

# Myth Sequences from the *Kojiki*

## A Structural Study

HENRIETTA DE VEER

### APPROACH

*Aim.* Studies of Japanese myths can be, and have been, carried on from various perspectives. One thinks, for example, of the political interpretation of Matsumoto (1928), the intellectualist orientation of Jean Herbert (1967), the naturalist viewpoint of Holtom (1938), and what may be called the proto-structuralist representation of Yoshida (1961, 1962, 1963). Common to all is a desire to explain a story in broad terms. Equally common is an inability to account for most of the concrete features of a given myth sequence. To illustrate, when Susa-nō-wo and Amaterasu swear their oath and procreate, they do so facing each other across a river rather than in some other relational position. Why is this detail included? A myth may be more than the sum of such details, yet it is evident that to change the details would be to change the myth. By the same token, it is plausible to assume that understanding the details in their systematic interrelations is essential to understanding a myth.

The aim of this study, accordingly, is to elucidate systematically the meaning of various details and images in Japanese myths. I hope to be able to show that there exist systematic relations between specific features in the myths and that certain features tend to cluster and co-vary in a number of contexts. This is not to say that a given detail, image, or symbol necessarily means the same thing in every context. Fire, for example, may mean one thing in one myth but something else in another. The assumption that the various images stand in a systematic relation to one another makes it necessary, therefore, to look at several myths and see how the images vary in relation to one

another. I believe I have found that there is a *systematic* varying of images, that the varying is not random or arbitrary.

Ethnographic research on pre-Buddhist Japan is unfortunately rather limited, so certain questions have to remain unanswered for the present. Lévi-Strauss has devoted considerable attention to the Bororo understanding of the jaguar in connection with his analysis of the role of the jaguar in Bororo myths (1969, pp. 81–84, 97–98, *passim*). I, however, will have to leave open the question why a mouse is used in a particular sequence rather than some other animal. All I can hope to do is to show that certain images are used recurrently, that these images are related to other images throughout the myths, and that these images co-vary in systematic fashion.

*Method.* In order to get at the systematic relations of images, it is important, as indicated above, to begin by looking at several myths. This procedure enables one to see how the same image is used in different contexts and with what other images it is associated. I propose to do this by constructing a series of comparative charts that will: (1) point up overall structural similarities between myths, and (2) bring to light the recurrent images existing throughout the series of myths selected for analysis.

What I have done is to single out six separate action sequences from the myths found in Book 1 of the *Kojiki*. These six sequences are not exhaustive of Book 1, but the limitation follows from the assumption that intensive analysis of a few sequences is likely to be more productive than a superficial treatment of all. “Action sequence” is here defined as a myth sequence with a definite beginning and end and in which there is a break in the action before the next sequence.

Material from the *Nihongi* plays an important but secondary role in this study. It is relegated to a secondary position because the method employed calls for comparing *whole* mythic sequences, not the separate sentences of which they are composed. The fragmentary nature of the *Nihongi* sequences requires, given

this method of analysis, that they be considered secondary. When, however, an image occurs in the *Nihongi* that is relevant to the particular images emerging in the course of the investigation and that is not yet found in the *Kojiki*, it will be taken up in the appropriate context.

#### THE SUBTERRANEAN REALM

The Izanagi/Izanami myth sequence and the Opo-kuni-nushi/Susa-nō-wo sequence are the first to be studied. To save space, the two sequences are presented in summary form.

##### M<sub>1</sub>. *The Izanagi/Izanami myth*

Izanami, burned in giving birth to the fire-deity, dies. The grief-stricken Izanagi buries her, but wishes for her return. He goes to Yōmī, the realm of the dead. When Izanami comes to the door of the hall, he greets her saying that the lands they were creating are not yet complete, so she must "come back." Izanami is willing, but doubts that she can do so because she has eaten at the hearth of Yōmī. She says she will consult the gods of Yōmī and instructs Izanagi to wait where he is, forbidding him to look at her. But she is absent so long that the impatient Izanagi, using a tooth of his comb as a torch, enters the hall. He sees the maggot-ridden Izanami, is struck with fear, and flees.

Izanami, furious at having been humiliated, dispatches the hags of Yōmī to pursue him. He distracts them by throwing down a bit of vine he had used to bind his hair. It immediately bears grapes they stop to eat. Next he throws down a comb. It sprouts bamboo shoots they stop to eat.

Izanami then unleashes eight thunder-deities and a horde of warriors. Izanagi, while fleeing, defends himself with his sword. At a certain pass, he finds three peaches and with them attacks and successfully drives off his pursuers.

Izanami herself takes up the chase, but at the pass named Yōmō-tu-pira-saka where the land of Yōmī is connected to the human world, Izanagi rolls a huge boulder across the path and prevents further pursuit. With the boulder between them, they break their troth.

Leaving Izanami, Izanagi senses that he has been polluted by Yōmi and purifies himself in a river. Each item of clothing he removes gives rise to a deity. Again, each level of water he bathes in gives rise to a deity. Finally, washing his left eye leads to the existence of Ama-terasu [the sun deity], washing his right eye gives rise to Tuku-yōmi [the moon deity], and washing his nose produces Susa-nō-wo [a deity associated with water and storm].

Izanagi rejoices in his abundant progeny and assigns a mission to the last three. To Ama-terasu is given the mission of ruling Takama-nō-para [the heavenly realm]. To Tuku-yōmi is given the mission of ruling the realm of night. To Susa-nō-wo is given the mission of ruling the ocean (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 56-71).

M2. *The Opo-kuni-nushi / Susa-nō-wo myth*

Opo-kuni-nushi, though the youngest of many brothers (deities) and servant to them, gains the hand of the princess Yagami. Angered, the eighty brothers plot to kill him. At the foot of a mountain, they order him to wait and catch a red boar they say they will drive down the mountain, threatening him with death if he fails. Then they heat up a boar-shaped rock and roll it down the hill. Opo-kuni-nushi, on seizing it, is burned to death.

His mother carries her lament to the heavenly realm, and two deities are dispatched to restore him to life. Seeing him restored to health and beauty, the eighty brothers again lead him into the mountains. This time they open a tree with a wedge, put him inside, and remove the wedge, thus crushing him to death.

His weeping mother seeks him out and revives him, advising to go someplace where the deities will not trouble him. As he goes, they catch up to him, but while they are stringing their arrows, he escapes through the fork of a tree.

Advised to obtain counsel from Susa-nō-wo, he goes to that realm. There he and the princess Suseri, Susa-nō-wo's daughter, are attracted to each other and become husband and wife. She describes him to her father as beautiful, but Susa-nō-wo looks at him and calls him ugly. Susa-nō-wo invites Opo-

kuni-nushi into his house. The first night he causes him to sleep in a room full of snakes, but Suseri gives him a snake-repelling scarf. The next night Susa-nō-wo puts him in a chamber full of centipedes and bees, but again Suseri gives him a protective scarf. The next day Susa-nō-wo shoots an arrow into a plain, tells Opo-kuni-nushi to fetch it, and sets fire to the grass on every side. Just when Opo-kuni-nushi is surrounded by flames, a mouse appears and says, "The inside is hollow-hollow; the outside is narrow-narrow." Hearing this, Opo-kuni-nushi stamps his feet, falls into a hole that opens beneath him, and hides there as the fire passes over.

The mouse then presents him with Susa-nō-wo's arrow—minus the feathers, which her children gnawed away. Suseri, in tears, is preparing for her husband's funeral when Opo-kuni-nushi appears and returns the arrow to Susa-nō-wo.

Thereupon, Susa-nō-wo leads him to the house and has him pick lice from his head. Opo-kuni-nushi sees centipedes on Susa-nō-wo's head. Suseri gives her husband red clay and nuts of the Muku tree. He bites open the nuts, puts the red clay in his mouth, and spits out the mixture. Susa-nō-wo, thinking he is biting open and spitting out the centipedes, is pleased and dozes off.

Opo-kuni-nushi then ties strands of Susa-nō-wo's hair to the rafters, blocks the door with a boulder, and makes off with Suseri on his back and with Susa-nō-wo's sword of life, bow-and-arrow of life, and heavenly speaking cither. But as he flees, the cither brushes against a tree and wakes the sleeping deity. Alarmed, Susa-nō-wo pulls down the hall, but is detained from immediate pursuit by having to disentangle his hair. He then chases them as far as Yōmō-tu-pira-saka pass, from that point calling out and saying: Use the sword of life and bow-and-arrow of life to subdue your half-brothers. Make Suseri your chief wife. Dwell at the foot of Mt. Uka, plant your palace posts on bedrock, and raise its crossbeams to Takama-nō-para, you scoundrel!

Opo-kuni-nushi pursues and subdues his eighty divine brothers and starts to build his kingdom. The princess Yamami shares the conjugal bed, but because she fears Suseri, the chief wife, she goes home, leaving the child she had borne

wedged in the fork of a tree (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 93-103).

*General analysis.* What do these two seemingly unrelated myths have in common? On the most superficial level, both are concerned with a journey to Yōmī,<sup>1</sup> and in both the heroes have a reason for the journey: one to get back his wife, the other to get advice. Since the obvious similarities end here, an analytical chart may help to make clear the less conspicuous structural features and recurrent images.

CHART 1  
PAIRED FEATURES OF TWO MYTH SEQUENCES

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife and intruding husband: impatient husband leaves Yōmī empty-handed
M <sub>2</sub>	Father, daughter (wife), and intruding son-in-law (husband): patient husband leaves Yōmī with wife and magical implements
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero comes for wife
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero comes for advice but "steals" wife and advice
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband cannot look at wife but does so in secret
M <sub>2</sub>	Man and woman look at each other and become man and wife
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife has eaten of the hearth of Yōmī
M <sub>2</sub>	No mention of wife's having eaten of the hearth of Yōmī
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero follows wife, lights fire, sees her rotting body (finds her ugly)
M <sub>2</sub>	Wife returns with father to see hero (father finds hero ugly)
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife dispatches hags and thunders of Yōmī (signifying vermin) to kill hero
M <sub>2</sub>	Wife gives hero magical implements to save him from snakes, bees, and centipedes (vermin of Yōmī)

1. It may be questioned whether Yōmī was the destination in both cases, since the name does not occur in M<sub>2</sub> and Susa-nō-wo is not usually associated with the realm of the dead. It should be noted, however, that Susa-nō-wo's land, identified in M<sub>2</sub> as Ne-nō-kata-su-kuni, is usually considered equivalent to Yōmī (Philippi 1968, p. 530). Even if this equivalence is disallowed, both can be recognized as mythical realms separate from the heavenly realm. This is sufficient for present purposes. For convenience, however, both realms will, in the following, be called Yōmī.

CHART 1 — *Continued*

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero saved through his own magical devices
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero saved through his wife's magical devices
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero wards off hags through things from his hair that he changes into food (apparent food), but finally makes them flee by throwing peaches (real food) at them
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero wards off the father by appearing to eat and spit out the centipedes from his hair (anti-food)
M <sub>1</sub>	Through the ornaments in his hair, the hero is saved
M <sub>2</sub>	Through tying up Susa-nō-wo's hair, the hero is saved
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero and wife break troth by facing and looking at one another
M <sub>2</sub>	Father gives daughter and husband advice from a distance, looking after his escaping daughter and son-in-law
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero returns alone and empty-handed and establishes children as rulers of the land
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero returns with wife and magical implements to establish himself as ruler of the land
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero purifies himself and creates gods
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero creates land with no purification
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife killed by fire in giving birth to it
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero escapes death by fire through hiding in underground cavern
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife internally burned to death
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero escapes being burned externally by hiding internally
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero lights fire with comb from his hair in order to see his wife and inadvertently causes her death (decay)
M <sub>2</sub>	Father lights fire around plain to kill hero, but fails to kill him (cause him to decay) through ignorance of cavern
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife causes destruction of herself through fire
M <sub>2</sub>	Brothers cause (apparent) destruction of hero through fire
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero causes destruction of his wife through fire
M <sub>2</sub>	Father causes (apparent) destruction of hero through fire
M <sub>1</sub>	Living wife fair in husband's eyes, but rotting wife ugly
M <sub>2</sub>	Living husband beautiful to wife, but ugly to her father

Before developing certain features from chart 1, it will prove useful to point up the contrast between the state of affairs at the beginning and end of each sequence (see chart 2).

CHART 2  
INITIAL AND TERMINAL STATES IN TWO MYTH SEQUENCES

SEQUENCE	FEATURE	
	Initial State	Terminal State
M <sub>1</sub>	Son kills mother by virtue of his fiery nature	Father kills son (fire) with sword and creates water
M <sub>2</sub>	Brothers kill brother with fire	Brother subdues brothers with sword and kills them by drowning
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero insults wife by looking at her and finding her visibly ugly	Hero found infected with pollution, though not visibly
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero insulted by father as ugly though he is not so visibly	Hero makes contact with visible pollution (centipedes)
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband looks at wife when he ought not	Wife and husband do not touch but look at one another
M <sub>2</sub>	Husband and wife look at each other	Wife and husband touch but do not look at one another
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero has magical implements in hair with which he distracts vermin, eating thus aiding his escape	Hero purifies himself
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero finds vermin in (father's) hair and pretends to remove them by eating, not-eating thus aiding his escape	Hero does not purify himself but purifies his brothers

Examination of charts 1 and 2 makes it evident that there are structural parallels in these two sequences, parallels that become apparent only as one sequence is considered in relation to the other. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this method of analysis makes conspicuous recurrent images that might otherwise be overlooked. The images I propose to examine here are: hair, eye contact, fire, decay, and food.

*Fire, food, and decay.* As Izanami dies in giving birth to fire, she vomits, urinates, and defecates. After descending to Yōmī, she cannot return to earth because she has "eaten of the hearth of Yōmī." It is dark in the hall of Yōmī, and when Izanagi lights

a fire to see her (against her wish), he sees her rotting and festering with maggots. Again, in M<sub>2</sub> fire causes Opo-kuni-nushi's first death and consequent ugliness. (Only when he is rubbed with water in the process of reincarnation is he made a "beautiful man" again.) Susa-nō-wo also attempts to kill Opo-kuni-nushi by burning him to death.

In the M<sub>1</sub> examples, fire appears to be associated with death and decay. Defecation, urine, and vomit represent that which was but is no longer food. What was once food has lost its identity through decay. Rotten food can thus be recognized as an appropriate symbol for death, for it is a natural transformation of that which is culturally defined as edible. Death, in the same way, causes the natural transformation or rotting of a human being (one endowed with culture), making him no longer human. With regard to food, fire is an agent of cultural transformation. Fire is to the cultural transformation of meat as rot is to its natural transformation.

But what is the relation of this observation to Izanami's statement that she cannot return to earth because she has "eaten of the hearth of Yōmī"?

Lévi-Strauss (1969, p. 142) argues that cooking is a cultural act, an act that defines man as man and sets him apart from the natural world. Since Yōmī as the land of death, rottenness, darkness, and vermin is the converse of "the Central Land of the Reed Plains" (the land of the living), it may be suggested that if the function of a hearth among the living is to make edible that which is deemed inedible (the cultural transformation of food), so the Yōmī hearth may stand this function on its head: rotting (the natural transformation of food) is the way of cooking in Yōmī. Izanami, therefore, has not only died but also defined herself as dead through eating the inedible.

Fire enters the picture when Izanagi, to see his wife, lights a tooth of his comb as a torch and enters the hall only to see a rotting corpse swarming with maggots. Here again fire and rot appear closely related. In this case the living husband has the

fire and the rotting wife does not. It may even be conjectured that he somehow caused her to rot, since the "swarming maggots" image occurs only after he has lit the fire.

The next question to be considered is that of the relation of the foregoing to the two fire images found in  $M_2$ . The first is the death-causing heated boulder. This event occurs not in  $Y\ddot{o}m\ddot{i}$  but on earth. Nonetheless, there is a similarity, though inverted, between this event and that of Izanami's death, for while both die of burns, her burns are internal but his external. Moreover, he is resuscitated to life and beauty, but she remains dead and ugly. (The relation of ugliness to decay and death will be taken up later.) The second fire image is that of the ignited plain whereby Susa-nō-wo sought to kill Opo-kuni-nushi. Caught inside a circle of flames, Opo-kuni-nushi escapes through falling into a subterranean cave. Birth symbolism aside, it may be suggested that Susa-nō-wo was trying to force Opo-kuni-nushi to "eat" of the hearth of  $Y\ddot{o}m\ddot{i}$  but failed.

In both sequences, eating and the subject of what constitutes food are recurrent images. In  $M_1$  Izanami cannot return to earth because she has eaten rot, and Izanagi fends off his pursuers with hair ornaments that become (apparent) food. It can hardly be coincidental, moreover, that the hags, while not hesitating to eat that which only appears to be food, flee when real food is flung at them. In  $M_2$  Opo-kuni-nushi tricks Susa-nō-wo by cracking nuts and spitting them out with red clay (in lieu of centipedes). Seeing this, Susa-nō-wo is content and goes to sleep. Now why should this action satisfy him? In the light of the preceding discussion, the answer seems clear. To eat centipedes, the vermin of  $Y\ddot{o}m\ddot{i}$ , is equivalent to eating rot or decay. Had the hero eaten what humans consider anti-food, he would have become, like the inhabitants of  $Y\ddot{o}m\ddot{i}$ , non-human.

The food/decay polarity thus shows us: (1) Izanami eating rot that identifies her with rottenness; (2) the hags of  $Y\ddot{o}m\ddot{i}$  pursuing Izanagi in order to eat him (culturally he is a non-food) and pausing to devour what seems to be food but is not, but being

repelled by real food; and (3) Opo-kuni-nushi effecting his escape from Yōmī through pretending to eat rot. It is congruent with this line of thought to suggest that the reason Suseri was able to leave her father's realm may have been that she is nowhere described as having eaten of the hearth of Yōmī, the fire of decay that produces anti-food fit only for the dead.

*Hair.* Not in distinction from but in relation to the preceding discussion, another image that calls for consideration is that of hair. We begin with a review of the hair images in M<sub>1</sub>.

The first is in Yōmī when Izanagi lights the end-tooth of a comb taken from his left hair-bunch and sees Izanami's body rotting and crawling with maggots. The Japanese word for end-tooth is *wō-bashira* which means "male pillar," an ornate way of saying penis. In this scene, therefore, hair appears to be connected with fire, rot, and sex.

The next scene is when Izanagi throws down a vine used to secure his hair-bunches and the comb from his right hair-bunch. They turn, respectively, into grapes and bamboo shoots, that is, (uncooked) food.

Again, when Izanagi starts to purify himself from Yōmī-derived pollution, he throws down his headgear. The god thus produced is called Aki-gupi-nō-usi-nō-kamī. Etymologically, the name can be understood thus:

AKI, id., "be full," "be satiated," also possibly in a derivative sense "be open," "open"; GUPI, id., "swallow, "eat," but possibly derivatively the noun kupi/gupi, "post," "stake," as in Iku-gupi-nō-kamī, etc. USI, phon., "ruler," "master".... This deity may have performed some sort of purificatory function by opening his mouth and swallowing sins or evils (Philippi 1968, p. 452).

Here it would seem that articles taken from the hair have some relationship to eating and/or bodily orifices.

The two dominant hair images in M<sub>2</sub> are those of Opo-kuni-nushi's pretending to eat centipedes he picks from Susa-nō-wo's

hair and his tying Susa-nō-wo's hair to the rafters. The former, with respect to eating, stands in inverse relationship to the hag scene in M<sub>1</sub>. There the dead (hags) eat fresh (uncooked) food from the hair of one who is alive; in M<sub>2</sub> a living person ostensibly eats vermin (signifying rot) from the hair of the ruler of the dead.

Why hair and eating are associated remains unclear at this stage of the analysis, but as a preliminary comment it may be ventured that there seems to be a close and intricate relationship between eating, hair, and sexual symbolism.

*Eye contact.* The image of eye contact is a recurrent one. In M<sub>1</sub> Izanagi looks at his wife, despite her taboo, and brings about disastrous consequences. At the end of the sequence, they face one another, maintaining eye contact, and break their troth. In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi and Suseri establish eye contact, are pleased with each other, and become man and wife. The sequence ends with Opo-kuni-nushi carrying Suseri away from Yōmī on his back—hence without eye contact.

Symmetric inversion suggests the pattern summarized in chart 3.

CHART 3  
EYE CONTACT

Sequence	Initial State	Terminal State
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband looks at wife when he should not	Husband and wife look at one another and break their marriage
M <sub>2</sub>	Man and woman look at one another and marry	Husband makes sure he does <i>not</i> look at wife when he should not

Again it appears that M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> are inversely related to each other by means of the eye contact image. Directing one's gaze to another and exchanging looks with another involve a potency that may be dangerous or creative. The most dangerous situation, so far as these two sequences are concerned, is looking at another without that person's knowledge or against his or her wishes. Only as other myth sequences are analyzed, however,

will it be possible to arrive at a precise statement as to when eye contact is dangerous and when it is creative.

The next myth sequence also concerns a journey—in this case to the ocean.

#### THE SUBMARINE AND TERRESTRIAL REALMS

##### M3. *The Po-wori myth*

Po-deri, a fisherman with the luck of the sea, reluctantly submits to the entreaties of his younger brother Po-wori, a hunter with the luck of the mountains, that they exchange implements and the luck they embody. Yet even with his brother's hook, Po-wori catches nothing. Even worse, he loses the precious hook in the sea. Po-deri demands its return, and even though Po-wori breaks up his sword and makes compensation with a thousand hooks, Po-deri will be satisfied with nothing but the original hook.

As Po-wori weeps by the sea, a [minor] sea deity listens to his tale, makes for him a small boat of closely woven bamboo, puts him in the boat, and counsels him thus: Follow the current I push you into until you come to a palace. This is the palace of Wata-tu-mi, the great sea deity. Climb the tree next to the well. From the top of the tree you will be seen by Wata-tu-mi's daughter, who will tell you what to do.

All goes well, and Po-wori climbs the tree. The daughter's maid comes to draw water, sees Po-wori's image in the well, and looks up at him. He asks her for water, but when she offers it to him, he takes a jewel from around his neck, puts it in his mouth, and spits it into the vessel. It adheres to the container, so the girl takes both vessel and jewel to her mistress, the princess Tōyō-tama. Hearing the explanation, she goes outside to see him for herself. They regard each other lovingly and become man and wife.

Tōyō-tama informs her father of Po-wori's arrival. He too goes out to see for himself and recognizes him as the son of the deity who rules the Central Land of the Reed Plains [the world of men]. He welcomes him, providing him with carpets to sit on, preparing a lavish feast, and giving him his daughter

in marriage. For three years, Po-wori lives in this realm.

At the end of three years, Po-wori remembers his brother and the lost fishhook and sighs with sadness. Questioned by his father-in-law, he tells what happened. The deity summons all the fish of the sea and asks if any took the hook. They reply that it must be the sea-bream, for he has something caught in his throat and cannot eat. They examine the sea-bream, find the hook, remove and wash it, and present it to Po-wori.

As it is presented, Wata-tu-mi says: When you return this hook to your brother, say to him that it is "a gloomy hook, an uneasy hook, a poor hook, a dull hook," and give it to him from behind your back. Later, if he makes a high rice paddy, you make a low one; if he makes a low one, you make a high one. I, controlling the water, will make him poverty-stricken within three years. If he becomes angry and attacks you, take this tide-raising jewel and cause him to drown; if he pleads with you in anguish, take this tide-ebbing jewel and cause him to live.

Giving him the jewels, Wata-tu-mi summons the crocodiles, explains that Po-wori needs an escort for his return to the upper realm, and asks them to make estimates of the days required to make the journey and return with a report. Each crocodile answers in accordance with its length. One promises to escort him to his destination in one day, so he is selected. Po-wori gets on the neck of the crocodile and arrives in one day.

He meets his elder brother, gives him the fishhook as instructed, and sees his brother become poorer and poorer. Whenever his brother attacks him, Po-wori use the tide-raising jewel and causes him to drown. When he pleads in anguish, Po-wori uses the tide-ebbing jewel and saves him. Alternately suffering and anguished, the elder brother finally pleads to become Po-wori's minion.

At this time Po-wori's wife Tōyō-tama emerges from the sea, pregnant and near the time of delivery. She says she wants to bear the child not in the ocean but on land, as befits a child of the heavenly deities.

A parturition hut thatched with cormorant feathers is started at the edge of the beach, but before the thatching is finished,

her labor begins. She enters the hut, but warns her husband not to watch, saying that in the course of her delivery she will revert to her original form and does want to be seen. Po-wo-ri watches secretly anyway. He sees her turn into a gigantic slithering crocodile, is astonished, and flees.

Tōyō-tama, on learning she had been observed, feels shamed. Leaving her child behind, she returns to the sea saying: I had intended to go back and forth [between the terrestrial and submarine regions], but now that I have been shamed ... And she closes the border [between the two realms]. But even though bitter, she still retains unsuppressable yearning and sends her younger sister, Tama-yōri, to nurse the child... (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 148-157).

*General analysis.* Parallels between this sequence and the first two are easily discerned. All three are concerned with men who journey down to realms ordinarily considered inaccessible to human beings. Each hero has a specific reason for the journey: in this case, as in  $M_2$ , to obtain advice. Other relationships that come into view through analysis are shown in a series of charts. Chart 4 focuses on features found in all three sequences, chart 5 on elements found in two out of the three, and chart 6 on initial and terminal states in all three.

CHART 4  
RELATED FEATURES IN  $M_1$ ,  $M_2$ , and  $M_3$

Sequence	Feature
$M_1$	Journey down to Yōmi
$M_2$	Journey down to Yōmi
$M_3$	Journey down into the ocean
$M_1$	No father to approve marriage
$M_2$	Man and woman marry without father's approval
$M_3$	Man and woman marry with father's approval
$M_1$	Hero gets out by means of his own devices
$M_2$	Hero gets out by means of wife's help
$M_3$	Hero gets out by means of father-in-law's help
$M_1$	Through food, hero wards off hags
$M_2$	Through anti-food, hero wards off father-in-law
$M_3$	With food, hero is accepted by father-in-law

CHART 4 — *Continued*

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Hags eat "food " provided by hero
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero pretends to eat and spit out "food" from hair of father-in-law
M <sub>3</sub>	Hero eats and spits out a jewel, later eats father-in-law's food

## CHART 5

## RELATED FEATURES IN TWO OUT OF THREE SEQUENCES

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife forbids husband to look at her
M <sub>3</sub>	Wife forbids husband to look at her
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife shamed by husband's looking at her when he ought not
M <sub>3</sub>	Wife shamed by husband's looking at her when he ought not
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband flees when he sees wife dead, swarming with maggots
M <sub>3</sub>	Husband flees when he sees wife as gigantic slithering crocodile
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero is crushed to death in a tree; escapes through a fork in a tree; his wife leaves baby in the fork of a tree
M <sub>3</sub>	Hero, at palace of sea deity, is discovered in a tree

## CHART 6

INITIAL AND TERMINAL STATES IN M<sub>1</sub>, M<sub>2</sub>, AND M<sub>3</sub>

SEQUENCE	FEATURE	
	Initial State	Terminal State
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero goes to get wife	Hero returns alone
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero goes to get advice	Hero returns with stolen wife and advice
M <sub>3</sub>	Hero goes to get advice	Hero returns with advice but no wife (though she follows later)
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband and wife "touch" (procreate)	Husband and wife have no physical contact
M <sub>2</sub>	Husband and wife have no physical contact	Husband carries wife on back (procreation impossible)
M <sub>3</sub>	Husband and wife "touch" (procreate)	Husband and wife have no physical contact
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband and wife procreate together	Hero procreates alone

CHART 6 — *Continued*

SEQUENCE	FEATURE	
	Initial State	Terminal State
M <sub>2</sub>	No procreation	Hero procreates alone
M <sub>3</sub>	Husband and wife procreate together	Wife should give birth alone but does not
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero looks at wife when he should not	Hero and wife look at each other and break troth
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero and woman look at each other and marry	Hero and wife do not look at each other
M <sub>3</sub>	Hero and woman look at each other and marry	Hero looks at wife when he should not

Of particular interest in these charts are the images of eye contact and water.

*Eye contact.* The image of eye contact recurs frequently but in a bewildering variety of contexts. In M<sub>1</sub> Izanagi looks at his wife when he should not, and this has disastrous effects. In M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> hero and woman meet, look at each other lovingly, and become husband and wife. Later in M<sub>1</sub> Izanagi and his wife face each other to end their marriage. In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi, when escaping from Yōmī, carries his wife on his back, a position from which he cannot look at her. In M<sub>3</sub> Po-wori looks at his wife when he ought not, and again disastrous consequences follow. What, if anything, can be inferred from these scenes?

Earlier it was noted that eye contact (or its opposite) involves a potency that can be either dangerous or creative. In one case (M<sub>3</sub>) forbidden eye contact occurs during a birth scene; in another (M<sub>1</sub>) it occurs in relation to death. Context, therefore, appears to be of little help in determining the meaning of eye contact. It becomes necessary to consider the matter on another, more abstract level.

In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi is apparently able to leave Yōmī with his wife because he, perhaps intentionally, positions himself in

relation to her so that he does not and cannot look at her. "The Look," as Sartre calls it, becomes dangerous when done without the knowledge or consent of the person looked at—in each case a woman. (A woman's gazing at a man is apparently less potent; only when the man looks at the woman do destructive results ensue.) The person looked at is made an object to the other, a vulnerable object. If, however, mutual consent is involved in the looking or not looking, then its potency can benefit both parties. In M<sub>1</sub> it enables Izanagi and Izanami to end their marriage; in both M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> it enables a marriage to begin. Looking when forbidden, particularly from man to woman, would seem to lead, then, to negative or injurious results, but looking with mutual consent to positive.

More important, from the perspective of scale, are the "universal" consequences of eye contact. In M<sub>1</sub> eye contact leads to the radical disjunction of Yōmī from earth (no one can travel between them again). In M<sub>2</sub>, conversely, Yōmī and earth are rejoined by what appears to be a purposeful avoidance of eye contact (a sequence with a parallel in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice: they are allowed to return from hell to earth provided he not look at her). In M<sub>3</sub> the hero's looking at his wife despite her prohibition leads to the radical disjunction of earth and ocean (no one can now cross the boundary between them).

*Water.* Previously undiscussed but important in all three sequences is the image of water. In M<sub>1</sub> Izanami, dying as a result of having given birth to the fire god, urinates and creates a water goddess. Izanagi kills the fire god with his sword, and from the flowing blood various storm and water gods come into existence. In an M<sub>1</sub> variant in the *Nihongi*, Izanagi, while fleeing the hags of Yōmī, "made water against a large tree, which water at once turned into a great river" (Aston 1956, p. 25) and facilitated his escape. Finally, Izanagi purifies himself by cleansing his whole body in water, thus creating Ama-terasu and Susa-nō-wo, two important deities in the Shinto pantheon.

In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi, after being burned to death, is revived and restored to beauty through being rubbed with water. At the end of the sequence, he subdues the brothers who had killed him with fire by sweeping them down the rapids of a river.

M<sub>3</sub> is replete with water imagery. Po-wori loses his brother's fishhook in the ocean. As advised, Po-wori ventures into the ocean depths and climbs a tree next to a well. The serving maid, come to draw water, sees him. He asks her for water, but when she offers it, he does not drink it but instead spits a jewel into the water vessel. At the end of the sequence, Po-wori takes revenge on his brother by drowning (and alternately reviving) him. Finally, his wife, shamed by his action of looking at her contrary to her expressed wish, leaves him and returns to the sea.

In M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> fire and water stand, it would seem, in opposition to one another, for fire causes death whereas water gives life. M<sub>3</sub> seems to suggest another way of thinking about water, but before this matter can be ascertained, another sequence must be introduced.

#### M<sub>4</sub>. *The Birth of Po-wori*

Ama-tu-piko meets a lovely maiden at a certain cape and asks her who she is. She says that she is the daughter of [the mountain god] Opo-yama-tu-mi and that her name is Kō-nō-pana-nō-Saku [hereafter abbreviated Kō-nō-pana]. He also learns that she has an elder sister, Ipa-naga. He expresses a wish to marry her and asks for an answer, but she says the answer must come from her father. Ama-tu-piko thereupon sends to her father for permission, and her father, highly pleased, sends him not only a shower of gifts but also Ipa-naga.

Now Ipa-naga is exceedingly ugly, so Ama-tu-piko is afraid and sends her back, but he keeps Kō-nō-pana and has conjugal intercourse with her for one night.

Opo-yama-tu-mi, ashamed because Ipa-naga was sent back, sends a message: The reason I offered both daughters was that I swore an oath that if the child of the heavenly deities [Ama-tu-piko] employed Ipa-naga, his life should be as eternal as a rock [*ipa*], and if he employed Kō-nō-pana, he should flourish

like the blossoms of the trees [*kō-nō-pana*]. But now that Ipanaga has been returned, his life will be short like that of the tree-blossoms.

This is why emperors die.

Later, *Kō-nō-pana* announces that she is pregnant and about to bear a child. *Ama-tu-piko* doubts that pregnancy could have resulted from one night together and denies being the father. *Kō-nō-pana* replies: If the child is not yours but another's, let it not be born safely, but if it is yours, let it be born safely. Then she builds a doorless house many yards long, enters and seals the hole with clay, sets fire to it and proceeds to give birth. The child first born in the midst of the flames [*po*] is *Po-deri*. Next is *Po-suseri*, and finally *Po-wori* (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 144-147).

*Symbols and meanings.* *Po-wori*, then, is a fire deity (as are his brothers), and this is important to understanding *M*<sub>3</sub>. That *Po-deri* should be killed through drowning is most appropriate, since this is the way one "kills" fire. It is also reasonable that *Po-wori* did not drink the water offered him, for it might have "killed" him. The possibility, however, of *Po-wori*'s journeying to the depths of the sea without injury remains unexplained.

Lévi-Strauss (1963, p. 210) argues that symbols possess not an intrinsic, unvarying significance but a significance that depends primarily on position within a mythic context. On this view, meaning is relational, and if there is a change in the way one term in a relation is used, there will be a corresponding change in the other. If water, for example, is used one way in one myth but differently in another, its opposing symbol, fire, will change accordingly.

In the first three sequences, the main action took place in *Yōmī* or under the sea. There fire was associated with death, water with life. In *M*<sub>4</sub>, however, the action takes place in the world of the living. In this case fire is associated with life, and water with death. Thus water and fire may either cause death or give life, depending on the context. The symbol does not stand by itself. (This point is taken up again below.)

Other features that make  $M_4$  distinctive include the heroine's referring her suitor to her father rather than responding directly to his proposal, and the importance of fire in the birth scene. For a general view, however, of the relationships between the myths, analytical charts will again prove useful. Chart 7 focuses on features involved in all four sequences, chart 8 on features found in two or three of the four, and chart 9 on initial and final states.

CHART 7  
RELATED FEATURES IN  $M_1$ ,  $M_2$ ,  $M_3$ , AND  $M_4$

Sequence	Feature
$M_1$	Protagonists: husband and wife
$M_2$	Protagonists: father, daughter, and husband
$M_3$	Protagonists: father, daughter, and husband
$M_4$	Protagonists: father, two daughters, and husband
$M_1$	Husband wants wife to return for procreation but she does not
$M_2$	Husband does not procreate with wife
$M_3$	Wife leaves husband but still desires to procreate, so sends sister
$M_4$	Wife and husband procreate once in one case, never in other
$M_1$	Wife will not return with husband; he leaves alone
$M_2$	Man and woman meet, marry without father's approval, leave together
$M_3$	Man and woman meet, marry with father's approval; he leaves alone
$M_4$	Man and woman meet, wait for father's approval to marry; father gives both daughters to hero; he returns elder, has intercourse once with younger; he leaves
$M_1$	Wife and husband procreate
$M_2$	No mention of wife and husband procreating
$M_3$	Wife bears one child, but there is no mention of sexual relations
$M_4$	Hero rejects elder sister, spends only one night with younger
$M_1$	Husband returns without wife and creates alone
$M_2$	Husband returns with wife and creates alone
$M_3$	Wife follows husband in order to give birth alone
$M_4$	Wife follows husband in order to give birth alone
$M_1$	Wife is ugly to husband
$M_2$	Husband is ugly to father-in-law
$M_3$	Wife is ugly to husband
$M_4$	Husband is beautiful to father-in-law, one wife ugly to husband

CHART 7 — *Continued*

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife is ashamed because of her ugliness
M <sub>2</sub>	Wife is not ashamed by her husband's ugliness
M <sub>3</sub>	Wife is ashamed because of her ugliness
M <sub>4</sub>	Father is ashamed because of his daughter's ugliness

CHART 8

RELATED FEATURES IN TWO OR THREE OUT OF FOUR SEQUENCES

Sequence	Feature
M <sub>1</sub>	Wife dies through giving birth to fire
M <sub>4</sub>	Wife lives through giving birth in midst of fire
M <sub>3</sub>	Wife gives birth in incompletely built hut (not closed in)
M <sub>4</sub>	Wife gives birth in completely closed-in house
M <sub>3</sub>	Wife gives birth, but husband watches even though warned not to
M <sub>4</sub>	Wife gives birth unwatched (husband could not watch even if he wanted to)
M <sub>1</sub>	Husband breaks bond of trust with wife (he looks at her when he should not)
M <sub>3</sub>	Husband breaks bond of trust with wife (he looks at her when he should not)
M <sub>4</sub>	Husband breaks bond of trust with wife (he does not believe in her faithfulness)

CHART 9

EYE CONTACT AT BEGINNING AND END OF FOUR SEQUENCES

SEQUENCE	FEATURE	
	Initial State	Terminal State
M <sub>1</sub>	Hero looks at wife when he should not	Hero and wife look at each other and break their troth
M <sub>2</sub>	Hero and wife look at each other and marry	Hero, perhaps purposely, does not look at wife
M <sub>3</sub>	Hero and wife look at each other and marry	Hero looks at wife when he should not
M <sub>4</sub>	Hero and wife meet (look), but wait to marry	Hero does not (and cannot) look at wife

As these charts show, some features occur in all four sequences, some in only two or three. For present purposes, recurrent and systematically used features are particularly important, for they give evidence of structural relationships among the sequences despite differences of content. Features of this kind to be discussed here are eye contact, ugliness, and marriage.

*Eye contact.* The image of eye contact (and lack of eye contact) recur in the M<sub>4</sub> sequence. At the beginning, a man and woman meet. He finds her lovely, but she refers his proposal to her father. The father approves, and the hero is presented not only with the bride he sought but with her elder sister as well. At the end, the wife gives birth in a completely closed-in hut to which she has set fire—a situation in which her husband could not watch her even if he had wanted to. Yet his *not looking* can be thought of as playing a positive role in permitting her to emerge unharmed. In M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> the wife was ashamed at being seen by her husband and promptly broke the bond between them; in M<sub>4</sub> she is not made vulnerable by secret watching and emerges unscathed. Again it appears, therefore, that “the Look,” if unwanted or unknown, can be dangerous and harmful. Conversely, the absence of eye contact, when its avoidance is desired, leads to beneficial results.

*Ugliness.* It is interesting to observe that ugliness, in M<sub>4</sub>, is explicitly connected with mortality and death. Because Amatu-piko rejected the ugly daughter, shortness of life, we are told, came into existence—at least for emperors. This point may serve as a clue to the meaning of ugliness in the first three sequences.

In M<sub>1</sub> ugliness characterizes both Izanami and the hags, all of whom are dead. In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi, on being restored to life, becomes “a beautiful man” again—the implication being that he had been ugly. It seems peculiar at first that Susa-nō-wo calls Opo-kuni-nushi ugly when it is Opo-kuni-nushi who is

alive and Susa-nō-wo who rules the dead. This difficulty disappears, however, when it is recalled that Yōmī existence involves an inversion of earthly values. Just as decay was the Yōmī method of cooking and anti-food its nourishment, so Opo-kuni-nushi, in Yōmī perspective, would appear not beautiful but ugly.

Ama-tu-piko, in M<sub>4</sub>, is afraid of his wife's ugliness, and in this respect his attitude parallels the fear experienced by Izanagi (M<sub>1</sub>) and Po-wori (M<sub>3</sub>). In M<sub>3</sub> as in M<sub>1</sub> the hero's wife is ashamed at having been seen in a state of ugliness, breaks with the hero, and becomes functionally dead to him. In both cases, moreover, this functional death results, as noted above, in a radical disjunction between earth and the two nether realms. Thus in both M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> the wife ends in a land of no return. Her ugliness, when seen by her husband, becomes the cause or occasion of a broken relation, a functional death, a rupture with cosmological overtones.

*Marriage.* The four sequences presented thus far, taken together, can be considered as variations on the theme of marriage. In M<sub>1</sub> the husband fails to regain the wife he sought. In M<sub>2</sub> the hero wins a wife incidentally and without her father's permission, and he successfully takes her back to earth. In M<sub>3</sub> the hero also wins his wife incidentally, this time with her father's permission (after the fact), but he does not take her back to earth—though she later follows in order to bear his child on land. In M<sub>4</sub> the hero wants to marry a woman but is obliged to wait for her father's permission; he is presented not only with the woman but also with her ugly sister, rejects the latter outright, and spends only one night with the former.

By ordinary standards, M<sub>2</sub> stands out as the single example of a "successful" marriage. Before going into this matter, however, I think it will prove useful to introduce data from another sequence.

## THE TERRESTRIAL REALM REVISITED

M5. *The Susa-nō-wo/Dragon myth*

Susa-nō-wo, expelled from the heavenly realm, descends to the upper reaches of the Pī river in the land of Idumo. Seeing a chopstick floating down the river, he realizes that there must be people upstream and sets out to find them.

He comes on an old man and woman, with a maiden between them, crying. On asking why, Susa-nō-wo learns that the couple fearfully await the return of the eight-tailed dragon of Kosi that has come once a year and eaten their seven other daughters and is now due to come for the eighth, Kusi-nada.

Susa-nō-wo asks what the dragon looks like. The answer is that its eyes are like cherries, that its eight-headed, eight-tailed body is so enormous that it spans eight mountains and valleys and is overgrown with moss and gigantic trees, and that its belly oozes blood.

Susa-nō-wo then asks the old man to give him his daughter. The father first asks his name. On learning that he is the brother of Ama-terasu and has just descended to earth, the couple reverently present her to him. Susa-nō-wo immediately transforms her into a comb, which he inserts into his hair-bunch.

He then orders the couple to brew wine with an eightfold brewing and build an eight-doored fence, at each door erecting eight platforms and placing on each platform a barrel filled with the specially brewed wine. They do so, and when the dragon comes, it drinks the wine, becomes drunk, and goes to sleep.

With his sword, Susa-nō-wo hacks the dragon to pieces, but when he cuts the middle tail, his sword blade breaks. Thinking this odd, he thrusts deeper with the stub, and a great, sharp sword appears. He pulls it out, finds it extraordinary, and reports the matter to Ama-terasu, at the same time presenting her with the sword. This is the sword Kusa-nagi (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 88-90).

*Marriage.* In the foregoing sequence (which, like M4, is of earthly provenance), the father agrees to give Susa-nō-wo his

daughter, but only after hearing his identity—in this respect differing from the sea deity in M<sub>3</sub> who recognized Po-wori without having to be told. As in M<sub>4</sub>, the father's permission is needed and granted. It may be conjectured that the form of a marriage differs according to the realm (Yōmī, ocean, or earth), but this point will be considered more fully in the analysis of M<sub>6</sub>, which concerns a marriage in the heavenly realm.

*Eating, sexual relations, and hair.* A striking image in M<sub>5</sub> is that of Susa-nō-wo's transforming his bride into a comb he inserts into his hair to save her from being devoured by the dragon. This one image combines sexual, alimentary, and hair symbolism. As such, it may be presumed to have links with the hair images described earlier.

In M<sub>1</sub> we found hags trying to eat the hero but distracted by items from his hair that turned into apparent food when he threw them down. In M<sub>5</sub> we have a dragon (male) who eats women and a threatened woman whom Susa-nō-wo transforms into a comb and pushes into his hair. It is conceivable, therefore, that the dragon is the earthly equivalent to the hags of Yōmī. Not to be overlooked is the fact that the hags are women, for their pursuit involves a kind of sexual symbolism in reverse: they chase him not to have sexual relations but to eat him.

Another hair image was that of M<sub>3</sub> in which Opo-kuni-nushi pretended to eat the centipedes, the vermin of Yōmī, from Susa-nō-wo's hair. Both because of their appearance and because of the circumstance that Susa-nō-wo asks Opo-kuni-nushi to pick the vermin from his head rather than from his hair, it is plausible to regard the centipedes as the Yōmī equivalent of hair. Here again the scene links hair and alimentary symbolism and suggests that eating, quite apart from volition or intention, is an avenue to assimilation. (Thus when Po-wori ate the feast his father-in-law provided, he would seem to have become one with the inhabitants of the submarine realm—but this is something other than death.)

Less readily apparent than the foregoing is the sexual symbolism that comes into view through reflection on the relationships among Izanagi's flight from the hags (M<sub>1</sub>), Opo-kuni-nushi's "eating" of the centipedes (M<sub>2</sub>), and Susa-nō-wo's transforming of the maiden into a hair comb (M<sub>5</sub>). In M<sub>1</sub> decayed women (equated with vermin) chase a man in order to eat him; he saves himself by throwing down hair ornaments that change to apparent food they stop to eat. In M<sub>5</sub> a dragon eats women and is about to eat one when she is saved by the hero's putting her into his hair in the guise of a comb. Put as a verbal formula, the two scenes might be expressed as follows:

$$(M_1) \frac{\text{Women seek to eat man}}{\text{He saves himself by diverting}} \frac{\text{Dragon (male) seeks to eat woman}}{\text{She is saved by another who makes}} (M_5)$$

them with hair ornaments that turn to food
=
her into a hair ornament (a non-food)

From this it appears that M<sub>5</sub> is the inverse of M<sub>1</sub>. This inverted relationship can be taken as a key to the analysis of M<sub>2</sub>. The sexual symbolism bound up in the image of Susa-nō-wo's sticking his bride into his hair (M<sub>5</sub>) can hardly be misconstrued. The inverted sexual symbolism of M<sub>1</sub> has already been touched on: Izanagi was made the object not of sexual but of alimentary appetites. M<sub>2</sub> can be thought of as combining M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>5</sub>. In M<sub>2</sub> Opo-kuni-nushi and his wife are never described as having sexual relations. Their joint endeavors can be subsumed under the heading of how she helps him in relation to various vermin. In the last of these scenes she helps him trick her father into believing he is eating and spitting out the vermin on his head. Actually, however, his *not eating* enables him to continue his marriage and bring his wife back to earth. In both Yōmi sequences, therefore, the vermin symbolize anti-sexuality and sterility, a condition associated with death. In the terrestrial realm, conversely, hair (the earthly equivalent to Yōmi's vermin) is linked with sexuality and fertility. Again one is led to suspect that the meaning of the symbol is to be grasped in relation to the realm of symbolic action.

This analysis leaves unexplained the meaning of Opo-kuni-nushi's tying Susa-nō-wo's hair to the rafters, but this matter can better be treated in relation to M<sub>6</sub> which also involves a number of hair images.

*Water and blood.* M<sub>5</sub> presents a water-blood combination found in only one other sequence among those studied so far, namely, M<sub>1</sub>. In M<sub>1</sub> Izanagi dismembers the fire god, and from the gushing blood a number of water and storm gods are produced. In M<sub>5</sub> Susa-nō-wo hacks the dragon to pieces, and in consequence "the Pi river ran with blood." Earlier in M<sub>5</sub> the dragon was described as overgrown with moss, cypress, and cryptomeria, and as having a belly that oozed blood. Moss, cypress, and cryptomeria require substantial amounts of water, so in the figure of the dragon, water and blood are brought into association.

The problem, however, is more than one of simple association. In M<sub>1</sub> the elements brought into relation through Izanagi's killing of the fire-god and the theogonic consequences of that act are three: fire, water, and blood. In M<sub>5</sub> Susa-nō-wo's slaying of the dragon and causing the river to run red involves only two: blood and water. The suggestion to be made here is that blood, which is at once red (like fire) and flowing (like water), stands between the two in such a way that when its counterpart is fire, it represents water, and vice-versa. In this view the dragon's blood is associated with water, a symbol of life, and is therefore to be understood in this context as a symbol of death. By the same token, the blood of the fire god (here a symbol of death) signifies life through its relation to water, rain, etc. Again it turns out not that a symbol *has* meaning but that it *assumes* meaning by virtue of its relationships with other symbols.

#### THE HEAVENLY REALM

The final sequence is particularly important in that it draws together nearly all the images under discussion.

M6. *The Susa-nō-wo/ Ama-terasu myth*

Ama-terasu rules the heavenly realm and Tuku-yōmi the night in obedience to the divine command, but Susa-nō-wo fails to rule the ocean. He weeps and howls, and his beard grows eight hands long. So profusely does he weep that the green mountains wither and the rivers and seas dry up. Malevolent deities grow as thick as summer flies, and calamities occur everywhere.

Izanagi asks Susa-nō-wo why he neglects his realm to weep and howl, and Susa-nō-wo tells him it is because he wants to go to Yōmī to see his mother. Enraged, Izanagi expels him [from earth], and Susa-nō-wo decides to go first to the heavenly realm to say goodbye to Ama-terasu.

As he ascends, the mountains and rivers roar and the lands shake. Startled, Ama-terasu suspects her brother of coming to usurp her lands. She does her hair up in hair-bunches [like a man], strings her hair and arms with maga-tama beads, arms herself, stamps the ground, and furiously demands that he explain his presence.

Susa-nō-wo gives an innocent answer and insists that he has no ulterior motives. Ama-terasu, suspicious, challenges him to prove that his intentions are pure, so he proposes an oath-bound trial through bearing children [letting the nature of the children show which is right]. They stand on opposite sides of a river and swear their oaths. Ama-terasu then asks for Susa-nō-wo's sword, breaks it into three pieces, rinses them in a well, chews them to bits, and spits them out. In the misty spray three female deities come into being. Then Susa-nō-wo asks for Ama-terasu's beads, rinses them in a well, chews them, and spits them out. In the misty spray there come into existence five male deities.

Ama-terasu distinguishes the two sets, identifying the deities born of her possessions as her children and those born of his possessions as his. Susa-nō-wo claims victory on the ground that his pure intentions led to the begetting of graceful maidens. In victorious frenzy he breaks down the ridges between her rice paddies and covers up their ditches, then defecates and strews his feces about in the Hall of the First Fruits. Ama-terasu, however, does not rebuke him, but tries to justify his

behavior. Nevertheless, his misdeeds become increasingly flagrant. Finally, when she is seeing to the weaving in the Weaving Hall, he opens a hole in the roof and drops down a dappled pony he has skinned backwards. The weaving maiden, seeing this, is alarmed, strikes her genitals against the shuttle, and dies.

Then Ama-terasu, afraid, shuts herself in a cave, and darkness reigns both in the heavenly and earthly realms. The crying deities are as numerous as summer flies, and frightful calamities occur. At length they assemble in a river-bed and call on one deity, Taka-mi-musubi, to devise a plan. [In accordance with his plan,] they cause cocks to crow, commission a mirror and strings of maga-tama beads, and have two deities augur the future by burning the shoulder-bone of a deer. To the upper branches of an uprooted tree they fasten the maga-tama beads, to its middle branches the mirror, and to the lower branches white cloth and blue cloth, presenting the whole as a solemn offering and accompanying it with an intoned liturgy.

At this point a brawny deity conceals himself beside the door of the cave, and Amë-nō-uzume, tying up her sleeves and hair and taking a bundle of sasa leaves in her hands, overturns a bucket before the cave door and starts to stamp on it. She becomes possessed, exposes her breasts, and pushes her skirt-band down to her genitals. At this the assembled deities burst into laughter.

Curious, Ama-terasu opens the door a crack, wondering why there is singing, dancing, and laughter when all should be dark. Amë-nō-uzume says it is because there is among them "a deity superior to you." Meanwhile they hold up the mirror, and Ama-terasu, intrigued, slowly opens the door and starts toward the mirror. Then the brawny deity pulls her out, and another deity draws a [sacred] rope between her and the cave and establishes it as a boundary beyond which she cannot go. With this, light floods the heavens and the earth.

The assembled deities then deliberate and impose a fine on Susa-nō-wo for his destructive acts, exorcizing him by cutting off his beard and nails, and expelling him "with a divine expul-

sion.”

Hungry, the outcast Susa-nō-wo asks food of [the food-goddess] Opo-gē. She takes various viands out of her nose, mouth, and rectum, prepares and serves them. Thinking she is serving him polluted food, Susa-nō-wo kills her. In her corpse a number of things grow: in her head, silkworms; in her eyes, rice; in her ears, millet; in her nose, red beans; in her genitals, wheat; and in her rectum, soy beans (paraphrase of Philippi 1968, pp. 72-87).

The images of greatest theoretical interest in  $M_6$  are those that have occurred in the preceding sequences and thus lend themselves to structural interpretation. On this basis, the images to be considered are again those of hair, eye contact, food, decay, and water. An attempt will be made to show the relations between  $M_6$  and the first five sequences, then in the concluding section to draw things together through a discussion of all the sequences.

*Hair.* The first hair image in  $M_6$  is that of Susa-nō-wo's beard. Part of his excessive behavior (weeping and howling) is his excessive hair growth (a beard eight hands long). Behavioral lack of control is emphasized by the symbol of uncontrolled hair. The second image is that of Ama-terasu preparing for battle by tying her hair into two bunches interwoven with maga-tama beads, characteristically masculine behavior. Again, Susa-nō-wo produces children for Ama-terasu by means of the beads from her hair which he rinses in the well, chews up, and spits out. Finally, when Susa-nō-wo is expelled from the heavenly realm, the gods cut off his hair together with his finger- and toenails. (In some manuscripts they pull out his beard and extract his nails.) Philippi suggests (1968, p. 86, n. 25) that the haircutting was exorcistic, which in turn permits the interpretation that hair has a magical power which, if not controlled, can be destructive. In any event Susa-nō-wo's long, uncontrolled beard goes together with his uncontrolled, destructive acts. Control is restored by

controlling (cutting) his beard. More radically, cutting off his beard symbolizes cutting him off from the upper realm—control through exclusion. (From this perspective it becomes easier to understand why Opo-kuni-nushi merely ties Susa-nō-wo's hair to the rafters rather than cutting it off. His act was intended not to punish or exorcize Susa-nō-wo but only to render him temporarily impotent.)

Edmund Leach, in his article "Magical hair" (1967), discusses the apparently universal connection between hair and sex. The connection is accounted for by the fact that both males and females start to grow bodily hair with the onset of puberty, hair thus becoming a signal of sexual capability. On this view, cutting Susa-nō-wo's hair would signify emasculation or at least the weakening of sexual potency.

In this connection, some importance attaches to the positions Ama-terasu and Susa-nō-wo assume and the actions they perform when procreating: they stand with a river between them (no physical contact occurs), and they take objects from one another, wash and "eat" them, and spit them out, thus producing children. The images of eating, sex, and hair are interwoven.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Ama-terasu, the woman, adopts the hairstyle of a man, whereas Susa-nō-wo, the man, wears his hair long like a woman. One is led to infer role-reversal. In the sequences previously examined, the one who withdrew or inserted hair ornaments for magical purposes was a man. Here the situation is the opposite: the hair-associated objects used in procreation come from the woman's hair. It is the woman's hair, moreover, that is more potent—a circumstance accounted for by the fact that she fills a masculine role. Taking his sword, the symbol of masculine power and virility, she breaks it into pieces which she then chews up and spits out, thus creating his children: three female deities. He, as was seen, does likewise with her hair ornaments to create her children: five male deities. Thus a woman who looks like a man creates females from an object symbolizing masculine power, and a man who looks like

a woman creates males from objects that here appear to symbolize feminine power.

*Food and water.* By no means coincidental is the fact that this procreation scene involves eating. Susa-nō-wo and Ama-terasu produce offspring not through sexual intercourse but through eating and spitting out. This feature has parallels in other sequences.

In M<sub>3</sub> Po-wori attracts the attention of the sea deity's daughter by means of a jewel he takes into his mouth and spits out. This act appears to have sexual implications, for its consequence is that the daughter, seeing the jewel stuck fast to the vessel, comes out to see the stranger and falls in love with him. In M<sub>6</sub> the chewed up pieces of sword and maga-tama beads are referred to as "jewels." The similarities between these sequences are striking, particularly since in both cases the jewels are associated with water.

With this as background, the story of Opo-kuni-nushi's chewing up and spitting out centipedes becomes more comprehensible. The centipedes can be taken as polar opposites of the jewels. Since eating jewels suggests sexual activity, eating centipedes emerges as a symbol of anti-sexuality and sterility. If Opo-kuni-nushi had in fact eaten the centipedes, he would have been rendered sexually impotent. More generally, it appears that sex and eating are seen as somehow similar and symbolically interchangeable. This point will be taken up in more detail in the conclusion.

*Decay.* Closely connected with the food image in M<sub>6</sub> is that of decay. When Susa-nō-wo rages with victory, he defecates and scatters his feces in the hall where the first fruits are tasted. After his expulsion, he asks for food from the food goddess, is served with viands taken from her mouth, nose, and rectum, and kills her in the belief that she has served him polluted food—but all manner of foods grow up from her corpse. The polar relation-

ship in the former is that between fecal matter (old food, that which is no longer food) and first fruits (new food, fresh food). The polar relationship in the latter is that between a living body that produces food through transforming the inedible and a dead body that produces food through transforming the inedible. In both cases one finds an implicit but important distinction between food and non-food.

The uses of food and non-food throughout the various sequences suggest an ongoing process of contextual definition. It is "unnatural," for example, that a man should eat rot and vermin. One who did so would be counted "inhuman." At the same time, however, rot and decay exemplify a change from form to formlessness, thus serving as apt symbols of beginning and growth. As Mary Douglas contends (1966), rotting and dissolution entail loss of identity. The end of the decaying process is a state of formlessness at once dangerous and creative. This ambiguity is illustrated in the food goddess scene where non-foods associated with rot become life-giving viands on the one hand, a cause of death on the other.

One discovers, then, a kind of dialectic. Susa-nō-wo defecates in the hall where the first fruits are tasted, but these fruits, on being eaten, will enter a state of decay (be defecated). Izanagi is chased by rotten beings who try to eat him (culturally, he is a non-food); they fail because of stopping to eat fresh (apparent) food thrown at them—food that will shortly become rotten like them. Opo-kuni-nushi, a living human being, pretends to eat and spit out Yōmī vermin (signifying decay), an act that would have rendered him less than human. Susa-nō-wo saves a living woman from the fate of being made dragon food. In each case man is defined either in terms of his eating behavior or in terms of other's eating behavior relative to man.<sup>2</sup>

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2. It is interesting to note that the opposition between the fresh and the decayed receives greater emphasis than that between the cooked and the decayed. This may reflect the comparative unimportance of cooking in ancient Japan.

*Eye contact.* As in previous sequences, M<sub>6</sub> entails some eye contact symbolism. In procreating, Ama-terasu and Susa-nō-wo face each other from opposite sides of a river. Toward the end, she hides herself in a cave where she cannot be seen by him. The effect of this act is to blind everyone else, for Ama-terasu's hiding conceals the light whereby they see. The point to be emphasized, however, is that she cuts off visual contact of her own volition (just as in M<sub>4</sub> it is the choice of the heroine, Kō-nō-pana, to seal herself into the parturition house so nobody could see her). Putting herself into relation to Susa-nō-wo in such a way that she cannot be seen is essential, it would seem, to her regaining and retaining control.

Only in ambiguous situations, that is, in situations where eye contact is unknown or unwanted, do dangerous or destructive results occur. This inference is supported by all the sequences considered.

#### CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

The images selected for discussion in the foregoing sections involve three discernible levels of meaning. One is that of how a symbol functions within a particular myth sequence. Another is that of how a symbol functions in relation to other sequences. These are the two levels on which analysis and discussion has so far proceeded. The third, to be attempted now, is to seek a more general level of abstraction that will permit the explanation of a number of symbols simultaneously.

Lévi-Strauss argues that there are in society inherent contradictions that man attempts to deal with through symbols and stories in the form of myth but never succeeds in resolving.

Such [mythical] speculations, in the last analysis, do not seek to depict what is real, but to justify the shortcomings of reality, since the extreme positions are only *imagined* in order to show that they are *untenable*. This step, which is fitting for mythical thought, implies an admission (but in the veiled language of the myth) that the social facts when thus examined are marred

by an insurmountable contradiction (Lévi-Strauss 1967, p. 30; italics in original).

In context, Lévi-Strauss is talking about symbols that have paradoxical meanings but are nonetheless socially functional. Japanese myths, on this view, represent continuing attempts to deal with such contradictions, attempts that permit of no genuine resolution. From this perspective, let us re-examine the chief images that have recurred throughout all or many of the six sequences.

The scenes of Izanagi and the hags, Susa-nō-wo and the dragon, and Opo-kuni-nushi and the centipedes suggest that hair can be understood as playing a mediating role between eating and sex. When related in one way to one symbol, it relates in the opposite way to the other. Thus when functioning as an alimentary symbol, hair becomes an anti-sexual symbol. Conversely, when it functions as a sex symbol, it becomes an anti-alimentary symbol. The Izanagi and Opo-kuni-nushi sequences (M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub>) illustrate the former, the Susa-nō-wo/dragon sequence (M<sub>5</sub>) the latter. The Ama-terasu/Susa-nō-wo procreation scene (M<sub>6</sub>), however, allows us to see the eating-hair-sex triad from an angle close to that proposed by Lévi-Strauss.

In M<sub>6</sub>, it will be recalled, Ama-terasu gives Susa-nō-wo beads from her hair while facing him across a river. He goes through the rinsing, chewing, spitting process already described and creates progeny. The scene combines hair, eating, and sex, but no physical contact occurs. As in the Yōmī sequences previously discussed, eating takes the place of sexual relations. The outcome, however, differs according to realm, for in Yōmī eating leads to decay, in the heavenly realm to the creation of gods. The power that is creative in heaven is destructive in Yōmī.

The question to be considered here is: why are sex and eating seen as analogous? Three answers may be proposed. On the most superficial level, both sex and eating involve bodily orifices

through which things go in and out. More fundamentally, both involve assimilation of a foreign element and a product: in the case of eating, the product is urine and feces (and sometimes vomit); in the case of sexual relations, birth. One can distinguish, however, still a third level: that of how human beings define themselves as human. Both eating and sexual behavior are cultural acts. As such they are statements through which man defines himself to himself. For this reason, both forms of behavior entail numerous restrictions, for in both cases people have evolved cultural norms or boundaries that can be violated only at the cost of lessening one's humanity to the extreme of ceasing to be human.

Eye contact, again, is powerful but ambiguous. It can be beneficial or harmful. It can mean the difference between life and death. Beneficial eye contact occurs in a controlled situation, one in which no one is unknowingly or unwillingly made the object of another's gaze. Harmful eye contact occurs in an uncontrolled situation where one party is observed without his knowledge or consent. In these sequences, however, it is always the (unwanted) *man's* gaze that has harmful effects, just as it is always the *man's* hair (or the hair of one in a masculine role) that is the more potent. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the question of the social structure of pre-Buddhist Japan and the patterns of man-woman relations that then prevailed. Strictly on the basis of these sequences, however, it can be inferred that even such a "natural" act as looking is a form of cultural behavior and hence involves certain prohibitions. To violate these prohibitions is to violate not only one's own humanity but also the humanity of the other, rendering both, one, or the other less than human.

The food-decay relationship, at the surface level, illustrates a cyclical dialectic: food grows decayed, out of the decay grows more food, etc. On another level, what one eats defines one's status as a human. To eat human flesh or rot, for example, is a violation of Japanese cultural norms. One who did so would

define himself as no longer human.

It appears, therefore, that the problem to which ancient Japanese man addressed himself through mythical speculation was: what is it that defines man as man and sets him apart from other beings? Each myth presents an apparent but fragile solution, fragile because bound to a particular context. The power of life and death in such images as hair, food, decay, sex, and eating is both creative and dangerous, depending on whether they occur in Yōmī, under the ocean, on earth, or in the heavenly realm. Thus through his myths, early Japanese man sought in many ways to work out solutions to this problem—but never arrived at a definitive solution.

This study has left many questions unanswered—and some, perhaps, unsatisfactorily answered. But it has been shown, I hope, that the sequences studied form a coherent symbol system and that the images employed involve a considerable degree of structural interrelation.

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Henrietta DE VEER

YOSHIDA Atsuhiko (*continued*)

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