Myth in Traditional Kankanay Society

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N O R M A   N.   L U A

This article seeks to uncover the meaning of the folk narratives collected by Morice Vanoverbergh, C.I.C.M., from the Kankanay of Bauko, Mountain Province, between 1910 and 1915.[1] The study endeavors to abstract the world view expressed in the narratives by discussing the theme and content of the folk narratives, their setting, characters, and social relationships. The article concludes with some reflections on the role of the myth in Kankanay society.

THE KANKANAY MYTH:
CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

Various schools of myth study have illumined the multifaceted nature of the traditional sacred story and, consequently, its many functions in a traditional society: to explain phenomena, to endow tradition with value, to reveal the dynamics of the psyche, or to reconcile contradictions.[2]. However, it may be that the most arresting feature of myth is its being pitched upon the territory of the unknown. As a story laid in the primeval world, it situates itself beyond the reach of history.[3] It treats what lies beyond the range of reason and the senses as a narrative charter of religion.[4] And when read as a symbolic statement about man, society, and the world, it explores the

1. A linguist-anthropologist, Fr. Vanoverbergh did literal translations into English of the Kankanay texts and had both texts and translations published in several journals which are available in the libraries of the University of the Philippines. The Ateneo de Manila Rizal Library has copies of the folktales and the first collection of narrative songs. See the note on "Bauko and its People" in *Philippine Studies* 37 (1989):81-92.

2. Percy S. Cohen, "Theories of Myth," *Man*, n.s. (September 1969):337.

3. Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), p. 9.

4. John Greenway, *Literature Among the Primitives* (Penn.: Folklore Associates, 1964), p. 100.

shadowy area of meaning where answers to the ultimate questions of origins, possibilities, and destiny are attempted.[5]

Nevertheless, myth, in its excursions into the unknown, takes off from well-chartered territory. As it has been aptly put, culture provides "the background context of the known against which the unknown can be described."[6] The realities of the sociocultural life become the raw materials out of which imaginative possibilities are constructed, and the existential problems are the grounds from which paradigms of reality are projected. Thus, myth may be said to possess a twofold nature: that of being a narrative charter of both the known and the unknown insofar as these are perceived by its tellers.

In the traditional Kankanay society, myth is a charter of the unknown. It speaks of a reality which antedates the traditional Kankanay culture and history. As part of Kankanay ritual, it addresses itself to beings shrouded in mystery. It also recalls the origin of the ritual to which it is integral and explains its primordial constitution.

Victor Turner observes that rituals are usually of two kinds: life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction.[7] Life-crisis rituals are associated with important stages in the physical and social growth of an individual such as birth, marriage, or death, while rituals of affliction deal with misfortune, illness, or any hazard to the existence of the individual or the group.

The situations which call for the recitation of myths in Kankanay society divide neatly into these categories of transition and affliction. Situations of transition are childbirth, marriage, and death. The building of a new house may also be included since a new house usually means a new family. Situations of affliction include illness, dry fields, pestilence, collapsed houses, etc. Both types of situations revolve around one basic concern—survival of the group and the individual. By involving itself in such situations, the Kankanay myth becomes an intimation of the historical conditions linked with such situations. Thus, it becomes a narrative charter of the known.

Narrative structure, character, setting—through these conventions the narrative mode structures and offers a world.[8] Used in myth, such

5. John Middleton, ed., *Myth and Cosmos: Readings in Mythology and Symbolism* (New York: The Natural History Press, 1967), p. x.

6. Elli Kongas Maranda, "Five Interpretations of a Melanesian Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 339 (January-March 1973):9.

7. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 6-7.

8. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 214.

conventions structure a vision of the primordial reality. A look into the narrative conventions of the Kankanay myth is therefore a necessary prelude to the apprehension of its total vision.

The Kankanay sacred stories vary·in length and structure—from a twenty-five-word tale with a germinal plot to a rambling story consisting of a succession of episodes. The majority, however, fall somewhere between these two extremes. Generally, the narrative structures of the Kankanay myths do not follow the conventional definition of plot, which usually implies a conflict between two more or less equal forces plus the subsequent action and interaction. Rather, the myths acquire a coherent structure when viewed in terms of a single line or direction such as a search or a pursuit. What this structure manifests is the presence of a problematic situation which may or may not give rise to a conflict. This situation develops into a resolution, which is then followed by an ending.

A typical myth begins with a situation where the problem is often explicit as in the more developed stories, but sometimes only implied as in those which contain germinal plots. This initial situation either implies a mere perception of an inevitable contradiction as a *given* of the situation or gives rise to a definable conflict. This problematic situation is revealed to be caused by nature, as in most myths; by other beings, as in a few; and, in at least two myths, by the individual's own self.

It is nature in its myriad forms which figures as the most prominent antagonist in the sacred stories. For example, a man's problem may be brought about by natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, rain, etc. Problems may also arise from the natural processes of birth, growth, and decay or death. Finally, nature as antagonist may also refer to the animal world—to the creatures which contribute to man's afflicted state.

In the myths, resolution of the problematic situation is accomplished in three ways. The most conspicuous method is the mediation of a higher being, who tells man what to do or shows him how to do it. The second way out of the dilemma is through the help of another human being. This second method seldom occurs, and when it does, reference is always made to rituals. This reference again brings the intervention of a higher reality, although this time in an indirect way. Hardly perceptible because it occurs only twice is resolution through one's own effort.

In most myths, the ending is a direct reversal of the initial situation. Sick persons are cured; dry fields are irrigated; despised individuals become leaders; tradition is affirmed; and poverty turns into self-

sufficiency. What is significant in these endings is that they usually do not stop with a mere description of success and happiness. Most myths end with the transmission of ritual knowledge not only to the rest of the community but also to neighboring groups.

Four myths, however, do not follow the happy-ending formula. One sounds like a trickster story with one character making it a habit to steal the fish caught by another. Two end in death, and one—the story of a marriage between a man and a bird that transforms itself into a woman—ends in separation.

Four character types recur in the Kankanay sacred stories: a pair of siblings, higher beings, marvelous animals, and natural phenomena or forces of nature.

The pair of siblings usually consists of two brothers, two sisters, or a brother and a sister. At times, the two brothers are accompanied by another sibling, usually a sister. These siblings are always afflicted with disease, despised, or faced with problems of livelihood.

Mysterious beings from an upper world saturate the sacred stories. Of these beings, Lumawig appears most frequently, usually as the originator of rituals.[9] Rarely featured is Kabunian whose significant appearances are in the origin stories.[10] The spirits of ancestors and the heavenly bodies (Venus, the sun, the moon) come next in prominence. All these higher beings are pictured as superior to man in knowledge and ability. They are endowed with mysterious powers but are responsive to man's needs and subject to man's placation. The stories present them in quotidian situations where they behave like human beings in their modes of speech and relationships.

Snakes, birds, and insects are the leading animal characters. These creatures are shown to possess suprahuman powers with which they either help or afflict man. Like the higher beings, these creatures are always presented as humanlike: a snake marries a woman; a cricket speaks, and suffering birds search for a remedy for their affliction. Forces of nature take on major roles in the Kankanay sacred stories as hazards to men. These are thunder, lightning, rain, and mist.

Four areas of activity are featured in the physical world in which the characters of the myths move. These areas are earth, bodies of water, the sky, and the forest. Earth is the arena of human activity.

9. Lumawig is a famous, although ambiguous, Kankanay deity who is believed to be once a human being. Discussion of Lumawig as a mythical character is on p. 162 of this paper.

10. Kabunian is generally known as the supreme Kankanay deity. His name, however, is an object of controversy. Further discussion of Kabunian is on p. 164 of this article.

Nevertheless, the human being shares it with the animals and the forces of nature which hover above him. Bodies of water are occupied by the spirits of ancestors and other dead men, while the sky is the higher being's domain. Somewhere between the earth and the sky lies the forest into which the two brothers often wander after having been cast out by their neighbors. In this forest they are led to an encounter with Lumawig and other mysterious beings.

The inhabitants of each area are not restricted to their respective domains but wander into the others. Lumawig comes down to earth; the two brothers ascend to the dwelling place of the mysterious beings, and in one myth Bangan goes into the spring and encounters her ancestors and other dead men.

HUMAN REALITY IN THE KANKANAY MYTH

In the primordial world of the sacred stories, human beings figure significantly as diverse characters: siblings, wives, husbands, children, neighbors, and even divine beings in human form.[11] Of these characters, the most conspicuous by frequency of appearance are the two brothers. A scrutiny of the initial situations in which these human characters are mired betrays four recurrent problems.

Forty-five myths present illness as the springboard for action. The human body is shown sundered by a myriad of ailments like sore eyes, respiratory and intestinal disorders, fever, and inflammations of different sorts. This physical disruption extends to the animal world which is under human care. Thus, pigs become scabby, and dogs and chickens contract pustules.[12] Another deterrent to physical wholeness in the myths is hunger, which shows up in situations marked by dried-up fields, poor harvests, or simple lack of food. As the myths proceed further on and these physical problems are dealt with by the human characters, it becomes apparent that this lack of wholeness involves more than just the physical self. It is symptomatic of a more encompassing kind of alienation.

Three modes of social discord take shape in the narratives: outright enmity between individuals, tension between the individual and the group, and rejection of the individual by the group.

11. For example, Lumawig, obviously a divine character appears as a well-defined, if afflicted man in many of the myths. The ambiguous status of Lumawig is discussed in a later portion of this article.

12. Morice Vanoverbergh, "Prayers in Lepanto-Igorot as It Is Spoken at Bauko," *UMJEAS* 4 (July 1953):95. Henceforth, all references to this section will be indicated by issue and page numbers.

Enmity between individuals is depicted in ten myths. One, for example, features a father whose hatred for his son's idiosyncracy (he bites into anything made of iron and thus ruins necessary implements) drives him to plot his own son's death. Another narrates a conflict between two characters whose respective pigs started the initial trouble.

Three myths give the sheerest intimation of disharmony between the individual and the group or group tradition. Mentioned earlier is the tale which starts with a question about the sacrificial killing of animals. A second story portrays a man who "offers a sacrifice, then grieves over what he suspended."[13] The third has two men disputing the group's desire to wait for the proper time in which to partake of the sacrificial animals.

Rejection by the group happens in nine myths, two of which identify poverty as the cause of rejection. The seven others correlate rejection with illness by presenting the two—rejection and illness—as comprising a single package. The following is a typical beginning of such myths:

> There are, they say, two brothers; there is, they say, a younger sister of theirs; they are all bleary-eyed, they say; then somebody offers a *sida* sacrifice and the brothers go out; then, they say, when they give them *tapey*, they spit in it and put forth their lips at them. (2, 18)

One myth, however, centers on the exact relationship between social discord and physical ailment. Human beings become sick, according to this myth, because "You were brothers a long time ago; then you became enemies."

Several myths centering on illness point to spirits as the cause of diseases. In one such myth, for instance, the ancestor's spirit confesses to having caused a man's disease, while in a second myth, another ancestor is revealed to be behind a girl's mental illness. There are three myths which cite neglect of rituals connected with ancestors as the cause of illness. One myth ascribes sore eyes and cough to one's failure to perform the necessary burial rites. A majority of the myths, however, are not explicit about who or what lies behind physical ailments. Nevertheless, all myths dealing with illness depict ritual performance as a cure. The typical procedure is for a higher being (a spirit, or a heavenly body), to perform and teach the ritual, which immediately restores the health of the afflicted person.

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13. It is ritual practice to suspend from the rafters of the house some portions of the sacrificial animal.

At this point, it is worth recalling that ritual is, in essence, communication with the mystical power believed to be inextricably connected with human affairs.[14] It is also a symbolic action, a formal behavior prescribed by the community and as such is socially integrative.[15] If ritual is all this, then its use to effect a cure discloses what is perceived to be the ultimate cause of illness in the human world: the disruption of harmony among three elements that make up man's total environment. These three elements (individual man, the human community, and the mysterious power that bathes the world around man) are brought together in ritual.

In several stories, elements in the physical environment devastate human lives, plans, and property. These are the elemental forces: wind, thunder, lightning, rain, and mist. Thunder and wind destroy villages (4,52-53); lightning burns houses (4,97), and mist causes men to lose their way (4,64-65). Rivalling these natural forces are the creatures of the animal world. In one myth, a snake comes back to life and inflicts death upon its human wife (4,40-41). Other myths feature disease-causing insects like the caterpillar which afflicts the eyes (4,79-80).

The myths, in fact, picture these potent aspects of nature as possessing much contrariness that they themselves engage one another in constant combat. For example, one myth has the thunder and wind embroiled in a contest of might. What this points to is a disjunction so pervasive that it does not spare human beings who have no choice but to eke out an existence within the confines of this hostile environment.

The outstanding physical concerns around which the myths revolve make existence in the flesh an apparent *given* in the mythic world. An incarnate existence in the myths means, first of all, existence in a body which is susceptible to disease. It is also a body which needs food and shelter for sustenance. This physical existence makes the human being vulnerable to the contingent which his visible and invisible environments unleash. His body becomes the target of displeased spirits; his house, animals, and farm become the arena for the powerful beings' arbitrary display of power.

In the myths, contradiction permeates human existence and characterizes all levels of relationship participated in by man. Contradiction is initially manifested in man's own self when his body becomes ill and alienates itself from man's plans. It moves into the community

14. Edward A. Fischer, "Ritual as Communication," *Worship* 2 (February 1971):73.
15. A. Amaladoss, "Symbol and Mystery," *Journal of Dharma* 4 (October 1977): 394-95.

in the form of enmity and rejection. It finally stalks through the cosmic world when beings of the higher realm and creatures and forces of the natural environment throw man's body, home, and farm into disarray. Crystallizing this existential contradiction is the image of the sick human being which is stamped all over Kankanay mythology. As portrayed in the myths, illness is not merely a physical ailment that begins and ends with the afflicted person. It is a phenomenon that has its origins in social and cosmic discord.

Lack of integration and the threat of the contingent make for an existence characterized by unmitigated poverty. Human life in the mythic world is made empty by a tremendous lack—lack of physical wholeness, food, social harmony, and rapport with the rest of the environment. By himself, the human being in the myths cannot sustain his own life. His own strength and knowledge are not adequate for all the problems which existence scatters upon his path.

This unintegrated, empty state of being is condensed in the ever-present image of the two brothers in Kankanay mythology. Occupying central roles in forty-three myths, these two brothers are depicted as poor, sick, and despised. Constantly hounded by misfortune, they become a cogent symbol of the afflicted human condition. In this light, the fact that they are two and are brothers may yet be revealing of the notion that man discovers his basic brotherhood and solidarity with other men when confronted with his immense poverty.

What looms ahead of this constricted life is, of course, the ultimate limitation—death. There exists one myth among the Kankanay which comes to terms with this ultimate limit to physical existence. This myth narrates how the banana was chosen to be the ancestor of human beings, a choice which had dire consequences as unequivocally stated in the following:

> . . . When the banana produces its fruit you shall get a child; when the banana bears fruit it dies, and the same will happen to you; if you had chosen the snake for your ancestor, you would have received the snake who casts its skin. (2,16)

This myth presents a man as a being-toward-death. Death or physical annihilation is here presented as a *given* of life—the end of earthly existence—and nothing can be done about it. It is the final note which echoes in the daily afflictions of life.

But in the Kankanay myths, the human characters often refuse to surrender to the existential *givens* of human life. This emphatic negation is communicated in two basic forms. In the face of limitations, the human characters' immediate response is always a creative activity

designed to deal with the particular problem that confronts them at a given moment. In most instances, work is the immediate response. To ward off hunger, the men in the myths fish, farm, and hunt with care, logic, and caution (4, 54-59). To guard against possible drought, they locate their farms where water is abundant. They build strong houses (4,61-62), and construct pens for their animals (4,58-59). In some instances of social alienation, the human characters themselves try to repair the rupture in the relationship. The brothers who are despised try to court their neighbors' affection with good deeds: "If there is, they say, an old man with a load, they meet him; if they catch a prey, they give it to the children" (3,105).

Thus, Kankanay mythology is never wanting in human initiative or creativity aimed at obtaining a more viable situation. In fact, one myth has human creativity bordering on the questionable. This myth features a very poor woman who procures palay seedlings by building a pit intended to trap the men who are returning home from a harvest. As they fall into the pit, some grains of palay also fall which the woman then gathers and plants. She is rewarded with a good harvest.

This sense of responsibility for ones's situation shine through even when the failure of human remedies drives one to a negative stance. In some stories about two brothers, this negative stance has two expressions. One is withdrawal from society. Wracked by disease and derided by their neighbors, the two brothers set out for the outskirts of the town and deliberately lose their way in the forest. Another is contemplation of suicide. Thus, when the sun's wife tells the brothers that "the sun will come out and search for you and you will die," they reply, "That is what we look for." In another myth, the brothers are equally emphatic about their wish to die: "Let us look for somebody to kill us" (4,70).

On the surface, these two actions seem life-negating, but since they are both expressive of one's refusal to be a passive victim of situations that are in themselves life-negating, these actions, in essence, constitute an affirmation of life in its profounder and more expanded sense. It is in this light that suicide may indeed be affirmed as an "attempt to give a final human meaning to a life which has become meaningless."[16] In the myths, self-banishment, whether in the limited form of exile from the community or in the radical fashion of separation from one's total reality, is truly an expression of such a final

16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 157.

attempt, an indication of the will to be actively engaged in charting out the course of one's life, even if it leads to death.

Despite human creativity and initiative, the mythic world generally denies the human individual success. The futility of his efforts compels the human being in the myths to venture out of the self into other segments of his world for help. In several stories, a breakthrough comes about with the help of other human beings. In one myth, for instance, a sister wins the battle for her brothers, while in others, neighbors come to the aid of the afflicted.

The pivotal role of ritual in the resolution of problematic situations in the myths emphasizes the indispensability of the mysterious realm in man's search for a better life. Equipped with knowledge and power superior to man's, the beings of the suprahuman reality hold the key to the problems of life and become the human characters' last recourse. Most significant among these are the beings in the upper world and in the forest who teach the human beings the different rituals needed to alleviate their sufferings. The sun and the morning star add to this group of ritual teachers, and the spirits of ancestors and other dead men complete the ensemble.

The twofold response of the human characters to their problematic situations establishes certain characteristics of the mythic human being. The myths confirm affliction as part of being human. Affliction is inherent in the contradiction between man and the different segments of his environment. Man aspires for good health, but his environment offers him disease. He works hard to be secure, but his surroundings unleash contingencies. To the threat of the unknown and the unexpected, he replies with his limited powers and knowledge. The reality of death only serves as an acute reminder of his hollowness that constantly begs to be filled.

Despite this stark limitedness, the myths allow that man can be free. It has been said that "freedom is the basic experience of responsible self-being."[17] In the myths, responsible self-being manifests itself with the characters' choice of action in the face of the problems of living. It is through choosing to act, to do something about one's given situation that the human being in the myths discovers the extent of his powers and comes to a greater self-knowledge. This greater awareness of his situation leaves him open to the only possible solution. In this instance, man's freedom consists in making a "leap of

17. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 65.

faith," a surrender to the unknown, for at the other side of this unknown is certain perdition.

The crucial role of the *other* in the myths is indicative of a view of man as a being-with-others. Relation, according to the myths, is inherent in human nature, for man cannot *be* in isolation. His efforts are futile without the cooperation of other beings in his world. Thus he must maintain or forge a connection with these segments of his world, especially with the suprahuman reality with which continual communication through ritual is indispensable.

Relation and communication with the higher reality as conditions for material well-being is strongly hinted at in the Kankanay origin story, which presents human beings as originally brother and sister who come from the Kankanay godhead. Human life, the myth suggests, originates from the higher reality, and in this primordial origin lies the interconnectedness among all human beings and between the human and the divine. As the sacred stories intimate, all beings are as a family, all involved in the collective enterprise called life. A rupture in this unity results in illness—the one image which captures the pervasive contradiction characterizing an existence that is forgetful of relations.

The pervasive happy ending in the myths that is radically opposed to the conflict-ridden initial situation signals a belief in the possibility of fulfilment. In effect, the myths affirm that human aspirations for the good life can be actualized. However, the myths argue that actualization can only occur when man recognizes his limited condition and thus comes to the fact that he must relate to that which is the ultimate source of fulfilment. The myths draw a clear picture of what this state of fulfilment is like. It is a reversal of the initial situation. Whereas in the beginning of a typical story, the two brothers are beset by misfortunes, in the end "they offer up libations, and they become strong, and they were the men that were numerous and self-sufficient." The fulfilled state means good health, numerous descendants, self-sufficiency, and social and cosmic harmony. The harmony that pervades this ideal state is signalled by the fulfilled man's being a ritualist. It will be noticed that this ending structures the whole of human experience within the framework of illness and health—with illness as man's lot and health as the godhead's gift. The cure effected by ritual brings with it the total package of fulfilment. If illness is the symbol of man's afflicted state, then health, inversely, is the one index of full integration. A healthy person, the myths imply, is one who is in harmony with his own self or body, with his fellowmen, and with the different mysterious powers that inhabit his environment.

THE GODHEAD IN THE KANKANAY MYTHS

As the human characters reach out to the suprahuman realm in
their pursuit of material well-being, the Kankanay mythic world comes
alive with different characters whose names also appear in the non-
narrative prayers. That these names are invoked in prayers and
sacrificial ceremonies signifies that, to the Kankanay, they are impor-
tant figures in the mysterious reality with which man communicates
in ritual. To the Kankanay who subscribes to the myths, these names
are indications of that "Something or Somebody beyond, a mysterious
power which cannot be seen and is not fully understood but which
is at work in the world."[18] However, since, any divine name or symbol,
including the word *God*, is a construct designed to express a concep-
tion of the godhead as it is experienced or encountered in a situation,
the different experiential grounds of encounter—the situations,
moments, places—that are mapped out in the mythic world also become
intimations of this conception.[19]

In the myths, the human characters break into the suprahuman
realm at certain crucial moments, which are of two kinds: moments
of lack and moments of fulness. In most myths, the encounter occurs
when human life is at its most diminished state. Of these diminished
situations the most frequently delineated is that of illness. It is usually
when the human characters seek a cure that they come upon myste-
rious beings. Another situation ripe for encounter is social alienation.
Unwanted by everyone, the two brothers bring themselves to where
human derision cannot reach them and in so doing usher themselves
into a meeting with powerful beings. Situations of extreme poverty
such as hunger or drought are also grounds of encounter with the
suprahuman reality.

Given the Kankanay primitive environment, communal existence,
and limited technology, to be wanting in health, food, and friends is
to be stripped bare. These experiences of extreme want transposed
into the myths are thus the Kankanay's "boundary situations" from
whose precarious edges the human being realizes his dependence on
the higher reality for completeness.[20]

18. Malcolm McVeigh, *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion
and Christianity* (Mass.: Claude Stark, 1974), p. 9.

19. On God as a construct, see Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: McMillan
Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 213-17.

20. See Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith*, p. 209, on notion of "boundary situations."

The myths indicate that the suprahuman reality is also experienced during moments when human life seems at its peak or when contradictions are resolved and life is in a state of equilibrium. Such moments in the myths include a good harvest, the birth of a child, the successful construction of a house, etc. The sense of fulness is further enhanced by the fact that, in the myths it is Lumawig, the epitome of the integrated being, who experiences these moments and who performs the rituals. That the human being in the myths is brought to a communication with the suprahuman at his peak moments underlines a tacit recognition of man's basic poverty, a realization that such blessed moments are not due to man's innate capabilities. The palpable contradictions and the inevitable contingencies that mark human existence only serve to sharpen this realization so that, even in his best moments, the mythic human being senses the fragility of his life. His communication with the suprahuman realm during such moments is, therefore, both a thanksgiving for the gift of fulness and a humble supplication for continued sustenance, without which fulness vanishes like a bubble.

These two grounds of encounter signify that in the world of the myths, the human being senses the suprahuman in both extremes of human experience. It is at these peaks and precipices of life that he catches a glimpse of that which buoys up his existence. From these edges of experience, the mysterious reality is revealed to be "more" than man, "other" than him, and it is because of this "more-ness" and "otherness" that it can redeem man from his limited state.

Mircea Eliade has noted that space has never been homogenous for him who is aware of the mysterious, that he experiences interruptions or breaks in it, and as a result, some parts of space become qualitatively different from others.[21] In the Kankanay myths, such parts are those where epiphany occurs. They may be grouped into three: places of elevation, marginal areas, and bodies of water.

Elevation is a common image in Kankanay mythology. Kabunian lives in Mt. Pulis (2,20); Lumawig descends from an abode in the sky (4,80); and the sun and the morning star, of course, reside in the sky. Because of the Kankanay region's topography, elevated places are a common sight among the Kankanay, and descent and ascent are a daily experience. High places are special for several reasons. First, high places are usually above human habitation, and although they are not invulnerable to human intrusion, they ordinarily prove taxing

21. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 120.

to human effort. Second, because of difficult access, the higher areas
in the mountainous region are usually unoccupied, unfarmed, and as
such are laden with unknown dangers. Third, high places give the
impression of omnipresence in that they are visible from the lower
areas from almost every angle. This is especially true of Mt. Pulis in
Bauko. The highest peak visible from the town, Mt. Pulis seems to
stand watch over Bauko in ubiquitous majesty.

From all this, it becomes apparent that elevation, for the Kankanay
is an image for transcendence.[22] It hints at a reality that is near and
yet apart from and superior to the human sphere. By employing this
image, the myths allude to a conception of the suprahuman reality as
a *beyond*.

This apartness of the higher reality is further emphasized by the
difficult passage motif found in the myths. There is tension where the
earth and the sky meet or touch, and ascent is accomplished at great
risk. In one myth, objects caught in this tension are crushed purport-
edly by the sky:

> . . . They take, they say, a stone, and put it inside, and he [the sky] smashed
> it to pieces, and they put, they say, a tree across and put it inside, and he
> crushed it. . . . (3,102)

This apartness is also reflected in what the dwellers of the higher
regions repeatedly say to those who are able to get through: "Why!
No man ever gets through, and you got through" (2,18). Descent is
just as difficult, and this is intimated by the use of a narrow bridge,
a bamboo, to effect a successful descent.

In many myths, epiphany occurs in areas beyond the edge of town,
in its outskirts or far in the forest. For example, in one myth, a disguised
being who later reveals herself as Kabunian's daughter appears at the
outskirts of the town. In several myths, Lumawig is chanced upon in
the forest. As social rejects, the brothers wander far beyond the edge
of the town into the forest where they meet mysterious beings. The
point where earth and sky meet is located at the edge of the forest.

Two things are immediately noticeable about these marginal
areas. First, they are outside the structures, physical or otherwise, of
human society. Second, such areas in the Kankanay reality are char-
acterized by the presence of danger not only in the form of lurking
enemies but also of raw, profuse power as manifested by the wild or

22. Elevation is evidently a universal image for transcendence as attested to by
Mircea Eliade in *Images and Symbols*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward,
1969), p. 166.

the untamed. Used repeatedly in the myths, such areas suggest two notions about the suprahuman reality. One is transcendence. The godly reality is depicted to be beyond human structuring through which experience becomes intelligible to man. And because this is so, it manifests itself best where the human penchant for order or structure is least exercised or felt. The other notion is power. Mary Douglas points out that in primitive cultures, power is assigned to the margins for the simple reasons that they are in contact with the unknown, the undefined, the so-far unmanipulated, and are therefore expressive of immense possibilities.[23] This understanding of the margins gives added dimension to the marginal state so often associated with the godly in the myths. The sick, poor, and despised brothers are privileged to meet with the higher beings, while the daughter of Kabunian manifests herself on earth in the guise of a destitute girl.

Bodies of water are also a favorite haunt among transcendent beings in the myths. The spring of Tudey is a dwelling place for spirits, and the river at various times houses the morning star (3,94), a snake who teaches ritual (4,59-60), and even Lumawig (4,87). In most mythologies, water is the symbol for "the *fons et origo*, the reservoir of all potentialities of existence" which precedes every form and sustains every "creation."[24] However, one need not go further than Kankanay reality to recognize the life-giving, life-sustaining, and unitive properties of bodies of water. They do not only serve as the chief means of irrigation but also are a major source of food. The central role of such bodies of water becomes obvious in Bauko where life revolves around the spring of Tudey. The spring has always been the town's main source of water for all purposes, and this fact makes it an object of daily pilgrimage for the townspeople. It is also connected with stories about the origin of Bauko and is considered the dwelling place of Paduka, the townspeople's ancestor.[25] From all this, it becomes evident that, by employing the water-image in connection with transcendent beings, the myths affirm the idea of the godly reality as the source of all life.

Aside from the moments and places of epiphany, conceptions of the godhead may also be gleaned from the modalities of being exhibited by the characters who are indicated to be partakers of the transcendent realm. The most prominent of such characters are: certain aspects of nature, the spirits, Lumawig, and Kabunian.

23. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 94-99, 161.

24. Eliade, *Images*, p. 151.

25. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Religion," pp. 87-88.

An obvious partaker of transcendent power in the myths is nature, whose different facets are shown to be charged with a superior force. The elemental forces are an example. As previously mentioned, wind, thunder, lightning, rain, and mist display capabilities which humble man and which often prove destructive to his plans. The sun and the morning star are also disclosed to be holders of superior knowledge which they share with men through ritual (3,97-100). The animal world constitutes another aspect of nature steeped in mystery. The bird in one myth is Lumawig in disguise (3,105-7). In other myths snakes rise from the dead, afflict men, and also teach ritual. The insects are active with suprahuman powers, too. They take away illness (4,91), and direct men toward a cure (4,81).

It is easy to understand how people of all climes, particularly those who subsist on agriculture, came to regard with awe the life-giving power of the sun and rain. In primitive societies, rain is indispensable as the chief, if not the only, means of irrigation. The sun is the main source of energy besides being rain's partner in bringing about vegetal growth. The heat that emanates from the sun is especially precious to those who live in primitive areas with low temperatures due to a temperate location or high altitude such as those inhabited by the Kankanay.

Both the elemental forces and the heavenly bodies seem impervious to time. The sun and the morning star are constants in the sky. Rain, lightning, wind, thunder, and mist are recurrent phenomena. In contrast to all of these, man dies. This seeming insusceptibility to time of some aspects of nature finds an expression in the image of the snake which recurs in Kankanay mythology. Because it throws off its skin periodically, the snake intimates immortality,[26] a notion made explicit in an origin myth.

Against the Kankanay's bound existence, nature's way of being seems characterized by freedom indeed. Not only are the natural forces beyond human control and manipulation. They also exhibit independent wills. The wind "blows where it wills" like its biblical counterpart, and lightning may strike anywhere and at any time. The potent creatures of the animal world also seem to taunt man's bound nature. Birds can fly, snakes are untamed, wily creatures left to roam and to strike humans at will, insects do not take heed of human plans and

26. It has been noted that in widely separated countries snakes are believed to be immortal because they are rejuvenated every time they throw off their skin. See Alexander Krappe, *The Science of Folklore* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), p. 61.

continue to pester lives and crops (besides propagating themselves in leaps and bounds against all odds).

The myths identify several types of dwellers in the spirit world: ancestors, slain men , anonymous spirits, and spirits with specific names. The nature and origin of the last two types are not adequately delineated in the myths, although they are believed to occupy every conceivable corner of Bauko.[27] What the myths are unequivocal about is these various spirits' possession of superior knowledge and power. They cause illness, transform themselves into objects (2,21), and teach ritual. Evidently, the spirits are of the transcendent world.[28]

That spirits of dead human beings partake of transcendence is indicative of certain notions about death. As attested to by the active spirits of dead men in the myths, death is not the end of existence for the human personality. Rather, death is a transition from one state of being to another, to one which, from all indications, transcends the limitations inherent in existence in the flesh. The spirits' ability to inflict disease at will is an index of independent power, and their knowledge of ritual means that they are privy to the mysteries surrounding human life.

This changed state notwithstanding, the myths suggest that death does not mean a severance of relationship with the human world. There is constant communication between men and the spirits. Human beings need illumination from the spirits, who now possess superior knowledge, while the spirits continue to exert influence upon the lives of their descendants.

At first glance, it seems that the spirits' penchant for causing illness is a product of malevolence. A second look, however, warrants the opposite conclusion, for illness, as discussed earlier, is never an end in itself. Rather, it points to a failure on the part of human beings to integrate themselves with the other segments of their reality. The ancestors' insistence on ritual as a cure underscores the need to relate to the transcendent realm of which the dead are now a part, but the fact that the ancestors initiate the whole process of communication brings attention to a specific segment of this transcendent reality with which human beings must be integrated for a better life. This segment is the past. In the myths, the ancestors demand remembrance of themselves who existed in the past. Thus, it may be said that through

27. Vanoverbergh, "Kankanay Religion," p. 79.

28. Souls of dead men are supposed to go to the mountains. See C.R. Moss, "Kankanay Ceremonies," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 4 (October 1920):348.

them the past is recalled—past experiences, past lives, past ways, which together make up the Kankanay heritage. In effect, the illness which the ancestors inflict on their descendants is a reminder, a harsh one to be sure, that they are not living as they ought to and that they cannot live apart from their past and still expect to attain their aspirations for material well-being.

The myths also feature powerful characters who undoubtedly are emissaries of the transcendent realm. These are Lumawig, Bangan, Pati, Tomtom-en, Dada, and Kabigat. These characters are shown at various times to inhabit high places, dense forests, or areas which are simply intimated to be ordinarily inaccessible to human beings. They figure as teachers or original performers of Kankanay ritual.

Of these beings, the most prominent is Lumawig, who puts in the most number of appearances in the whole body of myths.[29] He figures as a significant, if not the central, character in forty myths. However, he presents a problem because different myths show him in two radically opposed roles: as the original performer or teacher of rituals and as a human being who himself needs to invoke outside help for his afflictions and sustenance. In his first role, he displays qualities which make him undeniably a transcendent being. First, he exhibits confident knowledge about rituals and their effect on human beings and thus intimates being privy to the ultimate secrets of life and death. In one myth he proclaims with authority: "I shall teach you the *legleg*-sacrifice; you should take a very large chicken, and offer it, and water will run like before." (4,56). Second, he is always a successful mediator in that he performs effective rituals for afflicted human beings. And third, he is shown to reside in areas which are intimations of transcendence. Indeed, Lumawig cuts such an impressive figure in the myths that he is cited as one of the two contenders for the Kankanay equivalent of Supreme Being.[30]

As a human being, Lumawig is involved in two kinds of situations—situations of affliction and situations of abundance. As an afflicted man, he either performs the necessary ritual or invokes the spirits for a sick child (4,89), ailing animals (4,95), or a collapsed house (4,61). As a man of plenty, he makes offerings for a newly-born child or for

29. With the exception of Bangan who appears in a few tales, the rest of these characters figure in only one or two tales and only in cameo roles. Discussion on Bangan is omitted because in the stories where she is featured, she does not become a definite character. This leads one to suspect that, as in the folktales, the name Bangan is a convenient name for any female character in the traditional Kankanay narrative.

30. Scott, *On The Cordillera* (Manila: MCS Enterprises, 1966), p. 124.

productive animals. In this second situation, he is not the one who helps the situation attain fulness; rather he himself is man fulfilled. All this redounds to Lumawig's ambiguous status in Kankanay mythology and, consequently, religion. Some studies have attempted to shed light on this ambiguity by calling attention to the fact that Lumawig is generally perceived by the mountaineers as a man who was later deified.[31] If this is indeed so, then the three types of situations in which he figures in the myths (afflicted man, fulfilled man, transcendent being) may be taken to correspond to the stages of his ascent to superior status. In this light, Lumawig in the myths is man-who-became-god.

However, there is also textual evidence which points to the reverse—that Lumawig is god-who-became-man. There are three myths which tell the story of a transcendent being who comes down to earth to marry an earthling. Two identify the transcendent being as Lumawig, while the third leaves the character unnamed. What is significant in the stories is that the transcendent being becomes subject to the usual human travails after he marries a mortal being. Thus, his children get sick, and he has to invoke the help of higher beings—his mother and father—who teach him the appropriate ritual.

Whether or not Lumawig was indeed a man who became god, the unassailable datum is that the myths paint a well-defined human existence for him. To the Kankanay, this means that Lumawig, indeed, was "one of us." As a transcendent being who was once a man, Lumawig becomes a significant mythical character on four counts. First, he infuses human nature with the godly, either through incarnation or presence as a latent power. Second, through this infusion, he rescues the human condition from being fixed in a constricted mode of being. Through Lumawig, the notion that man can be fulfilled or, better still, can cross over to transcendence and intimacy with the godly reality rings clear. Third, he becomes a prototype for man—the Kankanay's new Adam, in effect. As a man he is not spared the exigencies of existence, yet he overcomes. As such, he becomes a figure to emulate. Whether afflicted or fulfilled, he is shown to be in constant communion with the suprahuman reality. And as a being who is fully integrated with the suprahuman, he is a man-for-others, an effective mediator and ritual teacher who readily comes to suffering man's succor. Finally, Lumawig brings a personal dimension to the Kankanay conception of the godhead. With him the incomprehensible, impersonal, and nameless mysterious reality nebulously scattered in

31. Ibid., p. 35.

nature assumes a human visage and thus becomes knowable and
accessible in a personal way.

Although Kabunian appears as a character in only three myths, the
name is mentioned with significance in six others. A perusal of these
stories immediately unfolds the unique position that Kabunian occu-
pies in Kankanay mythology and religion. For one, the word *Ka-
bunian* is not a personal name as *Lumawig* is. As evident in the texts,
the word is not preceded by the personal article *si* but by the definite
article *san* or *di*, so that its literal translation is *the* Kabunian.[32] For
another, Kabunian is presented in unique roles given to no other
suprahuman character in the entire body of myths: author of the deluge
and creator of the first man and woman. For a third, Kabunian is the
only di-vine character who is involved in a story shadowed by an
ethical question. In this story, Kabunian gives tacit approval of an
obvious wrongdoing.

Another index of the character's uniqueness is the fact that in five
myths, the name is applied by the human characters to any being who
displays remarkable power (e.g., power over life and death) and unique
qualities. Thus, when Bugan in one story binds harvested palay with
her saliva, people exclaim: "Why! is this one Kabunian!" In another
story, the two brothers say of Lumawig: "Is that Kabunian then, he
it is who cured us; if he had not been here we would have died" (4,42).
And in a third story, the being who comes down from the sky and
who miraculously fills the basket of two sisters elicited manifest
surprise: "Why! is he Kabunian then. . . ." (3,8). Finally, Kabunian
is the only one who is identified with Mt. Pulis, which is Bauko's
highest peak.

From all this, three observations may be made. First, Kabunian is
conceived to be the ultimate in power, the one who exercises power
over life and death and, (if one myth would be enough indication)
over questions of right and wrong.[33] Second, although Kabunian is
featured as a single character in three myths, the name is not iden-
tified with one definite form of manifestation. In short, Kabunian is
not a definite personality as Lumawig is. Rather, the name is applied
to disparate personalities like Bugan (a woman), Lumawig (a man),
and even the sky as in the folktales.[34] Third, Kabunian is identified

32. An observation made by Fr. Vánoverbergh in "Kankanay Religion," p. 79.

33. Fr. Vanoverbergh observes in "Kankanay Religion," p. 94, that the term *idungdung*
is mostly applied to Kabunian. The term means to decide according to right and wrong.

34. See Vanoverbergh's "Tales in Lepanto-Igorot as It Is Spoken at Bauko," *UMJEAS*
1 (1951):36-37.

through actions characterized by distinctive potency and unique ways of being. Thus, in the myths, any manifestation of extraordinary power or quality by whosoever is a manifestation of Kabunian.

At this point, it may help to recall that mystics usually "distinguish between God and godhead, between *deus* and deitas," with *God* as a cipher for a conception of the indeterminate though encompassing *godhead*.[35] The names, symbols, and conceptions vary according to each culture's historical situation, but the godhead remains formless, without image or likeness.[36] All these ideas help crystallize what *Kabunian* means. It is evident that the word embodies a conception of the godhead as an encompassing reality that is inexpressible in one single identity, form, or symbol, a reality which is not fully understood but which, nevertheless, manifests itself through anything or anyone with power and transcendent qualities. The use of the term *Kabunian* discloses that, like the mystics, the creators of the Kankanay myths make a distinction between *deus* and *deitas*, between the indefinable godhead and its myriad revelations in the human experience. Lumawig, the sky, the spirits, etc., are all *of* Kabunian. They speak of Kabunian, but they do not totally encompass or exhaust its meaning, for Kabunian remains more than any one or all of them combined.[37]

The discussions on the experiential grounds of encounter and the different forms in which the godhead is encountered reveal four notions implicit in the myths about the godhead and its relationship with the human reality.

The myths indicate a sensing of the godly reality within the bounds of the human world. Initially, this reality is intimated in situations where man discovers his limited nature. It is as Emily Dickinson saw it: want is a "quiet Commissary / for Infinity."[38] And this "Infinity" acquires translucence as man experiences full moments in a life that is marked by poverty. Nevertheless, it is not only within human subjective experience that this godly reality comes alive, for the objective world also houses this mystery. Nature is quickened by suprahuman

35. Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith*, p. 144.

36. Ibid., p. 143.

37. It seems, therefore, that Dr. William Henry Scott's controversial conclusion that Kabunian refers to "a class or place of deities" holds more weight than the opposite contention that Kabunian is a single entity, the highest being in the Kankanay roster of deities. See Scott, *On the Cordillera*, p. 142.

38. Poem 1036 in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, T.H. Johnson, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

power, and dimensions of space are disclosive of transcendence. Even trivial, mundane objects and creatures are hosts of this indwelling power.

Notwithstanding this presence of the godly in the human world, the myths are emphatic about the godhead's transcendence. The reality that is sensed within the bounds of experience and incarnated in nature is revealed to be beyond the limits of man's world. It is wholly different from man. It exhibits power, imperviousness to time and space, and independence, in contrast to man's poverty, boundedness, and dependence. Manifested in potentially destructive forces, the godly reality shows a freedom of being which does not admit to being a mere tool of man. Through the images of margins and heights, it is intimated to be outside man's categories and structures.

In the context of this transcendence, the perplexing figure of Kabunian may be better understood. As shown in the myths, Kabunian escapes easy categorization, even categories of right and wrong as hinted at in a problematic myth discussed earlier. What is wrong for man may not be wrong in the context of a totality which, by its very nature, must necessarily escape limited human perception.[39]

The myths suggest that it is the godhead's being *in* and yet *beyond* the world which makes it the natural anchor of an existence which, though limited, aspires for fulfilment. The transcendent reality is the source of life—life that the myths picture as undeniably physical.

The godhead as life-giver and life-sustainer is an idea that pervades Kankanay mythology. It surfaces as man copes with the various intimations of death and as he celebrates occasional moments of fulness. It shows in the images culled from life-giving nature: sun, water, rain. And it is explicitly affirmed in a creation story. This conception of the godly reality's direct and intimate involvement with human life may help explain the noticeable eclipse of Kabunian by Lumawig in Kankanay religion.[40] The fact is that, in the non-narrative prayers, Kabunian is invoked only once, while all sorts of objects, creatures,

39. The woman in this myth appears to have "stolen" from the harvesters despite the fact that the trick she uses insures that she gets only a negligible part of the harvest. It seems to this researcher, however, that the story hints at some concept of social and cosmic justice—a concept surreptitiously appearing in the myths but prevalent in the tales. It may be that what is wrong with the entire situation is the presence of poverty itself, in the tradition of the Deuteronomic prescription of "There shall be no poor among you." (Deut. 15:4).

40. An observation made by Fr. Vanoverbergh in "Kankanay Religion," p. 85. His explanation is that Lumawig's being a culture hero makes him nearer or more accessible to human beings.

heavenly bodies, and natural phenomena are addressed. Kabunian as the all-encompassing, inapprehensible formless godhead is necessarily inaccessible. It is this godhead's manifestations—the ones that are directly related to human life like Lumawig who is believed to have been once a man, and the natural forces that affect man's very survival in the most concrete way—which assume more prominent roles in the Kankanay's bid for a better life. The "eclipse" of Kabunian by his more immediately perceived incarnations is therefore an indication of a conception of a godhead which is unavoidably linked with the concrete and more basic preoccupations of a difficult life.[41]

In the Kankanay myths, breakthroughs are a frequent occurrence. Man ascends to the upper world (although with difficulty), and the divine beings descend to earth. The result of all this traffic is the enhancement and transformation of the human reality. Though transcendent, the godly reality is not impassive nor beyond reach. It communicates itself to man as a power immanent in the world and discernible in human experience.

Despite this openness, the godly reality's freedom and arbitrariness in the exercise of power necessitate an avenue of communication by which man and god may come together for man's benefit. As the myths present it, the godhead itself has given this avenue to man. Suprahuman beings are the original performers and teachers of ritual. In Kankanay ritual, the interpenetration of the godly and the human realms is captured in the images of the offerings and in the ritual eating of the same offerings. Creatures of the natural world tended by human hands are offered to the mysterious powers. Thus offered, they break into the transcendent plane and become partakers of the godly. Having become part of the godly, these offerings are then consumed by men, and by virtue of this communion men become sharers in the godly life. Nowhere else is this idea made more transparent than in Lumawig—man, hero, god.

What cannot be denied is that, in the mythic world, these conceptions of the godhead are invariably tied up with the human being's basic poverty, which renders him incapable of dealing successfully with his material concerns. What is laid bare is a structure of com-

41. It seems that this transfer of emphasis from the omnipotent, transcendent godhead to more dynamic figures is not a monopoly of the Kankanay religion. Mircea Eliade states in *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 127, that the phenomenon is the result of the all-embracing importance placed by a culture, at a certain phase of its economic evolution, on the concrete and economic aspects of life.

plementary opposition between man and godhead, a structure which inevitably makes for dependence on the part of helpless man. Inclusive though it is, the godhead that is delineated in the myths is undoubtedly a filler-of-the-gaps.

MYTH AND REALITY IN TRADITIONAL
KANKANAY SOCIETY

The relationship between myth and reality is problematic, for myths have been observed to "tally with and yet do not tally with" the culture in which they have grown.[42] As the Kankanay mythic world is placed vis-a-vis the sociocultural reality which engendered it, the specific nature and effects of the relations between the two are illuminated.

Ethnographic studies reveal the basic ingredients that make up the historical situation of the traditional Kankanay. Briefly, these are: a mountainous territory on which the people depend for sustenance, hard physical labor and its attendant travails, the ever-present threat of enemies and contingencies unleashed by the environment, a community composed of a few wealthy families and a poor majority, and the rule of tradition and ritual.

Four cultural constructs loom large in the traditional Kankanay's sociocultural reality: family, community, tradition, and ritual. As discussed earlier, these constructs are rooted in the Kankanay's historical situation and imply certain perceptions and meanings given rise by this situation. The importance of family and village is indicative of a perception of man's helplessness before the hostilities of life and the indispensability of the human *other*. Notwithstanding this importance attached to other human beings, the ubiquitous presence of ritual in Kankanay life calls attention to a belief in a higher reality envisioned to be the ultimate recourse of human beings. It is expressive of the idea that without the aid of the mysterious beings, all human effort, individual and communal, is futile. The prominence of the old carriers of tradition underlines the mystery of this suprahuman reality, whose blessings may only be appropriated through the correct method handed down to the present generation by the mysterious beings themselves.

What all this points to is a close correspondence between myth and reality in the Kankanay experience. The myths reproduce the same structure of relationships among human beings, social group,

42. Ruth Benedict, quoted by Richard Dorson in "Current Folklore Theories," *Current Anthropology* 4 (February 1963):102.

suprahuman reality, and tradition, that underlies the sociocultural reality of the traditional Kankanay society.

The preceding discussion unveils the grounding of Kankanay myth in the world view that prevails in the traditional Kankanay society. Thus grounded, it is conditioned and shaped by the dominant concerns of the society. An examination of the conventions surrounding and constituting Kankanay myth clarifies the precise and total manner of this conditioning.

First, Kankanay myth betrays its conditioning through its content. It is worth recalling that the sacred stories are recited only in certain contexts or occasions which constitute the problematic or critical stages in human existence like death, illness, anticipation of calamities, etc. These are moments when the human being is acutely aware of his limitations against the contingent and the unknown. It is to these moments that Kankanay myth is called upon to respond, and it does. First, it explains the problematic by tracing its origins to primordial times. Death is traced to a primordial choice; illness is caused by the disruption of primordial unity, and in cases where the material demands of ritual prove taxing to the Kankanay's scanty possessions, myth explains the beginnings of these specifications and in so doing justifies them. Thus, Kankanay myth presents the problematic in life as *given*, and through this presentation paves the way toward their acceptance.

However, Kankanay myth does not merely explain the problematic *given*. It also offers a solution which, because it is depicted as ordained by the suprahuman beings, is in itself *given*. This *given* is ritual, whose efficacy depends upon its adherence to the original, a fidelity that tradition ensures.

The structure of the myth is also disclosive of its conditioning by traditional conceptions. The problematic *given* and its solution are enfleshed through the conflict-resolution pattern of the narratives. They also determine the two major sets of characters: helpless human beings and powerful deities. The prevalent narrative structure runs thus: helpless man's problems are solved by the powerful suprahuman being with the aid of ritual. This structure seldom varies. Even in the myth where Dungen resolves her own dilemma, Kabunian appears and instructs her to offer a sacrifice in order to be assured of continued prosperity.

Aside from the critical situations from which Kankanay myth emerges, the total atmosphere surrounding myth recitation is one major way through which the conditioning of Kankanay myth occurs. The atmosphere helps shape the distinctive nature of the myth as a story

which carries truth and therefore something which is not to be trifled with. It will be recalled that the Kankanay myths are prayers which are integral to ritual, and being such, are recited in a morally coercive atmosphere. Thus enveloped, their contents are sanctioned and anointed, as it were, by the holy. The fact that they are recited only by men and women who can trace their ritual knowledge back to primordial times intensifies their sacred quality.

The examination of the content and context of Kankanay myth unfolds a relationship of mutual reinforcement between myth and the traditional society in the Kankanay experience. Kankanay myth proclaims a set of conceptions from which the current social system evidently receives its explanation, justification, and strengthening. At the same time, myth recitation is so structured that the truth-value and coercive power of the sacred stories are reinforced.

By echoing within a religious atmosphere the conceptions under-lying the traditional structure of Kankanay society, Kankanay myth tacitly justifies the existing social structure. Unwittingly enough, it also glosses over whatever breaks and ruptures the existing order has seen fit to disregard because of the primacy given to group solidarity in the face of a difficult existence. Any ordering, it has been observed, implies a repression and consequently a sacrifice deemed necessary from some members of the group because of the group's historical conditions.[43] However, it may be that the current order begins to show signs of obsolescence and thus awakens the critical spirit of those who no longer feel that they are served by it or that their sacrifice is still necessary. When this happens, those who stand to benefit from the status quo need a tool to silence the critical spirit. In the traditional Kankanay society, Kankanay myth easily becomes this tool.

At this stage, it must be recalled that the social environment of the traditional Kankanay leaves much to be desired. It is a system where ritual is at the helm, where the primacy of ritual excuses the amount of precious produce, time, and effort expended for religious ceremonies, and where the ritual expenditures unwittingly give the well-off almost exclusive access to the suprahuman reality. From this structure emerge some problematic areas: the dependent-dominant relationship that issues out of the lopsided two-class system and the oppressive effects of ritual practices on the poor majority. The myths may be seen to paper over these areas through their narrative structure and avowed anchoring in the primordial reality.

43. Lucien Goldman, "Criticism and Dogmatism in Literature," in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, David Cooper, ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 144-45.

A review of the narrative structure of the typical myth reveals that the *kadangian* status of the two brothers is secured by strict adherence or obedience to the ritual specifications of the divine beings. Human effort has nothing to do with it. Rather, it is the successful communication with the suprahuman realm that counts. All this undeniably throws around the kadangian a sacred aura which insulates him from the envy of the less fortunate Kankanay. Likewise, ritual practices are protected from criticism because they are foreordained. Thus, it becomes clear that for those who are benefited by the prevailing system, the Kankanay sacred stories constitute a potent tool for suppressing individual sentiments which may twist the social system. These people are obviously the privileged in the traditional Kankanay society—the kadangian who control the economic life and the old, influential men who perform the political and religious functions of the *at-ato*.

Given the potentially villainous role of Kankanay myth, the obvious question is: Why do the poor Kankanay majority continue to subscribe to myth and ritual? One answer is pragmatic. Religious feasts are occasions when the poor partake of the bounty of the rich. As ethnographers are wont to comment: "the *cañao* is still a chief instrument of economic distribution."[44] In fact, in anticipation of this partaking of the goods of the rich, the less fortunate may voluntarily quiet their own portentous sentiments. As one ethnographer reports, a member of the wealthy class admitted that all his livestock would be stolen were it not for the fact that people knew that they would consume a considerable number of his animals during cañao.[45]

A second answer touches on the fact that Kankanay myth does echo conceptions which the traditional Kankanay himself would have formed from his perception of his condition. Kankanay myth does help meaning cohere out of experiences marked by physical difficulties and unfathomable elements. It is in the light of the Kankanay myth's adequate categorizing of the traditional Kankanay's existential situation that the continued prominence of myth and ritual may be better apprehended. The source of any religion's vitality, notes Clifford Geertz, lies "in the fidelity with which it expresses the fundamental nature of reality. The powerfully coercive 'ought' is felt to grow out of a comprehensive, factual 'is.'"[46] Because the myths, which are

44. Keesing and Keesing, pp. 196-97.

45. Ibid., p. 79

46. "Ethos, Worldview, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," in *Every Man His Way: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, Alan Dundes, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 303.

integral to the traditional religion, offer the Kankanay a vision of reality which bears out much of his actual experience and perception, it follows that there can hardly be any doubt about the truth of the norms and values that they embody and support. Such norms and values are not perceived as subjective preferences but rather as "the imposed conditions for life implicit in a world with a particular structure."[47]

A third answer dwells on some elements of Kankanay myth itself which a second look will disclose to be double-faced Januses. While they appeal to conservative concerns, they can be appropriated just as easily by those with progressive orientations.

It has been noted that an item of folklore may be ambivalent in that it "may act both as an instrument of continuity and as a mechanism for change."[48] Kankanay myth displays such an ambivalence. Despite its reconciling and stabilizing functions, Kankanay myth must never be underestimated as a foolproof tool by those who would want to preserve the status quo, for the paradox is that it can also be an agent of transformation.

One clear source of ambivalence in Kankanay mythology is the presence of some stories which do not fit the usual mold. Two stories give human effort a wide berth: one is the story of Dungen and the other is that of a man who successfully drives away, without ritual, a disease-causing spirit.

However, even in those stories which follow the typical conflict-resolution pattern, ambivalence rears its head. In response to the experience of helplessness, Kankanay myth generates elements which can prove disquieting to the prevailing social system. These progressive elements inhere in the sacred stories' conflict-resolution pattern and main sets of characters.

It must be remembered that Kankanay myth presents the sacred reality as the ground of human existence. It also depicts this sacred reality as one which subverts prevailing human structures or categories. By anchoring the human reality in the sacred, the Kankanay myth in effect leaves the human reality open to still undefined possibilities. It redeems man from fixity and projects him onto a wider arena of being and becoming.

This redemption is further intimated in the character of the two brothers. If the two originally poor brothers are the Kankanay Everyman, then what the myths are saying is that every poor Kankanay is

47. Ibid.
48. Roger D. Abraham, "Personal Power and Social Restraint in the Definition of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 331 (January-March 1971):30.

a potential kadangian. The character of Lumawig says the same, and the alignment of the sacred with the marginal state of poverty says as much. Furthermore, reversal as a narrative motif brings forth the idea of change, whose goal is "the good life" with which the myths invariably end. In effect, "the good life" in the myths become the model, the ideal against which Kankanay reality will be constantly measured and authenticated.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that these progressive elements are illusory, for upon closer analysis, the myths are unequivocal about the crucial role of ritual in attaining the good life. It may be so, but the fact remains that the vision of fulfilment exists as the *end*, while ritual is the *means*. There is no telling how these elements may affect the consciousness of the Kankanay when he is confronted with a recurring situation where the means do not bring about the end.