

Creation myths relate always to what was done among the "first people in the world which preceded this," while creation was going on, or more correctly, perhaps, during the time of those transformations or metamorphoses from which resulted the present world and the order of things contained therein.

Action myths relate to ever-recurrent processes in nature which began as soon as the sun had his course marked out for him and the physical world around us received its present form and fashion; this happened before all the "first people" were metamorphosed. The vast majority had received the physical bodies which they have at present, but a few were left, and they remained in various places till they saw or heard the new race, the Indians. Action myths, therefore, relate to various processes in nature which never cease. For us the most important are those involved in the relations between the sun and the earth.

The great Algonkin sun and earth myth which has many variants and vast wealth of detail, describes those relations more profoundly and broadly than any other Indian myth devoted to the same subject.

The Algonkin myth in its most extended form describes the earth maiden as becoming a mother through being looked at by the sun. She gives birth to a daughter who is called Wakos ikwe, the fox woman; this daughter becomes the mother of a great hero, the highest benefactor of aboriginal man in America. He is the giver of food and of every good gift by which life is supported.

Of this myth there is a shorter version in which the hero is born of the earth directly; he is her son, not her grandson.

This benefactor and food-giver is no other than that warm air which we see dancing and quivering above the earth in fine weather. Descended from the sun and the earth, this warm air supports all things that have vegetable or animal existence.

This myth in its more extended form, the one to which I have referred first, is similar to that which Schoolcraft pieced together and which Longfellow took as the foundation of his beautiful poem "Hiawatha," though not identical with it.

Schoolcraft, with his amazing propensity to make mistakes, with his remarkable genius for missing the truth and confusing everything