

A [sample entry](#) from the

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature

(London & New York: Continuum, 2005)

Edited by

[Bron Taylor](#)

© 2005
All Rights Reserved

doing, he sought to uphold vernacular spiritual practices in opposition to centralized religion and to defend the local shrines and their surrounding woods as places that not only generated a reverential attitude toward nature, but also supported local flora and fauna on sacred ground and provided a focal point for community self-regulation. True to his localist emphasis, Minakata fought for the preservation of specific shrines, such as the Oyama Shrine to which his family was historically attached, and was jailed at one point for his protests. In 1920 the Japanese government abandoned the contested ordinances. Although none of Minakata's writings have been translated into English, volume ten and the appendix to volume one of *Minakata Kumagusu Zenshu* do contain English-language pieces that he authored.

Patrick D. Murphy

Further Reading

- Blacker, Carmen. "Minakata Kumagusu: A Neglected Japanese Genius." *Folklore* 94 (1983), 139–52.
- Kato, Sadamichi. "The Three Ecologies in Minakata Kumagusu's Environmental Movement." *Organization and Environment* 12:1 (1999), 85–98.
- Minakata, Kumagusu. *Minakata Kumagusu Zenshu*, 12 vols. Shinobu Iwamura, ed. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971–1975.
- See also: Japanese Religions.

Mitchell, Elyne (1913–2002)

A poetically descriptive essayist on environmental issues, Sibyl Elyne Keith Mitchell (born Melbourne, Australia; daughter to Sir Harry Chauvel) was the first Australian to place the condition of her country's soil in the context of comparative civilization and ecology. Most of her life was spent on a station in the upper reaches of the Murray River, in southernmost New South Wales. While writing more aesthetically oriented works – *Australia's Alps* (1942), *Speak to the Earth* (1945), and *Images in Water* (1947) – her most famous work is on the need to preserve ecological balance. In *Soil and Civilization* (1946) she plots the paths of civilization away from an earlier ecological unity and a spiritual awareness that the whole of life rested in God. The same error of neglecting this unity, and showing irresponsibility toward the soil above all, brought trouble to Sumeria, Persia, Egypt, China and India, Greece and Rome, Western Europe, [and] the Mayas, with Westerners repeating the same errors in the Americas and South Africa. Her prophetic goal was to save a vulnerable Australia from the same fate, by (re-)extolling the soil as the divinely ordained matrix of our being, which has to be rebuilt, where damaged, with patient research and wise water conservation. Supporting images from the

world of comparative religion are prolific, if more often than not utilized as rather poetic invocations.

Garry W. Trompf

Further Reading

- Green, Henry M. *A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied*, vol. 2. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961.
- Hyde, William H., Joy Hooker and Barry Andrews, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 (2nd edn).
- See also: Australia.

Miwok People

Miwok (alternatively Miwuk, Mewuk, and Me-wan) is a modern designation which groups innumerable small nations of California Indians according to broad-based linguistic and cultural similarities. The Miwokan subgroup of the Utian language family (Penutian stock) consists of seven such cultural nationalities: Coast, Lake, Bay, Plains, Northern Sierra, Central Sierra, and Southern Sierra Miwok. While these categories provide a useful comparative framework, for most of their history Miwok peoples lived as members of independent, relatively egalitarian, multi-village tribes, each one with distinct territorial boundaries and control of the resources within those territories. The landscapes Miwok peoples inhabited varied from coastal baylands and inland hills to higher-elevation foothills and mountains in the Sierra Nevada. Today, eleven federally recognized tribes have Miwok membership; others are still seeking federal recognition.

For Miwok peoples, nature, culture, and religion did not exist as separate categories, but as blended elements of day-to-day life. As the underpinning of Miwok religious systems, creation narratives provided people with a sense of identity, rules of appropriate behavior and a context for evaluating life's most meaningful experiences. They described the actions of the "First People," supernatural personages with both human and animal attributes, and, at times, the attributes of natural phenomenon, such as stars and hail. The Miwok referred to the First People by the names of the present-day animals and natural phenomenon into which they transformed themselves after they created humans and provided "everything, everywhere" humans would need to live. Miwok narratives describe how the First People created human beings from crow, goose, raven, and turkey vulture feathers placed on or planted into the ground, or from wood and mud. One contemporary Bodega Miwok/Dry Creek Pomo woman sees the creation from feathers as confirmation that humans comprise "both earth and a spirit that soars" (Kathleen Smith, personal communication, 2002).

As a gift of the First People, the animals of today serve as a tangible reminder of myth-time, and Miwok cultures and spiritual values incorporated proscriptions for the responsible, respectful use of those same animals. According to Central, Northern, Southern and Coast Miwok sacred narratives, the very shape of people's hands was an outcome of the wise foresight of a Lizard personage. Northern, Central, Coast and Lake Miwok peoples variously attributed the red breast of robins, red throat of hummingbirds, and the ability to make fire from buckeye and incense cedar, as an outcome of the theft of fire by Robin and Hummingbird personages in myth-time, when they brought heat and light to an otherwise cold and dark world. Mount Diablo, Mount Konocti, Sonoma Peak, and the sites of other events during myth-time, all served as awe-inspiring reminders of creation, and became places of prayer and sources of spiritual power.

As with many other North American Indians, the birth imagery of a world flood permeates the creation narratives of the Southern, Central, and Coast Miwok. In Sierra Miwok versions, Frog, Hummingbird, and Dove, all male personages, obtain sand and mud from which to create (re-birth) the flooded world. Dundes (1984) has conducted a comparative study of psycho-symbolic elements of this distinctly male creation, which has cognates in several parts of the world.

Another mythic event that interconnected nature, culture, and religion among the Miwok featured a world fire. The Miwok were well aware of the regenerative qualities of fire, which they used as a horticultural tool, in a carefully managed way, to return nutrients to the soil, eliminate disease organisms from it, improve seed harvests, and bring about the growth of young, herbaceous plant material which provided browse for deer, elk and antelope, which they in turn used for food, clothing and tools. Regular burning caused the growth of long, straight shoots needed to make shapely baskets and a variety of other objects. It also eliminated the accumulation of fuel in the form of decaying plant material and other plant debris on the ground, thereby preventing the occurrence of the type of uncontrolled, destructive fire which spread across the world in myth-time.

Not only did the Miwok manage the land in a way that acknowledged their relationship with it and their responsibility to it, but they also ascribed consciousness to inanimate objects, as well as plants and animals. They viewed the world as comprised of an interconnected system of powerful, usually ambivalent, supernatural forces, including spirits associated with air, wind, and water, ghosts, and other beings, which existed as an integral part of daily experience. The world had the potential for both good and bad – not necessarily in the moral or ethical sense of right and wrong, but as an expression of harmonious and inharmonious elements. These component forces were good (in harmony) when under con-

trol, but had the potential for bad (illness or catastrophe) if uncontrolled.

Supernatural sanctions, ritual, ceremony, and cultural rules served to control and stabilize a potentially unstable world. They provided an affirmation of, and check on, natural forces. So it was that Miwok peoples kept the world harmonious (balanced) through prayerful thoughts, actions, and offerings, adherence to rules of proper behavior, fasting, and the observance of spiritual dances on a seasonal cycle.

The most sacred dances, as visual prayers, gave thanks to the Creator and served to maintain the world's spiritual balance, thereby ensuring the health and well-being of the group, protecting people from natural disasters, and creating the conditions necessary for an abundant harvest. The Miwok also held less sacred dances for doctoring, to dedicate and give thanks for the autumn acorn harvest, to initiate economic activities appropriate to a given time of year, to commemorate important events, and for mourning.

Throughout north-central California a roundhouse served as the center of religious observances. The earliest roundhouses were semi-subterranean, earth-covered structures supported by posts and secondary rafters, their shape reminiscent of the Miwok conception of the cosmos as a sky dome resting on the Earth; their central smoke-hole reminiscent of an opening, recognized by at least some Miwok, as existing at the top of the sky dome. Beyond this dome, and below the Earth, supernatural beings existed who conducted activities which affected the Miwok, such as creating earthquakes and moving the sun from east to west. The womb-like darkness and tunneled entrances of roundhouses evidence birth symbolism.

The roundhouse provided the locale for the observance of the Kuksu religious system, a system shared by people in the San Francisco Bay area, the Sacramento and northern San Joaquin Valleys, and adjacent hill areas.

Kuksu observances were characterized by a male secret society and, at times, a similar female secret society. The society members were chosen on the basis of their social, political or economic status. They underwent formal initiation rites and special instruction before receiving leadership positions. In their role as religious specialists, initiates administered the cycle of Kuksu ceremonies, which included singing, dancing, and curing. Through ritual observances, the dancers "recreated sacred time and in one way or another restored their people to the unsullied state that had prevailed at the time of creation" (Bean and Vane 1978: 665). In the most important and elaborate ceremonies, dancers represented supernatural spirits and beings, often the same as those prominent in creation accounts. The words of a Central Sierra Miwok *lileusi* dance expresses well the transformation from human to spirit that the dancers undergo: "This is what he [the spirit] said when he came. He came from Mt. Diablo

[Supemenenu]. The dancers get just like this fellow when they start to be this kind of a dancer" (Gifford 1955: 277). In undergoing this transformation, the dancers accepted tremendous responsibility. They adhered to stringent rules lest illness or catastrophe result from improper conduct of the dances.

The dancers wore elegant feathered regalia, comprised of flicker quill headbands, hairnets, headdresses, hairpins, belts, earrings and cloaks, which served as "a symbol of great wealth and prestige" (Bates 1982: 1). Because of the intense supernatural power associated with the dance and regalia, the latter had to be properly produced, manufactured, handled, and cared for. The makers sang special songs and made food offerings. Construction details, such as feather arrangements, showed the maker's respect for the birds from which they come. The finest examples demonstrated the tremendous technical ability and care needed to trim, cut, and secure the materials for a grand appearance. During the ceremonies, the actions of the dancers, firelight reflecting against their regalia in the otherwise dark roundhouse, the sounds of shell pendants and beads moving with their rhythmic steps, and the voices of the singers, accompanied by whistles, split-stick rattles, and a footdrum, all helped to transport the dancers and audience into the spiritual realm, and provided a visible affirmation of their day-to-day relationship with nature and the supernatural.

Spanish, Mexican, Russian and American intrusions onto Miwok lands irrevocably altered that relationship. Miwok peoples variously grappled with missionization, introduced disease, enforced servitude, displacement, massacres, separation in boarding schools, and social marginalization, at the same time that trapping, building, mining, logging, ranching, agriculture, and the elimination of Miwok land-management practices caused rapid environmental deterioration. The Miwok economy shifted from one based on foraging and horticultural techniques, to one based on a cash economy. Many Miwok converted to Christian religions, seeing elements of the older beliefs in the new religions. Where the older religious systems continued to be practiced, they underwent changes due to the implementation of the prophecies, visions, and dreams of new religious leaders, and the new and closer contracts established between tribes in wider geographical areas than the past. Some of this change may have been generated by the spread of the Ghost Dance movement into north-central California in 1870, with its hope for a return to the "peaceful and prosperous conditions" that existed prior to non-Indian intrusion.

Those Miwok who continued to dance began substituting cloth, buttons, glass beads, yarn, commercial cordage, and non-native feathers for some of the harder to obtain and make materials used in the older regalia, especially the raptor feathers of old, which the federal government, in an effort to prevent extinctions, made illegal to possess,

except by special permit. Although many old-time traditions had declined or fallen into disuse by the early 1900s, some Miwok people fought to keep the dances going. Notable among these efforts was that of the late Bill Franklin, who, in the 1940s collaborated with Sierra Miwok and Nisenan traditionalists to form what is now called the Miwok Dance Group. Franklin also helped establish Chaw'se (Indian Grinding Rock State Park), where a roundhouse was established, and an annual big time, which brings together several Central California Indian dance groups, occurs. He was also instrumental in the establishment of a Miwok Indian Roundhouse at Westpoint.

Some Coast Miwok dance with their Pomo relatives in a roundhouse established at Point Reyes National Seashore. Other Miwok people participate in dances at a roundhouse built at Yosemite National Park, where old-style ceremonies are hosted as well as an annual Bear Dance, a new tradition borrowed from the Mountain Maidu. Whether public or private, such dances provide an affirmation of Miwok peoples determination to ensure the health and well-being of their people and culture into the future.

Some of the older values and beliefs which bound nature, culture and religion together in Miwok life have undergone a renaissance in other areas as well. Those Miwok who continue to gather some of the native foods, such as acorn and manzanita, and natural materials from which to make cultural objects, such as basketry, still pray and leave offerings when they do. Miwok and other basketmakers are actively working with officials associated with National Forests and other public and private landholders to urge the discontinuation of herbicide spraying, ensure access to native foods and materials, and seek the reintroduction of native plants and ancient land-management techniques, especially burning. Contemporary Miwok peoples also seek protection of their sacred sites.

Beverly Ortiz

Further Reading

- Barrett, S.A. "Myths of the Southern Sierra Miwok." *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 16:1 (1919), 1-28.
- Bates, Craig. "Feathered Regalia of Central California: Wealth and Power." In James Dotta, ed. *Occasional Papers of the Redding Museum, Paper No. 2*. Redding: Redding Museum and Art Center, 1982, 1-30.
- Bean, Lowell John and Sylvia Brakke Vane. "Cults and Their Transformations." In Robert Heizer, ed. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8, California*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 662-72.
- Bibby, Brian. "Still Going: Bill Franklin and the Revival of Miwok Traditions." *News from Native California* 7:3 (1993), 21-35.

- Blackburn, Thomas C. and Kat Anderson, eds. *Before the Wilderness, Environmental Management by Native Californians*. Menlo Park: Ballena Press, 1993.
- Callaghan, Catherine. "Lake Miwok." In Robert Heizer, ed. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8, California*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 264–73.
- Collier, Mary and Sylvia Thalman, eds. "Interviews with Tom Smith and Maria Copa, Isabel Kelly's Ethnographic Notes on the Coast Miwok Indians of Marin and Southern Sonoma Counties, California." *MAPOM Occasional Papers Number 6*. San Rafael: Miwok Archeological Preserve of Marin, 1991.
- Du Bois, Cora. "The 1870 Ghost Dance." *Anthropological Records* 3:1 (1939), 1–151.
- Dundes, Alan. "Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male." In Alan Dundes, ed. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 270–94.
- Gayton, A.H. "The Ghost Dance of 1870 in South-Central California." *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 28:3 (1930), 57–82.
- Gifford, Edward Winslow. "Central Miwok Ceremonies." *Anthropological Records* 14:4 (1955), 261–318.
- Gifford, Edward Winslow. "Miwok Cults." *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 18:3 (1926), 391–408.
- Heizer, Robert F. "Natural Forces and Native World View." In Robert Heizer, ed. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8, California*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 649–53.
- Kelly, Isabel. "Coast Miwok." In Robert Heizer, ed. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8, California*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 414–25.
- Levy, Richard. "Eastern Miwok." In Robert Heizer, ed. *The Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8, California*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978, 398–413.
- Loeb, E.M. "The Western Kuksu Cult." *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 33:1 (1932), 1–137.
- Merriam, C. Hart. *The Dawn of the World, Myths and Tales of the Miwok Indians of California*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993 (1910).
- Rooth, Anna Birgitta. "The Creation Myths of the North American Indians." In Alan Dundes, ed. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 166–81.
- See also: Harmony in Native North America; Holy Land in Native North America; Mother Earth; Muir, John; National Parks and Monuments (United States); Sacred Geography in Native North America; Sierra Club; Spirit of Sage Council; Wilderness Religion.

Miyazawa, Kenji (1896–1933)

Kenji Miyazawa was a Japanese agronomist, poet, and writer. Through his writing we see how the knowledge of the scientist, the intuition of the poet, and the Buddhist's sense of compassion as well as understanding of the interdependence of all phenomena, can nurture attitudes rooted in "deep ecology" and promote the growth of a bioregional consciousness. Miyazawa's collected works include poems, songs, plays and tales (*dowa*). Although *dowa* refer to children's tales, his stories have earned international recognition as literary masterpieces, offering multiple levels of interpretation.

Miyazawa grew up in a struggling agricultural community in Iwate Prefecture, about 300 miles north of Tokyo. At age eighteen he embraced the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, a doctrine of co-enlightenment that preaches the essential unity of all phenomena over time and space, offering hope for Buddhahood to all, regardless of species or gender. Miyazawa was deeply influenced by this sutra, which calls upon the reader to act out the sutra with his or her body and mind, following the example of the various bodhisattvas who are prepared to come to the aid of all beings, whether man or woman, human or nonhuman.

Miyazawa studied at Morioka College of Agriculture in order to share his knowledge with local farmers. He also taught at an agricultural high school. During breaks from regular work in class and field, Kenji would lead his students up the volcanic slopes of Mt. Iwate, or take them to the local riverbed to dig for fossils. As they walked, he would tell them about the relationships over space and time between rocks, soil, plants, and animals. He was a pioneer of environmental education.

Although Miyazawa devoted his life to the local farm community, he was saddened to see wild lands destroyed for further development. In his poem "A Recitative on Irises by a Young Surveyor from the Land Cultivation Bureau," our surveyor decries as "original sin" the destruction of a lovely green highland with its dense clusters of irises, soon to be plowed under and converted to dreary humus (Miyazawa 1980: v.5, 198–200).

From early childhood Miyazawa enjoyed hiking over the plains and into the mountains of Iwate. His joy, bordering on ecstasy, is expressed in "Ippongi no" (One-tree Plain):

I am the beloved of forest and field.
When I walk through rustling reeds
Green messages, bashfully folded,
Slip into my pockets;
When I enter the shade of the woods,
Crescent-shaped lipmarks
Cover my elbows and trousers (Miyazawa 1980: v.2, 260–2).