, giving him "Cornwall and all of Godrich's land in town and field" and providing for his wedding (p. 310). Sir Isumbras celebrates the reinheritance of his own kingdom by giving each of his sons "a londe / And crown[ing] hem [them] kynges with his honde" (ll. 784-5).

Good knights are thus of "good" (i.e., noble) blood, and of "good" (i.e., noble, heroic, and Christian) character. Evil knights do not honor their noble blood or Christian duties. When medieval romances treat the notion of evil, they may do so through illustrations of knightly waywardness. For example, Sir Kay in the *Tale of Sir Gareth* is an "ungentle" (i.e., discourteous) knight of Arthur's court whose contentious words provoke frustration

in Arthur's more well-behaved knights (p. 236, *passim*). The "Brown Knight Without Pity," also in the *Tale of Sir Gareth*, deserves his fate at the hands of the more chivalrous Gareth, who blames him for his "wicked, [unruly] customs" (p. 299).

Throughout all romances, in fact, "evil" characters in general are those "villainous,"[16] non-noble (and ignoble), lower-born, or non-Christian characters who impede the progress of the knight in reaching his goals of wealth and status, or who disrupt the socio-religious hierarchies that privilege the knight but degrade those less fortunate pagans (or peons). The heroes of medieval romance experience as good those subordinate characters who preserve and protect this social hierarchy, and as evil those same characters who challenge the hierarchy, who elevate themselves to a position not warranted by their "bad" blood, or who take, rob, or steal the heroes' acquisitions. Medieval heroism thus values, and supports, an ethics founded upon dualism (knights vs. pagans), hierarchy (knights over serfs or pagans) and possession (a knight's property and inheritance defended against all others seeking to enjoy it). We can more clearly illustrate the relationship among these elements by examining the general structure of medieval romances and their protagonists' perceptions of good and evil, especially their means of coping with evil when they are confronted by it.

The style, plot, characterization, and themes found in medieval romances are firmly grounded in oppositional structures. The two-part theme of exile and return dominates nearly all plots of medieval romances as does a kind of binary syntax found in their protagonists' speeches and descriptions. In the *Franklin's Tale*, Dorigen is one of the "faireste" women under the sun, and the "treweste and the beste wyf" Aurelius, her secret admirer, has ever known (ll. 734-35, 1539). Aurelius himself is "con of the beste farying man on lyve [alive]," "wel biloved," and "holden in greet prys," loving Dorigen "best of any creature" (ll. 932-39). Each character endures vicissitudes of emotion and is continually buffeted between the extremes of living or dying, dying or suffering, "deeth" or "dishonour," being "ystiked [stabbed] . . . / For verray true love" or suffering shame (ll. 1317, 1336, 1358, 1476-77).[17]

The diction, syntax, and thematic structure of many medieval romances reveal a way of perceiving the world that is stable, principled, and exclusionary. Like those who engage in the petal-picking pastime of "s/he loves me, s/he loves me not . . . ," the authors of romances shape the life-decisions their heroes must face into dilemmas (the operative words in their speeches are often "or" or "levere [rather] . . . than"), not complex predicaments. Many romance heroes need only tap into the Christian fortitude with which their authors have endowed them in order to reduce such dilemmas to univocal challenges with unambiguous solutions. With a minimum of forethought, King Horn slays hundreds of pagans to earn glory in his homeland (ll. 607, 609, 613-20, *passim*). Sir Isumbras and his wife both dress in coats of armor "as [though] she were a knyghte, / And

forth wente with spere and shelde . . . They slowgh [slew] hethen kynges two / And othur Sarezens mony mo[re]: / Thrytty thowsand and thre"--"Grete joye it was to see" (11. 746-62). King Athelwold in *Havelok the Dane* "loved God and Holy Church, truth and righteous men, but he hated robbers, and all the outlaws he could find he hanged high on the gallows" (p. 288).

By eliminating the difficult grey areas existing between good and evil and by limiting the shapes these two forces can take (see Franz, 1977, p. 152), the authors of medieval romances reduce the number and kinds of choices their protagonists must make in response to good or evil.[18] These authors further disambiguate good and evil by referring to such forces archetypically, drawing from a familiar, and Christian, field of semantic reference. The Earl Goodrich in *Havelok the Dane* behaves as a traitor and is thus likened to "a wicked Judas . . . [who] took her [Havelok's beloved], from Winchester to Dover" (p. 290).

Viewing characters from within this kind of oppositional framework, we have no difficulty identifying those who clearly stand opposed to the protagonists and their endeavors. Pagans or "saracens" are one such group of antagonists. Thieves, ill-bred leaders who ascend to the hero's throne unlawfully, persons who deny the hero his rightful inheritance, or in fact any situation in which the hero finds his fortunes diminished or himself separated from his aristocratic community (or worse, mixed with classes lower than his own)--all of these are also evils for the medieval hero, who reacts with discomfort and aggression when confronted by them (Becker, 1975, p. 15). Sir Gareth's mother chastises King Arthur's court for not recognizing the signs of her son's noble birth and mistreating him as a result: "Ye did yourself great shame when ye amongst you kept my son in the kitchen and fed him like a poor dog" (p. 279). Havelok the Dane seeks "vengeance on the foe" who has treated him poorly, i.e., who has made him poor: "With wicked wrong he holds my land who has made me a beggar" (p. 299). The "wicked treachery" of Godrich's earlier decision to marry Havelok to Goldeboru hinges upon his false perception that Havelok is a "churl's son" and his assumption that the wedding will therefore be one of mismatched classes. Goldeboru also views the wedding as an act of wickedness, for she believes that she has been "unfitting[ly] . . . wed" to a churl, until it is revealed to her that Havelok is a king's son, and she shall "be a queen" (p. 298). Not surprisingly, the earls who steal both Havelok's and Goldeboru's inheritance are given their just deserts; both are drawn and quartered and burned for all to see.

Medieval heroes often view with suspicion and aggression others who do not occupy their own socio-religious level or who disrupt the "natural order of things" by daring to challenge it. A knight will not be dissuaded from agonistic encounters with strangers unless those strangers will occupy, both peaceably and of their own accord, their subservient status to him. To avoid confrontation, Havelok's servant asks that Havelok have "pity" on his wife and him: "both of us are your churls, your hinds" (p. 292). Similarly, Sir Gringamore befriends his foe, Sir Gareth: "as soon as your

dwarf told me what ye were and of what blood ye are come, and what noble deeds ye have done in these marches, then I repented of my deeds" (p. 270). In addition, a knightly hero will not perceive strangers with what might be called simple curiosity unless they can be shown, through noble words, deeds, or demeanor, to be *like* the knight, and therefore not alien at all. As the narrator in the *Tale of Sir Gareth* comments, "Right so came into the hall two men well beseen and richly, and upon their shoulders there leaned the goodliest young man and the fairest that ever they all saw" (p. 231). Sir Gareth's wealthy company and his own "fair" demeanor--a word used in connection with well-bred and handsome heroes--allows him a smoother entrance into Arthur's kingdom, perhaps, than had he been churlish, ugly, or poor. Sir Gareth's combat with his own brother, Gawain, and with Lancelot, the knight who grants Gareth knighthood, ceases only when Gareth's true identity is made known to these knights--in effect, when Gareth's "foes" are shown not to be foes at all but comrades or brothers, knights occupying the same social class. ("'Ah sir,' said Sir Lancelot, 'I am more gladder of you than I was; for ever me thought ye should be of great blood, and that ye came not to the court neither for meat ne for drink'" [p. 238]).

When knights willingly mask their identities, assume the dress and character of non-noble persons, or are reduced to beggary due to uncontrollable circumstances, it is for the purpose of reaffirming the nobility that lurks beneath the surface of their words and deeds, and which will be revealed by the tales' end. Sir Gareth's penchant for hiding his true lineage serves to heighten the noble and courteous qualities of his actions. Havelok's working-class activities through much of the romance, although something he accepts with a Christ-like patience, nevertheless stand in opposition to the royal stature he has been denied through the villainous behavior of his earl. In other cases, the hero's transformation into a poor or despised stranger serves as a kind of penance for the hero. Sir Isumbras's own change in identity serves a moral function by illustrating the evils of unchristian behavior. His pridefulness blocks his path to true kingship; losing his possessions, he assumes the role of Palmer and "smythes manne," and gradually reintroduces himself into his rightful kingdom. The hero Yvain, in the medieval French romance by the same name, also loses his identity and powers of reason for failing to honor his word to his lady-love, Laudine, and lives in the forest with a friendly lion until his heroic worth and prowess return to him.

But "self-other" switches such as these, for the purposes of overt moral edification, are not common in medieval romances. The authors of romances, instead, preserve the heroic identity of their protagonists by eliminating heterogeneity within the hero's world and by allowing their heroes repeated opportunities to confront or annihilate their opponents in their quest for ascendancy, unity within (but not outside) their kingdoms, and acquisitions. In a world where the values of good and evil remain constant and the relationships between characters remains relatively static,

it is the *quantity* of heroic clashes that the authors choose to embellish. Might makes right, and a medieval hero is both mightier and "right-er" if he can be shown to uphold the received values of good and evil time and time again through his repeated efforts.

Despite the cyclical repetition of such self-other conflicts in medieval romances and the hero's cyclical (and symbolic) return to his kingdom, the hero nevertheless seems to move in a linear fashion toward his goals through a policy of "overkill," eliminating all obstacles to (or competition for) his land, throne, or even lady-love (Goodman, 1988, p. 163; Lowe, 1983, p. 99). Such wholescale destruction of the "other" in the medieval hero's environment reinforces the eternal optimism projected by traditional stories that the protagonist will always succeed. It also under- scores the extent to which the medieval hero perceives that environment as unfriendly or even hostile--a lonely place fraught with dangers that are capable of seducing the hero to encounter them, for he is offered little else (Midgley, 1984, p. 83; Franz, 1974, p. 125; Bettelheim, 1975, p. 9; May, 1982, p. 246). A hero may find a troll lurking behind a bush to help him, or perhaps an old crone. Or he may call upon God for help. But friendly helpers seem to appear on the scene far too infrequently to aid the hero. Their journeys conducted nearly always alone, it is no wonder that the heroes of medieval romances find the nature that surrounds them dreary, their tasks burdensome, and the landscape rife with their projected fears and aggressions (Midgley, 1984, p. 125. 130; Bychowski, 1968, p. 29). Sir Isumbras, wandering and destitute, weeps "for pyne [pain]" and lives in continual "care and woe" (ll. 522, 536). Sir Gareth's excursion to prove his noble identity leads him into foreboding nights filled with lightning and thunder (p. 291). And the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* poignantly illustrates the lonely, cold, and frightful journey of his knight, who, "in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde," conducts his quest "al one [alone]," making his "mone," alone, to the Virgin Mary (ll. 733-36).[19]

The "classic symbol for alienation," Edinger (1972, p. 50) com- ments, "is the image of the *wilderness*." One senses, keenly at times, the medieval hero's alienation within his wilderness. Such alienation is due, in part, to his honoring an ethical system that does not acknowledge am- biguities--does not permit him the type of "constructive ambivalence" toward evil that might open him to other (perhaps non-violent) solutions to it (May, 1982, p. 263). The dualistic morality of medieval romances breeds, instead, the knight's disproportionately vengeful or destructive responses to evil, which, when this destruction is stated as "policy" and carried to extremes, becomes an evil in its *own* right (May, 1982, pp. 265, 267; Midgley, 1984, p. 86; Pocock, 1985, p. 42). The medieval knight's experience of his environment and the strangers inhabiting it is not a sacred one: he fears, but does not (or cannot) esteem what he encounters.[20] By controlling or killing those he encounters, the medieval knight achieves a pedagogical awareness of evil as "that which is to be feared," and perhaps a social awareness of boundaries that separate him from those unlike himself. But

by not respecting the essential "otherness" of those strangers, the medieval knight eliminates from his journey any experiences of the sacred or transcendent; he fails to honor and perceive the mystery that both binds him to, and distinguishes him from, others.[21] The medieval hero's martial accomplishments, which he recounts laundry-list fashion upon his return to his community, point to the absence of any transcendent experience of the "other" during his journeys. Instead, they suggest that the knight creates his identity through a vision of his separateness from others--through a policy of "separate and unequal"--and that the idea of "relatedness" as an ethical construct pertains only to his immediate, and equal, company of peers.[22]

"Replacing Yourself": Relational Ethics in American Indian Tales

The principle of relatedness is both part and parcel of the ethics of heroism as we find it in American Indian tales. Being in "right relationship" involves maintaining horizontal (not vertical or hierarchical) bonds between persons, the natural world, and the spirit forces that make their presence known through animate or inanimate objects. An Indian hero learns to both fear and esteem the other, to help his tribal members achieve proper harmony among themselves, and to teach his community to honor their place within the larger community of Nature. A good Indian hero's actions involve brave deeds, excursions into unknown territories, or encounters with "helpers," all of which further the hero's knowledge about maintaining this "right relationship."

The important function that relatedness serves in American Indian tales cannot be overstressed. As Lincoln (1983, p. 49) notes, "a tribal people learn to know richness in a sense of loss; they know through a necessary economy, tempered in poverty, that more is not always better." Existential concerns--a tribe's need for food, water, and shelter--figure importantly in American Indian tales, and an Indian hero can only meet such demands by protecting, even nurturing, his relationship to others and the world generally. American Indian tales cast the practical need for this kind of relatedness into a moral framework that supports all behavior appropriate to maintaining essential bonds, including bonds between tribal members and elders, between parents and offspring, and between (and among) human beings, Nature, and its spirit forces (whether positive or negative). American Indian storytellers recognize that the power to foster *or* disrupt these essential bonds resides in all the members of the community. Evil in American Indian tales thus takes the form of tribal members or forces that disrupt these essential bonds through willful displays of violence, greed, or ignorance, or through events that threaten the tribe's dependence upon Nature (see Taylor, 1985, p. 29; Russel, 1986, p. 19; Lowe, 1983, p. 91; Caplan, 1985, p. 112). Unlike medieval romances, American Indian tales often locate such evil within the hero's own family or tribe. But as Santo Domingo scholar Rina Swentzell notes, American Indians "are not a 'fallen'

people," i.e., an inherently sinful people paying penance for a single individual's mistake, their actions measured against the moral yardstick of absolute good and evil.[23] By acknowledging that both good and evil forces exist within but also beyond their heroes' tribal boundaries--by acknowledging the presence of both moral and natural evil in all things--American Indian tales suggest pathways of appropriate behavior for their heroes to take between these two extremes so that they might acquire the knowledge needed to avoid being seduced by either power. The Indian hero achieves this sense of moderation and balance by honoring an ethics of relatedness, and by confronting the powers that threaten it. Several tales of Eastern, Pueblo, and Plains Indian origin illustrate this heroic code of conduct as it operates in situations testing the protagonist's cleverness, resolve, and memory.

Like the medieval hero and other heroes in traditional folktales, Indian protagonists prove their bravery by seeking adventures, lured by the possibility that danger will await them when they leave the security of their tribe. Okteondon, who lives with his grandfather in the forest, ignores the old man's warning "not to go to the north for there is danger in that direction" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 107). Rarely, however, does the Indian hero exile himself from his community merely for the sake of the adventure itself, merely to prove his bravery, or even less to reaffirm his heritable rights within that community, so common an occurrence in medieval romances. An Indian hero's exile or acts of bravery are often brought upon by his tribe's lack of essential food or water, as in the Sioux story *The Arrow Thrower*. Turning Bear leaves with his scouts to kill buffalo, for the tribe's supply of meat has dwindled after the long winter (Standing Bear, 1984, p. 15). Sweet Medicine, in a Cheyenne tale, also performs magical feats to remedy the "very little game, and much hunger in the village" where he has been adopted (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 201). Indian heroes also leave home to escape unkindness, their departure a moral lesson to those who should treat them more graciously. In *The Boy Who Lived with the Bears*, an uncle's stinginess provokes the nephew to depart in "tattered clothing" and shabby moccasins, and to find generosity among the bears instead (Bruchac, 1985, p. 24). Indian braves exile themselves to confront these natural and moral evils, and it is toward their eradication or remedy that they direct their resourcefulness.

Like the medieval knight, the Indian hero is praised for his strength, horsemanship, and other physical accomplishments. Turning Bear and his companions "were famous for throwing the ball, and there were those who could shoot the arrow farther than any other man" (Standing Bear, 1934, p. 14). An unassuming protagonist named Dirty Clothes in an Iroquois story was a good hunter and would "spend many hours in the forest hunting" prey (Bruchac, 1985, p. 41). An Indian brave's accomplishments might also signal his passage into adulthood; Sweet Medicine's father rewards the boy for killing his first buffalo (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 201). In a similar vein, medieval knights are also rewarded for their strength; kings grant them

knighthood or give them large rewards. An Indian hero's bravery, however, does not necessarily grant him an air of entitlement or a superior status over his tribal members. American Indian storytellers generally attach less importance to a brave's strength than to his cleverness. An Indian hero is particularly clever when he can rely upon the wisdom of his ancestors to trick or outwit uncooperative companions or dangerous forces.   Dirty Clothes is indeed a clever hunter, but the laziness of his uncle forces him to be so. Armed with the "words his mother had spoken year ago,'" Dirty Clothes undertakes his solitary hunting journeys with confidence (Bruchac, 1985, p. 41). The Iroquois hero in *The Boy Who Lived with the Bears* "remembers what his parents had taught him," and in this way dispels his fear upon entering the bears' cave: "If you do good and have faith, good things will come to you" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 25). Skunny-Wundy, another unprepossessing hero in an Iroquois tale, defeats the Stone Giants by sheer trickery, for they are more stupid than he (Bruchac, 1985, p. 164). Son of Light is a Hopi hero who employs his wit in a several-tiered contest against a monster renowned for his excessive killing, maiming, and ingesting (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 211): "They did shameful things out of ignorance, because they didn't understand how to live" p. 199. Ignorance breeds evil, and a hero's knowledge becomes his best weapon for fighting against both.

By relying upon their memories and knowledge, Indian heroes harbor a "felt sense" of strength, a trust that sustains them on their journeys and fuels their encounters with negative forces. Hawk Dreamer "did not fear. So long as he could run he was safe. He was in the land of the Sioux and felt that the swiftness of his friend the Hawk was with him" (Standing Bear, 1984, p. 30). Like medieval knights, Indian heroes display the optimism and confidence required for their superhuman tasks.   The storytellers of American Indian tales, however, underscore their heroes' confidence time and time again through narrative asides, stressing at the same time that even fearful heroes can call upon their own resourcefulness, animal friends, or spirits to help them in time of need. Hawk Dreamer senses danger but "does not fear" because he knows the hawk protects him (Standing Bear, 1934, p. 30). Turning Bear breaks his bow, rendering it useless, "but this caused him no worry, for there was nothing to fear, and he thought that . . . he and the rest of the warriors would fix up broken bows, re-feather arrows, and make new sinew strings" (Standing Bear, 1934, p. 16). As Son of Light tells his wife, "don't be afraid. . . we'll come out of here alive and happy" (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 213).

An Indian hero uses his inner resolve to reassure those less trusting, but he knows that he has at his disposal helpers of all kinds to aid him if his own resolve fails. Nature is rarely, if ever, a forlorn place for the Indian hero: it speaks to him, nurtures him, offers timely advice.   Its inhabitants, birds or other sure-footed creatures, "serve as messengers" for the hero, becoming his "servants, guards, or scouts" (Courlander, 1982, p. xxxiii; Rank, 1932, p. 90; Edinger, 1972, p. 70; Franz, 1974, p. 120). For example, Hawks come to the aid of Hawk Dreamer (Standing Bear, 1934,

passim). The Hopi protector Spider Woman marshals together a number
of different birds of prey as well as a horned toad to protect Son of Light
from Man-Eagle (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, pp. 212-13). The Iroquois hero in
The Boy Who Live with the Bears receives not only protection from his
animal friends but a cherished glimpse into their animal nature: "And you
will remember what it is to know the warmth of an animal's heart" (Bruchac,
1985, p. 30).

When Nature does not offer an Indian hero ready protection, as in
the Sioux story the *Workers of Evil*," the hero can rely upon dreams or
objects endowed with magical properties. Okteondon receives a special
flute from his grandfather so that he will know "what game to hunt and where
to find it" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 106). When the flute fails him and he finds
himself abducted by a woman speaking "gentle words," his flesh torn by
ravenous birds, Okteondon responds with confidence ("he only laughed and
spit upon the wound which healed immediately" [p. 108]) born from knowing
that greater forces will protect him. A voice in Okteondon's dream directs
the hero to a "small cedar twig" that will grow and provide him an escape
route. A hero's spirit protector will also appear in a dream to warn him, as
does an Iroquois hero's protector, a great water bird, teaching young
Hahjanoh to "beware the eyes of false friends" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 99).

An Indian hero draws from all that Nature has to offer him, so much
so that he assumes the properties of Nature or of his spirit helpers during
his journeys. Hawk Dreamer, for example, escapes his enemies by flying
through the air like a bird (Standing Bear, 1934, p. 31); the narrator has also
likened his actions to that of a swift-footed deer (p. 29). Such similes, which
in the hands of medieval romancers are employed as stock descriptions of
heroic valor, in American Indian tales take on a special significance: they
underscore the hero's likeness to and dependence upon his natural habitat.
The woods and plains, to the hero in *The Hunter Who Was Saved By
Eagles*, were "like a book that he read each day," for "so long had he been
out in the solitudes of nature breathing only pure air and drinking only pure
water that he could smell the various animals when they came close to him
just as the animals could smell him" (Standing Bear, 1934, pp. 20-21).

One often senses a special reciprocity that exists between an
Indian hero and his environment, a flexible, even fluid bond between "self"
and "other" that, if respected, provides the hero with special knowledge or
a fresh perspective to be shared with his community (Ballard, 1988, pp. 16,
21). The lessons the hero learns are not always pleasant. But whether
pleasant or not, they are only made possible by the hero's willingness to
see the "other" for what it is, or may become. Honoring the "other's" space
and identity, the hero learns from it and often acquires its properties in the
process. When Dirty Clothes offers his assistance to the two small hunters
he sees struggling at his feet to kill a squirrel, they respond with kindness,
offering Dirty Clothes the freshly killed game and their hospitality. He
accepts, seeing only a tiny canoe much too small for him to enter, but "he
took one step . . . and found he had become as small as the tiny hunters"

(Bruchac, 1985, p. 42). They teach him many things about the forest animals, and "the corn and the squash and the beans which feed human life" (p. 43)--both useful and pertinent information for Dirty Clothes to pass to his old caretaker, whose niggardly treatment of Dirty Clothes prompted the hero's departure.[24] The hero's metamorphosis into well-attired brave when he returns to his tribe symbolizes his attainment of new knowledge and an enhanced outlook: "so many things had changed in just four days. It was the same place, yet nothing was the same" (p. 43). The transformation also suggests that Dirty Clothes has now become the sagacious "other," a foreigner to his tribe, and will (in a manner analogous to the tiny hunters) provide them with important knowledge if they honor him ("'You are welcome here, Stranger' . . . . The wisest of the old men and women listened well to this young warrior" [pp. 43-44]). In a similar fashion, the hero in *The Boy Who Lived with the Bears* also becomes an "other," a foreigner to his uncle, after having acquired the traits of his helpful bears. The uncle who mistakes his nephew for a bear and is chastened by the fact that he has almost killed him in his pursuit, "realized that he had been a wicked person. He had turned back, resolved to treat the son of his own sister well from then on" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 30).

Not all the hero's communions with Nature are favorable. On their journeys, Indian heroes learn prudence and moderation by having to contend with their opposites, i.e., excesses in their own behavior or in the behavior of those they meet. The protagonist in the *Two-Headed Snake* meets such a creature on an outing and treats it with fearless compassion, for it was limp from hunger. Hajanoh, in his oversolicitousness, feeds but cannot not quench the hunger of the snake, and does not recognize the greed represented by the snake's anomalous, two-headed body (see Asikinack, 1988, p. 5). The tale's somewhat unsatisfactory moral, "you must remember to treat with gratitude those who helped you when you were weak" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 102), only applies after the remains of the snake's gluttonous appetite have been transformed into a multitude of fish that feeds Hajanoh's tribe. The tale's earlier moral, however--"beware the eyes of false friends" (p. 99)--attaches much more readily to the tale's pedagogical framework, for it has been Hajanoh's overzealous helpfulness that has blinded the hero to the snake's four-eyed charm. Excess, whether of appetite, curiosity, or ignorance represents a kind of evil in American Indian tales; the hero's encounters with excess will either teach him the importance of moderation or will expose him to the consequences of living without it. The *Origin Myth of the Acoma* makes such consequences painfully clear. Despite being cautioned to "be always very careful in handling their baskets" of images, the two sisters, Iatiku and Nautsiti, "became too anxious to give life" to them, dropping one to the ground which "came to life itself, and with a power of its own. . . . This was the snake that was to tempt Nautsiti" (Velie, 1979, p. 25).

Excesses produce rifts between human beings and Nature that the Indian hero cannot easily mend. Negative forces, however they have been

introduced into his environment, are not always easy for him to spot or alter, no matter how good or well-intentioned he has become or how growthful his journey has been. Many American Indian stories suggest that harmful powers are gratuitous , self-animating, undefined, hard to catch, and once caught even more difficult to hold on to. "In long days past," an Iroquois storyteller begins, "evil monsters and spirits preyed upon humans. As long as the sun was shining, the monsters hid unseen in deep caves" (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 227). Frightful beasts lay waste the Hopi landscape (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 211), and "workers of evil" destroy Iroquois families (Bruchac, 1985, *passim*). All Indian heroes come to realize that evil powers coexist with good ones: "Hah! You can't get along without the evil one. He has a part to play in this world. You have to have the good and the evil" (Courlander, 1982, p. 6). Once spotted, these evil powers elude the hero's grasp. The young Iroquois mother in *The Flying Head* succeeds in eliminating the devouring head from her camp, but "nobody knows what became of it" afterward (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 228).

And yet such apparently radical, irreducible evils as these can be transformed, or at least their destruction mended. Indian heroes start this process of transformation with the help of their spirit protectors or through sheer determination not to let such evil powers continue to upset the harmony of their tribes. In *The Workers of Evil*, Okteondon burns an evil mother-in-law in a sweat lodge, initiating her metamorphosis into a screech owl that "flew out, hooting mournfully" (Bruchac, 1985, p. 113). With the help of his special cedar twig, Okteondon also manages to piece together the remains of people devoured by great birds, thus reversing their process of destruction. (See also Bruchac, 1985, p. 102). With the help of Spider Woman, Son of Light is able to transform "Man-Eagle . . . into a good-looking man" (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. 215). An Indian brave can confront evil by first transforming himself and by serving as a model for others to emulate. But he also transforms evil by trusting in powers greater than himself, and by placing his hope in what many an Indian hero optimistically asserts: "We'll come out here alive and happy." Hope, confidence, gratitude, magic, imagination, and a good heart all become the Indian brave's helpers in his quest for correct relatedness. His heroism directly reflects his appropriate and sustained use of all of them.

Like Apache moral narratives, these and other American Indian stories are "changing you now, making you want to live right. [They are] making you want to replace yourself" (Basso, 1984, pp. 42-3).[25] Indian heroes "replace" themselves in their desire to "live right." The hero's own special communion with his environment makes such a chain reaction possible, his own adventure, by extension, becoming a model of relatedness and replacement for the storyteller's audience itself. This flexible view of "self" and "other" suggests that morally correct action in American Indian tales involves personal growth, indeed, that the former cannot exist without the latter. As Moehle remarks, "the authentic innocence of transcendence involves the recognition that self-consciousness is implicitly other-con-

sciousness, and that evil arises from a surfeit of egoism through which the welfare of others is neglected in the construction of one's own acts" (1978, p. 109). Heroes in medieval romances recognize the "other," but in maintaining their privileged place within their "chivalric adventure-ideology," choose to integrate the "other" into their societies "whether by peaceful means or not . . . [or through] their destruction" (Nerlich, 1987, p. xxi). For the American Indian hero--secure within his environment and receptive to others in it--"otherness" is often welcomed and potentially gratifying, because it is through his contact with the "other" that he makes the bonds within his tribe more secure and meaningful (see Ronnow, 1989, p. 70; Laing, 1969, p. 42). "Otherness," as Highwater notes, "does not imply a single, alternative option" for the Native American hero but rather "a multiverse of possibilities" (1982, p. 68). American Indian heroes move within their multiverse with remarkable agility, comfortable with all that it might offer them, but not overconfident of their place within it.

Summary

Oral-traditional stories detail their heroes' growth through a narrative pattern of exile and return that places the heroes in situations repeatedly challenging their strength and resolve. Through the motif of the quest, medieval and American Indian tales alike reaffirm general psychological truths that bear upon our understanding of human nature. Stories about heroes are stories about us: about our desires to grow up, to defeat death, to prove ourselves in difficult situations, and to achieve recognition or admiration among our peers (Becker, 1973, p. 4). In this way, medieval and American Indian tales are about self-actualization. They maintain that "one has within oneself proclivity toward growth and unity of personality ... and an automatic thrust toward expression" of these qualities (Yalom, 1980, p. 9).

All forms of literature, however, reflect ideas peculiar to their cultures. The ways in which these basic human truths are represented in medieval and American Indian tales suggest the differing religious or social concerns that have informed these truths and have given them shape. To a large degree, the medieval knight's view of "self" and "other" encompasses the view that Western humanity has had (and continues to have) of itself. This is a view conditioned upon the superiority of the "self" as measured against the inferiority of the "other," reinforced through existing social (hierarchial) and religious (Judeo-Christian) codes of behavior. Such codes are not only inadequate to the task of interpreting American Indian perceptions of "self" and "other," they are inimical to the ethical foundation underlying them. Scott Momaday remarks that "you cannot understand how the Indian thinks of himself in relation to the world around him unless you understand his conception of what is appropriate; particularly what is morally appropriate within the context of that relationship" (Basso, 1984, p. 46). For the American Indian hero, self-actualization is self-transcendence.

By "becoming a part of something greater" than himself, the American Indian hero sustains a moral vision that not only reveals his "latent nobility"[26] but also protects, even strengthens, the relational fabric of his community. By reading these and other American Indian tales, Western healers may become more sensitive to the moral conflicts uniquely experienced by American Indians and to the needs of others who desire to revise or strengthen their own moral structures by including ideas of relatedness and relationship.

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Reference Notes

[1]For general discussions about oral-traditional mentalities, see Havelock (1963), Goody (1977), and Ong (1982).

[2]Zweig (1974, pp. 81-96) draws parallels between heroic adventure and the act of reading. See also Hillman (1983, pp. 40-46), in which he stresses how the act of historicizing one's own life stories gives meaning to, "enhances, [and] dignifies" those stories. Campbell (1988, pp. 123-163) offers a synchronic view of heroic behavior as seen in ancient and modern myths. I am grateful to Dr. John Nagel for drawing my attention to this work and others (e.g., Becker, 1973; Campbell, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Highwater, 1988; Yalom, 1980; and Wickes, 1963).

[3]See Brewer, 1980; Wilson, 1975; Bettelheim, 1975; Rank, 1983; and Franz, 1974 for psychoanalytical, Jungian, and general psychological interpretations of heroic growth as seen in specific romances and tales.

[4]For a discussion of the relationship between traditional narrative styles and ideologies, see Scott (1988, pp. 37-68).

[5]"The result of the concurrent presence of both these models [of moral structure] in the Western tradition is constant tension between hierarchy and dualism: hierarchies are always potentially threatened by a dualistic militance subversive of them" (Kavolis, 1984, p. 24). For further discussion about dualistic notions of good and evil, see Franz (1977, p. 140), Goodman (1988, p. 61), Highwater (1981, p. 27), Lowe (1983, p. 102), May (1982, p. 249), and Taylor (1985, pp. 34-35). Taylor (p. 37) and Nerlich (1987, pp. 6-11) discuss the religious- and class-specific nature of social hierarchies as they occurred in the Middle Ages.

[6]Goodman (1988, p. 163) views the need for repeated clashes between good and evil as an integral part of "city dweller" societies: "It seems to be an endless chain that never comes to a satisfying conclusion. Compulsively the ritual [struggle between good and evil] has to be repeated over and over again, a confrontation without end."

[7]Gilligan's (1982) pioneering work on ethical development discusses the importance of interpersonal relationships for women's moral frameworks, and the importance of abstract and hierarchical relationships for men's moral frameworks. For more information about the ethics of "appropriateness" as it relates to American Indian culture and hunter-gatherer societies, see Goodman (1988, pp. 58-60, 86, 96, *passim*); Lincoln (1983, pp. 51-53); and Basso (1984, p. 46, *passim*).

[8]See Erdoes and Ortiz (1984).

[9]See Standing Bear (1934).

[10]See Bruchac (1985).

[11]See Velie (1979).

[12]See Courlander (1982).

[13]See Crane (1986) for the view that Middle English romances focus not on the aristocracy but rather on the landed gentry, whose power had diminished during the years after the Anglo-Norman invasion.

[14]See Miller (1977, pp. 156-207) for a selection of medieval writings on the tenants of chivalry.

[15]"The quest for adventure . . . is thus a distinctive hallmark of a class: among other things, it distinguishes the knight from the *vilains*, the 'man who does not belong to the nobility'" (Nerlich, 1987, p. 6).

[16] Scott (1988).

[17]Wickes (1963, p. 37) argues that although good and evil are "forces . . . existing before personal life," they are "born anew within the individual through an act of choice and acceptance." Medieval heroes seem to "bring evil upon themselves" by choosing to acknowledge its existence outside of themselves, accepting only its external (but not internal) references.

[18]Jungian analyst Franz remarks that "loneliness, especially loneliness in nature, opens the door to the powers of evil" (1974, p. 142). Heroes, confronted by this loneliness, display an "infantile curiosity" or "pseudo-courage, a lack of respect for the power of evil."

[19]"What is sacred is simultaneously held in greatest esteem and greatest fear. It is the source of life and the power to take life away. From it man expects all rewards, success, and power; yet as a force greater than he, it might bring punishment, failure, and degradation . . . Man is ambivalent toward the sacred: he respects that which is greater than himself, desiring to possess and control it; but, in addition, he fears it, wishing to avoid its negative powers." (Stivers, 1982, p. 32)

[20]In *The Way of the Animal Powers*, Campbell (1983, pp. 8-9) outlines the psychic functions of myth to be found in all cultures: (1) the mystical or transcendent; (2) the cosmological; (3) the sociological; and (4) the pedagogical. To reflect a hero's psychological growth, such an outline can be inverted and adapted as follows: (1) the individual or psychological (involving the hero's pre-reflective, reflective, and articulated experiences); (2) the pedagogical (involving that which is taught to the hero); (3) the sociological (involving the hero's experiences of bonding, identity, and community); (4) the cosmological (i.e., the reality of the hero experienced by reference to another reality); and (5) the transcendent (suggesting the hero's experiences of epiphany and mystery). Thanks to Dr. Nagel for suggesting this modified scheme.

[21]"It is only by contrasting and comparing himself to *like* organisms, to his fellow men, that he can judge if he has some extra claim of importance" (Becker, 1975, p. 12).

[22]Personal communication; Santa Fe, NM, July 10, 1989. Zuni scholar and fieldworker Jane Young noted the difficulty of broaching the topic of evil to many American Indians, as it (too easily) encourages their discussion of sacred and taboo subjects (personal communication; Albuquerque, July, 1989). Limited interviews with three American Indians (Chippewa [June 28, 1989], Laguna/Zuni [July 6, 1989], Laguna/Acoma [August 3, 1989]) indicated their readiness to discuss evils *introduced into* their societies by non-Indian cultures (e.g., alcohol, drugs, cars, money), or the evils resulting from cultural conflict (e.g., adoption and subsequent abandonment by anglo parents, suspicion of non-tribal opportunities for higher education), and their effect on tribal or familial relationships. When asked for remedies to these ills, interviewees responded by stressing the importance of family bonds and community services--"relational" solutions strengthening already exiting relationships among tribal members.

[23]*Cf.* the Zuni tale *The Boy and The Deer* (Smith, 1986, p. 140). The callousness of the boy's human mother contrasts with the "deer-mother's tenderness. The deer-mother is made to speak an embittered indictment of the human mother's behavior."

[24]I am grateful to Jane Young (University of New Mexico) for suggesting Basso's very useful article.

[25]Will Durant, quoted in Yalom, pp. 434-435.

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