PREFACE

Why a Book about a Bedtrick?

Texts and Approaches

This is a book about the mythology of sex. More precisely, it is about the story of going to bed with someone whom you mistake for someone else. It is in some ways a companion volume to (a double or shadow of) my book entitled *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India.* Though each is self-contained, they are complementary; to use the Cinderella metaphor,[1] each book drops the other's second shoe. Where *Splitting the Difference* deals with men and women who split in two, fragmenting in situations that only occasionally involve either masquerades or sexual intimacy or both, *The Bedtrick* concentrates on precisely those two issues; that is, where *Splitting the Difference* is about gender, and about splitting the difference, *The Bedtrick* is about sex—more precisely, about lying about sex—and about telling the difference. And where *Splitting the Difference* deals, in a more or less classically philological way, with the historical development of texts within two specific and historically related traditions (ancient Greece and India, with a sideways glance at Victorian England and Hollywood), this book regards the entire world as its oyster and utilizes the irritating grains of sand consisting of a number of different methods to extract the string of narrative pearls. People who split or double in nonsexual ways (by being beheaded, for instance, or reified in mirrors) appear only in *Splitting the Difference,* but some of the people who split and double in order to play bedtricks overlap and appear in both books, double dipping as it were: some of the heroines of the first two chapters of *Splitting the Difference* (such as Saranyu/Samjna, Alcmena and Ahalya, and Eve White/Black) make a few cameo appearances in *The Bedtrick.* Each book, however, emphasizes a different aspect and different variants of those shared myths and considers them in the company of a different corpus of other myths.[2] This change of context[3] reveals a different set of meanings even in the same text (as

Borges demonstrated in his tale of Pierre Menard); texts on the same theme from other cultures offer a context in place of the historical context that most contemporary analyses of stories now attempt to supply.

To help the reader trace a theme or character through both books, I have employed a system of cross-references. A dagger (†) or a double dagger (‡) alerts the reader to the existence of other citations that constitute a context for the theme so marked, which can be located in the table of contents and/or in the index. A dagger refers to other citations in this book, and a double dagger to citations in both this book and *Splitting the Difference.* These three tools—the table of contents, the index, and the cross-references—are designed to help the reader use the book in a hypertextual way, to move from a particular instance of a theme to a place where it is more generally discussed. They are also intended to remind the reader that the theme in the particular text under discussion also appears elsewhere, often in another culture or a different age, and often with a different meaning, or that a concept briefly alluded to has been fully glossed elsewhere.

Aside from the obvious plan of arranging types of the bedtrick by culture and historical period, one might, ahistorically, arrange them according to the "schemes" or complexity of the plots, as William R. Bowden has done for the English Renaissance genre ("X, expecting to lie with A, is caused to lie with B instead through the conspiracy of A and B").[4] I have done a bit of that in chapter 1 (with the double-back, double-play, double-cross, double-back-cross, and double-back-cross-play) and chapter 8 (the double-cross-dress, double-back-cross-dress, double-back-cross-dress-play, and the double-cross-dress-back-play). I have also noted from time to time themes and plots that correspond to Stith Thompson's† periodic table of motifs and tale types (see appendix). But overall I have chosen to arrange the chapters according to the nature of the bedtrickster: rejected spouse, raped spouse, god or animal, ugly or beautiful woman, sexual rival, partner of a legal surrogate, politically disempowered victim, gender-crosser, incestuous relative, realistic plotter.

Each story can be read from the standpoint of the trickster (the person who plays the trick) or of the victim (by which I mean simply the dupe, the person who does not know that it is a trick, with none of the darker overtones of the word "victim"). Readers may find sympathies with either side—or, indeed, with both sides. Bedtricks have many different motives—people do it for love, for sex, for money, for revenge, to save their marriages, to protect themselves, to protect someone else, to gain infor-

mation, to gain political power—the list could go on and on. But Marjorie Garber has argued convincingly that sex is always the bottom line in tricks of this sort (particularly cross-dressing tricks), even where other excuses are given, such as, "s/he did this in order to a) get a job, b) find a place in a man's world, and c) realize or fulfill some deep but acceptable need in terms of personal destiny." Garber remarks, "I regard such appropriations of transvestism in the service of a humanist 'progress narrative' as both unconvincing and highly problematic."[5] The progress narrative (a self-deceptive or hypocritical excuse for cross-dressing) is what Laurence Senelick calls (with reference to the film *Victor/Victoria*† [1982]) the device of "transvestite in spite of him/herself."[6] Other excuses (like the explanation given for Billy Tipton's real-life masquerade[7] or that of the fictional Tootsie†—that they did it to get a job) are just that, excuses.

My primary texts by definition involve a consummated sexual act, but in my commentaries on these texts I have invoked other texts in which the physical contact is less intimate (sometimes just a kiss) or frustrated (the trickster unmasked before consummation), so long as the issues of intimacy raised by the bedtrick are illuminated by the text in question. And I have also included some texts of unconsummated bedtricks that are consummated in later interpretations; thus, for instance, Edmond Rostand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac*† has no consummated bedtrick, but the kiss, as usual, stands for more, and the film version (*Roxanne,* 1987) connects the dots and consummates the act. So, too, the implicit bedtricks in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*† and *Twelfth Night*† were made explicit in contemporary productions[8] in which the twin brother or Sebastian staggers out, more or less naked, from the house of the bedtricked woman (Adriana or Olivia); a contemporary production of *Midsummer Night's Dream,*† too,[9] left no doubt in anyone's mind that Titania and Bottom became lovers. (Shakespeare also depicted explicit bedtricks in *All's Well That Ends Well*† and *Measure for Measure*† and a quasi bedtrick in *Much Ado about Nothing.*) The bedtrick is expressed by acts of different intensities according to different conventions in different cultures and periods.

Each of the ten chapters is divided into two parts. The first part presents the texts, generally beginning with an example taken from ancient Hindu mythology and then moving from India to the rest of the world, and from gods to humans. Where Saranyu/Samjna provided the seminal text (what Hindus call the *bija-mantra*) for *Splitting the Difference,* the pivot of this book is the story of Shiva, Parvati (Shiva's wife, here in the

form of Kali/Gauri), and the demon Adi, a myth that seems to have obsessed me even more than the tale of Samjna, perhaps because Shiva is both my kind of god and my kind of guy: I touched upon this story in my first book, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (1973), translated it in *Hindu Myths* (1975), and analyzed it in *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (1980)—always, as here, using different variants and devising different interpretations. In this book it provides a kind of thread, often involving Shiva: Shiva's rejected wife must masquerade to seduce her husband (chapter 1); the demon Adi masquerading as Parvati fools Shiva and becomes the raped mother (chapter 2); Shiva's sexual rival attempts to seduce Shiva's wife (chapter 5), who sends her servant in her place (chapter 6); the demon Adi becomes an animal (chapter 3) and a female (chapter 8), while Parvati reveals her fair (chapter 4) interior by sloughing her black (chapter 7) outer sheath; she curses her son when he comes between her and his father (chapter 9), and she is recognized by Shiva only during the sexual act (chapter 10).

Each chapter then cross-culturally contextualizes the Hindu story with variants of the theme from the Hebrew Bible, medieval courtly romances, Shakespeare, operas, or contemporary literature, theater, and cinema. The first part of each chapter emphasizes differences among variants of the theme and different cultural aspects of each theme, noting other stories of the same type in the same culture and dwelling upon some of the striking details that make each variant unique, even within its own culture. These sections do not have full conclusions; they present a body of materials, each piece analyzed in itself, but leave the broader interpretations for the final part of each chapter, which I have called "Approaches."

The approaches present the shadow‡ of the text, the commentary, utilizing various disciplines: philosophy, psychology, zoology, feminism, theology, law, critical studies, queer theory, rhetoric, and structuralism. Although each set of ideas and questions is assigned to a chapter to which it is particularly appropriate, all of the approaches are relevant to all ten chapters, to all variants of the stories of the bedtrick, a wide range of approaches to a wide range of genres, like Cyrano's† suggestion for various methodological critiques of his nose: aggressive, friendly, descriptive, inquisitive, kindly, etc. In this way I have tried to create the textual and methodological equivalent of the kind of "thick description" that Clifford Geertz has prescribed for anthropological fieldwork. I have, for instance, used structural analyses, Freudian terminology, and my own mild brand of feminist consciousness throughout the book, though I have also explic-

itly discussed each of these methods in one of the ten discrete sections devoted to approaches.

These approaches, which embody ideas more than methods, are intended to raise the sorts of questions that might prove fruitful in drawing patterns of meanings from the stories in this book. Some of the questions are particularly associated with certain European or American disciplines, and some transcend or combine disciplines. But the ten approaches are not intended to summarize or even contribute to the disciplines upon which they draw. They ask the questions that the disciplines ask but do not give their answers, or cite all the scholars in those disciplines who have offered answers; they draw upon the more basic, classical formulations and leave it to interested readers to forage further in more sophisticated contemporary directions.[10] I claim no new insights into Lacan or Descartes; rather, I suggest that the texts of the bedtrick offer some answers to their questions, and I suggest some ways in which asking their questions enlarges our understanding of the bedtrick. I am poaching in these preserves, making commando raids to pick up any ideas I can find that shed light on the tricks played in the dark; I am using the theories that I know, the ones that I like, the ones that make sense to me for this problem. I am not trying to reconcile one discipline with the often warring methods of another, but I believe that it is possible to derive useful insights into a text from disciplines, or even schools within disciplines, that are not on speaking terms with one another. Nor do I mean to imply that my own disciplinary home, the history of religions, is necessarily more inclusive than the disciplines it draws upon, merely that some historians of religions, such as myself, find eclecticism a fruitful point of departure, or even of leverage.[11]

The questions will always take us back to the stories, which are greater than any of our ideas about them. I start with the stories, and leave them without final conclusions, to give the reader a chance to conceive her own ideas about them before hearing mine; and I have tried to arrange the stories in such a way as to let them speak for themselves while also telling the story that I want them to tell. Readers impatient with this agenda, and those who want to cut to the chase to find out why they should bother to read the stories at all, can always skip to the conclusion of each chapter, then to the sections on approaches, and finally to the summary conclusion of the book. Some people (I confess to being one of them) read academic books (and menus) backward, as if they were written in Hebrew: a glance first at the bibliography, to see, among other things, if their own works

are cited[12] and what texts are used, so that if the book proves bankrupt of ideas, one can at least check out the assembled sources and develop one's own ideas about them. Such people will probably turn straight to the conclusion of this book right after finishing with the bibliography and the notes, and only then read the stories. As Count Orlofsky, patron of the bedtrick ball, sings in *Die Fledermaus,* in an aria that could be the school song for all the actors, tricksters, and victims in these stories about sex, "Chacun à son goût." Whenever I hear that aria, I feel that they're playing my song, methodologically speaking.

TEXTS AS CONTEXTS

In some cases, I have provided a nonnarrative context for the stories I tell: some of the Hindu myths, for instance, may be explained by certain assumptions encoded in the caste system, and some of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible by considerations of the position of the Jews in the ancient Near East; American films reflect the attitudes of the cold war; European fairy tales refract early modern ideas about embryology; and so forth.

But the meanings of these stories are not limited to their social contexts. I have tried to argue for the methodological assumptions underlying the broad comparative enterprise in a book, *The Implied Spider,* that began life as the introduction to this book, *The Bedtrick.* Let me apply the arguments in *The Implied Spider* to the problem posed by *The Bedtrick.*

Comparison takes a myth out of its historical context and supplies, instead, the context of other myths, often from other cultures. Frequently, the best way to understand a myth is by understanding how it differs from other myths in the same culture as well as from variants in other cultures. Such a supplementary context is needed because of the fragmentary nature of our understanding of myths, especially those embedded in ancient texts. When myths tell us what happened, they do not always tell us why the people in the story did what they did or how they felt about what happened to them. To this extent, they remain open and transparent and can be retold, within one culture or in several cultures, with several very different meanings. Although well-told myths always have plenty of details to give them life and reality, they do not always have *psychological* details. Laconic texts leave us in the dark, where one thing looks much like another.

In the Hebrew Bible story of Rachel and Leah,† for instance, if we ask how it was that Jacob was fooled, how he mistook Leah for Rachel, we

find that the narrative background remains opaque and leaves us with insoluble riddles. Later Jewish commentaries raise and answer some of these questions, but we can also seek unofficial commentaries outside the tradition of the original text. Zwi Jagendorf, comparing the trick that Leah plays on Jacob with the bedtrick that Helena plays on her husband, Bertram (who thinks he's in bed with Diana), in *All's Well That Ends Well,*† agrees that "Shakespeare makes us understand in Helena's words what Leah might have thought in Jacob's arms."[13] And this is a two-way flow: questions about Shakespeare might be resolved by looking back at myths, "the same sort of myths out of which many of [Shakespeare's] plays develop."[14] Or by looking farther forward: Barbara Hodgdon compares the dynamics of *All's Well* with that of "the screwball film comedies of the late 1930's and early 1940's,"[15] as I will compare the tale of Rachel and Leah with the films that Bette Davis made in the 1940s and 1960s, in which she played her own evil twin.† I also think that Angela Carter's† story of twin sisters offers many wise answers to the questions left open by the Hebrew Bible story of Rachel and Leah, insights into the tension between sororal rivalry and solidarity, for example, answers that the rabbis did not choose to record (or did not think of), as well as different answers to questions that the rabbis did record. I have already suggested one way in which later productions can shed light on earlier texts, in resolving the question of the consummated or unconsummated bedtricks in *Cyrano, A Comedy of Errors,* and *Twelfth Night.*

The comparatist can use the speculations found in similar stories told in other cultures to fill in what is not said in the text under consideration. In this way we may use a Hollywood film or a modern British text to discipline our own imagination of what might have been in the minds of Rachel and Leah. And looking not only back but sideways, at India and Japan, further extends the parallax and hence the depth of our vision. In *Splitting the Difference* I called upon historical context to begin my analysis, but I also went on to argue, there and elsewhere, for the uses of cross-cultural, intertextual context (which Arjun Appadurai nicely characterizes as a "vertical takeoff, no taxiing on the [social contextual] runway")[16] in place of the historical, sociological context generally favored by contemporary trends in religious studies.[17] Terence Cave spells out the essential value of this method with regard to a bedtrick. Noting that people from the start compared the real Martin Guerre† with the fictional Amphitryon‡ (a man whom the god Zeus impersonated in order to seduce his wife, Alcmena), he remarks:

> In this way, Martin Guerre immediately enters the intertextual labyrinth composed by the literary memory of Western civilization. His story cannot be recovered as a unique event, experienced by living individuals: it is shaped *ab initio* by existing narrative structures and interpretations. Amphitryon is one of his siblings, Odysseus another, perhaps Oedipus another again. Shakespeare's plays, the first of which were written during Martin's lifetime, flourish on the materials of which his story is made, and make it difficult to read that story as anything but an implausible but disturbing old tale.[18]

I would broaden the network of Cave's Western intertextual memory to include a different sort of memory that might be called infratextual; and I would enlarge the family to include more distant cousins of Martin Guerre, such as the Hindu gods Indra† and Shiva.†

But here a voice of caution is heard, raising questions about cultural constructions of the bedtrick. Did people at other times, and in other parts of the world, have the same ideas about sex and gender, desire and knowledge, that prevail in European and American society today? Would the author of the story of Rachel have felt like Angela Carter (let alone the directors of the Bette Davis films) about such things as sororal rivalry? And a related question: Did Freud† put our ideas about all of this into our heads (or, to use the currently hegemonic lingo, construct them)? Is the idea that the sexual act is both revelatory and concealing, for instance, just a modern European idea that we read back into ancient texts, or is it really present in those texts, too? If it is present in a muted form, how do we use the manifest content of contemporary texts to excavate the latent content of ancient texts? How do we know our questions are not projections (like the projections‡ of lust that facilitate the bedtrick)?

To some extent, of course, they are projections; we cannot know what was in the mind of an author. But projecting other texts, rather than, or in addition to, our own ideas, into the text in question at least makes the projection more subtle and argues for an imaginary line drawn not just between our heads and the Bible but between the heads of the auteurs of the Bette Davis films and the Bible. This method puts the texts themselves in conversation with one another,[19] sometimes even in the intimate pillow talk of textual intercourse. Ultimately, we cannot know if an earlier author thought like a later one; but what either of them thought is always a human possibility, and we who have the advantage of hindsight may now bring those later possibilities explicitly to our reading of the older texts, acknowledging what we are doing.

Can we generalize about the human meanings that flesh out the abstract armatures common to many, if not all, of these stories? William R. Bowden, speaking of Shakespeare, answered this question with a confident no: "Obviously, the bed trick is strictly a plot device. It cannot carry much universal significance."[20] But I venture a qualified yes, qualified in asserting cross-cultural, rather than universal, meanings for the bedtrick as well as for the concepts of sex, love, and knowledge that undergird it.[21] These meanings are in part essential and in part culturally constructed; that is, some basic meanings are inherent in the structure in all variants of the plot, while other meanings attach themselves to many variants, and still others serve rather to show how very differently any two retellings of the story may view the plot, inviting us to contrast these ideas with those of our own time and place.

Our stories range from lighthearted comedy and farce (such as Angela Carter's twins, the Telugu loincloth story, and *Some Like It Hot*) through moralizing texts (such as the Jain and Buddhist stories in chapters 1 and 4) to the *mise en abîme* of metaphysical and psychological confusion in the Japanese tale of *The Changelings.*† Other differences result from different cultural periods, different religious or secular contexts, different ideologies. The bedtrick in the Hebrew Bible is primarily about the paternal inheritance of elder and younger brothers and about negotiating the boundaries of incest, while in medieval Christianity, it is about the tension between marital and extramarital love. In Shakespeare it is used to overcome the tension between monogamy and promiscuity and to explore androgyny and sexual jealousy; in nineteenth-century Germany and Russia, it is about paranoia, particularly political paranoia; in nineteenth-century England, about the sexual threat of women and the terror of aging; and so forth. Intertextuality within each tradition allows each genre to reflect upon others and to intersect with them, producing potentially infinite crosscurrents and undertones. I leave it to each reader to pursue the streams of his or her own fancy further into whatever genres or contexts strike a note of sympathy or leave questions unanswered.

The key to the game of cross-cultural comparison lies in selecting the sorts of questions that might transcend any particular culture. Some people think that there are no such questions, but some think, as I do, that worthwhile cross-cultural questions can be asked. Marliss C. Desens assumes a commensurability in audience response to the bedtricks in Genesis and in Shakespeare: "It may be that some of our contemporary responses to the bed-trick belong to our own cultural context, and we

should not ignore such responses [I would say, we should not assume that the first audiences shared them], but we might also pause to examine whether we have some common bond with those first audiences."[22]

This common bond is not necessarily a universal bond, but it is a cross-cultural bond. Though stories about bedtricks are told all over, some of the tricksters' motives, and many of their ways of getting caught and/or away with it, vary not just among cultures but among individuals. But comparison defamiliarizes what we take for granted. For example, this book will compare the story of Rachel and Leah in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 28) with Angela Carter's story of Nora and Dora (in *Wise Children*). Both stories are about a woman whose sister takes her place in the bed of her husband or lover. By comparing them, I am asserting a degree of generality: some of the problems that confronted Rachel and Dora are also being faced by contemporary British and American women. My act of comparison inevitably brings a third element into the field of play: my voice in addition to those of the Hebrew Bible and Angela Carter. My selection of these stories rather than others, and my decision to highlight certain shared elements of them at the expense of other elements that are unique to each version, are particular to me, not merely to my time and place.

The Uses of Insomnia

My agenda is multivalent: I am an old-fashioned philologist who finds Freud often relevant and sometimes persuasive, a feminist who finds structuralism the best starting point for the analysis of a myth, a heterosexual Jewish woman who was raised a Communist and has come to be more interested in the imagination than in what other people call "real life." The protagonist of e. e. cummings's *him* declares three props of his essence: "I am an Artist, I am a Man, I am a Failure."[23] My triad is "I am a Sanskritist,[24] I am a woman, I am an insomniac." I am by training an Indologist, by choice a mythologist,[25] and by nature interested in bedtricks.

I bring very different competencies to the different genres and cultures invoked in this book, beginning with my training as a Sanskritist and student of Indian literature. India, particularly Hinduism, is not only the culture that I know best, after my own (in some ways, better than my own), but the culture that I suspect of having the best stories; India has variations on mythological themes for which my own traditions do not even have themes.[26] I have presented the Indian texts in this book in much

more detail than the European and American texts, in part because I know the Indian texts best and like them best but also because I assume that most of my readers know the European texts better and have better access to them.

But the meanings of the Indian stories extend into and are often clarified and deepened by European legends, novels, and films. My second qualification to write this book is my insomnia, which began at roughly the same time as my interest in storytelling and accounts for a good deal of my knowledge of English literature (particularly Shakespeare) and all of my knowledge of B movies. I am not a scholar of films; I don't study the old silent ones or many foreign films, nor do I keep up with the latest Hollywood trends in horror and mutilation; I am an American Movie Classic buff. I watch films but do not read much about them besides Leslie Halliwell and David Thomson; for me films are primary texts, and all I can contribute to the study of films is their classical mythological context. I earned the red badge of bloodshot eyes watching the *Late Late Late Show* with my mother, and I sometimes feel that I ought to win the literary equivalent of the Croix de Guerre for sitting through not only the many truly terrible films about bedtricks on "late Thursday/early Friday" television but the advertisements for used cars and phone sex (some of which also offer doubles) that punctuate them—until, at last, the coup de grâce is administered at dawn, to the appropriate military strains of "The Star Spangled Banner." (I also owe to my mother my love of opera,† whose plots share with B movies the dubious privilege of providing a happy retirement home for mythological kitsch.)

The sorts of films I have concentrated on are the lowbrow popular movies that provide a rich compost for myths to grow in, the B movies that are (along with *Star Trek*†)[27] the *reductio ad absurdum* of many myths, for Hollywood is as much a myth factory as it is a dream factory. It has even been stated as a kind of law of nature that the worse the film, the better the metaphysics.[28] B movies employ the technique of bricolage (the art of making new things out of the scraps of old things),[29] which lies at the heart of myths: to make money, films take what works and copy it, beginning with gross plots and titles (such as the various remakes of *The Prisoner of Zenda*†). This habit has become so notorious that when Alan Bennett's British play *The Madness of George III* was produced as a film for distribution in America, it was retitled *The Madness of King George* for fear that Americans would mistake the British title for the third in a series of which they had missed the first two installments. "A survey had

apparently shown that there were many filmgoers who came away from Kenneth Branagh's film of *Henry V* wishing they had seen its four predecessors."[30] Such repetitions catch up not just whole plots but the constituent parts of the plots (the man, transformed into a woman, who gazes in solipsistic lust at his own new breasts) and conventional images (the swirling of the sky during a kiss) which abound in Indian TV and film presentations of myths, too. These are the recycled pieces that we call mythemes[31] when they occur in myths, clichés† when they occur in B movies.[32] Terence Cave notes that the sense of cliché "is also the sense of repetition, a compulsive returning to the 'same' place, a place already known, as if one were discovering it for the first time."[33] Mircea Eliade regarded this as the very essence of myth, "the eternal return,"[34] and it is certainly the essence of a masquerade: to present something known in such a way that people mistake it for something unknown (or the reverse).

The use of film clichés for the sexual act was wonderfully satirized in an old Monty Python skit in which, as a couple starts to make love on a bed, she sinks down backward and he bends over her as they fade out; then you see waves crashing, a train rushing into a tunnel, a silo rising, a silo falling, and so forth, until we see her sitting up angrily in bed saying to him, as he sits there operating a movie projector, "Are you going to show those films all night?" Films present unique aspects of the bedtrick because where texts (even those that assume the primacy of vision) are made of words, films (even "talkies") are made of images, inspiring new takes on the problem of representing two visually "identical" people.

My basic comparison is between ancient India and contemporary America, particularly Hollywood; the two worlds of Sanskrit texts and B movies intersect in me. Like all of my other books, this is primarily a study of stories from ancient India, seen through the ideas of a contemporary American woman. It is intended to show what ideas about sex as truth and/or lie are and are not shared by contemporary Americans and people from other cultures, primarily ancient India.

The Hebrew Bible and Greek and Latin literature provide the third circle of my texts. These three clusters of primary sources support the platform on which this book stands, and each is represented by enough texts to provide it with a literary, if not a social, context, a critical mass of texts that illuminate one another. The fourth circle, still within my own linguistic and cultural range, consists of German and French stories, some of which I grew up with (Viennese mother, Russian father) and others of which I sought for this project.

To indicate how yet other cultures have imagined yet other variations on the central theme, I have also drawn superficially upon myths from cultures I know less well. These other cultures are not always contextualized here at all, even by other texts. This fifth circle, a non-weight-bearing wall of my narrational edifice, constitutes the smallest fraction of this book but includes all the rest of the world. Like Bambi and his mother, I proceed with caution out of my safe Sanskrit-Hollywood-Hebrew-French/German thicket into this broader meadow of the wide world, a place where you can be shot down by a bad translation. (I inched out into this meadow at the very end of each chapter in *Splitting the Difference,* but I will stride boldly into it all the time here.) Here, like Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire,* I am "dependent upon the kindness of strangers" (upon their reliability, for translations and contextualizations).

Aside from stories from the Dravidian texts of South India and the Hebrew Bible, there is relatively little here from outside the language group known as Indo-European (Sanskrit, Greek, Norse, Celtic)—just a scattering of tales from Arabic, Inuit, Japanese, and Chinese texts, and an even thinner scattering from African, South American, Polynesian, Indonesian, and Native American sources (all in translation), narrative flotsam and jetsam from the ocean of my casual reading and viewing, carried to me by the strong current of my obsession. This uneven sampling reflects my weakness rather than any dearth of relevant stories; readers will surely be able to supply many other examples. Sometimes the meanings of the myths in these other cultures seem to agree with those of the cultures more broadly represented here, sometimes not; always we sense that we get only a portion of their meanings when we do not know the context. But to contextualize them would have made this long book infinitely long.[35]

APOLOGIA FOR THE LENGTH OF THIS BOOK

My mother bequeathed to me, along with the *Late Late Late Show* and opera, a passion for collecting things: paintings (for her) and stories (for me). My collection of bedtricks, made into the collage (or, if you will, bricolage) of this book, is certainly not exhaustive, merely a selection of some of my favorites. The goal of this promiscuously comparative book is not, primarily, to display my own obsession with stories about bedtricks but to display the human race's obsession with the theme. Since part of my argument is simply that there are variants of this myth all over the

world, I have cited many, many stories. To say, "There are lots of stories about this," tells you something significant about the theme; actually to tell a lot of those stories tells you far more. I take as my motto the epigraph from Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte:* "Truth is not found in a single dream, but in many dreams."[36] This book was not destined to be a haiku.

The bedtrick turns out to be the sort of cannibalizing project that Maggie Kilgour calls "*The Text That Ate the World,*" one of those themes that "set out to swallow reality in a single gulp . . . (*my* metaphor's bigger than *your* metaphor)," which she imagines as "a B-movie (written by Stephen King and directed by George Romero) about the 'encyclopedic impulse' to incorporate everything."[37] As my manuscript continued to grow, one potential publisher suggested that instead of publishing it in the old-fashioned way, on paper, I could simply put it on-line as a kind of Web site or chat bedroom and let people subscribe to the constant updates. Rejecting that option, I thought of subtitling it "The Silver Twig" (or, more arrogantly, "The Platinum Bough"), but if Sir James George Frazer has been an inspiration, he has not provided a methodological model. Then I thought of calling it "An Encyclopedia of Bedtricks" or "An Anthology of Bedtricks" or, in bad moments, "The Guinness Book of Bedtricks," for it ranges pretty widely, and I did try to arrange the stories systematically. But it would be presumptuous to claim that this book is an encyclopedia, for it is far too idiosyncratic in tone and taste to sustain the truth claims implicit in the title of "encyclopedia." My work to date was once described, by someone introducing me at a public event, as offering "a powerful anecdote" [*sic*] to certain lamentable trends in the field of the history of religions. This slip of the tongue is all the method to which I aspire here; I hope that *The Bedtrick* will indeed prove to be a powerful anecdote.

I have three primary goals in this book, in steeply declining order of importance. First is to delight and amuse; my criterion of selection has been primarily aesthetic rather than ideological: I have chosen the best stories I know, those rich in human insights and memorable images. Each chapter begins by telling some good stories, particularly stories not widely known in Europe and America, and by assembling clusters of vivid details. My second goal is to prove some points, such as the importance of the theme of the bedtrick, the fruitfulness of cross-cultural studies, the value of using many different approaches, and the existence of certain patterns in the ways that human beings have devised to deal with their sexual

fantasies. This I have attempted to do by the sheer number of examples, as well as by analysis and arguments in the approach sections. Third, I hope to dazzle the reader with my peculiar erudition, by juxtaposing narratives that no one else would think of juxtaposing.

I certainly do not expect every, or perhaps even any, reader to read the book straight through. Terence Cave, writing on a similar topic, speaks for me:

> Few readers will have the patience to read this book from end to end. . . . The topic is many-sided and the angles of approach varied. On the other hand, this is not just a collection of essays. It was written as a whole and some parts are not easily understandable without reference to others, not so much because the argument follows a single direct line, but because themes and images . . . recur in different contexts, and without some knowledge of those contexts particular cases may seem arbitrary or fanciful.[38]

The fabric of the bedtrick is such that the threads keep unraveling and doubling back on themselves, like the themes in a fugue, the twists in a Möbius strip. The appearance of arbitrariness therefore threatens this book perhaps even more than it did Cave's, and to counteract it I have devised the system of cross-references described above. The division of the text into small subsections is also designed to make the text browser-friendly.

There were many more stories in earlier drafts, but I boiled them down, like the woman who prepared milk-rice for the Buddha when he ended his long meditation after achieving Enlightenment: she milked a thousand cows and fed the milk to five hundred cows; then she milked those five hundred cows and fed the milk to two hundred and fifty, and so on, until she fed the milk of sixteen cows to eight. She used the milk of those eight cows to prepare the milk-rice for the Buddha.[39] But I had to stop midway, at about two hundred and fifty, for unlike Schelling's (or Hegel s) ideological cows, which are all black at night[40] (like women and cats†), and more like the ancient Indian wishing-cow, which you can milk of whatever you desire,[41] narrative cows do not look alike or yield just one kind of milk. This book is my offering of milk-rice for the enlightened reader.