1982

Black power the shamantic associations of the raven and the crow.

Sean G. Ferris
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/1311

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters’ theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.
NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopy de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE NOUS L'AVONS RECEUE

Canada
BLACK POWER:  
THE SHAMANIC ASSOCIATIONS 
OF THE RAVEN AND THE CROW 

by 

Sean G. Perris 

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of Religious Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at The University of Windsor 

Windsor, Ontario, Canada 

1982
ABSTRACT

BLACK POWER:
THE SHAMANIC ASSOCIATIONS
OF THE RAVEN AND THE CROW

by

Sean Geoffrey Ferris

Throughout their almost worldwide range, the raven and the
crow have evoked creative response. Their mysterious presence is par-
ticularly strong in the old traditions of certain Siberian and North
American aboriginal peoples, whose cultures were linked by the ancient
religious phenomenon known as shamanism.

I contend that the numinous quality of the raven and crow,
arising from the force of their natural characters, strongly lends
itself to myth and belief, and has been expressed there largely in
shamanic terms. Furthermore, I submit that the raven and crow--as
birds of power in nature, myth and religion--symbolize the shaman.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father.
To ravens and crows everywhere, who have no use
for the printed word, I give my deepest respect
and my effort at understanding.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Dr. J. Norman King for serving as my thesis director. While working hard and enthusiastically on my behalf, he demonstrated imagination, critical intelligence and an unflagging sense of humour. I am honoured that this sensitive scholar chose to help me with my thesis.

Dr. Joseph T. Culliton, C.S.B., to whom I am indebted for many reasons, also served on my thesis committee, bringing his considerable talents and energy to the task even though he admittedly doesn't "give a damn about ravens and crows."

I must also acknowledge the efforts of another scholar, Dr. Joseph A. Quinn, C.S.B., who kindly agreed to serve on the thesis committee. I greatly appreciate his careful reading of my paper and the interest he showed in my work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FLYING THE BLACK FLAG OF THEMSELVES: A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE RAVEN AND THE CROW AND ITS SHAMANIC IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>THE WORLD OF THE SHAMAN: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT VOCATION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BLACK POWER ANIMAL</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BLACK SHAMAN</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VITA AUCTORIS</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

I have long been interested in birds and stories about birds; how they came to be as they are, their mythical exploits, the powerful influence they have on the imagination once their flightpaths cross into man's consciousness. But, I am especially intrigued by ravens and crows, in nature and as they occur in religious belief, mythology, legend, folklore, fable, fairytale and superstition. W. B. Yeats remarked that there was a time when people perceived the universe as being divine, a place where ravens and other natural phenomena "were not less divine and changeable", and a flock of crows passing overhead was interpreted as "the dead hastening to their rest." There is evidence that as man marked the natural life and behaviour of the raven and crow, these large, black birds often flew through his inner life; and their unique strength, cunning, mysteriousness, and beauty variously engaged his creative spirit.

A certain ambivalence runs through the multiform creative responses to the raven and crow. Yet, whether characterized by sacred regard or fear and hatred, these imaginative perceptions, based partly on the birds' natural uniqueness, indicate respect—a deep respect of man for bird reflected in the religious and artistic spirit of man as he encounters what may be the apotheosis of avian form, the raven and the crow.

Large, totally black birds tend to trigger powerful images in the collective unconscious; thus the raven and crow of imagination possess a reality which functions according to its own mythic nature.
In terms of natural history, researchers—ornithologists, ethologists, wildlife biologists, etc.—would admit that much is not known about raven and crow behavior. Native peoples, have a different knowledge of these birds, having observed them in the wild for years, and thought about them. To an extent, such informal study transcends scientific inquiry in that it sees with a different eye—a native eye—one more at home in the bush.

Perhaps aboriginal stories and myths about animals and animal-people indicate, among many things, a belief in the power of stories to reveal insights into non-human worlds, which cannot be expressed in any other way. The old storytellers speak a special metaphorical language—a magical language—in relating stories of significant events in mythical and historical times, stories embodying power and conveying meaning. Many such ancient stories feature Raven or Crow functioning in various capacities, often in the role of the powerful shaman.

But who can know the whole truth about the raven and crow of myth and belief, when the scientific researchers, naturalists, hunters and natives as well, possess incomplete knowledge of the natural lives of these birds? The animals of earth and sky and sea will, to a great extent, always be strangers to us, inhabitants of hidden worlds. Thus, diverse peoples have, in a sense, created the coyote, the wolf, the owl, the eagle, the raven and the crow.

The human mind, especially that of indigenous North Americans, abounds in animal images. This seems to reflect an innate, primitive need, conscious or unconscious, to find meaning in and through non-human life forms which share the universe. And surely, if ravens and crows
were without their uniqueness and air of mystery, one would not find so many stories, beliefs and functions connected with them.

The North American aboriginal material concerning the raven and crow is part of certain native peoples' world views and perceptions of nature and reality in general. This paper is about the structure and religious significance of raven and crow symbolism found in the native stories, myths and beliefs; it is about the irrepresible life and power of these symbols. More specifically, the paper focuses upon the shamanic associations of the raven and the crow.

Whether the mythical Raven and Crow appear as shamans or the natural ravens and crows appear in connection with shamanic rites, customs and beliefs and are attributed supernatural power, their meaning and importance is often only implicit. Therefore, as animals with recognized powers and as the anthropomorphic beings of stories and myths, the raven and crow represent a complex spiritual reality, which I hope to penetrate but not exhaust. Just as our knowledge of their natural behaviour falls far short of complete understanding, we cannot hope to span the inner space of myth and symbol and seize the great black bird as he soars in this realm.
CHAPTER ONE

FLYING THE BLACK FLAG OF THEMSELVES: 1
A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE RAVEN AND THE CROW
AND ITS SHAMANIC IMPLICATIONS

We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical
concept of animals. Remote from universal nature, and living
by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the crea-
ture through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a
feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We pa-
tronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate
of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein
we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured
by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they
move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the
senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we
shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not under-
ings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the
net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and
travail of the earth. 2

Master flyers, possessors of consummate adaptive powers, mani-
festing remarkable avian intelligence, and the giants among perching birds,
the Northern Raven (Corvus corax principalis) and Common Crow (Corvus
brachyrhynchos) are thoroughly unusual animals. The harsh voice of the
crow heard across a field on a cold winter morning, the sighting of a
raven soaring high above tundra or wild boreal forest—experiences such
as these have been the elemental catalysts for a fair amount of scienti-
fic study of these members of the family Corvidae.

Before entering that complex ornithological world, one must
understand that many questions about these corvids—about animal behaviour
in general—remain unanswered. In the observation and interpretation of
avian behaviour there are inherent difficulties; for example, the natural historian must avoid the anthropomorphic trap, and resist imposing human value judgments on wildlife.

Of the 26 genera and 103 to 116 species in the almost worldwide family Corvidae, here we are concerned only with those species and subspecies of the genus Corvus. (See Appendix: Ravens and Crows of the Family Corvidae (Crow Family): A Taxonomic Listing.) In general, when this thesis speaks of the natural species raven and crow, it usually refers to the Northern Raven (Corvus corax principalis) and the Common Crow (Corvus brachyrhynchos). I shall now outline a natural history of the raven and crow. By no means will this ornithological study be exhaustive; only those descriptive remarks and scientific observations judged pertinent to the thesis will be made.

The crow family (Corvidae) is thought to have originated in the Old World during the Miocene Period, five to twenty-three million years ago. From there it spread to occupy its present ranges in North America and other parts of the world; corvid fossils twelve million years old, for example, have been unearthed in Colorado. Ornithologist, Carl Welty offers a comment on distribution that applies to ravens and crows:

[The fact that many North American birds are closely related to Asiatic species clearly means that their ancestors must have come over "from the old country" when the Bering Strait was a land bridge.]

There are six main faunal or zoogeographic regions in the world, including the North American continent, which is called the Nearctic Region; and the Palaeartic Region, which comprises Europe, Africa north of the Sahara, and Asia north of the Himalayas (i.e., Eurasia and Africa's northern border).

According to a summary of the areas in which various birds in
the North American avifauna originated, the ancient ancestors of ravens and crows came from Eurasia. This Palaearctic Region's land and fauna was at times joined to that of the Nearctic Region (North America) by a land bridge which once extended intermittently across the Bering Strait. Several species and subspecies of ravens and crows live in these two regions, sometimes referred to as one, the Holarctic Region. Thus, there is some certainty among ornithologists studying origins and distribution that the North American Corvinae represent an Old World Palaearctic element.

"The raven is the very embodiment not of evil but of wilderness," writes conservationist John A. Livingston, and surely this is so. Like the wolf and the loon, he is essentially a creature of the wilderness, tending to live in challenging habitats, merciless metaphors in landscape of the struggle for survival in the animal kingdom—environments that put man in his place.

Confining itself chiefly to the wildest, most remote and inaccessible areas of the world, the raven haunts rocky seacoast cliffs, storm-thrashed mountain crags, lonely boreal forests, desolate arctic tundra and desert canyons.

In winter, the harsh tundra—the vast, frozen, treeless plains of the northern arctic regions of North America and the Old World—dictates the terms for survival, quickly vanquishing the weak and the unwary. Yet, the Northern Raven—big, tough, strong, fearless—has evolved within himself adaptive qualities that empower him to reproduce, multiply, and live year round in a land ruled by cold. An Arctic biologist comments on what he recognizes as one of nature's foremost gifts to the raven:
In one bird it has developed a body and a spirit so tough and unyielding that it makes no visible concession to cold; winter and summer the coal-black, bare-footed raven sneers contemptuously at its Arctic environment as if by strength of will alone it has met and mastered the worst conditions that can come its way.

Although the bird forages over a great diversity of terrain, including town garbage dumps and roadsides, it prefers to scavenge the shores of lakes, rivers and the sea.

Ornithologist, P. A. Taverner, commented on the habitat preference of the bird, "sombre of colour, dismal in voice, solitary and wild of habit":

The Raven holds aloof from the haunts of men. As civilization has advanced into the primeval vastness, the Raven, unlike its close relative the Crow, has retired and is still today what it was in the beginning, a bird of the wilderness.

The raven does not avoid settlements entirely, for it frequents subarctic towns and native villages within its breeding range in the Far North, where garbage dumps can be scavenged without fear of persecution. Nonetheless, the raven's favoured habitat—wilderness areas—generally does not overlie that of man.

The crow has adapted to a variety of habitats, and is particularly fond of the woodlots and cultivated fields of agricultural areas and coastal settings as well. It does not flourish in heavy forest, but is often seen near such an area's lakes, rivers, marshes, meadows and bogs. Crows wintering in deep-snow regions forage along tidal shores or gather about the garbage dumps of towns and cities; but with the passing of the old slaughter houses, the winter crows of many areas have declined.

The raven's cosmopolitan range includes both North America
and Eurasia.¹³ In the New World the bird breeds far north into the tundra, from Alaska, arctic Canada, Greenland, and Iceland; south through the western U.S. and Mexico to Nicaragua, and in eastern North America south to Minnesota, northern Michigan, Maine and in isolated areas of the Appalachian Mountains (usually above 3000 feet). The raven ranges the Eastern Hemisphere from northern Eurasia (throughout eastern Siberia), south to northern Africa, Asia Minor, northwest India and Japan.

Common only in the Far North and West, the raven resides permanently in Canada, breeding from the high arctic archipelago (locally, where there are cliffs for nesting: e.g., Prince Patrick Island, southern Ellesmere Island) south through the Yukon, Mackenzie and Keewatin Districts, and southern Baffin Island; to southern British Columbia (including the fog-enshrouded shores and coastal islands), northern Alberta, central Saskatchewan (Flooten Lake, Nipawin), central-western and southern Manitoba; in western and south-central Ontario (Wanderland Lake, Gordon Lake, Algonquin Park); southern Quebec (e.g., Riviere du Loup, Magdalen Islands), Labrador, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. Some ravens wander as far north as northern Ellesmere Island, but we lack evidence of breeding there.

Always active, ravens winter primarily within their breeding range—croaking contentedly while surviving the coldest weather in the most desolate habitats—north at least to Melville Island and northern Baffin Island, and the Northwest Territories; also somewhat south of their breeding grounds in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The crow's North American Breeding range extends across southern Canada (except the West Coast, where one finds the Northwestern Crow, Corvus caurinus) and south to northern Baja California, central Arizona, central Texas, the Gulf of Mexico, and southern Florida. It winters in parts of southern Canada and regions southward.

In Canada, the crow breeds from north-central interior British Columbia through southwestern Mackenzie (Great Slave Lake), northern
Alberta, northern Saskatchewan (Lake Athabasca), northern Manitoba (Churchill), northern Ontario, central Quebec (Lac Mistassini, for example), and Newfoundland; and south through southern British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec (including the Magdalen Islands), New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia.

The Canadian winter range of crow includes southern British Columbia (e.g., the Okanagan Valley), southern Saskatchewan, southern Ontario, southern Quebec, southern Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. Winter crows are casual in eastern District of Keewatin (Eskimo Point).

Before going further into the lifeways of the raven and crow, one particular North American species of crow requires special mention. *Corvus caurinus*, the crow "of the northwest wind", is the specific name of the Northwestern Crow, which is found along the Pacific Northwest coasts and islands from southern Alaska (Kodiak, Sitka and Forrester Islands) to western Washington's Puget Sound, residing permanently, for example, on the coasts and islands of British Columbia (including Queen Charlotte and Vancouver Islands, and inland to Chilliwack).

This bird's full species status has been questioned, and one study concluded that this crow is actually a small race of the Common Crow. Nonetheless, the ornithological controversy regarding its standing has persisted over fifty years. However classified, the Northwestern Crow is a beachcombing scavenger smaller than the Common Crow and with a hoarser, lower-pitched *caw* note. Its habitat is similar to that of the Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) of the Atlantic and Gulf seacoasts: wooded shores, beaches and mud flats during low tide. The
Northwestern Crow also visits towns and native villages, where it walks about quite tamely.

This Pacific shore crow eats various shellfish, which it skillfully cracks open by carrying them aloft and dropping them on rocks. It also feeds on carrion (such as dead porpoises) washed up on the shore, refuse discarded by fishermen, sea birds' eggs, dead fish given up by salmon streams, grasshoppers and wild fruit.

The Northern Raven is the largest passerine, or perching, bird in the world, with a heavy, strong build and a wingspread exceeding four feet (up to approximately 56 inches). Its scutellated black feet are nearly hawklike; and the heavy, curved black bill is an especially formidable attribute approximately three inches long and one inch deep at the base, where the dense, forward-pointing sheath of stiff bristle-feathers protecting the nostrils is visible at close range. The crow also has this stiff protective sheath, and both species have rictal bristles (about the mouth).

When observed in the field the crow appears somewhat similar to the raven; nonetheless, although close relatives, they are different species with decisive physical differences. While the raven may attain a length of over two feet (22-27 in. or 55-68 cm.) the crow's full size is between 16-21 in. (43-53 cm.).

The crow shares the raven's total blackness and its robust build, but it is proportionately smaller in terms of bill, head, neck, foot size, wingspread (33-40 in.), tail and so on. Furthermore, the raven alone has shining lanceolate feathers—the shaggy, attenuated throat feathers which, at close range, resemble a loose-hanging, oily
black beard.

A primary striking aspect of ravens and crows is their insistent, funereal, overall blackness, although the play of strong sunlight upon the lustrous, solidly black plumage creates a metallic iridescence which is green, blue, or purple in tint. Ornithologist John Terres describes the crow as having a metallic violet gloss on the body, with blue-violet and green-blue gloss on the wings. The raven, he says, is "all-black with metallic lustre of purple and violet, sometimes green gloss on wings." But all parts of these corvids are jet black, from the tip of the stout bill to the tips of the stiff tail and claws.

Despite the raven's and crow's large, somewhat coarse build, this rough symmetry in combination with the overall ebony coloration lends an elegance, makes a stately contribution to their overall aesthetic quality. To me, ravens and crows are living examples in flesh, feather and bone of beauty in ugliness; their aesthetic manifestation is a different kind of beauty, a hard beauty. One has only to hold a raven or crow in the hand to appreciate the natural wonder of their forms. As a youth, wildlife artist Terence Shorté shot a crow that had attacked a robin's nest. When he picked it up he noticed the bird's pleasant, "woody" smell and its hard, shiny feathers; Shorté remembers thinking it was the most beautiful thing he had ever handled—from that moment, he says, he decided to draw birds for the rest of his life. The glossy feathers are indeed hard and firm, yet when gently touched they reveal a softness aptly described by J. Penwick Lansdowne:

Despite being without accenting colour or relieving pattern, their plumage is most beautiful. Dense and smooth, jet with an almost lavender lustre, it seems lacquered, to all appea-
ranches a perfect fibreglass shell. In the hand it is soft and rich as watered silk.20

Ravens and crows have stout, fairly long, generalized bills conducive to hammering, prying, gaping, and probing. The tearing and stripping of carcasses is facilitated by a subtle terminal hook.21 Large, curved bills such as these—especially the relatively massive bill of the larger raven—serve both as tools and weapons.

The colours of birds' feathers may be biologically advantageous, and this appears to be the case for large, black ravens and crows—another factor contributing to their uniqueness among passerines.22

Basically, the blackness of the plumage serves to maximize solar heat absorption; short-wave-length solar energy is absorbed by black feathers, and the temperature gradient between the bird's skin and its outer feathers is reduced. Thus, within a twenty-four hour period the raven or crow has a definite energy edge over an equally large non-black bird.

Recognizing that blackness helps to maintain body temperature and conserve body energy, one may then better understand the presence of certain birds in the more frigid environments. Even the Northern Hemisphere's coldest, harshest regions are not so forbidding as to daunt wide-ranging ravens and crows which, if an abundant food supply is available to exploit, may reside in the north throughout the year. Crows that do not migrate, as Angell notes, can survive brutally cold Canadian winters with temperatures as low as minus forty degrees Fahrenheit.23

The rugged Northern Raven (Corvus corax principalis), unusual among resident Arctic animals in retaining its sleek black coat year-
round, prospers in the desolate Arctic's bitterest weather, and carries on when all else seems dead in similarly unforgiving habitats. During the dark period (November through February) there is some modest local movement by ravens from islands such as Ellesmere and Devon in the extremely high North. But the Northern Raven is basically non-migratory, wintering as far north as northern Baffin Island and Somerset Island. Furthermore, Gibson claimed that some ravens remained all winter in northern Greenland, even at the northern limits of their breeding range. The birds, he said,

... do not all migrate in the fall because, after the sun had disappeared for the winter, we heard their hoarse croaking and five days before the sun reappeared, ... I saw in the dim twilight on the beach near our house a Raven lazily flapping along.

The larger corvids of northern and high-altitude habitats are more heavily feathered and better insulated against the cold; and their greater body mass produces heat in greater proportion to their heat-radiating surface area. Defining Bergmann's Rule, Terres notes:

In northern climates, the larger birds--with their body surface smaller in proportion to their body volume, compared to smaller birds--lose less heat, an adaptation to cold that conserves their body heat and energy.

At the opposite climatic extreme as well, black plumage may contribute to energy savings even in torrid desert environments like Death Valley and the Mojave Desert, where afternoon temperatures go well over 110° F. Ravens carry through under such oppressive conditions partly by exploiting their own blackness in relatively brief warming periods during chill desert mornings. Again we see the advantage of black feathers in terms of maximizing solar energy absorption. Before the day catches fire, the raven can complete its foraging and then rest in the shade.
(where blackness makes no thermoregulative difference) while the sun is high in the sky. Later, in the coolness of late afternoon and early evening, the adaptive desert raven ventures out to resume feeding, preying on small crepuscular animals, and perhaps visiting a lonely stretch of road or nearby dump to scavenge in the fading light.

Clearly, ravens and crows bear a partly-functional blackness. Besides the previously mentioned advantages of colour and size, a flock of large, black, aggressive birds, with its arsenal of mobbing and dispersing tactics, tends to confuse and dishearten most predators, whereas smaller black birds lacking raven or crow qualities experience their blackness as a serious drawback, making them highly visible to their natural enemies.28

According to Stettner and Matyniak, certain studies indicate that the different, unmammalian brain design of birds (smaller, smooth (rather than furrowed) cerebral cortex; very enlarged cerebellum) does not necessarily preclude their effecting intelligent behaviour by using other brain parts.29

Lacking a highly developed cerebral cortex—the higher animals' chief organ of intelligence—ravens and crows, for example, have displayed exceedingly intelligent behaviour in various tests, occasionally outperforming cortically superior animals. Such results point to the enlarged hyperstriatum of the avian brain as a potential Rosetta stone for neurologists striving to fathom higher brain processes and the origins and evolution of intelligent behaviour.30

Psychologist M. E. Bitterman devised a "multiple reversal" experiment which tests an animal's mental capacity, namely, its capacity
to solve problems by repeatedly adapting its behaviour according to new conditions. 31

To secure a food reward, the animal, having learned to choose between two symbols (a circle rather than a square, for example), must then switch to the reversed "correct" symbol (the square rather than the circle) which was previously unrewarded. This symbol reversal is repeated several times, and the animal's learning ability is assessed by the quickness with which it recognizes the need to reverse in order to gain the food reward. Crows and ravens have shown notable learning ability in multiple reversal experiments, and in this context they perform at least as well as many mammals. 32

Complex problems involving the ability to respond to the property of number have also served to measure birds' mental power. German scientists have found evidence of a "number sense" in ravens and jackdaws; these investigations have, according to Thorpe,

... proved beyond question the existence of ideation in animals. ... It suggests that man and animals have a pre-linguistic 'counting' ability of about the same degree but that man's superiority in dealing with numbers lies in his ability to use, as symbols for numbers, words and figures. ... 33

In various experiments conducted by ethologist Otto Koehler, ravens learned to "count" up to seven, revealing a rare capacity among animals to react to number per se; that is, without referring to additional stimulus properties. 34 For example, a raven was shown a key card numbered with spots and then was shown several containers, each lid marked with a different number of spots; selecting the lid bearing the same number of spots as the key card earned the raven a worm. Despite variations in the spots in terms of size, shape, and arrangement, the
raven was able to match numbers up to seven spots.

Leland Swenson, a Wayne State University psychologist, found that a raven could learn to distinguish a one-circle card from one marked with two circles; furthermore, the bird easily mastered the problem when squares, triangles, or irregular forms were substituted for circles, whereas an elephant (regarded as a highly intelligent mammal) in a similar test failed to adapt to the symbol switch, solving the "new" problem only after several hundred attempts. 35

Another aspect of avian intelligence was revealed in the inventive experiments of Moscow State University's L. V. Krushinsky. 36 Behind a slit in the centre of a large screen he placed two bowls; one bowl contained food, from which the animal fed. Suddenly, one bowl was moved to the left and the other to the right. Provided with this visual knowledge, the animal faced the task of making a modest inference that would enable it to go around the screen on the side towards which the food bowl had vanished, and thereby recover the food. Krushinsky discovered that rabbits, hens, and pigeons performed poorly, wandering aimlessly on the disappearance of the food. Cats initially tended to go as readily around the wrong side of the screen as around the correct one. Dogs, crows, ravens, and magpies, however, promptly resolved the challenge, walking quickly and directly to the correct side of the screen when first faced with the vanishing bowls puzzle. Thus, the Krushinsky tests resulted in another revelation of corvids' remarkable capacity for intelligent behaviour—outwitting the cat and equalling the dog's performance clearly indicates crows and ravens possess an impressively high level of cerebral energy. Not bad for bird brains.
The upshot of these findings is that ravens and crows, lacking the extraordinarily complex mammalian cerebral cortex, are nonetheless capable of intelligent behaviour, and demonstrate mental abilities hertofores thought of as belonging to mammals alone.

Harvard Medical School neurologist, Stanley Cobb's explorations of the avian brain led him to conclude that the bird's "organ of intelligence" was not its insignificant cortex, but rather the well-developed hyperstriatum, the uppermost area of the striatum: an "integrated, highly organized mass of nerve nuclei and fiber tracts making up most of the bulk of the cerebral hemispheres." 37

Of all avian species, members of the crow family (ravens, crows, magpies and jays) have the largest cerebral hemispheres relative to body size. Scientific tests indicate they are the bird world's supreme intellects—-not surprising if one shares the belief that ravens and crows possibly represent the furthest stage so far reached in avian evolution. 38 Keeping in mind the evidence that the avian hyperstriatum corresponds to the mammalian cortex, note that Cobb's brain studies found crows and their relatives—-species recognized as being more intelligent—-to have a more highly developed hyperstriatum. 39

Ethologist Konrad Lorenz recounted a singular experience with a tame raven, a species he considered to have "the highest mental development of all". Lorenz claimed that his raven Roah (so named after its call-note), in learning to use a human word to express his desire for something, was the only bird he knew of that associated a vocal expression with a purpose. Ravens, Lorenz explained, use a specific, innate call-note whenever they wish to invite others of their species to fly with
them. Passing low, from behind, above a ground-sitting bird, the raven wags its folded tail while delivering a resonant, throaty, and acutely metallic "krackrackrack" akin to a volley of gunshots.

Lorenz's raven often accompanied him on various ramblings, but in its later years the bird had a great antipathy for places where he had been previously frightened or had had some similarly disagreeable experience. According to Lorenz, one day while in such a place his distressed raven did something extraordinary on perceiving the scientist as being in a dangerous area:

... Roah bore down upon me from behind, and, flying close over my head, he wobbled with his tail and then swept upwards again, at the same time looking backwards over his shoulder to see if I was following. In accompaniment to this sequence of movements—which...is entirely innate—Roah, instead of uttering the above described call-note, said his own name, with human intonation. The most peculiar thing about this was that Roah used the human word for me only. When addressing one of his own species, he employed the normal innate call-note.... The old raven must, then, have possessed a sort of insight that "Roah" was my call-note!... Roah is, so far as I know, the only animal that has ever spoken a human word to a man, in its right context—even if it was only a very ordinary call-note.40

Splendid, consummate flyers, both raven and crow are very strong on the wing, often indulging in sensational aerobatics. But with a wingspread exceeding four feet—the Northern Raven's grander and swifter flight,41 in its frequent side to side turnings and overall more brilliant aerial prowess—including much soaring and spectacular dives, plunges, tumbles and rolls—is quite different from that of the archetypically flapping crow, which is not incapable of an occasional spectacular stunt of its own. As one author wrote:

The Raven... is a constant wonder for its complete mastery of the air. For a bird with a four foot wingspan and fairly heavy build, it executes intriguing twists, turns, rolls and dives.42
The main characteristic of the crow's flight is the frequent steady flapping—that familiar measured, thumping wingbeat. This is seen, for example, in the high and direct—"as the crow flies"—flight of the roost-bound crow as he beats along when his day is done. Except in a strong updraft or during a descent, the crow usually glides no more than two or three seconds, with it wings in a slight upward dihedral (a shallow V).43

The crow can spring directly into the air from the ground, where the raven must take a few good hops before taking off. When not in its powerful flapping flight, the raven often glides and soars hawk-like on horizontally-fixed wings. With less flapping and more soaring, the raven's wing action is slower and smoother than that of the crow, its flight often seeming to be a high-powered glide.

One of the great wilderness sights is the Northern Raven soaring majestically on flat, fixed wings, sometimes at dizzying heights. Like an eagle or large hawk, it may rise on a current and circle the sky for hours. Ornithologist and former Audubon editor John Terres acknowledges that the raven is a magnificent flyer, "the aerial equal of hawks and falcons".44 On hot summer days in the American southwest and Mexico, the White-necked Raven (Corvus cryptoleucus) soars high above arid plains and desert scrubland, occasionally plummeting into rising "dust devils" and riding the whirlwinds' columns to staggering heights.45 Furthermore, it is said that the raven can hold its position almost motionless in the teeth of a gale.46 Skinner wrote that he had seen ravens high above a snowy ridge, "riding the gale" apparently for the pleasure of it. Like vultures, he added, ravens often spiral above carrion. He saw one bird
transferring some prey back and forth between bill and claws as it carried the food through the air.\textsuperscript{47}

When the raven is seen in flight overhead, the terminal outline of its large, spread tail appears rounded or wedgeshaped due to the longer central tail feathers, as opposed to the crow's fan-shaped tail. Also, in contrast to the overhead flight appearance of a large crow, the raven's thicker, longer neck and bill extend farther ahead of the wings, which break sharply at the shoulders and have openings between the upturned tips of the primaries. The head appears heavy and somewhat triangular, with discernible bulges at the base of the jaws where the brow joins the bill.\textsuperscript{48}

Artist and naturalist Tony Angell recalls watching ravens one early morning in the southwestern U.S. as he stood at the edge of Canyon De Chelly's 500 foot drop.

I followed the flights of ebony-backed ravens that soared half that distance. They traced the steep stone walls with wing tips and their shadows raced in flattened and elongated pursuit over the centuries of rock.\textsuperscript{49}

Being the world's bulkiest songbird does not prevent the raven from executing thrilling aerobatic manoeuvres, including pairs somersaulting repeatedly or plunging falcon-like to earth. Ornithologist Richard Harlow reported his observations of the Northern Ravens' dramatic courtship flight:

\ldots they often soar together high up in the air with wing tips touching, the male always slightly above the female. At times he will give a wonderful display of his prowess on the wing, either dropping like a meteor for several hundred feet and fairly hissing through the air in the manner of the male Duck Hawk (Peregrine Falcon), or tumbling like a pigeon over and over.\textsuperscript{50}
The male White-necked Raven in aerial courtship, with its neck and throat feathers standing out like a fluffy boa, soars, wheels, sideslips and tumbles. Also concerning ravens' springtime exuberance, Dawson described a "game of tag" in which the birds chased each other and passed around an unidentified object:

After this I witnessed an aerial minuet by two gifted performers—a tumbling contest, wherein touching hands (vingtisps), with one bird upside down, was varied with simultaneous somersaults and graceful upright, or stalling, presentations. 51

Angell observed a pair of ravens "in a moment of passion" as they swept around a bend in Arizona's Parker Canyon. 52 Flying slightly below and in front of the female, the larger male raven gracefully turned flat onto his back and sailed upside down for more than ten seconds, before smoothly reassuming his upright position and rounding a bend with his mate. The male raven's spectacular upside-down glide is part of the courtship display, as is the female's act of hovering above the male with her legs dangling in invitation to him to chase her. 53

In winter, dumps and the like are good areas to watch crows wheel, swoop, and circle as they scavenge for garbage. But, as one field-observer attests, the crow's aerial versatility transcends the standard manoeuvres, impressive as they are. Angell believes that one crow he watched actually revelled in its flight skills as it rode 200 feet in tight circles on warm air currents and then, after dropping its legs and pulling its wings up over its head, parachuted straight down a hundred feet. Catching another thermal, the bird again circled up, only to fan its tail and execute a leg-dangling backslide. The playful crow's subsequent aerobatic attempts included "a variety of half turns, walking
in air, and partial slips and rolls." In addition, courting male crows frequently spice their performances with all manner of diving and wheeling.

Wildlife writer John Madson, an exceptionally perceptive crow-watcher, remembers what he terms "the Dance on Monkey Mountain"--the "mountain" being a mound swelling out of the flat sandy country on the north shore of Oklahoma's Lake Fort Cobb. Situated there is one of the world's biggest winter roosts, with a peak occupancy during January of at least eight million crows.

At day's end, the crows--"bits of black embroidery in the high Oklahoma sky"--would approach the main roost, pausing to dally and romp in adjacent fields before actually settling into the roost when darkness fell. Some crows, writes Madson, plunged downward a thousand feet, only to half-close their wings and "flash falconlike" above the treetops. But the "Dance on Monkey Mountain" itself was an aerial blazonry of black birds:

... a wild display of aerobatics, bouncing and rolling in the wind currents ... (with crows) sometimes seeming to fly backward ... dancing in a stacked aerial ballet....

To Madson, the crows seemed to be delighting in themselves as they performed with aplomb and considerable ingenuity--"... master aerialists at play, wrestling with the wild wind out of sheer exuberance ..."

Ornithologist Arthur Cleveland Bent received a report about a raven's flight behaviour involving a stick intended for nest-building. While several hundred feet in the air, the raven tossed the stick from its bill and would either snatch it back immediately or let it drop some distance before plunging downward to seize it with its bill just above the ground. Similarly, another flying raven was observed apparently
playing with a piece of dried skin, dropping it and diving to catch it in its claws. Ethnologist and natural historian Edward William Nelson described a playful flight tendency of Northern Ravens in Alaska which featured dropping a shell-fish (Echinus) from their bills while several hundred feet in the air:

... on several instances I have seen the birds dive hastily after the falling shell and capture it in their beaks before it reached the ground, apparently in sport.61

Hoyt, one of Bent's contributors, wrote about an unusual aerial encounter between a raven and an aggressive Peregrine Falcon, underscoring the former's agility:

The (Peregrine Falcon) stooped at the raven, calling faster... At the point I expected to see the raven get a hard blow, it flipped over on its back with its feet up in the air and warded off the blow.... The raven did not seem to use its wings in turning over but was upside down in a small fraction of a minute. At this the falcon swooped up in the air again, still screaming loudly. The raven turned over again just as quickly as it has turned onto its back and resumed its course slowly and steadily along the face of the mountain.62

This action, according to the witness, was repeated eight times before the falcon flew away; the following spring a similar duel was fought high above the edge of the same mountain.

Finally, W. W. Rubey wrote a vivid account of ravens' extraordinary flight behaviour as witnessed from Wyoming Peak's summit, elevation 11,363 feet. As Rubey and companions reached the summit, about thirty harshly croaking, snarling, and barking ravens assaulted them in long, almost vertical dives which, although actually mock attacks, prompted the men to throw rocks in self-defense.

On the first dive, each bird veered off from us at distances of 25 to 100 feet, fell past the peak, then swerved back up and dived again... But soon the Ravens tired of their sport
with us and took to another game in which they exhibited a type of bird flight entirely new to me.

Wyoming Peak falls off rather abruptly 3500 feet to the valley of Greys River. The Ravens rose perhaps 500 feet above us, then plunged suddenly into a remarkable series of dives, spins, and coasting which eventually carried them almost out of sight to the forests far below. At the top of the preliminary climb each bird turned sharply straight down and fell a short distance with closed (or at least closely cupped) wings. Then, as the speed of fall increased, the wings seemed to open part way and the dive was deflected somewhat from the vertical. Promptly, the Raven began to spin or 'barrel-roll' about its longitudinal or bill-to-tail axis, slowly at first, then more and more rapidly. This rotating fall continued at an accelerating velocity through a vertical distance of several hundred feet. At length, perhaps because the speed could no longer be endured, the wings were opened wider, the angle of dive began to level off, and the axial spinning gradually slowed down until, when the coasting flight became horizontal, rotation ceased. Each bird immediately swerved back up as far as its momentum would carry it and, from an elevation about 500 feet below that of the start, dived again. Thus, the entire performance was repeated over and over again, each successive dive leveling off farther and farther down the steep mountainside.

Turning to voice, a self-proclaimed birdsong expert disparaged the vocal efforts of the raven and crow, claiming, for instance, that the former merely "emits idiotic squawks and yells and shrieks". This anthropocentric judgment indicates a limited aesthetic perception of avian voices. Thoreau and others wrote impassioned words about the wild call of the crow, and many have discerned the spirit of wilderness in the raven's voice. I speak of black songbirds whose diverse "songs" are drawn into the aesthetic--and magico-religious--sphere not because of their easily perceived beauty (as in the vesper carillon of the Hermit Thrush), but by virtue of their raw energy, complexity and, above all, mystery.

The calls of the raven and crow are usually loud and harsh, but they are surprisingly varied, even to the point of the raucousness
giving way at times in spring to the subtle, not unpleasant whisper-song of courtship.

Thoreau wrote sensitively of the "untamed voice" of the crow, but few sounds are as evocative of wilderness as those of the Northern Raven. Furthermore, the raven of interior Alaska, for example, has a repertoire even more diversified than the crow's vocal store. It voices several multi-syllabled calls (e.g., kowulkulkulk), and the contextual communication content of its shorter notes (e.g., the kaaa calls), as well as the longer ones, is variegated by pitch, rate, intensity, duration, temporal patterning, and accompanying physical displays. The raven's chase call—kukuk—is often delivered while the airborne bird flips onto its back, barrel rolls, or executes end-over-end tumbles.

In contrast to the crow's "caw! caw!", the raven's common call is rather like a bark or squawk, and it has an extensive repertoire of these mostly harsh croaks, yells, and barks.

Ravens, in general, utter a great variety of notes, some described as a sonorous, deep, far-carrying croake-croake or wooden kwawk; a hoarse croc-croc; and a quick, throaty and rolling cur-ruk or cruk delivered on the wing. A rich, more melodious croang-croang has been heard, resonating pleasantly like a deep-toned bell and occasionally finishing in a resounding cluck. Further, the raven has been known to voice "a very distinct hollow, sepulchral laugh 'haw-haw-haw-haw!'; and during courtship the male offers a tender 'crawk' to his mate.

Cahonk-cahonk; cwaanh; cwahonk; onk-onk; craaounk; koeh, koeh, according to one ornithologist, approximates the sound of a raven conversing with himself, a "curious gargling, strongly inflected talk"
carried on at length. Similarly strange, in breeding season the raven lisps, croaks, buzzes and gulps.

Soper acknowledged the Northern Raven's vocal versatility--the lugubrious croaking, mimicry and so on--and drew particular attention to its more musical capabilities: a guttural yet bell-like note; an odd thung-thung-thung call akin to the mellow humming of a tuning-fork; and a metallic utterance like the mellifluous gurgling of the Red-winged Blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus), only much louder. Finally, a naturalist commented on an unusual note voiced by the raven as it foraged in the black humus of a heavily timbered area after the spring thaw:

During this period . . . one hears their metallic click, sounding like the stroke of a light hammer on a piece of heavy tin--one of the most remarkable sounds in the north Wisconsin woodlands. No one lucky enough to hear it will pass it without marvel, comment and inquiry as to the origin of it.

We have thus far failed to break the crow's language and communication code. Blessed with six pairs of syringeal muscles and a strong, limber tongue, the bird is equipped to voice many sounds, including other species' calls and exquisite whisper songs. Crows are accomplished mimics, able to imitate a child's cry, a dog's whine, a hen's squawk, a rooster's crow, a loon's wailing laugh, and more. Some captive crows mimic simple words and human laughter.

Chamberlain and Cornwall describe twenty-three distinct crow vocalizations and their meanings, including those for announcement, distress (the "squalling" call), dispersal (crows can differentiate between armed and unarmed humans, and this cry is often given by those acting as sentinels for the feeding flock), assembly, contentment, scolding and duet performances.
The crow's calls and notes have been variously described and interpreted. Caw variations, according to Knight, are signals carrying discrete meanings within the crow community. A sentinel's warning caw c-a-a-a urges feeding crows to seek refuge; caw-caw, depending on its tone and accent, means several things from contentment to distress; "look out" is conveyed by a sharp, abrupt caw; and wild, shrieking cries usually indicate enraged crows mobbing an owl.77

Ornithologists, intrigued by the crow's voice, have offered several other accounts of calls and notes: a piercing laugh, ha-a-a-a-a and a guttural turkey-like gobble, cow cow cow;78 an uncommon clockity-clock, clockity-clock, pleasant cooing notes, and a strange, song-like hollow-clo-o-o-ol-o;79 caw mutations such as orr, orr, ah, ah, and gnaw, gnaw; a wailing kaa, wha, wha, wha, kaa, wha, wha, wha; a jaunty ha, ha, ha, and a correspondent nevah, nevah.80

Townsend marvelled at the "conversational notes" exchanged within a small group of crows.

At times the notes are low and confidential, pleasant and almost melodious...again they are raucous and scolding, bursting at times into a veritable torrent of abuse.81

Allen wrote about the crow's sophisticated aesthetic sense, pointing to the precise time rhythm of caw notes he had studied. He believed that the crow relishes the rhythm and diversity of his vocalizations, and he asked, "Is he not, in a limited way, a true artist, a composer as well as a performer?"82

A passage written in the last century shall conclude this discussion of the crow's voice. In his 1859 journal, Henry David Thoreau recorded his deeply felt impressions of the crow. His simple
yet impassioned eulogy—which remains appropriate—seemed to identify the
bird's voice with its essence.

What a perfectly New England sound is this voice of the
crow! If you stand perfectly still anywhere in the outskirts
of the town and listen, stilling the almost incessant hum of
your own personal factory, this is perhaps the sound which you
will be most sure to hear rising above all sounds of human
industry and leading your thoughts to some far bay in the
woods where the crow is venting his disgust. This bird sees
the white man come and the Indian withdraw, but it withdraws
not. Its untamed voice is still heard above the tinkling of
the forge. It sees a race pass away, but it passes not away.
It remains to remind us of aboriginal nature.83

Omnivorous, scavenger—these words are among the first to
spring to mind when one thinks of ravens and crows. The diets of these
voracious birds are determined by the birds' circumstances, and in their
feeding versatility they survive on all manner of fresh and scavenged
food. In those places throughout their almost worldwide range where they
are not greatly disliked by man, various species of the crow family are
familiar scavengers about towns and villages. The House Crow (Corvus
splendens) of India and Sri Lanka, for example, commonly batters on
mankind.84

Utterly opportunistic, the raven is not particular about his
choice of food. If something is edible, odds are this hardy survivor
will eat it—be it carrion, freshly killed mammals or birds, birds' eggs,
reptiles and small vertebrates (e.g., mice, rats, lizards, snakes), fish,
insects, assorted vegetable matter, or garbage. All this applies to the
crow as well, for in his endless pursuit of sustenance he delights in an
extremely diverse fare, with any apparent feeding partialities being
governed by habitat and available sources.

Enduring despite natural and man-made perils, the large,
rugged raven and crow apply their remarkable intelligence and resourcefulness in their perpetual quest to subsist. Those characteristics, plus their scavenging, opportunistic and omnivorous natures—along with their boldness, vigorousness, and aggressiveness—have greatly contributed to the raven’s and crow’s status as the avian world’s paradigmatic survivors and success stories.

A. C. Bent described the Northern Raven somewhat anthropocentrically as "a filthy feeder", noting that "almost any kind of animal food that it can catch, kill, or find is grist to its mill." Berries, dead fish, stranded plankton, the afterbirth of seals—the bird consumes these items and any other organic material available. During winter in the Far North ravens must subsist mainly on animal carcasses found tossed up on shores. When carrion is scarce, they demonstrate feeding adaptability and a strong survival instinct; in the dead of an Arctic winter, desperately hungry ravens have been seen following hard upon the dog teams and battling for steaming dung dropped by the dogs.

The ravens that remain to face the winters in places such as Baffin Island, Southampton Island, and Canada’s Arctic coast, often find favourite feeding grounds snowed under. Then, pressed by hunger, they may risk death in attempts to seize the baits from steel fox traps.

Natural historian Ludwig Kumlten observed the feeding resourcefulness of ravens in the Arctic. More than once he saw ravens act in concert to kill a young seal that lay sunning itself on the ice near its hole. Under easy sail they would circle above the seal, lowering little by little until one of the birds suddenly swooped down into the seal’s hole, thereby blocking retreat. The raven’s mate would then set
upon the young seal and attempt to force or drag it away from the ice hole. This attacking raven smashed the seal's tender skull by delivering a few powerful blows to the top of the head with its great curved bill. Kumlien also saw two ravens join forces to kill an Arctic Hare (Lepus arcticus) by alternately attacking it as they chased it down a mountainside. Furthermore, he witnessed six or seven ravens severely injure a young deer in a relay-style attack, which caused the wounded animal to thrash about in agony and eventually kill itself.

Nature's harsh realities and apparent brutalities should not, of course, be judged by human moral standards. Yet to see two big, black ravens kill a "cute baby seal" would affect some people emotionally, even though we too are predators in that we must destroy other life forms to live. Furthermore, as British poet Ted Hughes (who has been fascinated by animals since his youth in the West Yorkshire moors) remarked, "Animals are not violent, they're so much more completely controlled than men. So much more adapted to their environment."

The raven has a mysterious ability to home in on carcasses over distant horizons and out of its sight. A group of three or four ravens in direct, purposeful flight over the frozen tundra signifies that caribou attended by wolves can be found in that direction, and soon the ravens will be stripping a carcass. Similarly, the sight of ravens flying from Baffin Island's rocky cliffs toward the floe's edge means that some four miles out from shore a polar bear has killed a seal—for which the bold black scavengers will soon contend. Not only seemingly indifferent to wind and bitter cold, the raven apparently thinks nothing of scavenging fresh kills beneath the death-dealing jaws of the mammals to whom the
meat belongs.

One author mentioned a feeding preference of ravens living above 3000 feet in the Appalachian Mountains of Pennsylvania and the Virginias:

Where mountain folk haul carcasses of horses and cows into lonely recesses of the uplands, I have known ravens to appear and cleanse the bones.94

Ravens in the American West of the late nineteenth century haunted the slaughterhouses to devour offal.95 If not persecuted, ravens still frequent man-made refuse sites in the North, as do crows, which may also be seen combing suburban shopping centres for scraps at dawn.

In Ungava Peninsula during the fall ravens gorge themselves with berries and heavily stain the rocks where they go to digest the fruit. Many ravens have been seen along the banks of Ungava's Koksauk River, feasting on the decomposing offal of native-killed deer.96 During winter, Northern Ravens on Southampton Island catch lemmings, but feed principally on carcasses of whales, seals, and walruses found and utilized before the winter took hold. A dead whale may provide a winter's sustenance for a flock of ravens, which also scours the edge of the ice floe for seals killed there, and patrols areas where wolves might have dragged down caribou. In addition, ravens take bait and rip apart trapped foxes and owls.97

In areas such as the coast and islands of southern Alaska, summer finds ravens, like crows, plundering the unprotected nests of gulls, murres, and cormorants. Human intrusion into seabird colonies often results in abandoned nests and subsequent repeated raids by ravens, which seize eggs and nestlings for immediate devouring or future use.
Speaking of exploiting other birds, ravens have been seen harassing Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*), thereby forcing the distraught birds to disgorge food; specifically, the vultures' carrion vomit—nourishment apparently attractive to the raven.\(^{98}\)

Ravens and crows sometimes tease dogs, and at an Inuit camp on North Baffin Island a biologist observed three ravens systematically antagonize a large sledge-dog in order to appropriate its frozen seal meat dinner.\(^{99}\) The birds surrounded the dog and alternately hopped toward him, forcing him to leave his meat while he made rushes at the closest ravens. Eventually, with the dog led far enough away, one raven unhurriedly picked up the unprotected meat and took to the air with his companions, the three ravens inducing the dog to chase them before climbing higher into the sky and vanishing with their booty.

A. C. Bent was told that men working in Ontario lumber camps would bury their provisions in the snow before going out to work in the bush, for fear that ravens would tear open the canvas bag. French Canadians in camp, practising a bit of ornithomancy, interpreted the raven's hoarse croak as "Poché! Poché!" ("Bag! Bag!"), and claimed he was demanding the food bag.\(^{100}\)

In feeding, *Corvus* sometimes use their feet in the manner of a hawk or owl. The raven's hawklike feet have heavily taloned inner toes which are used to impale and fix food to a surface, ready for tearing and stripping.\(^{101}\) Crows have been seen dipping their feet into schools of herring to snag a dinner;\(^{102}\) and they use them to snatch and carry off young birds and ears of corn.

The crow's powerful bill, like the raven's but on a smaller
scale, is adapted to field-foraging, predation, and carrion-packing and stripping. Almost anything edible—seeds, grasshoppers, cutworms, frogs, snakes, nestlings, carrion—is crow nurture. To succeed in securing food, however, and maintaining its high energy level, a bird must possess the necessary traits. Madson explains why the crow thrives:

(The common crow has the physical and psychological equipment to exploit almost any possibility that comes along.103)

In winter, crows are fond of gathering and feeding in standing corn. The birds, gifted with adaptability and great survival potential, have benefited from agricultural land, where they consume not only corn but mice, moles and shrews as well. To the farmers’ dismay, crows sometimes pull up sprouting corn and feed in orchards, pecan groves, and watermelon fields which supply juicy melons for the birds to drill into after a long day of dry feeding. Crows visit the breeding colonies of herons and gulls, but normally predation is minimal. When intruders drive birds off their nests, however, crows swiftly and silently penetrate the colony and efficiently carry off eggs and young.

William Brewster, a noted literary ornithologist of the nineteenth century, witnessed some crows devouring twenty “good-sized” trout which fishermen had hidden in a spring.104 This may have occurred because the crow, as he patrols an area, is quick to recognize departures from the norm. A farmer may see around a ring-necked pheasant’s hayfield nest, leaving a patch of untouched clover which greatly interests the passing crow. He will investigate, discover eggs, and never forget that possible source of food.105

Along the seashore, the raven and the Northwestern Crow
(Corvus caurinus, inhabiting the coast from Alaska to Washington's Puget Sound) raid seabird colonies and feed on refuse and many forms of marine life, including mollusks and mussels, often breaking the shells by dropping them from on high. On tidal flats at low tide, crows working the mussel beds on a windy day reportedly make accurate allowance for the curve the mussel will take as it drops toward a rock below. 106

The closely related European Hooded Crow and Carrion Crow (both designated Corvus corone) are representative of Corvinae in their feeding habits. When not foraging among a shore's tidal refuse, they may be found heartily devouring a carcass or dispatching sickly birds and animals or methodically combing the moors for nests with eggs or nestlings. Hooded Crows have been known to prey on lambing ewes, newborn lambs, and larger animals found at a disadvantage. 107 Two "hoodies", in one incident, attacked and quickly killed a lamb struggling in a marsh. According to the witness, by the time he got close to the scene the crows had pecked out the animal's eyes and inflicted fatal wounds to its brain. 108 Some Kansas farmers claim that crows not only damage winter wheat, but also blind and kill newborn calves. 109

The raven has a wonderful symbiotic relationship with the wolf and the coyote. 110 The bird feeds on carrion provided by wolves and may sometimes lead wolves to their prey. Furthermore, the two animals seem to enjoy the company of one another, as evidenced by the game of tag they play together. 111 Hungry ravens often shadow hunting wolves to partake of the remains of a kill. When snow makes tracks visible from the air, ravens will dog the wolf pack's trail in their endless search for a bloody carcass. 112 Wolf expert L. David Mech writes:
It appears that the wolf and the raven have reached an adjustment in their relationships such that each creature is rewarded in some way by the presence of the other and that each is fully aware of the other's capabilities. Both species . . . possess the psychological mechanisms necessary for forming social attachments. Perhaps in some way individuals of each species have included members of the other in their social group and have formed bonds with them.113

When squawking ravens circle above a dying animal, coyotes with their eyes skyward thereby know exactly where food is available. An experienced coyote feeding on a carcass, having learned the meaning of the raven's alarm cries, will abandon the meal whenever a black sentinel barks his raucous warning.114

The crow-owl relationship stands in marked contrast to the symbiotic relationship of ravens, wolves and coyotes—it is an ancient feud. Whenever a piercing hoot sounds in the depths of the darkened forest, it means that animals abroad in the area—from medium-sized mammal to roosting bird—are open to the terror of a winged "tiger among birds".115 It is a primitive sound that speaks of a savage taloned grip of death on the heels of a whisper in the night—it is the voice of Bubo virginianus, the Great Horned Owl, a magnificent assassin who hears all but cannot be heard, sees what cannot be seen. When this owl comes like an angel of death upon a surfeit of prey in the black of night, be it chickens or roosting crows, he will often kill again and again, devouring only the brains of the victims of his ferocity. He is the crow's primal nightmare and the daytime object of his hatred and fury; for any owl spotted during daylight hours becomes the target of a raging mob of crows.

The early European immigrants warred against North America's
wilderness and wildlife, and often sought to exterminate perceived villains such as omnivorous ravens and crows.\textsuperscript{116} The birds were regarded as vermin partly for economic reasons (crop and livestock damage), but the antipathy had deeper roots. Angell speculates that the raven might have aroused ancient fears within some immigrants, fears connected to a heritage that remembered the terror of Viking raiders marching under the sacred raven standard.\textsuperscript{117}

In extreme cases of the general cultural phenomenon theriophobia, ravens and crows (and wolves) were thought to be Satan's representatives--physical, irrational, insatiable and vicious creatures of wild, Godless wilderness. John Rodman:

> Theriophobia appears to be compounded of two major elements: man's disgust with his own body and appetites ... and man's anxiety stemming from the loss of inhibitions (e.g., against the killing of one's own species) normal to other animal species. The well-spring of theriophobia is thus fear of self, and its central mechanism is projection. In the most alienated form of theriophobia, the beasts themselves were seen as animated by devils, and man's extermination of the beasts and of "savages" (bestial men) was carried on as part of God's war against Satan.\textsuperscript{118}

Thus, the destruction of ravens, crows, and wolves often represented the subjugation of wilderness (the dangerous unknown) and an unconscious attempt to crush the hated beast within.

Conservationist John Livingston makes an interesting contribution to the discussion of theriophobia:

> Black is an unfortunate colour for a large, omnivorous bird. Whatever redeeming traits the crow may have (and it has many), the bird's very blackness seems to condemn it. Few native animals have been persecuted with such savage persistence.\textsuperscript{119}

Since the European settlement, the raven and crow have often
had a bounty on their heads. In the campaign for his destruction, the
crow has faced traps, poison, shotguns, and bombs—and has weathered this
storm of human enmity. Few animals, facing such persecution, have been
so tremendously successful in the life struggle as the crow. Large,
strong, resourceful and cunning, he has battled for existence and beat
adversity hollow, whether natural or man-made. Ironically, therefore,
it may be the rugged crow who prevails.

If any critter was designed to endure and ultimately
prevail, it is Crow. Brigand and buffoon, forever adjusting
and adapting and cocking a suspicious eye at the situation,
he'll hang in there from sheer perversity, his own bird to
the last.121

A Manitoba zoologist, surveying the ravaged wildlife in the
scorched wake of a 150,000-acre forest fire, spoke similarly of the raven.
"Ravens," he said, "will be here when men are long gone."122

After years of headhunting corvids with bullets, bombs, and
poison, man now gives some protection to these most persecuted of birds.
Angell suggests that in our time of vanishing habitats and species, this
somewhat softened attitude may be part of a recovered primal realization
that our lifeways are intertwined with those of other life forms.123
Maybe we are done with killing ravens and crows; "if such is the case,
Raven may again become a symbol for a new order and understanding."124

The raven, heaviest and strongest among passerine species,
is quick to learn and profit from experience. Although resourceful,
fierce, and crafty as well, it is shy and wary throughout most of its
range, and has, like the crow, learned to stay beyond the range of
gunners where persecuted. By being a scavenger, however, the raven
also faces the dangers of baited traps and poisoned carcasses. Nonethe-
less, this bird—and the crow family in general—is an impressive survivor, owing in part to its tool-using ability.

An animal's ability to use tools, like play, indicates an aspect of intelligence. In this case, the capacity to adapt to the requirements of a given situation. A raven defending its nest, for instance, bombarded descending mountain climbers with rocks—aiming accurately enough to bounce one off a man's leg. A northern European Carrion Crow (Corvus corone), having seen signal flags snap up near an ice hole, watched ice fishermen subsequently haul in fish on their lines, rebait hooks, and return to their shelter. Upon seeing a flag pop up as a line was struck, the crow coasted down, took the line in his bill, and tugged it while walking away from the hole. Every so often he released the line, but kept it from slipping back into the water by walking on top of it while returning to the hole. Once there, he again moved backward with the line in his bill. Finally, after repeating the process several times, the crow yanked the fish onto the ice and devoured it.

Many crows have taken man's encroaching technology in their stride. They have been known for example to trail milkmen only to pry off bottle caps and drink the delivered milk; and crows purposely drop walnuts on busy streets to exploit the nutcracking power of automobiles.

The play activities of ravens and crows function as a testing, development and refinement of essential life-skills. According to biologist Edward Wilson, play—a very mysterious animal activity—is conjoined with a large brain complex and a great emphasis on learning in behaviour development; and "unequivocal play behaviour" is remarkably well developed in ravens and crows. For example, dozens of ravens
were observed taking turns using the high, crumbling banks of Ungava's Koksoak River as a slide. During the daytime thaw, according to the witness, several birds at a time would stand at the top of the bank and then ride the loose pebbles and clay to the bottom, all the while croaking incessantly. In Pennsylvania during winter, crows foraging along waterways were often seen journeying up and down the rivers on cakes of drift ice, apparently for the pleasure of it.

Ravens, according to ornithologist Millicent Ficken, indulge in the most complex avian play, their intelligence allowing a multifority of play through which they "learn relationships with the environment that contribute to their plasticity of behaviour and great ecological success in many different habitats". Flying ravens drop and catch twigs and pieces of heather; a captive raven repeatedly tossed a rubber ball up in the air and caught it, frequently while lying on its back and passing objects to and fro between bill and claws; two young African White-necked Ravens (Corvus albicollis) played a form of "king of the castle" in which one bird flaunted a lump of dung or a small stick while standing on a mound, up which the other would charge in an attempt to wrest away the brandished object; and a raven and a dog worked out a play activity that had them alternately chasing one another around a tree. One of E. Gwinner's captive ravens amused himself by hanging from horizontal ropes by one leg while striking acrobatic poses with his head and free leg. His ravens also disported by sliding down a smooth piece of wood.

Ravens and crows are unequaled in the avian world partly because of their strength, elegance, formal beauty and aura of mystery; but primarily by virtue of their "subtle cerebral quality" a peerless breadth of intelligence and vitality of mind evidenced by their communi-
cative, tool using, and problem solving abilities. Wilderness writer John Madson believes that the crow—"a bird for all seasons"—likely represents the endpoint of current avian evolution.

It's as if the most practical, general features of the class Aves had been built into one bird, plus a low sense of humour and a raffish cleverness...\footnote{99}

Many ornithologists concur with Madson. John Terres, for example, asserts that ravens and crows are the "evolutionarily most advanced birds of all—the most adaptive and intelligent...."\footnote{140} and Derek Goodwin, a world renowned expert on Corvidae, agrees with Sir Arthur Landborough Thomson's judgment:

The crows, as a family, may represent the furthest stage so far reached in avian evolution; much in their behaviour suggests a highly developed mentality...\footnote{141}

Artist-naturalist Tony Angell describes ravens and crows as "a most remarkable consolidation of highly evolved animal social systems, physical apparatus, skills and beauty," adding that they are recognized as "the apotheosis of avian form and a spirit worthy of the highest artistic tribute."\footnote{162} Similarly, wildlife artist J. Fenwick Landdowne, after paying tribute to their superior intelligence, elaborate language and behaviour, and the overall complexities of their lives, points out that:

(F)or ages these birds have engaged the attention of men. By strong character and dark cunning the family as a whole has won, if not affection, then a reluctant respect and a place in the mythology of many races.\footnote{143}

In conclusion, one must admit that the preceding natural histories of the raven and crow are incomplete. But this is understandable. Considering the relatively small amount of research done
on these birds, it would be presumptuous to think we know all there is to
know about them. Furthermore, having written in scientific detail about
 ravens and crows, in the end Angell was moved to admit that these birds,
in a sense, ultimately transcend avian biology:

There is also that intriguing element about corvids that
is of the unknown. These birds are more than descriptions by
weight, measure, colour, and distribution, for behind their
amber eyes are answers to questions we may never learn to ask. 144

Many questions concerning these birds remain unanswered and
perhaps unasked. But why be so concerned with their natural lives when
primarily we wish to explore their symbolic associations? The many
striking aspects in the natural history portraits of the raven and crow
have been absorbed into the inner lives of aboriginal Siberians and the
first North American peoples, into their dreams, magico-religious beliefs,
myths, and other oral traditions. The old beliefs and stories involving
some form or aspect of these black birds are partly anchored in the
natural reality of the species. The unique lifeways of the raven and
crow have passed transformed into the realm of myth and symbol, where a
raven is more than a raven and a crow is more than a crow. Thus, one does
well in seeking to know these birds, for with an awareness of their natural
power we may better understand tribal man's respect for them. That respect
is strongly reflected in the shamanic associations of the raven and crow,
the focus of this study. So let us now enter the shaman's strange world,
into which the black birds were accepted on the strength of their qualities.
NOTES


13. The delineations of the raven's and crow's ranges are based on W. Earl Godfrey, Ibid., p. 275 (raven); 276 (crow).


According to Mackenzie, most books which show the measurements of birds take the length from the tip of the bill to the tip of the tail from specimens measured on their backs on a flat surface. These measurements are invariably longer than the bird is when seen in life. John P. S. Mackenzie, The Complete Outdoorsman's Guide to Birds of Canada and Eastern North America (Toronto: Pagurian, 1976), p. 12.

Measurements (in millimetres) of the Northern Raven (Corvus corax principalis). Adult male: wing 417.0-445.0 (427.9); tail, 228.0-258.5 (244.5); exposed culmen (The ridge of the upper mandible (maxilla) of the bill), 72.0-78.0 (74.4); tarsus, 56.0-67.5 (64.9). Common Crow (Corvus brachyrhynchos). Adult male: wing, 303.0-328.0 (316.9); tail, 170.0-200.0 (185.3); exposed culmen, 46.0-52.0 (48.5); tarsus, 58.0-63.0 (60.5).

W. Earl Godfrey, The Birds of Canada (National Museums of Canada Bulletin No. 203, Biological Series No. 73) (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1966), pp. 274-75. Male Alaskan ravens average about 3 lbs. 12 oz. (1,383 grams); females 2 lbs. 6 oz. (1,085 grams). Male crows range from about 15 1/2 oz. to 1 lb. 6 1/2 oz.; females 14-3/4 oz. to 1 lb. 3 3/2 oz. These weights are from Terres, Audubon Society Encyclopedia, pp. 137, 144.

There are many aetiological tales telling how the raven or crow became black. Perhaps these stories are partially rooted in the natural phenomenon of albinism. The various degrees of albinism among birds are due to a genetic change that inhibits the formation of an enzyme (tyrosinase) governing the synthesis of pigment (melanin). With an apparent higher incidence of albinism among birds with dark pigmentation, albinistic crows are relatively common (58 records. See A. O. Cross, "The Incidence of Albinism in North American Birds", Bird-Banding, 36 (1965), pp. 67-71.) Being a conspicuous species, crows are more likely to be observed; and this, plus the fact that a white or partially white crow is a startling contrast to the usual overall black plumage, results in more frequent reports of albinism. A totally albinistic female crow was killed in Yarmouth, Maine; feathers, bill, feet and claws—all were pure white, and the iris was pink. Near Dearborn, Michigan a black parent crow was sighted with three young on the wing; two were gray, one was pure white.

I have never read or heard a report of an albino raven, but the relatively frequent reports of albino crows leads me to believe such a bird has existed. Perhaps since ravens live in more remote habitats, an albino raven is less likely to be seen than an albino crow. Furthermore, albinistic birds in general are usually shorter-lived because of physio-


22. This discussion is based on Tony Angell’s remarks about corvids’ colour and size. See Tony Angell, Ravens, Crows, Magpies and Jays, pp. 73, 75.

23. Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 73. While ravens winter close to their breeding areas, crows have various seasonal movement patterns which differ according to the region of the continent. In some northern areas, crows appear to move only a few hundred miles in spring and fall; in the Midwest however, long distance migration takes place, with some crows journeying up to two thousand miles from the Canadian provinces down into the midwestern states, where hundreds of thousands of the birds gather at night in immense roosts. See Donald W. Stokes, A Guide to the Behaviour of Common Birds (Toronto: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 157-58.


25. Langdon Gibson, "Bird Notes from North Greenland" (1922), cited in Bent, p. 201.

26. Welty explained size advantage this way: . . . (S)pecies of birds living in colder climates will be larger than related species in warmer climates. This rule . . . clearly results from natural selection in favor of the physiological advantage involved. Birds with larger bodies have relatively less surface through which to lose heat, a large bird being in essence the same as two or three small birds huddled together to keep warm. See Carl Welty, "The Geography of Birds" (1957) in Barry W. Wilson, ed., Birds: Readings from Scientific American (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980), p. 17.


28. Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 75.

Ibid., p. 199.


W. H. Thorpe, Learning and Instinct in Animals (1956), quoted in John Terres, Audubon Society Encyclopedia, p. 64.


Ibid., p. 197.

Ibid., p. 197.

Ibid., pp. 197-98.


Konrad Z. Lorenz, King Solomon’s Ring: New Light on Animal Ways (1952) (New York: New American Library, 1972), pp. 106-07. Desmond Morris, formerly curator at the London Zoo, describes an incident involving Konrad Lorenz and a tame raven with which he was out walking. The bird was flying above Lorenz, and now and then the ethologist would take a piece of raw meat from his pocket and feed it to the raven, which would plunge from the sky whenever Lorenz’s hand moved towards his clothing (Lorenz called this an “intention movement” signal, which in this case meant food was available). The scientist made a bloody, painful mistake: having copiously imbibed during lunch, Lorenz needed to relieve himself, which he proceeded to do while standing near a hedge. Hovering above, the raven saw Lorenz undo his trousers and reacted as if a juicy piece of meat was being taken from a pocket and offered for his consumption. The huge raven, bellowing hoarsely, slashed down from on high and seized Lorenz’s penis with its great beak; as the man roared in agony, the bird “placing its huge feet firmly on Lorenz’s body . . . started to tug fiercely at the stubbornly resistant food offering, like a blackbird trying to pull an earthworm from a garden lawn”. Lorenz survived, having deepened his knowledge of “intentional movements—small, incipient actions that during the course of evolution can easily become developed into exaggerated animal signals”. The raven, responding to the first subtle element in the behaviour sequence had demonstrated intelli-


Owing to factors that affect its speed—wind, angle of flight, whether it’s being pressed, etc.—the measurement of a bird’s speed capabilities is tricky and highly uncertain. See John Storer, "Bird Aerodynamics," (1952), in Barry W. Wilson, ed., *Birds: Readings from Scientific American* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980), pp. 36-37.


43 Having spent a fair amount of time watching airborne crows, I recall times when a crow appeared to be gliding on flat wings, albeit briefly. The consensus is, however, that sailing by the crow is on wings in a shallow dihedral.


45 Ibid., p. 144. In this case the raven performs much like a hawk or vulture or any other static soarer which avails itself of rising warm-air currents (thermals) to stay aloft without flapping its wings. See Terres, p. 377.


48 Bent, pp. 198-99.

49 Angell, *Ravens, Crows*, p. 35.


53 Ibid., p. 86.
54 Ibid., p. 77.
57 Ibid., p. 59.
58 Ibid., p. 60.
59 Samuel Dickey, correspondence with Bent, *ibid.*, p. 188.
60 Ibid., p. 195.
64 Bruce West, "Birds Have Their Virtuosos . . . and the Also-sangs", *The Globe & Mail* (August, 1979).
66 Ibid., p. 84.
69 Harlow, "The Breeding Habits . . .", p. 197.
70 H. E. Tuttle, correspondence with Bent, cited in Bent, p. 198.
71 Dr. Samuel Dickey, correspondence with Bent, cited in Bent, p. 198.
Francis Zirrer, correspondence with Bent, cited in Bent, p. 193.

Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 83.


Ibid., p. 249.


Bent, Life Histories, p. 190.


Bent, Life Histories, p. 190.

Ibid., p. 201.


Ibid., p. 194.


93. Ibid., p. 92.

94. Dr. Samuel Dickey, correspondence with Bent, cited in Bent, pp. 191-92.


98. Rev. J. J. Murray, correspondence with A. C. Bent, cited in Bent, p. 195. "Birds' food selections may lead one to wonder about their senses of smell (olfaction) and taste, especially those of ravens and crows, which eat not only fruits, grains and insects, but carrion, offal, dung and sundry garbage as well. For discussions about the complex problems of avian olfaction and sense of taste, see Terres, *Audubon Society Encyclopedia*, pp. 830-31, 879.


112. Lopez, Wolves and Men, p. 67.


114. Ryden, God's Dog, pp. 80-81.


117. Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 53.

118. Rodman, "Dolphin Papers", p. 20. For the Puritans' theriophobic reaction to the North American wilderness, see Nash, Wilderness, chapters 1-2.


120. The crow remains abundant in Oklahoma, despite those years in the thirties of wholesale roost-bombing; but the raven, once abundant in Kansas and Oklahoma, has disappeared along with the buffalo. The extermination of the Plains Bison (Bison bison) on whose carcasses it fed and the cattlemen's use of poison explain the raven's departure. No buffalo meant a hugely curtailed food supply; and eating poisoned wolf-bait and the viscera of poisoned wolves killed many ravens. See Margaret Morse Nice, The Birds of Oklahoma, rev. ed. (1931), cited in A.C. Bent, p. 202. The White-necked Raven (Corvus cryptoleucus) of the western plains and deserts is rarely seen today except in western Texas, Arizona,
New Mexico, and down into Mexico. It gradually disappeared from Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado, where it was abundant over a century ago. As with the American Raven (Corvus corax simillimus), the White-necked Raven's departure was sealed when the buffalo were killed off and no more carcasses were to be found strewn across the plains, when iron trains supplanted the wagons and the scraps they left in their wake. See Charles E. Aiken and Edward R. Warren, *Birds of El Paso County, Colorado*, Colorado College Publication No. 74 (1914), cited in A. C. Bent, p. 215.

Except during winter, crows share Ontario's Algonquin Park with ravens, which depend almost entirely on the remains of wolf-killed deer for their winter sustenance. Wolves in the Park are officially protected, but for years they were poisoned and the resultant disruption of Algonquin's winter ecology included the near extinction of the raven in that area. See under Wolves, Dogs, and Foxes/Family Canidae in Province of Ontario, Ministry of Natural Resources, *Mammals of Algonquin Park*, 1978. Unpaged.

Crow roosts have been bombed under the euphemism "control"—meaning the unrestrained slaughter of an unprotected species. In the twenties and thirties, Oklahoma roosts were regularly hung with wired pipe bombs while the birds were out foraging. "The blast came late at night when the roost was filled with sleeping crows... Through all the annals of man's relentless persecution of wildlife, nothing can compare to the instantaneous carnage that occurred when a roaring storm of shrapnel and a wave of concussion swept through a crowded crow roost." Madson, "Dance on Monkey Mountain", p. 60.

121 Madson, "Dance on Monkey Mountain", p. 60.
123 Angell, *Ravens, Crows*, p. 54
131 Turner, notes on Ungava Peninsula, cited in Bent, p. 196.


134 Ibid., p. 577. See also W. H. Thorpe, Learning and Instinct in Animals (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); and R. Moreau, "Do Young Birds Play?", Ibis, 86 (1944), pp. 93-94.


138 Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 9.

139 Haddon, "Dance on Monkey Mountain", pp. 54-55.


142 Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 105.

143 J. Penwick Lansdowne, foreword in Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 7.

144 Angell, Ravens, Crows, p. 105.
CHAPTER TWO

THE WORLD OF THE SHAMAN:
A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT VOCATION

The earliest human communities of which we know seem already to have required the services of a mediator between the bright world of myth and ordinary reality. The shaman fills this role. He is the prototype of the artist, the priest, the dramatist, the physician; all rolled into one. Gradually a realization began to dawn: the shaman is man's basic creative response to the presence of the mythic dimension.  

Shamanism is an ancient technique for travelling in an ecstatic state among the spiritual regions and for dealing practically with souls and spirits. As a complex religious system of mind-body healing, it thrives within and alongside a culture's predominant religion. Mircea Eliade, a historian of religions, regards the shaman as "the great specialist in the human soul." He qualifies shamanic ecstasy by saying that only an ecstatic whose soul is believed to depart his body during a trance and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld can be regarded as a shaman. Ake Hultkrantz, the eminent student of North American indigenous religions, defines the shaman as: 

... a social functionary who, with the help of guardian spirits, attains ecstasy in order to creat a rapport with the supernatural world on behalf of his group members.  

Hultkrantz notes that Eliade's definition of shamanism excludes several Siberian and North American cases where, for example, the shaman does not leave his body, but awaits the arrival of the spirits, which may be dispatched by the shaman to retrieve a patient's soul, as in the
Gilyak séance. 6

The first shamans arose in response to mankind's uncertainty and need in difficult circumstances. Shamanism existed in the most ancient prehistoric cultures, where various crisis situations required one who could serve as "hunting magician", as doctor, as diviner, as tribal intermediary before the supernatural powers. 7 In their primal struggles to survive, tribal hunters 8 in extremely harsh northern environments were assisted by the shaman, who apparently understood, communicated with, and influenced, the mysterious forces which directed human life. 9

A religious phenomenon found in many hunting and gathering cultures, shamanism is particularly associated with Siberia (northeastern Asia) and central Asia; the term shaman is derived, through the Russian, from the Tungus word ŋaman: "one who is excited, moved or raised." 10

The shamanic vocation among the Tungus existed in connection with most of the traits commonly linked with shamanism, including "nervous disease", ecstatic procedures aided by guardian spirits, divination and healing. Since Siberia is shamanism's principal homeland, the concept of shamanism must be directed by the Siberian data; and it is Tungusian shamanism which has imbued the technical term's meaning. 11 Shamanic phenomena were widespread, however, and must be identified through phenomenological considerations rather than etymology. 12

As Eliade's classic work on the "archaic techniques of ecstasy" 13 documents, the general structure of shamanism is universally consistent, whether it occurs in the Americas, Europe, central Asia, Siberia, or Australia. Anthropologist Peter Furst indicates that:
... whether in Asia, Australia, Africa, or North and South America, the shaman functions fundamentally in much the same way and with similar techniques—as guardian of the psychic and ecological equilibrium of his group and its members, as intermediary between the seen and unseen worlds, as master of spirits, as supernatural curer, etc.  

He adds that the shaman is equipped "to transcend the human condition and pass freely back and forth through the different cosmological planes . . . . "  

Throughout most of the arctic, Eskimos knew the shaman as the angakok; certain Alaskan Eskimos called this primary religious intermediary tungralik or kakalik—"one who has spirits," referring to the helping spirits who aided him in mediating between man and the supernatural forces. The Eskimo shaman or angakok could see the spirits and communicate with them, and because he was able to see that which was hidden from others the Copper Eskimos also called him elik—"one who has eyes." The shaman was capable of perceiving coming events; he could discern the dark colour of objects that had been in contact with dead bodies; see into the future and into one's deepest secrets; see the souls of the dead and hear them speaking. He knew the location of game, and could generally see, hear, and know almost everything. In the shamans' special language, the Inupiat angakok Aua told Knud Rasmussen, the great Danish explorer, the words for "shaman" and "shaman pupil" are better translated as "one who makes it into a shadow" and "one who is on the way towards making himself a shadow."  

The shaman usually acted for his people. As a mediator between man and the otherworldly powers, he interceded on behalf of community members seeking help from the spirit world.
Sometimes a myth of the diver's establishment of shamanism long ago is cited to explain why the shaman strove to achieve a link with the hidden world. Frequently, however, it was thought that the spirits forcefully elected the shaman, whereupon the shaman-to-be descended to the underworld and underwent a symbolic initiatory death and resurrection. The novice's "death" was symbolized in old cultures by darkness, isolation, tortures, burial, fainting and so forth.

As many Siberian and North American accounts describe, the spirits came to the man (or woman) in a dream or vision and chose him to become a shaman. He may have rejected the call, whereupon he was afflicted with sickness and nervous attacks until he acceded to the spirits' demands—or until he died. In other words, the spirits were inexorable shaman-makers, capable of destroying balky candidates.

Thus, the shaman was "chosen". For some, where the people did not elect a candidate, the call came through singular self-inflicted trials of fasting and mutilation in which some animal spirit eventually appeared, and henceforth became the seeker's liaison with the spirit world. More commonly, spirits elected a shaman; they came to the person in a dream or trance that may have been a stark vision of a raven, for example, or an involved, full-blown psychodrama, revealing the inner transformation all shamans must undergo. As in transformation rites imposed by the tribe, the chosen one—in the grip of a long, deathlike trance—suffered a horrible thaumaturgic death and dismemberment by demonic forces. Then, in this visionary ordeal which may have lasted several days, the spirits created new organs and a new body for him, and resurrected the shaman from the fearful nadir. Upon recovery, he became apprenticed to an
accomplished shaman, absorbing over several years the mythological, technical and healing knowledge of his culture's mighty shamanic corpus.25

Shamanic enlightenment enabled one to lighten the darkness and see what is hidden to most. As Rasmussen wrote, the Iglulik Eskimo shaman's enlightenment, his gaumanEq,

... enables him to see in the dark, both literally and metaphorically speaking, for he can now, even with closed eyes, see through darkness and perceive things and coming events which are hidden from others; thus they look into the future and into the secrets of others.26

When exploring shamanism, it is often best to let the shaman speak for himself. The Iglulik shaman named Aua spoke to Rasmussen about his shamanic enlightenment.

I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song. . . . And then in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight, I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. Art, I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way. I had gained my gaumanEq, my enlightenment, the shaman-light of brain and body, and this in such a manner that it was not only I who could see through the darkness of life, but the same light also shone out from me, imperceptible to human beings, but visible to all the spirits of earth and sky and sea, and these now came to me and became my helping spirits.27

Anthropologist Michael Harner 28 defines a shaman as "a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness—at will—to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons."29. He adds that the shaman has one or more spirits which serve him. Scientific researchers may regard the shaman's psychic constitution and systematic training as the primary source of his powers, but believers tied his wondrous boon to his being
summoned, trained and aided during his shamanizing by his auxiliary spirits. 30

The shaman alone was able to deal with evil spirits and the gods. In this, however, he required the aid of his helping spirits. They were a source of power for the shaman; they assisted him in his spiritual encounters with the supernatural, and it was through his spirit helpers that the shaman communicated with the ruling forces of the earth. 31

Zoomorphic spirit helpers sometimes appeared to the novice Tlingit Indian shaman while he was fasting alone in the forest. 32 Thalaniut Eskimo shamans attempted to acquire powerful helping spirits (Tomnait) through great physical hardship. By exposing himself to harsh weather and suffering hunger and thirst, the shaman entered a trance. In this state, a particular Tornak appeared to him, with which the shaman battled to gain its lifelong aid. The ordeal may have killed him. 33

Ecstasy, as the precondition for the shaman's activity, is the chief, salient characteristic which has distinguished shamanism. Eliade recognizes the techniques of ecstasy—the shaman's power to leave his body at will—as the essential element of shamanism. 34

Ecstasy always involves a trance, whether "symbolic" or pretended or real, and the trance is interpreted as a temporary abandonment of the body by the soul of the shaman. 35

An issue in itself, ecstasy should be generally construed, according to Hultkrantz, as:

A state of trance, a psychogenic, hysteroid mode of reaction that forms itself according to the dictates of the mind and that evinces various depths in various situations. 36

Thus, the ecstatic state manifests itself in frenzy, gleeful transport, a light afflational trance, corpse-like comatose torpidity, and similar
The prototypical Siberian accounts of shamanism depict shamans undergoing one or more of these states (sometimes all of them); and, although the measure of ecstasy is not fixed, it is invariably a concomitant of shamanism. The depth of the shamanic trance varies according to cultural tradition and, in some cases, one's psychic and physical stamina underwent violent ecstatic exertion. While rare attributes were not required of all shamans, some Siberian shamans had to face the demands of extremely arduous performances, and therefore overall durability counted heavily in their being selected. Ecstasy generally demanded exceptional capabilities; and the authentic shaman clearly stood apart from other men in his ability to enter a state of trance at will.

States of trance were induced through intense physiological and psychological stress, or pharmacologically, using hallucinogenic plants or fermented beverages. Jivaro Indian shamans (uwisin) of the Ecuadorian Amazon, for example, still use the hallucinogenic vine tea natea to enter trance states and contact the supernatural world. In contrast to Eliade, who suggests that the ritual use of psychotropic plants and fermented drinks is a late, degenerate shamanic technique for inducing trance, some anthropologists and ethnobotanists believe that it, like the "pure" religious experience (non-pharmacologically triggered), is rooted in archaic Old World Palaeolithic shamanism.

The shamanic state of consciousness is related to what Carlos Castaneda terms "nonordinary reality." Nonordinary reality is perceived by one in the shamanic state of consciousness as a transcendent state of awareness or trance involving also "a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state."
This would include knowledge about the cosmic terrain of the Underworld (or Lowerworld) and other realities in the shamanic universe.

The altered state of consciousness element of the shamanic state of consciousness includes some depth of trance. As a nonordinary psychic state, "trance" must not be confused with a nonconscious state, as it often is in nonshamanic Western culture. Eliade notes:

Among the Ugrians shamanic ecstasy is less a trance than a "state of inspiration"; the shaman sees and hears spirits; he is, "carried out of himself" because he is journeying in ecstasy through distant regions, but he is not unconscious. He is a visionary and inspired.45

Harner regards the shamanic state of consciousness as a conscious waking state, into and out of which the shaman wills himself when he chooses.46

As noted, some measure of altered consciousness is necessary to shamanic work, even if it is only the subtle, light trance sometimes employed in healing. A shaman in such a state, appearing lucid, is actually occupied with inner visions.47 While the shaman was in his trance, usually his shamanic consciousness remained somewhat connected to the everyday reality of his physical environment.48 The shaman was indeed always close to the Earth, spiritually linked with animals and plants.

All phenomena--human, animals, plants, etc.--encountered in the shamanic state of consciousness are perceived as fully real, within the context of nonmaterial, nonordinary reality.49 Normally, these forms are hidden. Furthermore,

Shamanism goes far beyond a primarily self-concerned transcendence of ordinary reality . . . . The enlightenment of shamanism is the ability to light up what others perceive as darkness, and thereby to see and to journey on behalf of a humanity that is perilously close to losing its spiritual
connectedness with all its relatives, the plants and animals of this good Earth. 50

The shaman moved between states of consciousness and between realities at will, "a magical athlete ... engaged in mythic feats." 51 In an altered state of consciousness, the shamanic journey was undertaken in a quest for knowledge of the hidden world. The ecstatic doctor's soul was believed to ascend to heaven, descend to the netherworld or underworld (descensus ad inferos), or journey great distances into space. 52 As psychopomp, the shaman guided the souls of the dead to the underworld; he retrieved the lost souls of the sick, carried sacrifices to the dead, and asked the spirits about an epidemic befallen his people, or the location of game or a lost person. 53

Frequently, the shaman's work area was plunged in darkness, and his eyes may have been covered prior to entering the trance. The shaman dropped to the ground, and his soul journeyed in ecstasy to another world. 54 The shamanic journey, a most essential task, often took the form of a sinking to the underground world or, in Eskimo shamanism, to the bottom of the sea. 55 Some ethnographic accounts say that the shaman in trance sends his soul into another realm, while "his body lies as though dead." 57 In fact, a shaman sunk deep in trance was considered "dead" for the duration of his journeying soul's absence from the body. 58

The imagery of shamanic soul flight often involves the taking of bird-like form, and native traditions--especially Siberian and Eskimo--are replete with bird-shamans and shamans with bird familiars and bird-like extremities or appendages. Aided by a coat representative of a bird skin, the Yukaghir shaman, and other Palaeo-Asiatics, could trans-
form themselves into a bird and fly, an ability analogous to that possessed by the mythic heroes of the Chukchee, Koryak, Kamchadal, Aleut and North American indigenous peoples. The Eskimo shaman was especially renowned for his ability to fly.

Shamans travelled in ecstasy throughout the universe. Aboriginal traditions speak of shamans flying to the moon, to the sun, to the upperworld, and to the underworld. They visited gods above the earth and below the sea; in a state of trance, they descended or sank to lake and sea bottoms and to the underground realms of the dead. Shamans, aided by spirit helpers, were said to soar around the world and to make soul journeys between distant earthly locales. On his return to this world and ordinary reality, the shaman may have presented some clairvoyant knowledge or performed an act of healing power.

The soul flight or journey may have occurred in the shaman's trance-dream, or in an imitative séance involving, for example, the climbing of the ritual heavenly pole, the dramatization of a canoe trip down the river of death and the subsequent battle with the spirits of the dead, or zigzag running in pursuit of a patient's soul.

For strongly shamanic cultures, however the journey is expressed, the ideological base of the soul flight, according to Hultkrantz, was a belief in soul dualism and a detachable free-soul. Soul dualism suggests alternate functioning between "body-souls (ego soul, life-souls, breath)" that give vitality, mobility, and consciousness to waking man, and the free-soul, "man's excorporeal form of manifestation in dreams, trance and coma." During the latter, altered states, the shaman could separate his free-soul, i.e., his own self, from his body (ecstasy) and
have it journey to remote places, even beyond the perilous boundaries of the realm of the dead.  

Shamanic cosmology, as a world view found in classical Siberian and North American shamanism, is a premise of the soul journey. Universally, the spirit realms of shamanic cosmology are structured somewhat consistently, and characteristic figures and images recur (e.g., the dog barring the cave-mouth, the freezing river).  

A tripartite (at least) layered world of sky, earth and underworld dominates this cosmology, along with the concept of the world-tree (axis mundi, Cosmic Tree at the Centre of the World), the link to the regions above and below and channel to the spirits of those worlds. By climbing the world-pole, the shaman enacts his soul flight and ritually expresses communication with the spirits.

By his magic flight, the shaman connected the otherworld to this world and re-established the primordial ecological unity of the mythic age (illud tempus). As living nexus, he spanned the primal, mythic past and historical time; he recreated the cosmic wholeness of the lost paradise and thus, with consummate mastery of psychological transitions and states, broke down barriers and temporarily healed a ruptured universe in restoring health and equilibrium among his people.

Soul flight experiences do not circumscribe shamanic ecstasy, and in any event its supreme importance in shamanism rests on its significance: ecstasy cracks the door to the supernatural world; it is the context in which the shaman penetrated the other, unseen world and encountered the spirits.

Thirty thousand years old or more, the shamanic lifeway is
"the most widespread and ancient methodological system of mind-body healing known to humanity." Shamans helped other humans to conquer sickness and hold off death. Speaking from his experiences among contemporary shamans, Harner writes:

... the pair, the shaman and patient, together, venture into the clarity of darkness, where ... the shaman sees the hidden forces involved with the depths of the unconscious, and harnesses them or combats them for the welfare and survival of the patient.

In rare cases, the shaman was able to restore a dead person to life.

However, the latter is to be understood, the healing shaman's methodology was essentially psychotherapeutic, regardless of whether his patient's malady was physiological or psychological. Indeed, many shamanic healing techniques and other practices appear to have foreshadowed modern psychoanalysis by thousands of years.

Many aboriginal cultures held malevolent forces responsible for a wide assortment of disorders. Evil spirits caused sickness, they ravaged, murdered and devoured people; they caused accidents, and affected weather conditions and the game supply. Since these horribles ones frequently besieged individuals or the entire community, the shaman—especially the Eskimo angakok—battled long and hard for his people against the ubiquitous evil beings.

The shaman usually worked at night and in darkness so that his perception could more easily transcend ordinary reality. The shamanic seer had to enter an altered state of consciousness, and in this he was often aided by drumming, rattling, singing and dancing. Shamanic performances and séances were essentially religious events characterized in part by an emotionally charged atmosphere and the raw spiritual energy
and primal frenzy of the shaman.

Many of the shaman's tasks were related to death and the dead. Shamans were believed capable of raising the dead, but by a wish or a glance they could kill. Raising the dead may be understood as the ultimate metaphoric expression of shamanic healing. Aboriginal shamans often gained shamanic knowledge through personal death/rebirth experiences. The powerful shaman, it was said, could himself die and come back to life. "Dying" was recognized as a means of augmenting one's shamanic powers.

Closely related to the shaman's help in the securing of game was his duty to control the weather. The Eskimo community called on the angakok to tame storms, and to predict weather conditions. The shaman calmed the weather through the use of songs, magic words or special rites and ceremonies. Since the shaman was capable of seeing and knowing what was hidden to others, his talents were occasionally solicited to search into the future or prophesy coming events.

Not only did a shaman fight evil spirits, but he also was occasionally forced into combat with rival shamans or he accompanied warriors into battle. Commonly wearing just an apron and an amulet necklace, the Tlingit shaman went about virtually naked, packing armour, knives or war clubs only when facing hostile witches or an enemy tribe's shamans. An armed, battle-hardened shaman was always counted in the ranks of a Tlingit war party. He was a wild, awesome figure with lengthy disheveled hair which bound up his shamanic power; at the risk of forfeiting this power and perhaps his life, the shaman never cut his unkempt hair.
bat; rather, the shaman—assisted by his guardian animal spirit—"fought magic with magic." Many Yukaghir legends describe fights between shamans seeking to flaunt the power of their spirits and achieve fame. Metaphorically speaking, the battling shamans "shot" or "ate" one another; that is, they waged spiritual war using their unseen arsenals.

Shamanizing performances were often protracted, spectacular affairs, with the intense shaman drumming, singing and leaping about—sometimes in regalia heavily hung with iron (Siberia)—attaining ecstasy and entering the spirit world. He handled fire in this condition, displayed awesome strength and agility, and survived stabbings. Most spectacular and impressive were those exhibitions of power in which the shaman suffered grievous bodily injury but recovered without any apparent wounds. On such occasions, the shaman shot himself with a gun, stabbed himself with a knife, severed his limbs only to replace them, was burned alive, or harpooned himself. A Kutchin Indian shaman who failed to effect a cure would sometimes shoot himself or run a spear through his body, "sawing it back and forth." Although he had apparently killed himself, the shaman regained consciousness and bore no scar on his body. In the early 1900's a Nunamiut Eskimo shaman was trying to demonstrate his power. As he was beating a drum and singing loudly and emotionally, his wife approached and buried a knife in him. Reportedly, he didn't bleed or waver from the stabbing.

Whether or not these feats were authentic, they certainly affected the shaman's audience. By executing these "tricks", the shaman aimed to demonstrate his supernatural abilities. Concerning the shaman's trickster aspect, Rasmussen claimed that shamans understood their tricks
as a means of bringing themselves in contact with the spirits.\textsuperscript{90} Also, in relation to the shaman as trickster or buffoon, among some Plains Indians a figure called the "contrary" served as both clown and shaman; and the Canadian Dakota "consider the clown to be the most powerful of shamans."\textsuperscript{91} Regardless of the depth of their magician's repertoire, shamans tended to be sincerely religious, believing strongly in themselves, their powers and their ability to help their people.\textsuperscript{92}

The Tlingit Raven and Wolf shamans, each possessing several strong spirit helpers, were perhaps the most powerful and most dreaded among north Pacific Coast people.\textsuperscript{93} A Tlingit shaman's lengthy, unkempt hair—in some cases reaching down to his calves—was a symbol of his power and holiness, and his aloofness from trivial concerns.\textsuperscript{94} After his death, an erected guardian spirit figure watched over the corpse and shamanic paraphernalia, which was placed in a gravehouse far from the village.\textsuperscript{95} A Tlingit shaman was feared in life and death. His house in the woods was avoided and one would not eat anything while near a shaman's gravehouse for fear of being stricken with a mortal sickness.\textsuperscript{96}

The Yukaghir of Siberia cut up their dead shamans and carried amulets of dried shaman's flesh for protection and luck in travelling, hunting and fighting. The dead shaman's skull was held sacred and his heart was highly valued as a symbol of courage. If a deceased shaman's relative did not receive bone or flesh as a protector, he would instead receive a remnant of the shaman's clothing drenched in the shaman's blood.\textsuperscript{97}

The theme of shaman as outsider or outcast is quite strong in the ethnographic literature. Around the turn of the century, for in-
stance, a Nunamiat Eskimo shaman was hired as a hunter by a whaling ship captain. One night while drunk, the shaman accidentally killed the little girl he had adopted. Several men, including the captain and the ship's missionary, tied him to the mast and took turns lashing him with a dog whip. Only his shaman's power saved him from death. Deprived of most of his trade goods, the shaman and his family moved to the mountains. Sometimes the shaman would rave about the horrible beating he had endured and swear vengeance. Several of the whaling ship's crew died later, but it is said that the shaman's power was not strong enough to kill the missionary. The beating stayed with the shaman, and he eventually killed his own family and another family. Nicholas Gubser, the ethnologist who relates this story, does not know the shaman's fate.98

Although unbalanced and incompetent shamans were not unknown, many accounts exist of intelligent, knowledgeable shamans, who were physically hardy and famed hunters as well.99 The shaman functioned in two worlds, for he usually shared the daily life of his people and also, within the trance, immersed himself in the world of supernatural powers, partaking of the spirits' abilities in order to identify with his guardian spirit, to transform himself, to fly and so forth. But the shaman functioned as such only part-time; indeed, he was commonly a responsible family man and a consummate hunter and artist as well. The ability to perform successfully in everyday life, as well as in the realm of the extraordinary, was recognized as evidence of the shaman's power.100

All shamans were people of action and knowledge, but the truly great masters of knowledge, power and healing were few. Their communities were tough critics when it came to rating shamans; glory was not
easily earned or given. The Eskimos and other indigenous peoples tra-
titionally respected and honoured the status of shaman. Nonetheless,
shamans faced accusations of baneful witchcraft and sorcery; and in
fact, although not all nefarious witches were shamans, shamanism has had
practitioners who turned to evil sorcery. Most good, helpful shamans
were respected and held in awe, but an evil shaman was greatly dreaded
and feared. Gubser finds that many of the ethnographic accounts depict
the shaman as a negative force; and in his situation with the Nunamiut,
Gubser says that "shamanism seemed to loom larger as a source of fear than
as a source of comfort and hope."  

To conclude, the shaman, in his integrating capacity, claimed
that the link still exists between the everyday world and the paradisi-
world of the mythic age as it existed before the primordial severances
of Creation. This message lived in the magic shamanic journeys from
the mundane realm to the supernatural and back. The shaman's ecstatic
flight symbolically healed the wounds of the human condition and reunited
sundered reality; it recovered the bliss of long-lost wholeness. Himself summoned to a deeper way of being, the heroic shaman—through
imagination, dream, trance, myth, symbol and ritual—undertook the an-
cient quest for meaning, and exemplified the universal human inability
to resist the vocation of spiritual seeker. In one sense, the shamanic
adventure was, and in some places still is, a profoundly aesthetic en-
counter with the wonder of the universe, a heroic quest and primal
drama of the human psyche.

Finally, no matter how long he lived and how many wonders he
saw and comprehended, a great shaman always stood in awe of the grandeur
and complexity of the universe and of Nature. The ancient bedrock of
the shaman's spirituality is the quintessence of religiousness throughout
time and space—a sense of mystery. Having sketched the way of the sha-
man, in the next chapter I shall discuss the shamanic associations of
the raven and crow in terms of the shaman's guardian animal spirit and
aspects related to this power animal.
NOTES


4. Ibid., p. 5.

5. Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 34.

6. Ibid., p. 29.

7. Ibid., p. 35.


11. Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 27.

12. Ibid., p. 27.


15. Ibid., p. ix.
Concerning the terms Inuit and Eskimo: The Eskimo peoples of arctic Canada... of North Alaska and Greenland, speak dialects of a single Eskimo language, inuktitut, in which they refer to themselves as Inuit. The Eskimo populations of West Alaska, South Alaska, and Siberia speak other related Eskimo languages and do not think of themselves as Inuit. The term Eskimo includes all peoples that speak languages of the Eskimo type, and ancient peoples whose archaeological remains indicate that they were of the "Eskimo tradition" but whose languages are not known. Inuit is used to refer to the present occupants of the area between Bering Strait and Greenland, and to their archaeological ancestors of about the past thousand years. From Robert McGhee, Canadian Arctic Prehistory, (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), p. 3.


In terms of the distinctive mediator aspect, the mythical culture hero appears to reflect the shaman. See Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 34.

Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 34.


Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 34.

Eliade, Shamanism, pp. 33ff, 110 ff.


Rasmussen, Iglulik Eskimos, pp. 118-19.

As part of his explorations into the way of the shaman, Michael Harner went to the Peruvian Amazon and lived among the Conibo Indians of the Ucayali River region, an Upper Amazon forest culture. There, he imbibed the shamans’ sacred drink made from the "soul vine" ayahuasca, and experienced "the little death." See Michael Harner, The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 2-6.

30 Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 33.


32 Frederica DeLaguna, "Tlingit Shamans," in Henry B. Collins et al.,
The Far North: 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art (Washington:

33 Farley Mowat, People of the Deer (1952), Vol. 1. of Death of a
People--The Ilnalmut (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, rev. ed. 1975),
P. 259.

34 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 4.


36 Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 28.

37 Ibid., p. 28.

38 Ibid., p. 31.

39 See Peter T. Furst, ed., Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of
Hallucinogens (New York: Praeger, 1972); and Michael J. Harner, ed.,

40 Michael J. Harner, The Jivaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls

41 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 401.

42 Furst, Flesh of the Gods, p. 1x.

43 Harner, frequently uses the terms "Ordinary State of Consciousness"
(OSC) and "Shamanic State of Consciousness" (SSC), illustrating the
difference by noting that "dragons, griffins, and other animals that would
be considered 'mythical' by us in the OSC are 'real' in the SSC." Harner,
The Way of the Shaman, p. xiii.


45 Eliade, Shamanism, pp. 222-23.

46 Harner, The Way of the Shaman, p. xvi. Harner says that a shaman
in the shamanic state of consciousness is sometimes neither alert nor
waking, but "commonly he is very alert even if not in a fully waking
state; and very commonly in the Shamanic State of Consciousness he is
both alert and waking." Ibid., p. 50.
47. Hultkrantz, "Definition of Shamanism," p. 28.
49. Ibid., p. 53.
50. Ibid., p. 139.
51. Ibid., p. 44.
53. Eliade, Shamanism, p. 182. Eliade discusses the passages the shaman followed to capture and restore a sick person's soul: the subterranean descent, the plunge to the ocean bottom, and the celestial ascent. Ibid., pp. 239, 241-42, 289, et passim.


70. Ibid., p. 136.


Addendum to note 33: Would-be shamans among the Caribou Eskimos underwent tremendous initiatory hardship. One became a man of knowledge, a shaman, only through sufferings that were "almost enough to kill." Exposure to extreme cold and hunger and being shot numbered among the privations, for the Caribou Eskimo believed that the more one suffered for his art, the greater the shaman he became. See Rasmussen, Caribou Eskimos, pp. 51-58.
CHAPTER THREE

BLACK POWER ANIMAL

Without warning the crack and cackle of the raven's call rent asunder the silence . . . . The rasping call was nearer now. It seemed to be inside—and yet did not. Four times the nerve-shattering call sounded. Once at each corner of the lodge with the earthen floors . . . . 'Tidings, tidings, tidings. The raven brings tidings. Hark, ye! The raven journeys to all places. The raven sees all things. The raven smells all things. He knows all that comes to pass. Listen now and take heed of the message he brings . . . .'

Shamanism, as noted earlier, is very old, its roots buried thousands of years deep in the Palaeolithic Age. The premises, practices, and motifs of the religious phenomenon were similar throughout the holarctic, perhaps having originated in the spirituality of Stone Age man.

In the bowels of the sacred hunting-age Lascaux Cave in southern France, there is a mysterious Upper Palaeolithic rock painting some 25,000 years old. Included in this dramatic tableau is a crudely drawn naked shaman, prostrate and rapt in trance. He appears to have a bird's head or to be wearing a bird mask; his penis stands erect (as often occurs in dream or trance states); a staff surmounted by a bird image lies beside him. According to mythographer Joseph Campbell,

'He is certainly a shaman, the bird costume and bird transformation being characteristic . . . of the lore of shamanism . . . throughout Siberia and North America.'

Edward A. Armstrong, who specializes in ornithological folk-
lore, titling the Lascaux rock painting "The Death of the Bird-Man," the "death" being ritual or symbolic. He says that the bird atop the pole or staff in the scene may represent the shaman's soul in the form of a raven, since Basque tradition refers to the raven as the spirit of the prehistoric hunters' caves.7 The similarity between the head of the bird on the staff and that of the fallen shaman strongly suggests an affinity between the man and the bird, a guardian animal spirit-shaman relationship in which the latter, in an altered state of consciousness, takes the form of his power animal and becomes one with it. In sum, the bird depicted in the ancient Lascaux Cave painting, tentatively identified as a raven, symbolizes shamanic ecstasy, soul-flight capability, and basically the shaman's powers of transformation and transcendence.

For thousands of years before Darwin, people in primitive cultures believed in the relatedness of man and animal, and in their ability to converse.8 The animal people of their myths, for example, alternated between zoomorphic and anthropomorphic form, and were marked by many of the characteristics found in the natural species whose names they bore.9

The shaman in particular was known to communicate with the wild animals of land, sea and air; and the mythic animal-human unity remained accessible to him within the non-ordinary reality of an altered state of consciousness.10

The wisdom of the shamanic state of consciousness included a deep respect for all the life-forms of the earth, with an acknowledgment of man's dependence on them and his kinship with them. The shaman recognized at all times the strong and ancient lifeways of the natural
world; and he believed that nature, approached in a shamanic state of consciousness, willingly revealed what is normally hidden. In anthropologist Michael Harner's words, "Even in broad daylight, one can learn to see shamanically the non-ordinary aspects of natural phenomena."\(^{11}\)

Shamans traditionally recognized their powers as being those of the animals, the plants and the primal energies of the universe.\(^{12}\) According to Eliade, in shamanism the animal symbolized, in part, a direct, authentic connection with the Upperworld, the Underworld, the mountains, the impenetrable forest, the wilderness—with the beyond.\(^{13}\)

Generally speaking, the link between man and the animal world was a fundamental reality in shamanism, with the shaman using his knowledge and techniques to share in the power of that world. The shaman joined with the energy of the animal world through his guardian spirit, whose presence and special help was essential in his work.\(^{14}\)

The raven and the crow powered their way into the consciousness of numerous shamanic cultures. Ethnologist Nicholas Gubser met an old Nunamit Eskimo who "claimed the raven as his friend". One day he stood by his tent and called to a passing raven, asking it to come to him. The man shouted, and the raven circled twice. Mr. Raven was his uncle, this Nunamit would frequently say, adding that his dead uncle was named Tulugak (raven). The man claimed a simple affinity for the raven.\(^{15}\)

Omaha Indian hunters scanned the sky for soaring crows, and acknowledged the birds' assistance in locating game. "He's a buffalo hunter," an old Omaha explained.\(^{16}\) While visiting a Hawaiian village in 1779, Captain James Cook learned that the tame crows kept about the dwellings were sacred to the people.\(^{17}\) The aboriginal Ainu of northern Japan called the
crow Pashkur Kamut and worshipped it as a god who once prevented the sun from being swallowed by a murderous evil spirit by pecking the monster's tongue until it disgorged the fiery orb. Among the Coos Indians of the Northwest Coast, the thunder was said to roll from Crow's throat, and the lightning to flash from his eyes.

Newborn Iglulik Eskimo males were often clothed in garments made of a raven's skin with the feathers outside. Since ravens always find food, this raiment was believed to help in making a strong hunter. The Netsilik Eskimos (Netsilingmiut) valued the raven's head and claws as a potent hunting amulet. In the old days the Haida Indians called upon the raven; sometimes they left food on the beach for the bird, and asked it for something when it came near. Acknowledging the raven's potency, the Bella Coola tribe used to ask him to intercede in their behalf by requesting the supreme being to stop a rainstorm. In such cases, a person addressed the raven by his chief's title, Nowakila. Similarly, sometimes during severe winter weather the head of a captured raven was smeared with grease. As the bird was released, its captor would say, "Please end the cold wind, Nowakila."

The Narragansett Indians, now vanished, recognized Caitankotowitt as a being with the power to create and destroy life. This ambivalent being was represented by a crow, which had flapped out of the Creator's garden to bring man his first seeds for planting and which left soft spring rains and breezes in its wake every year. The people never turned their hand against this bird, even when it damaged crops.

The Navajo hunter tradition includes a sweat lodge song given to mankind by the divine being and keeper of the game animals, Black-god (Haash-
cheeshzhini), to confirm his presence in their midst in the form of Crow.

A fragment of this song goes as follows:

The one who flies in the sky, na-ya-ya.
Above the top of Black Mountain,
I fly in the sky.

Black-god's (Crow's) name was spoken only when one was hunting or praying. In Navajo hunter mythology Black-god still appears in the form of Crow; and today Crow still warns his game animals of the stalking hunter. Historian of religion Karl Luckert says that one of his informants perceived all gatherings of crows or ravens as manifestations of Black-god.25

The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska believed it was wrong to laugh at the raven, that doing so would bring bad weather. Two harmonica-playing Eyak who laughed at some ravens hopping about were forced to burn their mouth harps and stand in the smoke for purification because it snowed the next day.26 The great African raven was esteemed as an uncle by some Sudanese of Upper Egypt, and his murder was always avenged. After justice was apportioned in such cases, the slain raven was laid on a bier and borne to the graveyard amidst a shouting, flag-waving procession, whereupon it was given a solemn burial.27 The raven was a very important bird among the Ingalik Indians of the western sub-Arctic, having held an ancestral position as "house grandfather." In Ingalik shamanic cosmology, departed souls resided just beneath the surface of the apparent world on a level of the universe known as "Raven living," so designated because of its chief figure, the Raven, who originated this chthonic afterworld and whose Ingalik name means "house grandfather." His dwelling was said to sit on the near side of a river which one had to cross to reach the land where most souls of the dead
lived. A dead woman's soul journeying to the afterworld came through a
tunnel dug by the Raven, and spent one or two nights with him, depending
on her attractiveness. 28 An Ingaliik was permitted to use a raven's skin
and claws as an amulet, but beyond this the taboo against killing a raven
was very strong because the raven, it was said, could kill men. 29

Finally, analogous to the wolf and raven of Norse mythology,
the raven and crow sometimes appear in North American Native traditions
as powerful black winged beasts of death and war. According to a Ponca
chief, the leader of a war party sought knowledge of future events from
the wolf or the crow. This same man knew a story about crows serving a
warrior-leader as scouts because they wanted to feast on human corpses.
The crows scouted the enemy, then returned to report their number and how
many were to be slain; and the war party was successful. The Ponca chief
also said that the wolf and the crow had offered themselves to the people
as partners in a covenant in which they would guide the people to enemies
and game, and the people would kill proficiently so that the wolf and
crow could feast on flesh left in the battlefield or in the chase. 30 It
is important to understand that the crow is paid high tribute indeed when
the Ponca and Omaha ritually speak of him in the same breath as the wolf,
the great buffalo runner of the plains. The Blood Indians of Alberta,
the northernmost division of the Blackfoot Nation, call the raven
omachkaisto--"big crow." The Old People recognized the raven as the
wisest of birds. Hunters and warriors searched the sky for it because
success awaited those who followed in its flight path. On other occasions
ravens warned Blood war parties of enemies nearby and announced forth-
coming news. 31 A great Blood warrior named Young Pine had several war
medicines. Included among these sacred power objects was the stuffed body of a raven, which he wore atop his head. It had been given to him in a dream.32

The preceding ethnographic fragments represent but a fraction of the evidence that many aboriginal peoples perceived the raven and the crow as being powerful, mysterious birds. Although not only shamans sensed their numinous character, it was chiefly shamans who had the raven or crow as guardian animal spirits and experienced the power of these black ones. Frequently, the guardian spirit serving and protecting the shaman had the form of a power animal,33 a spiritual entity which also became another identity for him. In order to deal with the normally unseen spiritual powers, the shaman required this mighty power source; and thus a guardian spirit being was a sine qua non for the shaman. He consulted with it in an altered state of consciousness, journeyed shamantically with it, and employed it for his benefit and that of the sick and injured.34 Incidentally, a shaman's helping spirits might have committed evil only when in the service of one who had turned his shamanic arts to evil ends.35

The guardian animal spirit of the Penobscot shaman (northeastern Algonkin) was known by the term baahi'gan, meaning "instrument of mystery." When practising his magic art or generally exercising his power, the shaman sometimes assumed the form of his animal helper which, once acquired, was considered a part of him.36 The guardian animal spirit in general was an energizing force, and shamans believed that possessing its power made one's body resistant to harmful power intrusions or infections, which we know as sickness and disease. Thus besides increasing one's energy,
mental alertness, and self-confidence, the power animal was also essential in fighting off noxious energy intrusions capable of subjugating mental and physical health.\textsuperscript{37}

As noted, the shaman's personal power was fundamentally rooted in the power of his guardian and helping spirits. According to the ethnographic literature, a shaman often acquired his guardian spirit during a spirit quest in a lonely wilderness location, although it may have been gained involuntarily or in other special shamanic ways.\textsuperscript{38} Guardian power animals and helping spirits came to shamans in dreams or while they were hunting or travelling alone.\textsuperscript{39} The neophyte Chudshar Kutchin shaman dreamed and sang a great deal, often losing his appetite and becoming very thin during his initiatory period. In the dreams his soul journeyed extensively and acquired a guardian spirit, "the animal to whom he sleeps," which would later talk through the shaman during his seances.\textsuperscript{40} Would-be Koryak shamans passed lonely days and nights in wilderness solitude enduring extreme cold and hunger in preparation to receive the spirits' call. The spirits appeared to them in visible form and gave them knowledge and power. During his wilderness trial, one Koryak shaman in Siberia told Jocheelson, the spirits of the raven and the wolf came to him and commanded that he either become a shaman or die.\textsuperscript{41} A Yakuts shaman (Siberia) was said to have given birth to a raven, nearly dying from the ordeal.\textsuperscript{42} This appears to be related to the shamanic phenomenon of ritual transformation into the opposite sex at the command of spirits, but it may be primarily a metaphorical rendering of the ordeal involved in acquiring a guardian animal spirit.

A Bella Coola Indian story relates that once a raven soared
over four-brothers in a canoe and said, "My name is Qaxaxsila. I am going to give you supernatural power." When the guardian animal spirits spoke to shamans and shamans-to-be, or manifested themselves in human forms, such magical occurrences were understood as indications of their power. Guardian animal spirits frequently spoke when they appeared to Lakota Sioux vision seekers. When he was absorbed by his great sacred vision, the Oglala Sioux warrior and holy man Black Elk heard crows speaking to him.

I could understand the birds when they sang, and they were always saying: "It is time! It is time!" The crows in the day and the coyotes at night all called and called to me: "It is time! It is time! It is time!" . . . I could not get along with people now, and I would take my horse and go far out from camp alone and compare everything on the earth and in the sky with my vision. Crows would speak to me and shout to each other . . . "Behold him! Behold him!"

Bogoras persuaded a Chukchee shaman named Scratching-Woman to give a seance in his quarters so that he could record the voices of the shaman's various spirits. Chukchee shamans sent their spirits to distant places or transformed themselves into one of them according to need. One of the guardian animal spirits called by Scratching-Woman, as he sat drumming in the utter darkness of Bogoras's house, was a raven, "who cawed lustily." The shaman summoned this power animal during healing work because the raven could devour sickness and disease. As stated, the presence of the raven spirit was marked by the characteristic croaks and barks of a natural raven. The shaman's raven, however, was also able to speak like a human being, although the words were uttered in a strange timbre and occasionally interspersed with its specific bird cries.

A few assorted examples further establish the raven and crow
as important guardian animals and sources of power which came to
the shaman to help him. Raven-chief (the "Strongest One"), a figure in
a Chukchee story, encounters a poor boy on the tundra who seeks magic
power. In return for his knife which the boy has snatched from him, Raven-
chief makes the boy a mighty shaman.49 One may note that in giving the
boy shamanic knowledge and power, Raven-chief himself appears to be a
master shaman. The Bella Coola remembered a terrible sickness which
afflicted chiefs only, about two hundred years ago. A certain man was
gravely ill, so he went off alone into the forest and lay down. A raven
came to him and plucked out one of his eyes, commanding the man as he did
so to rise and take the name "Restored to Life through the Raven." The
man returned to his village a great shaman, and performed a shaman's
dance. Although he had only one eye, he possessed the spirit of Raven
as his guardian power animal.50 Ethnologist Birket-Smith was told of
a legendary Chipewyan warrior-chief and shaman who was so great that if
he had not lived, "the Chipewyan would all have perished by now."51 He
killed many enemy Cree, and was said to have been all-wise, impossible
to kill.52 His name was Raven-head, and likely his name and the raven
skins with which he adorned himself were related to his source of power,
for Raven could give one wisdom, strength and courage.

A Paviotso Indian shaman of western North America's Great
Basin commented about the source of shamanic power:

"Indians were put on this earth with trees, plants,
animals and water, and the shaman gets his power from
them . . . . A long time ago, all the animals were Indians
(they could talk). I think that is why the animals help the
people to be shamans."53

Anthropologist Willard Z. Park compiled a list of Paviotso shamans and
the sources of their powers. Several shamans derived supernatural power
from the spirit of the crow.\textsuperscript{54}

Animal spirits helped the shaman in his tasks. They answered
questions, recovered lost objects and souls that had been abducted, bat-
tled evil spirits, and went on errands. They also served as mediators
between the shaman and the supernatural powers—thus functioning as sha-
mans in their own right—and carried the shaman on journeys to the moon
or to the Land of the Dead.\textsuperscript{55} The crow and the raven, for example, were
helping spirits in Ainu shamanism, one of their roles being that of
messenger.\textsuperscript{56} An Ainu tale describes an incident in which a crow revived
a shamanic hero who fell unconscious after combat with a crane demon.\textsuperscript{57}

After the helping spirits had initially come to a shaman and
he had spoken to them and learned their names, he could then summon them
at will by calling their names, singing, or merely thinking about them
while in a shamanic state of consciousness.\textsuperscript{58} Mythic beings such as Wolf,
Raven and Crow represent their entire respective species. Similarly, a
shaman's guardian animal spirit represented the whole species to which
it belonged. Thus, a person possessed not just the power of a crow or
a raven, but the power of Crow, or—the power of Raven. A shaman with a
guardian animal usually tapped the spiritual power of the whole species,
although he did hook into that power through a particular manifestation
of it.\textsuperscript{59} The raven frequently appeared as the guardian power animal of
arctic shamans.\textsuperscript{60} The Koryak shaman of northeastern Asia commonly pos-
sessed the raven as his tutelary spirit, and this power animal helped
him in his struggles with disease-inflicting evil spirits, rival shamans
and other enemies.\textsuperscript{61} Bogoras met a Chukchee shaman whose name was
derived from his favourite spirit. He was called Valvinpinachin, meaning "raven old man." The ancient Narragansett Indians of early Rhode Island associated the crow with the head, and thus with the free soul. A crow was said to have resided in the head of a shaman living in Martha's Vineyard in the seventeenth century. The bird had come to the shaman and occupied his head, where it served in part as his black sentinel, ever alert to any approaching danger. Furthermore, the Narragansetts believed that the crow was an agent of good and bad fortune. The crow to them was a black shaman in his own right, a twilight being betwixt and between who journeyed regularly between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Thus, these people strongly sensed power emanating from this bird. The Montagnais of Escoumins in the lower St. Lawrence believed that the shaman had a raven or crow with which he conferred supernatural knowledge and sent out on spiritual missions. Finally, among Thompson Indian shamans and warriors the raven was a guardian animal spirit and source of power.

As an introduction to my discussion of shamanic amulets, charms, and magic and ritual words involving the raven and crow, I shall now turn to a historic Native movement.

Among many Indian tribes west of the Mississippi at the end of the nineteenth century, the crow (ho) was the sacred bird of the Ghost-dance. The crow was revered as the messenger from the spirit world, and its blackness was considered symbolic of death and the shadowland. Thus the crow was a shamanic power animal and something of a shaman in his own right in that he was a mediator between this world and the upper spirit world on behalf of the people. Prairie tribes
also held the raven sacred, although it flew down into the plains from its mountain home only occasionally. Ghost-dancers wore depictions of the crow on their shirts, leggings and moccasins; they wore its feathers in their hair and sometimes carried the stuffed body of a crow in the dance. James Mooney’s report on the Ghost-dance includes a portrait of an Arapaho named Black Coyote holding a stuffed crow skin. In one Arapaho camp, the people interpreted the harsh cries of their captive crow as inspired messages from the spirit world.

In Arapaho Ghost-dance mythology the crow appeared in song as the messenger and leader of the dead, the ghost armies gathering in the shadowland yonder. The crow was the awaited shamanic messiah who was to come with his spirit armies to help the living. In a sense, he was an eschatological symbol of transformation and regeneration of the earth. Several Ghost-dance songs originated in the ecstatic dancer’s trance vision, in which the mediating crow from the spirit world was seen circling overhead. "The crow has called me, . . . / When the crow came for me, . . . / I heard him, . . . / The crow is circling above me, . . . / The crow having come for me, . . . " The singing and dancing were primarily means of inducing trance states as the spirit friends drew near. Another ghost song expresses the omniscience of the crow, the messianic messenger from the spirit world who hears and knows all.

I hear everything
I hear everything
I am the crow
I am the crow.

An Arapaho chief named Little Raven composed a ghost song which exhorted believers to ready themselves for the imminent coming of the new Native
Finally, there was a ritual Ghost-dance song, containing the lines "The Crow is running. He will hear me," which affirmed that the crow as shamanic power animal and messiah responds quickly to the dancer's prayer and comes swiftly to heed his petition.

Among the Sioux, one of the most noteworthy things connected with the Ghost-dance religion was the ritual ghost shirt which was worn during the dance and at other times by the believers. The symbols painted on the ghost shirt represented the sun, moon, stars and the holy, mythic visions of the trance, including the sacred crow. At one time during the Ghost-dance movement, the Sioux believed that neither bullets nor blades could penetrate these sacred ghost shirts emblazoned with the great Crow.

In the preceding Ghost-dance description one can readily see that the use of amulets and ritual magic words was strong in that movement. Their use, in fact, was generally very important in shamanism, and thus magic words, amulets and charms deserve further comment.

During his initiation the neophyte shaman had to learn the secret language used in séances to communicate with animal and non-animal spirits. The novice learned the secret language and magic phrases either from a master shaman or directly from spirits contacted through his own efforts. In addition, each shaman had a personal power song which he sang to invoke his spirits. Frequently, the essence of the shaman's secret language, magic words and songs was animal language, or was rooted in animal cries.

In the old days men in shamanic cultures survived by hunting, and had a sacred relationship with the animal world. Magic power songs
used for luck in hunting were sometimes learned from animals. The Ingalik people utilized "animal songs," which were brief, magic incantations originally learned long ago when men could talk to animals. The "songs" had been sung by animals in the kashim of the animal people. These incantations varied in strength and were always whispered inaudibly. Typically, songs were used to secure luck in hunting and fishing, but they had other functions as well. The Ingalik's Raven song was shamanic and very powerful, for it worked to save the lives of children.

Magic words and songs were traditionally a particularly strong source of power, but they were extremely difficult to obtain. The last area of knowledge a new Iglulik Eskimo shaman had to learn centered on the recitation of magic prayers and magic songs, which could bring good weather, successful hunting and heal the sick. A shaman might have practiced magic words while pacing the floor of his house alone, but the best magic words came inexplicably to one alone in the great solitude of the mountains, for these words were the most effective. An Iglulik shaman could acquire a potent magic prayer by the following method:

When one sees a raven fly past, one must follow it and keep on pursuing until one has caught it. If one shoots it with bow and arrow, one must run up to it the moment it falls to the ground, and standing over the bird as it flutters about in pain and fear, say out loud all that one intends to do, and mention everything that occupies the mind. The dying raven gives power to words and thoughts.

Various supernatural phrases were chanted to drive off sickness, shackle storms, draw game, save human life, give dead things life and so forth. Before a child's first journey, Aua, an Iglulik Eskimo shaman (angakooq), had to introduce her to the people's hard life by means of a magic formula. Observing this rite, the shaman bare the little girl's
head and pressed his lips close to her face to recite the magic words:

I arise from rest with movements swift
As the beat of a raven's wings
I arise
To meet the day

Wa wa

My face is turned from the dark of night
To gaze at the dawn of day,
Now whitening in the sky. 85

The "Raven Incantation" was used by Chukchee shamans seeking to acquire power to harm their enemies from the Raven spirit. 86 In the following Chukchee incantation used to relieve stomach pains, the shaman calls on the guardian Raven spirit, who performed like a shaman himself in removing disease.

I call Kuurkil (the name of the Raven). This abdomen . . . I make into a bay of the sea. The bay is frozen, altogether bound with ice. Plenty of rubbish is frozen there in the ice of the bay; the rubbish is the disease . . . . 'Oh! . . . stomach, you are full of pain . . . . Ho!' I call to Kuurkil. 'You, Kuurkil, you travel around from very remote times. I want your assistance. What are you going to do with this bay? It is frozen. Mischiefous people made it freeze. You have a strong beak. What are you going to do?' Then the Raven breaks the ice through, . . . but in reality it is the disease which is broken. 87

Amulets and charms were sometimes acquired through personal supernatural experiences with animals; 88 and according to Birket-Smith, it was a common Eskimo concept that the efficacy of amulets was based on a mysterious bond between the amulet owner and the animal species from which it was taken. 89 For some Chugach Eskimos of Alaska, for example, a raven's foot amulet possessed magical power and bespoke the possessor's intimacy with the spirit of Raven. 90

Shamans throughout the arctic made amulets in the course of fulfilling their office. 91 The amulet's uncommon powers derived from
the animal spirit associated with the physical object, not from the actual object itself. The concrete substance of an amulet symbolized the power of the animal spirit represented. Thus, an amulet made from a raven or a crow was essentially a symbol of the bird’s spiritual presence and power. Shamans had the special capability required to create amulets and infuse these otherwise ordinary materials—such as animal parts—with supernatural power.

Amulets had singular powers to bring luck, ward off evil forces and grant one extraordinary strengths and abilities. The shaman sometimes provided his patients with amulets of healing power. As stated, the effective helping power associated with an amulet came from the spirit of the animal from which it was taken, not from the object itself. Certain prescribed animal parts, however, had to be used according to purpose. A woman in childbirth, for example, was required to use a raven’s claw as the toggle in the strap that secured the bottom of her amaut (bag for carrying a child). Later, the child wore the claw as an amulet that brought strong life and successful hunting. These powers did not flow from the claw itself, but emanated from the spirit of tuluq, the raven. Like the magical raven song or incantation, the raven amulet among the Ingaliak was used to save children’s lives. A raven’s right foot was sometimes affixed to the right shoulder of a child’s parka; or the skin of the raven was placed under the animal skin of a child’s bed. In addition, having the raven’s longest primary feather tied in one’s hair constituted a cure for tuberculosis. In Ingaliak culture the power of the raven amulet derived from the bird’s association with death and the afterworld of people who died by common causes.
The Iglulik shaman, Aua, told Rasmussen that he had lain "dead as a stone" the moment he was born, strangled by the umbilical cord. Certain taboos had been breached by his parents. A female shaman named Ardjuuaq, however, came and wiped the mother's blood from the baby's body with the skin of a raven, and used the same skin to make a little jacket for the child. Then she said of Aua, the future shaman, "He is born to die, but he shall live." And the shaman stayed with Aua's mother until the baby showed signs of life. Thus a raven skin, the outward manifestation of the bird's spiritual power, figured in the birth of a great shaman.

Representations of "totem" animals among Palaeo-Alaskan and Pacific Northwest Coast peoples were often rooted in the concept of animal helping spirits, or more specifically, in the supernatural guardian animal spirit experience of an ancestor, who was frequently a shaman. For instance, a Kwakiutl shaman's wooden storage box collected in 1893 is distinguished by a high relief carving of a raven on the lid. The raven was probably the shaman's guardian power animal. In East Cape, Siberia, ethnologist-explorer Edward William Nelson saw bone and ivory arrowheads and spearheads bearing the raven totem mark; and he noticed symbolic raven tracks tattooed on the forehead, above each eye, of a boy in Plower Bay, Siberia.

Among the Chukchee, the choice of charms and amulets depended on dreams, chance encounters with wild animals, a shaman's command and the like. The assortment of Chukchee charm-strings often included a real raven's head-and/or a wooden image of it. Sometimes the raven's head charm or amulet represented the "assistant" in the upper realms, i.e.,
an Upperworld guardian animal spirit, who was described as having a raven's head, or represented in sketches as having a raven's head and feet, one wing, and one human hand. The Chukchee mentioned the Raven in various incantations and directed a part of their sacrifices toward this "assistant" in the celestial spirit world who, according to their shamans, usually maintained the natural raven's form and lived in the sky, near the Polar Star. The greatest Chukchee shamans possessed this Raven as a guardian power animal, and he would come when summoned from the spirit world to help them in their healing work. Raven, these Siberian doctors said, devoured disease as a bird devours worms.

To conclude this exploration of amulets, I shall say a word about the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians, a nomadic hunting people living in the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula. During times of famine and disease, healing visions and dreams which can save the afflicted are revealed to the Montagnais-Naskapi shaman by Katipenimitch, Lord of the Caribou and ruler of all animals and all people. The shaman's healing vision is depicted by a woman in secrecy on a Natutshikan, i.e., a necklace, which is given to the patient, who must wear it for the rest of his life. The Natutshikan bears the dream-representation of the shaman's spiritual helpers. The shaman is said to work inside the sufferer until he is cured; and, since the Natutshikan is worn for the rest of the patient's life, the shaman's powerful spirit helpers never actually depart. In addition, according to Montagnais-Naskapi belief, two immense ravens guard the House of Katipenimitch, Lord of the Caribou. The ravens were recognized as wondrous messengers who carried word of sickness to Katipenimitch in his daunting mountainous realms, where famine and illness were
unknown. The raven's supernatural powers could be magically transferred to one through the wearing of a shaman's raven-image Natuchikan. The Kontagnais-Haskapi shaman's soul flight or journey was also depicted in this sacred Natuchikan form, the wings of the raven thereby powering him in his shamanic tasks.107

Some comments about the mythic Norse god Odin and his ravens will now lead us into the shamanic phenomenon of transformation.

The relationship between Odin and the raven is very old and deep,108 as evidenced by the many metaphorical names for Odin and for raven. Odin is the "raven-god," the "raven-tempter," and "the priest of the raven-sacrifice." Ravens were sometimes called " Odin's greedy hawks."109 The pagan horsemen perceived the raven as a bird of war and death, for it haunted the battlefield and devoured the bodies of the slain. According to Harry Holstun Lopez,

The ruler of all the gods, Odin, kept two wolves always at his side, Gerei and Freki. They accompanied him in battle together with his two ravens, and tore the corpses of the dead. Thus, Wolfram, from Wolf-reben, "wolf-raven," was a great warrior's name and to see a wolf and a raven on the way to battle augured victory.110

Odin was sometimes called brofragud, the god of ravens, because he had two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, which he sent out journeying over the world each day at dawn. By noon the ravens were perched on the god's shoulders, whispering in his ears all that they had seen and heard.111

The following lines are from the Grimnismal:

Huginn and Muninn (Thought and Memory)
Fly every day
Over the wide earth.
I fear for Huginn
Lest he come not back;
But I fear yet more for Muninn.112
In the context of the battle carnage, ravens were associated with violent death and the devouring of the corpses of the slain. But, while Odin’s wolves are called Ravener and Greed in the Grimmismal, his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, appear there in a different role. The birds may be regarded as Odin’s spiritual qualities in concrete zoomorphic form, but, more precisely, the ravens symbolize the soul of Odin as ecstatic shaman, sent out to journey far and wide.

Certain old Scandinavian beliefs, states Eliade, concerned zoomorphic helping spirits visible only to shamans. He adds:

We may ask if Odin’s two crows, Huginn (“Thought”) and Muninn (“Memory”) do not represent, in highly mythicized form, two helping spirits in the shape of birds, which the Great Magician sent (in true shamanic fashion!) to the four corners of the world.

Recalling the earlier idea of ravens as a symbol of Odin’s soul in flight, one may understand that concept as a shamanic explication of Eliade’s comment about Odin’s ravens as guardian power animals. According to Norse mythology, Odin was a master shapeshifter; he would fall into a death-like trance (shamanic state of consciousness) and his soul in animal form would then travel rapidly to some distant realm. As noted, ravens were identified with Odin, and the pagan god sometimes transformed himself into raven form at will in order to journey over great distances. Thus, “the ecstatic journey of Odin in animal forms may properly be compared to the transformations of shamans into animals.”

The ability to metamorphose into the form of one’s guardian spirit or power animal was a prevalent and ancient shamanic belief. Many accounts exist of shamans who could transform themselves into birds and fly or change partially or wholly into some other animal. Usually,
the shaman undertook metamorphosis in pursuance of his professional duties. Shamanic transformation was commonly associated with a performance or séance in which the summoned guardian animal spirit entered the shaman’s body and spoke through him. The shaman would howl like a wolf, croak like a raven, or emit some other animal sound, depending on the species of his power animal. 121

Speaking of what he describes as the religious and "mystical solidarity between man and animal," 122 Mircea Eliade says that certain human beings were able to change themselves into animals, understand their vocalizations, and partake in their extraordinary knowledge and powers. When a shaman successfully became animal and shared in the animal lifeway, the rift between man and the animal world was temporarily undone.

It was not until after a primordial catastrophe . . . that man became what he is today—mortal, sexed, obliged to work to feed himself, and at enmity with the animals. While preparing for his ecstatic and during it, the shaman abolishes the present human condition and, for the time being, recovers the situation as it was at the beginning (in illo tempore). Friendship with animals, knowledge of their language, transformation into an animal are so many signs that the shaman has re-established the 'paradisal' situation lost at the dawn of time. 122

The shaman's act of self-transformation into an animal spirit recalled and reasserted the primal oneness of the human and animal worlds. In the shapeshifting shaman—now man, then beast, then man again, but always retaining some of the wild beast within himself—two great nations remained forever linked.

Inuit oral tradition speaks of the prevalence of shapeshifting shamans in relatively recent times. 123 The shaman had special qualities of mutability and duality, enabling him to sometimes be both animal and
human, and to shapeshift from one form to the other. The duality aspect
of the shaman's nature, which was also an aspect of his self-transforming
ability, is underscored in a print by artist Simon Tookoom's of Baker Lake,
titled, "The World of Man and the World of Animals Come Together in the
Shaman."125

Thus, in the shamanic state of consciousness the shaman peri-
dicularly metamorphosed into another form. However radical the transfor-
may have been, the shaman was aware of the situation and what he was
doing, and could readily return to his normal state.126 Such was zoomor-
phic transformation, the passage of the shaman from one state of being
to another—the passage into and out of the animal world.

In the course of his extraordinary spiritual journey guided
by the Yaqui brujo (sorcerer, warrior shaman, "man of knowledge") don
Juan Natus of Sonora,127 Carlos Castaneda experienced transformation into
a crow with the aid of humito ("little smoke"), a smoking mixture made
from a hallucinogenic mushroom (possibly Psilocybe mexicana).128 Before
speaking further of this, I would like to mention an incident which
occurred. Castaneda recalls, while he walked in the desert chaparral with
don Juan:

At that moment an enormous crow flew right over us, cawing.
That startled me and I began to laugh . . . To my utter amaze-
ment he shook my arm vigorously and hushed me up. He had a most
serious expression. "That was not a joke," he said severely . . .
"What you saw was not just a crow!" he exclaimed.129

Don Juan Natus, Yaqui Indian sorcerer and nagual, had been a
crow "and while in this life he turned into one again."130 Mexican Indians
knew the tutelary spirit as "nagual," a term which referred to both a
guardian animal spirit and to the shaman who became that power animal.131
"Nagual" also designated a shaman who was capable of transforming himself; thus, Castaneda speaks of the Mexican Indian sorcerer don Juan as "the Nagual". When he said to Castaneda, "I am a crow. I am teaching you how to become a crow," don Juan meant that he could take the form of a crow, or "adopt alternate form." A powerful shaman like don Juan was able to become a crow without using psychotropic plants to induce the required altered state of consciousness. Indeed, a person in a primitive culture was not obliged to use a narcotic substance in order to experience metamorphosis into a bird or other creature. A statement by Castaneda in The Eagle's Gift supports this claim:

Don Juan had also told us that all the faculties, possibilities, and accomplishments of sorcery, from the simplest to the most astounding, are in the human body itself.

Castaneda describes his experience—aided by a hallucinogenic blend—of becoming a crow and flying. He felt long, beautiful crow's wings growing out of his cheekbones and other such sensations of the metamorphosis.

I had the perception of growing bird's legs... I felt a tail coming out of the back of my neck and wings out of my cheekbones. The wings were folded deeply. I felt them coming out by degrees. The process was hard but not painful.

Don Juan then hurled Castaneda up into the air, where he "extended his wings and flew" in the company of other crows. Castaneda was shaken for some time after he returned from his three day soul flight with the crows. Later, don Juan explained that he himself had learned to become a crow because crows "are the most effective of all," adding that "it takes a very long time to learn to be a proper crow."
The shaman's spiritual power animal served as an alter ego, imparting to him transformation potency, notably the power of transforming himself from human form into the power animal and back.\textsuperscript{139} Animal spirits carried the shaman to distant earthly places and to the spirit worlds. But it is also true that the shaman himself became the animal spirit, thereby demonstrating his genuine ability to mount to the sky or descend to the underworld.\textsuperscript{140} Being attended by a bird or becoming a bird oneself indicated "the capacity, while still alive, to undertake the ecstatic journey to the sky and the beyond."\textsuperscript{141} Furthermore, transformation into an animal during a séance also represented a re-enactment of the shaman's death and resurrection. The ecstasy and the transformation were "the concrete experience of ritual death; in other words, of transcending the profane human condition."\textsuperscript{142} Another dramatic note of interest: shamans occasionally challenged one another in animal form, and if his alter ego was killed in the ensuing battle, the shaman himself died not long after.\textsuperscript{143}

Many shamans throughout the primitive world danced, accompanied by drumming, to induce a shamanic state of consciousness sufficient to having the animal metamorphosis experience.\textsuperscript{144} In other words, dancing was a way for an individual to evoke and become one with his guardian power animal. In some cases, neophyte shamans danced in imitation of animals as part of a process of learning how to change into animals.\textsuperscript{145} In dancing, the shaman made a self-sacrifice of his own energy to the power animal, and gave proof of his sincerity to the beast. Dancing was his way of praying, and a religious act performed to evoke the sympathy of the guardian animal spirit. "In shamanism it can truly be said that you dance to raise your spirits."\textsuperscript{146}
Therefore, shaking their rattles to the throb of a drum and moving their bodies accordingly, shamans often "danced their animals." A shaman concentrated on being Raven or Crow, for example, and invited the wild creature to stay in his body; he voiced its cries and experienced the bird's emotions. The dancer in the shamanic state of consciousness, his eyes half-closed, may have seen the guardian animal spirit moving in a non-ordinary environment, for in this perceptual context the shaman could often see the animal even while being that animal and having its power.

Drum and rattle were used for entering and maintaining the shamanic state of consciousness. The shaman further altered his consciousness by donning a mask, for the darkness provided by it facilitated his shamanic trance and concentration, thereby helping him to transform or to communicate with the spirit worlds. Each Tlingit shaman had a number of spirit-powered masks and rattles, the latter often being large chief's rattles featuring carved figures of the raven. With regard to masks, there is an Alaskan Eskimo mask, now in the Lowie Museum, representing a human face. The dance for this mask told about a shaman who owned eight ravens which helped him as messengers. He would send a raven to someone's house, first removing the raven's head to reveal the face on this shaman's dance mask. The human-faced raven summoned the person to accompany him to the shaman's house, and he was compelled to go.

The mask often symbolized the guardian power animal and its energy, as well as the remarkable relationship between the shaman and that spiritual potency. Northwest Coast shamans danced wearing special
masks and trappings to augment the consciousness of oneness with their guardian animal spirits. Also, shamans in general used masks and other props to make their transformations into power animals more spectacular. The Dkokimo angakooq, for example, may have spoken with the voice and in the language of the raven while wearing the skin, feathers, beak and claws of the great black bird. In some dramatic dances of the Eyak Indians, a shaman named Kai became Raven. His jacket of tanned hide was hung with raven skins, and he wore wings on his arms and a bird's tail in back which flapped as he danced. Raven wing feathers rose from his headband, and a great wooden raven's beak thrust out from the top of his head, throwing its shadow over his face. Unification of power animals with shamans was the goal of much animal-like dancing in the primitive tribal world, thus the performances transcended mere imitation. With the putting on of an animal mask and so forth, the shaman changed himself into an animal. A Tlingit shaman named Weasel-wolf used a mask representing his Raven spirit. The shaman's wearing of the Raven mask bespoke his power to transform himself into Raven, and emphasized his access to the spirit world and his unique relationship with the supernatural.

The shaman regularly transformed himself into his guardian power animal and exercised it through dancing and through singing its songs. He acknowledged "big" dreams as messages from the guardian spirit. Dancing the beneficial animal aimed to keep it content and reluctant to depart from the shaman. Through this action, the animal spirit inhabiting the shaman's mind and body could again have the pleasure of existing in material form. In return, the shaman received the power
of the entire animal species represented by the guardian spirit. Frequently, this meant the power of Raven or Crow. Other than dancing, the shaman changed himself into his power animal and physically exercised it in the solitude of wilderness. This method must have been particularly appropriate and satisfying for the Raven guardian spirit, since the raven is a wilderness bird par excellence.

Animal sounds and behaviour during shamanic séances heralded the presence of the spirits. In addition, many words uttered in these performances were rooted in the cries of birds and mammals. Learning the animals' language, especially bird language, meant knowing nature's secrets and thus being able to prophesy and communicate with the beyond. As Eliade notes, "Animal language" is only a variant of 'spirit language,' the secret shamanic tongue . . . Among the Kwakiutl, the afterbirth of a male newborn was sometimes left on the beach for the ravens. A man whose afterbirth had been eaten by ravens reached maturity possessing the power to understand their cries. In the old days, when the ravens were wheeling and calling vociferously, a man whose afterbirth had been eaten by the black birds was sent out to listen to their cries. The Lillooet Indians saw the raven as a bird of great mystery, and their shamans counted the raven among their most powerful guardian spirits. A Lillooet shaman who had the raven as his guardian power animal was thereby able to understand the cries and behaviour of those birds. The ability to hear, see and interpret the non-ordinary aspect of raven cries and behaviour involved shamanic transformation into the black power animal, for one must have, to a degree, become Raven in order to understand his speech and his actions.
Acoustically transported during the séance by motion, drumming and rattling, the shaman danced his guardian animal spirit, making the movements and sounds of the power animal. Some Siberian and North American shamans called like birds, roared and growled as they experienced their power animal transformations. Such a phenomenon represented not an overpowering possession, but rather the shaman's conscious reaffirmation of his oneness with his guardian animal spirit. In Eliade's words, it was "Possession than a magical transformation of the shaman into that animal." A Kobuk River Eskimo angakoc named Keseruk performed a "bead séance," which began with his summoning Raven. According to a Kobuk informant, Raven came into Keseruk's person, whereupon the shaman cried, "Raven has my body." A raven's beak emerged from his mouth and a raven's voice croaked, "Kahk-kahk-kahk." Instances of a shaman's guardian animal spirit emerging from his mouth were not unheard of.

In appearance, shamans imitation of the actions and voices of animals can pass as "possession." But it would be more accurate to term it a taking possession of his helping spirits by a shaman. It is the shaman who turns himself into an animal. Or we might speak of a new identity for the shaman, who becomes an animal-spirit, and "speaks," sings, or flies like the animals and birds.

In northeastern Siberia, Joeholson observed a Koryak shaman as he vigorously beat a drum and sang wildly in a loud voice, summoning his guardian spirit. Among his primary power animals was the raven, whose eventual presence in the séance was marked by harsh raven cries pouring from the depths of the shaman rapt in trance. At the height of his frenzy, the shaman abruptly stopped his singing and drumming to announce that the raven spirit was saying he should cut himself with a
knife.\textsuperscript{170} Waldemar Bogoras witnessed a Chukchee ceremony in which shaman sang strange songs, beat their drums savagely, and violently moved their bodies with the approach of their spirits. In some cases the spirit of Raven came and entered a shaman, who then assumed its appearance, took on its movements, and cried with its raucous voice.\textsuperscript{171} The very powerful shaman would even attach a raven's bill to his face before transforming himself into the fierce black bird. The temporary metamorphosis, actions and all, was so dynamic and awesome that the shaman can be said to have actually become Raven.

The sense of being Raven or Crow was not the instant result of putting on the bird's skin or representative mask. These were outward signs that one was calling on his raven or crow power. The Western mind neither grasps nor accepts the idea that aboriginal man could actually be Raven and participate in the bird's spirit: But it happened. A man did not become like a raven; rather, he became Raven. This indicated "an intimacy with the environment, a magic 'going in and out,' so that the line of distinction between a person and his animal helper was not always clear."\textsuperscript{172} Thus were raven and man one.

There is a classic story about a guardian animal spirit or power animal that must be told before concluding this chapter. It truly helps to establish the raven as a numinous shamanic bird. The Iñaluit, an Inuit tribe in the Northwest Territories, periodically relive certain incidents through storytelling, incidents based on fact and imagination involving "the Black One of Air."\textsuperscript{173} A great Iñaluit hunter and shaman named Hekwaw, they say, had a son, Bellikari, who one day killed a raven with a sling. Hekwaw bound the raven's bill and talons in a small skin
pouch and sewed it onto the back of his son's parka. Then, as his wife
Sput and his son listened solemnly, Hekwaw the shaman stared into the
dark tundra that rolled away to the north and said:

Son of Sput, here is a thing for you to remember all
the days of your life. In the time that is yours you will
listen for the voice of the Raven. When the Raven Spirit calls
in the night, you will listen and do what the spirit says you
must do. This day you brought down the Raven, and the Black
One does not die as other birds die. In all of my time I have
not heard of a man who came close enough to the Black One to
strike him down from the air. I think this is a sign that the
Raven Spirit will help you, has chosen to help you. So you must
not again lift your hand to the Black One of Air, but listen
instead to the voice of the Raven in the long hours of darkness
and do what his voice shall tell you to do.174

Months later, Hekwaw asked Bellikari, his son and a neophyte shaman,
to speak to Kaila, the God of All Weather, on behalf of an Inuits
named Alekahaw, who was about to make a winter journey. Standing in the
centre of the igloo, Bellikari called lustily to the Black One of Air,
the Raven Spirit. Suddenly, he collapsed on the ground in trance and the
awesome harsh voice of the Raven bellowed from his throat, calling five
times. After the young man had recovered from his intense experience,
he said he had seen the Raven Spirit and been warned by it not to journey
out on the frozen plains for at least five days, or else he would be
raided by the mighty winds of Kaila. Alekahaw, however, was not con-
vinced of the strength of the young man's guardian animal spirit, so
he and his fellow travellers set out north despite the warning. But,
just before they left, Bellikari gave the doubting Alekahaw a raven's
wing feather and advised him to beseech the Raven Spirit for help in
the event of trouble. Then he passed his amulet belt under Alekahaw's
arms in a ritual movement and turned his face to the sky, saying to
the Black One:

"Watch this man who is blood of our blood! Speak to him with thy voice which is as harsh as the rocks, if he has need! Come to his eyes and show him the way he must go, if he calls for your help!"

Alekahaw and company had travelled the desolate plains no more than a day when the devil wind of Kaila roared down upon them, confirming the message of the Raven Spirit. Forced to erect a rough camp against the storm's raw fury, they endured several days of cold and hunger. Reminded of Bellikari's counsel, a shaken and disoriented Alekahaw finally went and stood upon a hill, where he addressed the Black One:

"Listen, you Black One of Air! Listen to the cry of a fool who is lost, and come from your place in the dark sky and show him the way!"

From the hill where he had stood, a huge black raven soared purposefully towards the horizon. The travellers followed the bird, and within a few days safely entered some Thalmut camps.

On another occasion, as Bellikari was walking into a deep, rocky gully to check a fox trap, he heard the spirit of the Black One warning him off with raucous cries which cut the air with their terror. As it turned out, Bellikari would have come suddenly upon the dreaded grizzly bear of the Barrens had the Raven Spirit not spoken to him through the terrified croaking of a trapped raven, thereby warning him of the great danger in his path and ultimately saving his life.

Except for a few more closing words, this chapter has run its course. It remains for me to express my strong affinity for the raven and the crow. Their presence strengthens me, and in this sense, at least, they are my guardian power animals. Not that I claim to be a
shaman. So, I have only explored some of the shamanic perceptions and methods found in the path of the "one who has spirits." During a visit to the North, I spent some time and energy attempting to get closer to the raven. Early in the morning I would go to a remote area or stand alone by the river and, having fasted for some time beforehand, concentrate on meeting and communicating with the raven spirit. One day in winter, I was thinking about the idea of an animal approaching someone and calling him by name, when suddenly a huge raven soared above the tamarack and stunted spruce, calling hoarsely in the wind and rain. There seemed to be some real communication and communion in that moment. In any event, the way to find out about raven and crow is to make the journey to them and ask raven and crow themselves. I listen and watch, yet do not fully hear or understand what they say and do. But raven and crow do, as I see it, affirm their own shamanic power. They make their presence felt, a presence embodying earthiness and mystery at once. There also seems to be some anguish, some sadness and sense of desolation about them. Another time, a strange dream came to me in which a shaman became a fierce, gaunt raven. Its cruel beak gaped and spewed black fire, and as the raven/shaman bellowed from deep within its throat my head exploded with the rush of carrion breath. This dream-image didn't frighten me; I believe it comes from the raven spirit, who is beneficial and approachable.

The shamanic associations of the raven and the crow in terms of the guardian animal spirit are old and deep. And having seen how the shaman and the black power animal became one in the transformation experience, perhaps we can now more easily enter the heroic world of myth,
where the cable giants have become Raven and Crow, powerful mythic shamans. After looking at these epic figures, I shall conclude the paper with a discussion of the raven/crow as a symbol of the shaman.
NOTES


9. The term "prehuman flux" may be used to refer to man’s primeval relatedness to all living creatures and to the essential continuity among organisms. In the mythic age beings could change their external forms; they existed in a state of flux. Animals, plants, rivers, celestial bodies and so forth were recognized as fluid "people". The mythologies of primitive peoples contain examples of this ancient religious awareness. Joe Earl J. Luckert, *The Navajo Hunter Tradition* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1975), p. 133.


12 Ibid., p. 57.

13 Eliade, Shamanism, pp. 93-94.

14 Harner, Theeway of the Shaman, p. 59.


25 Luckert, Navajo Hunter Tradition, pp. 24, 39, 178-79.


30. Fletcher and La Flèche, *Cahaba*, p. 246.


33. "With good reason Native North Americans sometimes referred to guardian spirits as power animals—they gave power and were often perceived as animals. But an animal-human duality was common in the primitive world, so guardian spirits could appear in anthropomorphic form as well. Animals appeared as human beings in the dreams of the Colorado River Valley Society; and the Jivaro say that a guardian spirit appears in a vision as an animal, but comes later in a dream as a human. Joe Harner, The Way of the Shaman, p. 50. William J. Arik, *Shamanism in Western North America: A Study in Cultural Relationships* (University of Northwestern University, 1936), p. 83; Michael J. Harner, *The Jivaro: People of the Sacred WaterFalls* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Natural History Press, 1972), pp. 133-34.


37. Harner, *The Way of the Shaman*, p. 60. Harner comments on the guardian spirit's bearing on the health of the psyche: "Guardian spirits are only good; but if your power animal's messages are ignored, or if it is not exercised through dancing, it may become disconsolate, discouraged, and want to leave your body. Its discomfort may unintentionally flow into your own consciousness, causing tension and anxiety. If you do nothing to remedy the situation, it will shortly leave you, and you will again be dis-spirited." *Ibid.*, p. 101.


45. Ibid., p. 59.


48. Ibid., p. 438.


52. Crazy Horse, the strange holy man of the Oglala Sioux, believed that this world was only a shadow of the real world. Before a battle he would enter the real world by dreaming himself into a trance or shamanic state of consciousness. Then, he was unbeatable in a fight because "he could endure anything." Incidentally, while in the real world of his shamanic state of consciousness, Crazy Horse saw his horse dancing "as if it were wild or crazy." From this vision came the great warrior's name. Joe Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (1970), (London: Pan, 1972), p. 230.

53. Park, *Shamanism in Western North America*, p. 16.

54. Ibid., p. 10.

In the late 1880's a Paiute of western Nevada named Novoka received a revelation of the coming of a new Native earth and the sacred dance that would prepare the way for it. The Ghost dance spread with varying success both west and east, across the Great Basin and into the Plains, from Oklahoma to Canada. Ethnologist James Mooney wrote: "The great underlying principle of the Ghost dance doctrine is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease and misery." Most Plains tribes, including the Sioux and the Arapaho, called the dance the "spirit" or "ghost" dance because its every aspect related to the advent of the spirits of the dead from the spirit world. See James Mooney, The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, originally published as part 2 of the Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1892-93 (1896), University of Chicago Press, 1965, pp. 19, 35.
Ghost-dance mythology and evokes the striking images which came to an Arapaho in a trance vision: "... the crow, as the messenger and leader of the spirits who had gone before, collected their armies on the other side and advanced at their head to the hither limit of the shadowland. Then, looking over, they saw far below them a sea, and far out beyond it toward the east was the boundary of the earth, where lived the friends they were marching to rejoin. Taking up a pebble in his beak, the crow then dropped it into the water and it became a mountain towering up to the land of the dead. Down its rocky slope he brought his army until they halted at the edge of the water. Then, taking some dust in his bill, the crow flew out and dropped it into the water as he flew, and it became a solid arm of land stretching from the spirit world to the earth. He returned and flew out again, this time with some blades of grass, which he dropped upon the land thus made, and at once it was covered with a green sod. Again he returned, and again flew out, this time with some twigs in his bill, and dropping these also upon the new land, at once it was covered with a forest of trees. Again he flew back to the base of the mountain, and is now... coming on at the head of all the countless spirit hosts which has already passed over the sea and is marshaling on the western boundary of the earth." Ibid., p. 233.

74 Ibid., p. 234.
75 Ibid., p. 243.
76 Ibid., p. 245.
77 "Stand ready,
Stand ready.
So that when the crow calls you,
So that when the crow calls you.
You will see him,
You will see him." Ibid., p. 249.
78 Ibid., p. 252.
79 Ibid., pp. 31, 34, 68. In a somewhat similar vein, the Omaha Indians respected the shamanic power of symbolic war decoration and ritual words. The bravest Omaha warriors won the right to wear "the Crow", an elaborate war honour made with dressed, painted and feathered animal skin. Included in this composite decoration were the tail of a wolf and the entire skin of a crow, helping to illustrate the warrior's essential connection with all forms of life and his contact with the supernatural. "The Crow" war decoration also symbolized a battlefield after the conflict. The fluttering feathers on the animal skin represented feathers dropping from crows as they fought over the bodies of the slain. As well as being associated with carnage, the wolf and the crow had a mythic relation to "soldiers," special men chosen from among those with "the Crow" who acted as marshals during the annual tribal hunt. The Ponca, a plains tribe close to the Omaha, used a warfare-hunting ritual when appointing soldiers for the tribal hunt, illuminating the relation of the crow and the wolf to the hunter and the warrior. The wolf and the crow address the people as "little ones" in this spoken ritual, and the animals' power draws the
buffalo...herds near. These two beasts offered their assistance "once and for all time," and the warrior had to acknowledge his dependence on these supernatural helpers. I quote the ritual words pertaining to the crow: "Kala cova, in ages long ago you were 'moving'-eeka! (The ritual refrain eeka means "I desire," "I crave," "I ask or pray for.") Of soldiers you were a war leader, it has been said--eeka! Where were congregated our desire (herds of buffalo), you wait--eeka! They (the herds) were gathered lowward, where the wind blows you walked, it is said--eeka!... The prayer feathers ruffled at your neck as you walked, it is said--eeka! The people cry Ho! in admiration, as you walk, so it was said--eeka! You shouted again and again back to them from the distance, it is said--eeka!... The herds of animals... Verily you cause them to come near--eeka! This have you done, so it is said--eeka!..." The ritual use of the word "moving"--as in "male crow, in ages long ago you were 'moving'" and "male wolf, in ages past you were 'moving'"--brings the crow and the wolf into mythic relation with Nakoda, the power that "moves" and grants life to all things. Long ago, the powerful "moving" action of the crow and the wolf was a creative force. The ritual also speaks of the mythic promise of the crow and the wolf to help warriors and hunters in their endeavours. "The Crow" war decoration, jointly originated by the Penne and the Omaha, preserved the story of this sacred association and vow. See Fletcher and Lajtensch, Omaha, pp. 441-41, 444-46.

76. Iliade, Shamanism, p. 96.
77. Ibid., p. 97.
84. Harnhussen, Netimik Eskimos, pp. 273-93.
86. Ibid., p. 47.
88. Ibid., p. 503.

100 Ibid., p. 118.


103 Ibid., p. 203.

104 Ibid., p. 203.

105 Hasmussen, Ibulik Eskimos, p. 160.

106 Ogden, Ibulik Dental Culture, p. 127.

107 Hasmussen, Ibulik Eskimos, pp. 116-17.

108 Hasmussen also met a Netsilingmiut child named Tertaq the "amulet boy," who had to wear eighty different amulets in order that he might become a brilliant hunter invulnerable to life's many dangers. Prominent among these amulets was an entire raven's skin with head and claws, fastened on the front of his coat under the chin. One specific power effected by the raven skin enabled the hunter to come unseen upon the caribou at the crossing place. See Hasmussen, Ibulik Eskimos, p. 274.


111 Edward William Nelson, The Eskimo About Bering Strait, Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1896-97 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), pp. 324-35. Nelson also reported that weapons of the Bering Strait Eskimos marked with the sign of the raven totem were believed to become invested with some of the bird's qualities and to be carriers of death. Some Bering Strait Eskimo hunters carried a pair of raven's claws in their quivers, as well as a wing or tail feather from the same bird. Ibid., pp. 322, 325.


113 Ibid., pp. 310, 356.

114 Ibid., p. 319.

106. Another aboriginal myth involves a daunting place and two giant ravens. The remote and rugged coastal headlands of mid-California is called Point Conception, and in a Chumash Indian story it is "a wild and stormy place" known as humag—Gate of the Raven. A soul journeying to the promised land (similaga) must first pass through this portal of Death, the Raven gate. Cage within it and past the Land of Widows and the clashing rocks, the soul comes to a place in the deep ravine where two gigantic ravens (gaa) perching on each side peck out the soul's eyes. The soul immediately restores its vision by picking two poppies and inserting them in its eye sockets. Upon finally reaching Similaga the soul receives eyes made of blue abalone. See Scott Feather, "Raven Gate: The Other Face of the Pt. Conception Controversy," *Parabola*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1981), pp. 84-93.


110. Larry Holsten Lopes, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 273. A horse warrior was metaphorically referred to as "feeder of ravens" or "raven-feeder," and it was indeed a good omen to be followed by a raven when on route to battle. Ravens were frequently depicted on Danish and Icelandic battle-standards. One such magical banner carried into battle was called *ravenlandeye*—raven, the land-ravens or Raven of waste and desolation. In early Norse poetry, blood was called "the raven's drink" and "Huginn's sea," "Huginn" being the name of one of Odin's birds and a poetic synonym for the raven in general. Here the warrior was "the reddener of Huginn's cloths" or "of his bill," and a battle was described as "Huginn's feast." See Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, pp. 58-59. Furthermore, Davidson says that an Old English poetic adjective translated as "choosing the slain" was used in reference to the raven; and an early Old Norse poem, *Grafmænd*, has the form of a conversation between a raven and a Valkyrie, one of Odin's bloody, supernatural battle-women. See Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 65.


112. Ibid., p. 58; Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, p. 146.
Ibid., p. 146.

114 Turville-Petre, Myths and Religion of the North, p. 58.

115 Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, p. 147.

116 In English translations of Eliade's works, the generic term "crow" is used for both the raven and the crow. To be specific, Odin's birds are actually ravens.

117 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 391.

118 Turville-Petre, Myths and Religion of the North, p. 61.

119 Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe, pp. 117, 141; Turville-Petre, Myths and Religion of the North, p. 60.

120 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 391.

121 Jodogott, The Coming and Going of the Shaman, p. 75.

122 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 94.

123 Ibid., p. 95.

124 Jodogott, The Coming and Going of the Shaman, p. 75.

125 Ibid., pp. 63, 219.


127 Castaneda's sorcerer friend don Juan was primarily engaged in a kind of warrior shamanism, as opposed to the path that emphasizes healing.


132 Ibid., p. 63.

133 Castaneda, The Teachings, p. 164.
134 Ibid., pp. 215-16.
137 Castaneda, The Teachings, p. 166.
138 Ibid., pp. 175, 176.
140 Eliade, Shamanism, p. 95.
141 Ibid., p. 98.
142 Ibid., p. 95.
143 Ibid., p. 94-95.
145 Ibid., p. 60.
146 Ibid., p. 66.
147 Ibid., p. 66-67.
149 John R. Swanton, “Social Condition, Beliefs, and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians,” Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1904-1905 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), p. 464. Tlingit shamans’ rattles were often carved in the form of a raven. One such rattle in the Royal Scottish Museum was used by a shaman to accentuate important pronouncements; it features a carved raven perched on the handle. Another wooden Tlingit shaman’s rattle, owned by a Rotterdam museum, represents a large raven with a recumbent shaman on its back. In his mouth the shaman holds a frog’s tongue from which he sucks “poison” said to be used sometimes by shamans in casting spells. The raven represents the shaman’s guardian animal spirit, on whose back the shaman, in an altered state of consciousness, is making a soul-flight. See Henry Collins and others, The Far North; 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1973), pp. 266-67, 269.
151 Lodgett, The Coming and Going of the Shaman, p. 179.

Bladgett, _The Coming and Going of the Shaman_, p. 75.

Birket-Smith and Delaguna, _Eyak Indians_, pp. 185-86.

Swanton, "Eskimo Indians," _26th Ann. Rept.,_ pp. 467-68. Inside a _kaspi_ (ceremonial house) in a lower Yukon River village of Alaska in 1842, Lieutenant Zagoskin of the Russian navy witnessed a dance featuring a dancer wearing only a crow mask. A story unfolded about a shaman who was a failed hunter, with the masked dancer enacting the parts of both the shaman-hunter and the crow who was his nemesis and the cause of his failure. The monstrous crow spoke to his caribou, tore fishing nets, and so forth. Finally, the shaman-hunter fell into an inspired conversation with the spirit of the crow. "Who are you?" he asked. And the crow spirit replied, "This is your share of trouble!" See ibid., _Eskimo Masks_, pp. 4-5.


Ibid., p. 62.

Ibid., p. 63.

Ibid., _Shamanism_, p. 92.

Ibid., p. 73.


_"Ga ga ga ga!"_ — Warriors are coming to make an attack.

_Gax gax gax_ — Ravens will eat the bodies of people drowned by the capsizing of canoes.

_Gaga ha hage_ — A chief died.

_Gax gax gax_ — There will be heavy rains.

_Wax wax wax_ — A stranger will arrive on a visit.

_Xok xok_ — When ravens cry thus while fighting in the air, there will be bad news.

_Yilaa gwilii_ — When a raven holds with its beak the end of a branch and hangs down, it means that a man's head will be cut off in war.

Similarly, the Bella Coola believed that when ravens croaked, they were actually speaking. Their language was unintelligible except to one who had, as an infant, been fed a small piece of flesh from under the left wing of a live raven, which was later released. Such a child matured with the ability to understand ravens' cries and learn from them of the approach of storms, rising parties, and so forth. See _Allworth, Bella Coola_, I, p. 705.
The shaman used his drum to toss a bead up through the smoke-hole. Dancing around the fire, he broke into a power song which described where the bead had gone and what he (the shaman) was seeing as the bead travelled along. When the bead was returning, the shaman became agitated; he ran around; and suddenly he caught the returning bead and collapsed in exhaustion. After a while, the shaman examined the bead and related what it had to say. This shamanic bead scance was used to locate caribou, for example, but more often it was somehow connected with curing illness.


_The Coming and Going of the Shaman_, p. 182. Rainey describes an autumn ceremony in which the shaman's helping spirit jutted out of his mouth. See Rainey, _Whale Hunters of Ilimina_, p. 399.

Jochelson, _The Koryak_, p. 17.

Jochelson noted that "shamans, with the help of the spirits, may see and otherwise injure their bodies without suffering harm." In this case, Jochelson recounted that the shaman asked him for his knife, which, because of his own unselfishness and his wife's frightened entreaties, he did not hand over. _Ibid._, p. 31.

Sogoraz, _The Chukchee_, p. 394.

Lopes, _Of Wolves and Men_, p. 112.


_Thalniul_, p. 165.

_Thalniul_, p. 170.

_Thalniul_, pp. 170-71.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLACK SHAMAN

... They took him into the house, and began to eat his body joint by joint. Still he was alive. They consumed Big-Raven. Then he came home, because he was a shaman.

By this point, one can readily see that the shamanic associations of the raven and crow, especially those surrounding the guardian animal spirit or power animal, constitute a veritable black flood of tribal traditions. Diverse aboriginal peoples clearly felt the presence of these large black birds, and responded imaginatively to that presence in many religious ways. In exploring shamanism, we have been in contact with the mythic dimension through the shaman, but it remains for us to briefly examine some of the myths proper, specifically the old oral stories about Raven and Crow created in shamanic cultures.

From northeastern Siberia on the Asiatic side of the Bering Strait eastward and southward to the southern part of Vancouver Island, various native communities recounted the old stories of Raven or Crow. In fact, throughout the Far North tribal man spoke of the great black birds in mythic context. Not surprisingly, Raven/Crow often appeared in primitive story as a powerful mythic shaman. This master shaman of heroic proportion falls into trance, journeys to other worlds, transforms the earth, communicates with spirits, heals, and generally lives intensely in a context of mythic power. With a warrior's spirit, he faces danger, death and the unknown; he undergoes ordeals, and fights rival shamans.
I shall describe some of the shamanic exploits of Raven and Crow, but something must first be said of the world in which the black shaman functions—the world of myth, "for which there is no known map."²

Myth is a profound symbolic form of religious expression which employs symbols and metaphoric renderings to express its truth; its substance is not that of chronicles or newspaper accounts. Professor of religion and psychology Thomas Moore offers this further thought:

Myth is more like a dream whose symbols have to be entertained and allowed to generate associations if its meaning is to be uncovered.³

The Raven and Crow stories, the myths of concern here, embody vivid, forceful images. In part, these ancient aboriginal myths reflect the personal numinous experiences, visions, and dreams of tribal man. Because of the earthy and erotic nature of Native traditions, the early ethnologists who collected the stories and wrote them down sometimes censored or bowdlerized material deemed obscene and offensive to Western European sensibilities. Frequently, sexual and vulgar incidents became islands of classical Latin dotting the English text, exotic islands of necrophilia, coprophagy, and assorted scatological description accessible to only the serious scholar. P. L. Travers, who describes herself as a "dowser of myth," makes a comment applicable to the stories of Raven and Crow:

It is this tension, the uncompromising insistence on both ends of the stick—black and white, good and evil, positive and negative, active and passive—that gives the myths their ambivalent power. In our Aristotelian, Apollonian world . . . the bloodiness of the myths, their vengefulness and brutality, their Dionysian recklessness—and . . . their splendor—are difficult to accept. They are too large for us, too mighty . . . . This grasping of the whole stick is an essential feature of the hero.
And thus it is a characteristic of the great shaman, Raven/Crow, who is indeed a hero.

In sum, a myth leads you to someplace, The Raven/Crow stories, which are very old, take one into a world of power, flux and mystery. While being works of art with aesthetic worth in themselves, more importantly these old stories have great depth, mystery and meaning, and in this they are sacred.

The mythic Raven/Crow of whom we speak is an animal person, a being with both bird and human attributes. In other words, he has a dual, anthropomorphic-zoomorphic nature, with his human aspect being distinctively aboriginal. Indigenous peoples' spiritual existence, and man's evolution as *homo religiosus* in general, has long involved thinking in terms of animal images and images pervaded by the reality of animals.

The raven/crow's nature as a natural animal and a mythic being is complex with regard to Native rites, beliefs, and myths. Examples of explicitly expressed belief in the supernatural power of the natural species raven or crow, although relatively rare, have been recorded among aboriginals, but frequently the importance of the mythic Raven or Crow is only implicitly conveyed through their stories. In any event, the depictions of Raven/Crow as great mythic shaman was, in part, an act of respect, and a clear indication that aboriginal peoples experienced the raven and the crow as ominous birds of power. For in tradition these birds came to represent the holy man of awesome sacred powers.

A mediator between earth and the spirit worlds, the wise mythic shaman Raven/Crow transforms himself into various forms (a shapeshifter who can shift with the best of them); journeys beneath the earth or sea and
ascends into the sky; makes things happen by sheer force of will. Furthermore, like any powerful shaman, Raven/Crow stands apart from and beyond the ordinary confines of society. His might, which is simultaneously venerated and feared, makes him an outsider.

Like the Ingalik, the Upper Tanana Indians never killed the raven. Because of the bird's presence in their myths, a feeling existed that he possessed a sacred quality.⁶ According to a Tanana creation story, Raven⁷ was sitting on a small pile of rocks jutting up from the sea. At his command, Big Fish (Big Fish is probably the whale of Northwest Coast mythology) dove to the bottom of the sea and brought up rocks, gravel and mud. Raven used this unmanifest primal matter to enlarge the pile of rocks into a low island. Then he sent Big Fish for moss, which he spread over the island, and some large rocks. The moss flourished and spread, trees grew, the rocks became mountain ranges—and thus Raven built Alaska.⁸

As Furst notes, and as the above myth indicates, "transformation . . . rather than creation ex nihilo . . . is the hallmark of shamanistic cosmology."⁹ Certain Native stories tell us that Raven/Crow, as an epic figure of titanic achievements, was specifically a creative transformer who created the world-as-it-is. He did not create ex nihilo, i.e., bring the world into objective existence, rather he transformed already existing primal matter, and was thus a "creator" in this qualified sense. According to several aboriginal traditions, at the time of the great flood Raven or Crow executed some form of shamanic earth-fashioning exploit. Sometimes, for example, he commands an animal to dive and bring up some earth. Raven/Crow then takes the mud and, intoning sacred,
magic words, tosses it upon the water. The chunk grows . . . Concerning Raven or Crow as creative transformer, the eminent student of mythology Joseph Campbell remarks:

It is hardly proper to call such a figure a god, or even to think of him as supernatural. He is a super-shaman. And we find his counterparts in myth and legend throughout the world, wherever shamanism has left its mark . . .

To this comment on the extremely ancient figure, one may add anthropologist Weston La Barre’s affirmation that the mythic transforming Raven/Crow is clearly a shaman, “with a shaman’s skills and failures.”

Thus, the Koryak, a sturdy, well-built aboriginal people of northeastern Siberia, regarded Big-Raven (Kutkinnaku) as a mighty shaman, and as the heroic founder or transformer of the world and the ancestor of the tribe. One segment of the northeast Asian Raven Cycle relates that Raven transformed himself into thunder and soared over the world, terrifying the people with his thunderous croaking. He also made rivers by dragging one of his black wings along the earth and filling the gouges with his urine. According to a Chukchee creation myth (Siberia), Raven flew across the sky defecating and passing water. His excrement became continents, islands, and mountains; lakes and rivers appeared where his urine fell. Another earthy aspect of Chukchee origins may be mentioned here. Since people did not know how to perform sexual intercourse, one primordial night (shamans commonly worked at night and/or in darkened rooms) Raven instructed Spider-Woman in the art of copulation, bruising her body with his great black bill in the process. Spider-Woman then imparted this knowledge to mankind.

Crossing the Bering Strait to North America, one finds more
traditions about the world-transforming Raven and Crow. Late last century an old Unaligmiut man living in Kigiktauik, Alaska told Edward William Nelson a creation myth. The main figure in this dramatic story is Raven, who journeys between the spirit worlds ranging from the sky to the bottom of the sea, transforms the earth for mankind's benefit, and generally performs like the most powerful of shamans.\textsuperscript{16} Eskimo people in an Alaskan village on the lower Yukon River told a story about the bringing of the light by Raven. When the sun and the moon were taken away and the people of the earth were left in darkness, it was Raven who restored the light after all the other shamans had failed.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, the Tsimshian Indians of the Skeena and the Nass on the northern Pacific Coast say that one day, when darkness covered the world, Raven left his home in the Queen Charlotte Islands. As he rose into the air and began flying inland, "his father named him Giant." Raven then shamanically flew to the Upperworld, determined to steal the daylight and return with it to earth. He succeeded, and when he broke the box holding the daylight the north wind began to roar. Observing Raven, the Frogs named him Txamsen, "and all the world had daylight."\textsuperscript{18}

North American examples of Campbell's earth-fashioning "super-shaman" deserve further description before we move on to some other types of deeds performed by the mythic black shaman. Among the Loucheaux Indians, "the Crow" was a great shaman. They say that at the cost of his life, Beaver dove deep into the waters covering the earth to scoop up the small amount of mud Crow required to make the world. Having scraped the primal mud from Beaver's lifeless paws, Crow ran his walking-stick through it and into the water so that the mud rested atop the water. Then "the
earth grew larger and larger," large enough to hold all the animals which stepped onto it from Crow's raft. Somewhere in the Yukon about the junction of the Old Crow and Porcupine Rivers, Crow's walking-stick—which has never rotted—still supports the land. And today at this junction stands the Loucheux village called Old Crow. The stark beauty of creation myths is evident in the following recorded story from the Yukon Indians' oral tradition of how Crow made the earth and its people:

Crow see that sea lion owned the only island. . . . The rest was water. He's the only one with land. The whole place was ocean.
Crow rests on a piece of log. He's tired. He sees sea lion with that little island just for himself. He wants land too.
So he stole sea lion's kid.
"Give back that kid," said sea lion.
"Give me beach—some sand," say Crow. So sea lion gave him sand. You know how sand in water floats? Crow threw that sand around the ocean.
"Be world!" he tell it. And it became the world.
After that he walk around, fly around all alone. He's tired. He's lonely. He needs people. He took poplar tree bark. You know how its thick. He carved it. Then he breathed into it. "Live," he said. And he made person.

In a Bering Strait Eskimo myth, Raven is said to have made Woman from the mud of the earth plain. After the fashioned image dried, he waved his great black wings over it and a beautiful young woman arose. The Netsilik Eskimos, one may note, told Rasmussen that a shaman created the first woman. Finally, in the primal mythic age, say the Haida, when "only the inner world existed, "Raven came upon a giant shell on the wild, sea-drenched beach of Rose Spit, northern Queen Charlotte Islands. He was drawn by strange sounds from within the shell, the noises of the First Men on the verge of passing from one world into another. This Haida story tells of Raven and the First Men discovering one another
and experiencing new realms ("an act of mutual discovery").²⁴ The First
Men encounter Raven, the powerful mythic shaman, as he gingerly perches
on the shell, resting between exploratory flights.

The shamanic associations of the mythic Raven/Crow include the
shaman's connection with the mystery of death. In a Quinault Indian
story, Raven journeys to the Underworld realm where the dead live. Because
he is a powerful shaman, he travels down there very quickly, and the
Underworld people wonder at his great strength.²⁵ But the main point here
is that the shaman's ritual or symbolic experience of death and his
acquired knowledge of the world of death afforded him power. The Koryak
said that the shaman Big-Raven introduced death among mankind.²⁶ "Death"
in this case may also refer to symbolic death, for as we shall see, Big-
Raven had profound experience of the shamanic death, which was a trial
and a passage to power and a new way of being. People never died in the
mythic age, according to the Kobuk River people, but they often suffered
from hunger. Understanding this, Toolooak the Raven ("who could turn
into anything" and "go anywhere"), with a shaman's special knowledge of
death and his compassion as a healer, decreed that starving men would
die--"and we know how to die from that time on."²⁷

Another shamanic death association appears in a Bella Bella
story. Raven, having feigned death, lies in a grave box and sings a power
song, thereby obtaining supernatural power.²⁸ This technique represents
the shamanic initiatory ordeal of ritual burial, and is related to acquir-
ing shamanic power by sitting all night in a graveyard or passing the
night with the corpse of a recently deceased shaman.²⁹

With further regard to origin myths, there is the idea of
Raven or Crow as the first, primordial shaman. In the beginning of time the Bella Coola Indians' principal supernatural being and supreme deity sent down to earth the ancestors of the Bella Coola and appointed Raven as their guide and teacher. He could alternate between avian and human form at will, and had been given imagination and "greater power than that granted to any other animal." Having the shaman's ability to communicate with the energies and life forms of the earth, Raven could talk to trees, mountains, animals, insects and humans. This Raven was a great shaman, and was sometimes referred to as chief, "The Light-Bringer," "The Wise One," "The Widener," or "The Unlooser of Light." Turning to Tlingit mythology, one finds it said that Raven taught people about shamans and shamanism. And many of the Nunamiut Eskimos living in Anaktuvuk Pass in the Central Brooks Range of northern Alaska say that the mythic Mr. Raven was surely a very powerful shaman, for he brought the land back by causing the great floodwaters to subside, and he brought light to the Nunamiut people. In addition, many Nunamiut think that shamanism originated in the time of Mr. Raven, and some of the more philosophical Nunamiut speak of Mr. Raven as the first shaman, who later passed his acquired shamanic power on to relatives.

The traditions of tribal cultures contain many more depictions of the raven and the crow as mythic manifestations of the powerful shaman. Big-Raven (Kutkinnaku) was recognized as the ancient father and protector of the Koryak people. More important, he was acknowledged as a great and powerful shaman. His name was uttered in all shamanic incantations, whether they were prayers addressed to him or, in a healing context, dramatic presentations of myths recounting how Big-Raven doctored his own
sick children, as well as those of others. Chanting incantations and beating his drum in a room plunged in darkness, he successfully performs his healing work on the son of Hare in one story.\textsuperscript{35} The Koryak patient often personified one of Big-Raven's children. In pronouncing an incantation, Big-Raven's presence was presupposed; the afflicted were brought before the healing power of his name.\textsuperscript{36}

Big-Raven, it was said, introduced the Koryak to the drum. Furthermore, he taught them incantations or magic formulas to help them in their conflict with evil spirits (kalau) and disease, and to enable them to consecrate amulets and charms, attract game animals, and communicate with the spirits.\textsuperscript{37} The vital essence of guardians and charms used to ward off attacks by evil spirits attained its potency through incantations connected with Big-Raven's name. As a powerful shaman, he constantly warred against evil spirits during his life, and the Koryak believed he continued after his death to protect them, his people, from the dark forces of disease and death.\textsuperscript{38} Belief in shamans wielding power from the grave was not unheard of in the aboriginal world, and, indeed, the Koryak claimed that Big-Raven was present at every shamanic seance and ceremony. Shamans began chanting their incantations, saying, "There, Big-Raven is coming!" During shamanic performances among the Reindeer Koryak, a raven would come flying into the house, prompting the host to say, "Slaughter a reindeer, Big-Raven is coming!"\textsuperscript{39}

Bogoras noted that the mythic Big-Raven was so great and powerful a shaman that some older people translated his name as "God".\textsuperscript{40} Even when a Koryak story has nothing to do with him, his name is nonetheless
mentioned in the beginning. But he is in fact the principal figure in many stories.

Our understanding of one such account is enhanced if we realize that the authentic shaman was immensely courageous, having had to intrepidly go forth to other regions and return, knowing that the passage held danger as well as power to be gained. He or she must be counted among those who have traversed and explored the heights and depths of the spirit world, for shamans in trance descended into the belly of the earth's underworld, a strange and holy chthonic realms of horror commingled with beauty. Just as some events, psychic and otherwise, act as a sword in that they dismember us, shake us up and change our way of seeing and being, the shamanic crisis journey of dismemberment represented such a traumatic spiritual experience at an extremely intense level. Big-Raven makes this journey down into the dark underworld in one Koryak story. He is ravaged by evil spirits, but is reborn; he survives the ordeal and increases his personal power in the process. And one better understands why an Eskimo shaman referred to entering the territory of death as “the great task.”

The personal religious experience of ritual or symbolic death and rebirth during the crisis journey increased the power of one who passed through it, and gave him extraordinary knowledge of death. In the most significant part of the story under discussion, after Big-Raven travels ecstatically to the nether regions, the underworld evil spirits (kalau) rend his body and devour him alive.

They... began to eat his body joint by joint. Still he was alive. They consumed Big-Raven.
This incident resembles the classic initiatory ordeal of the would-be shaman. But whether Big-Raven is here a neophyte in the grip of his initial ecstatic experience or an accomplished shaman testing or increasing his power is not important. The important thing is that he weathers the murderous assault by the cannibalistic evil spirits. He survives the horrific ordeal of dismemberment and death, and journeys home. Having suffered greatly on the chthonic path of sacred knowledge, Big-Raven establishes himself as one who has met death and been resurrected. Most important, he proves himself a shaman of great power, for his soul has passed heroically through a dark and terrible trial only to return stronger.

Then he came home, because he was a shaman.47

His shamanic journey completed, Big-Raven rouses himself from his trance and immediately girds himself spiritually before testing his newly-increased power against the malevolent forces.48 His subsequent slaying of evil spirits mythically represents the shaman's slaying of the dragons sickness and death. Furthermore, killing evil spirits, even with the assistance of a guardian spirit, was a task of heroic proportions, and such a feat was achieved by only the greatest of shamans.49 Herein lies the essence of this Koryak story: Big-Raven was a powerful shaman.

A profound experience in the "underworld of disease" took the shaman to a higher plane of consciousness, and he gained power through the terrible protracted illness and psychological struggle.50 Because he acquired knowledge about the realm of disease revealed to him, he could then, as a healer, guide the suffering across the moor of sickness and death.
The shaman learns to integrate the experiences of sickness, suffering, dying, and death, as well as to share the special knowledge of these powerful events with those who face disease or death for the first time. This ability is reflected in Koryak mythology: "The kalau (evil spirits) must be nearby," Big-Raven reportedly said, when his children fell sick.

Many good examples of Raven performing as a healing shaman exist in the mythologies of tribal cultures. Before briefly noting some of these, I shall now look to aboriginal stories in order to outline other aspects of the shamanic vocation of the raven and crow in myth.

In his mythic role as mighty shaman, Raven/Crow sometimes displays his trickster face, but that does not make him essentially a Trickster. As anthropologist Weston La Barre notes, "We must not forget the element of entertainment in Old World shamanism . . . the old shamanic self-dramatization." Raven plays an elaborate shamanic trick in an Upper Tanana Indian story, and demonstrates his great power in doing so. He stands singing by a campfire, and then falls down as if dead. His limbs are bound and he is placed on a huge funeral pyre. After the fire burns down to ashes, Raven's smoking liver is seen lying in the centre. Suddenly, the liver "jumped into the air and turned into Raven, who flew off, saying, 'caw, caw, caw.'" Big-Raven of Koryak mythology often amuses himself with bizarre tricks. In various stories, for instance, he turns his penis into a dog, and then returns it to its normal form and place. I suggest that here Big-Raven represents the earthy, sensual side of the Siberian shaman, who possessed the distinctive, rough sense of humour commonly found in tribal communities.
Jochelson and others noted the "obscene character" of Raven mythology from the Asiatic side of the Bering Strait and along the north Pacific Coast. But, despite the apparently coarse episodes involving Big-Raven, for example, the Koryak still thought of him as a powerful shaman and their heroic protector. One tale has Big-Raven temporarily turning his penis into a needle-case, his testicles into a thimble, and his scrotum into a work-bag. This clearly represents the shaman's ritual self-transformation into a woman at the divine command of the spirits, since the ethnographic literature reveals that sexual deviance in the form of transvestism and homosexuality was associated with shamanism in areas of Siberia and Alaska. The Raven of Chukchee lore also undergoes ritual transformation into a woman, in keeping with the fact that some male and female Chukchee shamans, at the request of their spirits, took up the lifeway of the opposite sex. In any event, an authentic shaman--male, female, or transvestite--was invariably capable of effecting ecstasy to communicate with the supernatural world.

Concerning the use of hallucinogens in shamanism, shamans passed to and fro between ordinary and non-ordinary reality whatever the task, with some aided in this difficult work by psychotropic substances, and many not. Koryak shamans sometimes ate the narcotic mushroom fly-agaric (Agaricus muscarius) to induce trance states, believing that the spirit of the Agaric could tell them about sickness, interpret dreams, and reveal the upper and underground worlds. According to myth, the shaman Big-Raven discovered this sacred hallucinogenic fungus and received strength and knowledge from the spirit of the fly-agaric after eating the mushroom. "Let the Agaric remain on earth," Big-Raven then
said, "and let my children (the Koryak) see what it will show them."\textsuperscript{63}

Another shamanic phenomenon found in connection with the mythic Raven/Crow is the power song. Prior to seal hunting, according to a Nehalem Tillamook story from the Oregon coast, Crow "would sing his power song. He would lie down and fast many days and then he would sing." Crow's wife would tell the people, "My husband is spirit-power singing."\textsuperscript{64} A shaman had at least one power song, often acquired while alone in the wilderness or involuntarily in a dream.\textsuperscript{65} The words and rhythm of a power song facilitated the transition into the shamanic state of consciousness and in such a context the shaman characteristically chanted other special power songs whose words worked to evoke his spiritual guardian and helpers and reawoke his power. Onlookers sometimes assisted the shaman by joining him in the singing, thereby making his power stronger.\textsuperscript{66} A Bella Bella story speaks of Raven dancing in shamanic regalia while all the people sing his song.\textsuperscript{67} The Bella Bella Indians clearly identify the raven with the shaman in their mythology. One night, they say, Raven sat before the fire in his house on the beach,

\ldots and when his wife spoke to him he only stared at her
\ldots He did not answer and it seemed that he had lost his mind. After a little while he fell down on his back and the people were greatly troubled.\textsuperscript{68}

This part of the story acknowledges that it was very difficult to maintain an upright position while in a deep shamanic trance. Furthermore, the shaman could see and experience his journey more clearly to do his work when lying down, fully relaxed.\textsuperscript{69} That said, we return to the Bella Bella story, in which Raven has fallen into trance:

Then he began to sing, humming the words so that the people could not understand them.\textsuperscript{70}
Because the shaman's magic words themselves possessed the power, they would sometimes lose their supernatural qualities if heard by other people. In addition, the strange sacred words were addressed to the spirits and acted upon by them, so it was irrelevant whether they were intelligible to humans. Returning to the story, Porpoise Woman says of Raven,

He is singing his shaman's song. 
He has something good for all of us.

This mythic fragment reflects the old belief that shamans were armed with various special chants or power songs which they used to communicate with gods and spirits, forestall evil, heal the sick, and procure favorable weather and successful hunting.

The mythic Raven/Crow of aboriginal traditions, as we have seen, fulfills the shamanic office in numerous ways. In addition to what has been discussed, a Chipewyan story indicates an important facet of shamanism among hunting peoples when it recounts that Raven "made magic all through the night" (shamanizing), thereby enabling the hunters to kill the caribou with their arrows. In another story involving game animals, this one from the Lipan Apache, Crow uses a pipe and tobacco for a shamanic purpose. They are part of his prayer that he might obtain some buffalo. The west coast of the Bering Sea once knew a story of Raven in which he demonstrated his shaman's control over weather by defeating the Wind-giants, thus ending an icy tempest on behalf of a famine-ravaged village. Turning to shamanism's important healing function, in a Bella Bella myth Raven saves the life of Crow's child by using the difficult shamanic sucking technique to extract an evil spirit or harmful power.
intrusion. Only a powerful shaman succeeded as a sucking doctor. Raven appears as a healing shaman in several other tribal stories. He uses dance, power songs, soul flight, and helping spirits in attempting to cure a woman, according to a northeast Siberian tale; and on the Pacific Northwest Coast he performs similarly in healing a man's bear wounds when other shamans from far and wide had failed. The raven also appears in Koryak tradition as a great shaman named Raven-Man, who restores Big-Raven's son Ememqu to life several times after he had been killed by an unconquerable giant who kept his heart hidden in a box. Speaking of the shaman defeating death, Haida mythology says that once Raven himself was killed, only to be resurrected by his helping spirits; and Tsimshian storytellers spoke of how Raven's awesome power filled the people's hearts with fear and dread when he was shot five times in the chest at close range and didn't even flinch, causing one assailant to faint.

The fact that many more examples could be cited means, of course, that the raven and crow were often depicted as shamans in aboriginal stories. But how did these big, "ugly", raucous birds become mythic shamans? I believe the answer lies in the birds themselves, for they are extraordinary. Various indigenous peoples were taken by the natural power and mystery of the raven and crow, so moved that they saw in their sleek black feathers a reflection of the shaman and all his dark spiritual power.
NOTES


7. Raven and Crow were known by many different aboriginal names. In northwestern North America the mythic Raven was known by these tribal names:

   - Yel (Tlingit)
   - Nankilas--"He Whose Voice is Obedied" (Haida)
   - Tzamsem (Tsimshian)
   - Hemaskas--"Real Chief" (Bellabella)
   - Hemaskas; Kl wehk waxat--"Great Inventor" (Rivers Inlet tribes)
   - Kl wehk waxaw (Kwakwutl)
   - Meskwah--"The Greedy One" (northern Vancouver Island Indians)
   - Oonat--"Chief" (Kwakwutl)
   - Qocimnit (Nootka)
   - Tsasquet--"Great Raven" (Tahltan)


141


Ibid., p. 641.


Ibid., pp. 483-85.


27. J. L. Giddings, Kobuk River People (College, Alaska: University of Alaska Department of Anthropology and Geography, 1961), p. 69. Raven's institution of death among the Lipan Apache seems to have a somewhat ominous tenor. Long ago, in the words of the myth, "Raven was the one who said, 'I want death to exist.'" He dropped a pebble into the water, saying that if it floated there would be no death. The pebble did not rise to the surface and thenceforth people died and could not come back to life. See Morris Edward Opler, Myths and Legends of the Lipan Apache Indians, Memoir of the American Folklore Society, Vol. 36 (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1940), pp. 38-39. In addition, because Raven was believed to be responsible for death, the Jicarilla Apache feared him as a sorcerer. See Morris Edward Opler, Myths and Tales of the Jicarilla Apache Indians, Memoir of the American Folklore Society, Vol. 31 (New York: G. E. Stechert, 1938), p. 46.


33. Jochelson, The Koryak, p. 18. Big-Raven (Kutkinnaku) always had an important part in the religious life of the Koryak people. The Koryak, on the Kamchatka coasts were Christianized at the end of the eighteenth century; Greek Orthodox Church dogmas were systematically drilled into them. In addition, these native Siberians suffered cruelty, exploitation
and other forms of colonial oppression. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Koryak were broken with helplessness and despair; they were afflicted with disease, a high mortality rate, taxes and levies, unrelieved poverty and starvation. One result of all this was that the Koryak revised and adapted the Christian preachers' judgment day stories and messianic teachings. Using local traditions of mythic heroes, they reshaped Christian stories to fit their old beliefs. Thus, Christ was not the messiah of the Koryak; their appointed deliverer became Big-Raven, their great mythic shaman of old. A traveler in northeastern Siberia at that time heard the Koryak say, "Kutkinnaku is walking on the earth and his wife under the earth and therefore there will be earthquakes and the earth will cave in." It was the first time in Koryak mythology that Kutkinnaku had appeared in the role of messiah. I. S. Vdovin, "The Study of Shamanism Among the Peoples of Siberia and the North," in Agehananda Bharati, ed., The Realm of the Extra-Human: Agents and Audiences (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 266-67.

34 Jochelson, The Koryak, p. 18.


36 Ibid., p. 18.

37 Ibid., pp. 22, 59-60.

38 Ibid., pp. 117-18.

39 Ibid., p. 18.

40 Bogoras, "Folklore of Northeastern Asia," p. 637.

41 Bogoras, Koryak Texte, pp. 42-43.


43 Ibid., p. 175; Eliade, Shamanism, p. 509.

44 Among the supernatural beings recognized by the Koryak were the kalau (sing. kala), malevolent spirits of a dual nature who sometimes approached and killed people invisibly or appeared as bloodthirsty cannibals. The underworld kalau or evil spirits, invisible to mortals and bent on inflicting disease and death, sometimes shot deadly invisible arrows which had to be quickly pulled out of victims by a shaman. It was also believed that kalau somehow cut their victims, ripping off flesh and gorging on internal organs. See Jochelson, The Koryak, pp. 27-28, 30.

45 The aspiring Labrador Eskimo shaman fasted and prayed alone in the wilderness, at which time the great spirit Tornqarsok appeared in the form of a great white bear, devoured the would-be shaman, and then vomited him out. See Ernest William Hawkes, The Labrador Eskimo,

46. Bogoras, Koryak Texte, p. 42.
47. Ibid., p. 42.
48. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
51. Ibid., p. 5.
54. McKennan, Upper Tanana, pp. 194-95.
56. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
57. Ibid., p. 323.
63. Ibid., p. 120. Two examples of contemporary shamans who have used hallucinogenic plants in their work: the 80-year old Mamatec Indian shaman, Maria Sabina, a holy "wise woman" who works with the sacred psilocybin mushrooms ("saint children") in all-night chanting-healing sessions (Veladas); and old Adamie, the weathered Dogrib Indian shaman


76 Opler, *Lipan Apache*, p. 124. Furst notes that "prior to the coming of the Europeans, nowhere in Indian America was tobacco employed for anything but shamanistic and religious purposes." See Furst, *The Roots and Continuities of Shamanism*, p. 20.

77 Bogoras, "Folklore of Northeastern Asia," p. 77.

78 Boas, *Bella Bella Tales*, p. 22.


80 Bogoras, "Folklore of Northeastern Asia," p. 656.
81 Ibid., p. 676.
CONCLUSION

The raven or crow need not be revered or regarded as sacred in order to be understood as a spiritual symbol, although I believe that these birds are indeed sacred. As a true religious symbol, raven/crow leaves one in mystery. Commentary does not exhaust his profound meaning, for he draws one deeper into an ultimately ineffable dimension of experience, into a depth that cannot be completely known.

Man has seen many things in the raven and crow. They were, to give but a few examples, a sometime symbol for evil, battle carnage, and death; a symbol of knowledge or spiritual wisdom; and for those close to Mother Earth they remain a symbol par excellence of wilderness. In any event, the raven and crow are powerful, mysterious birds, and were so perceived by many tribal peoples. While exploring the spiritual life and religious traditions of these shamanic cultures, I have come to believe that the raven/crow communicates the reality of the powerful shaman, that shadowy religious figure who has all but vanished with the old ways of the tribal world. If this is true, then in symbolizing the shaman the numinous raven/crow fittingly represents an ancient inner world of meaning.

Before explicating this idea further, I must ask you, the reader, to recall the strength and uniqueness of the raven and crow as natural species described in chapter one. Then note the birds' many shamanic associations, detailed in chapter three, which were largely based on their status as guardian animal spirits or power animals. Lastly, think
of tribal man's dramatic mythic portraits of Raven/Crow as powerful shaman, which are described in this chapter. If one is aware of all these aspects and has some basic knowledge of shamanism, he or she will be much closer to understanding the raven/crow as a symbol of the shaman.

Just as the earthy, imperfect and fallible shaman may be regarded as an "unlikely" holy man, it may be difficult for some to accept the "ugly", black raven/crow as a symbol of the shaman. So be it. But it is my perception that both the shaman and the raven/crow are at once earthy and spiritual. Raven/crow, for example, eats excrement, carrion and corpses, but also flies magnificently and was said to have supernatural powers; the shaman was frequently unkempt and wild, but he flew to other worlds and possessed spiritual powers. Whether one readily sees and feels the power of raven/crow, he is redeemed by his mythic contours, as was the shaman. Like the shaman, the raven/crow has been recognized as one who mediates between the natural and supernatural worlds while being bound to neither.

Peoples throughout the North strongly believed in the shaman's abilities. Indeed, the shaman's reputed powers ran so deep that he commonly inspired fear and dread within the community along with respect. In Alaska especially, the people regarded their shamans as extremely dangerous forces. In support of my contention that the raven/crow can stand as a symbol of the shaman, I claim a connection between the negative attitude toward shamans and the fact that the Alaska Eskimos of the lower Yukon River, among other Native peoples, greatly feared ravens as birds of evil power. I do so to preface the heart of my thesis, which
is this: what essentially establishes raven/crow as a symbol of the shaman is his power, a natural power which moved various peoples to see more in him than met the eye. The many manifestations in tribal traditions of raven/crow's power collectively indicate that he was widely perceived as a bird of strength and mystery. He was, in addition, often feared as one who could do great harm as well as confer great benefit. Thus, raven/crow evoked strong, ambivalent feelings and responses, as did the shaman.

In sum, the raven/crow symbolizes the one who stood apart and was set apart because of his great power and the intensity of his religious experience; the one who stirred uneasiness and fear within the people, as well as awe and respect; the one who embodied both earthiness and extraordinary spirituality and holiness; the one who always retained his air of mystery. To put it another way, as a numinous bird of power and mystery, the raven/crow symbolizes the powerful shaman: the dark outsider who was able to fly to the spirit world and communicate with the unseen forces of the universe.

I shall conclude with a few brief thoughts. Even when the great Danish explorer and ethnologist Knud Rasmussen traversed the arctic early this century, it was an oft-heard lament that shamans were not what they used to be. The Netsilingmiut stressed to Rasmussen the fact that they no longer had any great shamans among them.4 A Netsilik man named Nakasuk added: "In the old days the shamans could do everything."5 We have no right to doubt this statement. It is certainly true of Raven and Crow, and who are they but the powerful shaman on a mythic scale? I suggest that the gradual loss of Raven's sacred powers spoken of at the end of the Bering Strait Eskimo creation myth6 represents the passing
of the truly great shamans. One sees "ordinary ravens" on the tundra now, the story tells us, indicating that the awesome shamans of the aboriginal past have all but vanished. Along with the passing of the shaman and the advent of technology, it can be argued, came a loss of awe in the presence of the world's great mystery, a numbing of the sense of the numinous before the earth's natural wonders. But somewhere a crow is flapping lazily over a field, or calling harshly from the branches of a tall tree. Above some wild and lonely northern terrain a raven soars, his great black outstretched wings held hard against the cold sky. How can one not respect the earth when she has given us birds such as these who have seen the shamans and the old ways come and go? A natural power emanates from the raven and the crow. Their qualities are so extraordinary that tribal man made a place for them in his inner life, where they were sometimes honoured as guardian animal spirits and even as shamans. In doing this, he made it possible for some of us to observe a raven or crow and see in that mysterious black bird the shadowy figure of another one who was set apart by virtue of his power.
NOTES

1. John Fire Lame Deer, a Lakota Sioux shaman, speaks eloquently about himself as an unlikely holy man: "Seeing me in my patched-up, faded shirt, with my down-at-the-heel cowboy boots, the hearing aid whistling in my ear, looking at the flimsy shack with its bad-smelling outhouse which I call my home—it all doesn't add up to a white man's idea of a holy man. You've seen me drunk and broke. You've heard me curse or tell a sexy joke. You know I'm not better or wiser than other men. But I've been to the hilltop, got my vision and power . . . ." Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions (1972) cited in Halifax, Shamanic Voices, pp. 70-71.


5. Ibid., p. 502.

APPENDIX

RAVENS AND CROWS OF THE FAMILY CORVIDAE (CROW FAMILY):  
A TAXONOMIC LISTING

CLASS: Aves
ORDER: Passeriformes (Passerine)
FAMILY: Corvidae (Crows) SUB-FAMILY: Corvinae
GENUS: Corvus
SPECIES: Species and Subspecies of Corvus

RAVENS

SPECIES
COMMON RAVEN Corvus corax

SUBSPECIES
NORTHERN RAVEN Corvus corax principalis
AMERICAN RAVEN Corvus corax sinuatus

SPECIES
WHITE-NECKED RAVEN Corvus cryptoleucus
BROWN-NECKED RAVEN Corvus ruficollis
AFRICAN WHITE-NECKED RAVEN Corvus albicollis
THICK-BILLED RAVEN Corvus crassirostris
FANTAILED RAVEN Corvus rhipidurus
AUSTRALIAN RAVEN Corvus coronoides
CROWS

SPECIES

COMMON CROW Corvus brachyrhynchos

SUBSPECIES

EASTERN CROW Corvus brachyrhynchos brachyrhynchos
SOUTHERN CROW Corvus brachyrhynchos paulus
FLORIDA CROW Corvus brachyrhynchos pascuus
WESTERN CROW Corvus brachyrhynchos hesperis

SPECIES

NORTHWESTERN CROW Corvus caurinus
FISH CROW Corvus ossifragus
MEXICAN CROW Corvus imparatus
HAWAIIAN CROW (ALALA) Corvus tropicus
CARRION (and HOODED) CROW Corvus corone
JUNGLE CROW Corvus macrorhynchos
COLLARED CROW Corvus torquatus
PIED CROW Corvus albus
BLACK CROW Corvus capensis
HOUSE CROW Corvus splendens
SLENDER-BILLED CROW Corvus enca
AUSTRALIAN CROW Corvus orru
LITTLE CROW Corvus bennetti
ILLUSTRATIONS


A raven holding a berry; a Haida argillite design of Raven holding the sun. Drawn by Tony Angell, from his book, Ravens, Crows, Magpies, and Jays, 1978.

2. A raven flying; a crow in flight over dunes near Tillamook Head, Oregon. Drawn by Tony Angell.

3. A raven flying at River's Inlet, British Columbia. Drawn by Tony Angell.


5. A raven flying with tail spread. Drawn by Angell.


9. Ink copy of a section of the Palaeolithic rock painting in the Cave of Lascaux, France. It depicts a fallen shaman raft in trance and a pole or staff surmounted by an image of a bird, possibly the raven, which may represent the soul of the ecstatic shaman in flight. See pp. 78-79 of thesis text.

Koryak sketch of Big-Raven (Kutkinakhu), powerful mythic shaman. He has some anthropomorphic features in this drawing, such as arms and an
10. Soapstone sculpture of two ravens with an incised drawing on its base of an Alaskan Eskimo shaman and a drum. Having entered an altered state of consciousness by dancing raven-like to the throb of the drum, the shaman has transformed himself into Raven, his guardian animal spirit (power animal). See pp. 98-107 of thesis text. From Barbara Lipton, Survival: Life and Art of the Alaskan Eskimo, 1977.

11. Chukchee sketch of Luck-giving Being represented as a raven. He observes a hunter shooting a seal, having already laid claim to a portion of the meat. Beside it, Chukchee sketches of the "assistant" to the Spirit of the Zenith. This being was called "Raven's-Beak," and in Fig. a. he is portrayed as having a raven's bill painted on his face. In Fig. b. the "assistant" is represented as having a raven's head and feet, one wing, and one human hand. See pp. 95-96 of thesis text. From Waldemar Bogoras, The Chukchee, 1907.

A Chukchee charm-string which includes a real raven's head as one of the charms; a Chukchee wooden amulet in the form of a raven's head. From Bogoras, The Chukchee.

A Koryak snow-beater made from antler, with its handle carved in the form of a raven's bill. This guardian-charm was sometimes carried by one journeying alone in the wilderness, for it served as a fellow-traveller and guardian against evil spirits (kalau). From Jochelson, The Koryak.

Simple form of raven totem once found among Bering Strait Eskimos; raven totem depicted on a smoke-hole cover; Plover Bay, Siberia Eskimo boy with the mark of the raven tattooed on his forehead. From Edward William Nelson, The Eskimo About Bering Strait, 1899. See p. 95 of thesis text.

12. Image of power: This stone image of Raven's head was panned onto an ancient Native sledge hammer from the Northwest Coast. The striking hammer transformed; analogously, the mythic Raven alighted (came down) and things happened. From Wilson Duff; Images: Stone; B.C.; Thirty Centuries of Northwest Coast Indian Sculpture, 1975.
Depictions of Raven: Haida stone tobacco mortar; Tlingit wooden headpiece. Drawn by Angell.


Raven mask made by Chief Charlie Edensaw of Massett, Queen Charlotte Islands. The outer figure is Raven in his bird form; the inner figure represents Raven in anthropomorphic form. From John R. Swanton, Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida, 1905.

14. Haida Raven, by Bill Reid, Queen Charlotte Islands

15. Northwest Coast Native art: Raven, by Jerry Smith (Kwakiutl); Raven Stealing the Sun, by Ken Mowatt of 'Ksan Village (Tsimshian); Don Yeoman's Raven (Haida); Raven, by Kwakiutl artist Tony Hunt.

16. Bill Reid's copy of sections of the famous 4-part Tlingit Raven screen of Hoonah, Alaska.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ficken, Millicent S. "Avian Play," Auk, 94 (1977), 573-582.


McKenna, Robert A. The Upper Tanana Indians. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959.


----------------- Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos. Report of the
Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1929.

----------------- Observations on the Intellectual Culture of the Caribou
Eskimos. Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, Vol. 7,
no. 2. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1930.

----------------- Iglulik and Caribou Eskimo Texts. Report of the Fifth Thule
Expedition 1921-24, Vol. 7, no. 3. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske
Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1930.

----------------- The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture.
Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1931.

----------------- Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos. Report of the
Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, Vol. 9. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske
Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1932.


Ray, Dorothy Jean. Eskimo Masks: Art and Ceremony. Seattle: University

Ricketts, Mac Linscott. "The North American Indian Trickster," History

94-96.

Ridington, Robin; and Ridington Tonja. "The Inner Eye of Shamanism and
Totemism," in Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock, eds.,
Teachings From the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philo-

Rooth, Anna-Birgitta. "On the Difficulty of Transcribing Synchronic Per-
ception into Diachronic Verbalization," in Lauri Honko, ed.,
Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology. The Hague:

Sidney, Angela; Smith, Kitty; and Dawson, Rachel. My Stories Are My
Health. Whitehorse, Yukon Territory: Council for Yukon Indians,
1977.

Simmons, William Scranton. Gahtantowlit's House: An Indian Burial Ground
on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay. Providence:

Snyder, L. L. Arctic Birds of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 1957.


VITA AUCTORIS

1973-74 President's Roll of Scholars, University of Windsor.
1974-75 President's Roll of Scholars, University of Windsor.
1975-76 President's Roll of Scholars, University of Windsor.
1976 Honours Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies and Philosophy, University of Windsor.
1976-77 Ontario Graduate Scholarship
1977-78 University of Windsor Graduate Scholarship
1980-81 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Religious Studies Department, University of Windsor.
1981 Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Northern Training Grant
1981-82 Assumption University Award in Religious Studies