CHAPTER 2

"He may be lying but what he says is true": the sacred tradition of don Juan as reported by Carlos Castaneda, anthropologist, trickster, guru, allegorist

Charlotte E. Hardman

Shamanism has intrigued the Western world for over 500 years. When in 1968 an inaccessible and inscrutable student of anthropology called Carlos Castaneda published his book *The Teaching of Don Juan*, a legion of seekers after truth, social scientists, and scientists in the Western world became fascinated by the worldview of a Yaqui sorcerer who was teaching Carlos to "see" at twilight through the crack in the universe to an alternative reality by ridding him of his blinkered Western logic. Castaneda's books sowed the seed of Western shamanism, often called neo-shamanism, which spread worldwide in the 1970s. Castaneda has been described as "one of the great avatars . . . of the psychedelic age"[1] and "the principal psychological, spiritual and literary genius of recent generations," and the Yaqui sorcerer don Juan as "the most important paradigm since Jesus."[2] The anthropologist Edith Turner sees Castaneda's research as a great liberation, taking us – "like Dante – through a dark passage out the other side into a state of enlightenment."[3]

The two questions to be answered in this chapter are: (1) How did it come about that a large section of the Western world endowed Carlos Castaneda with such authority that his early books were welcomed as the discovery of an extraordinarily coherent ancient and sacred tradition? (2) When the authenticity of his sources was doubted, why did Castaneda's fame continue, focusing on his imaginative creation and the significance of a new kind of ethnography celebrating the experiential? This chapter argues that the concept of charisma can give a partial answer to these questions, especially if we focus on the creation of charisma through the use of allegory and rhetoric to construct authenticity and legitimacy. In this sense, the

[1] Goodman, *I Was Carlos Castaneda*, p. xi.
[2] Pearce, "Don Juan and Jesus," pp. 191–218, quoted in Noel, *Seeing Castaneda*, pp. 13–14.
[3] Turner, "The Teachings of Castaneda."

success of Castaneda's early works can be usefully compared with the art of fantasy literature (Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Pullman's *His Dark Materials*). He can also be compared to other figures who claimed access to undiscovered sacred sources, such as Madame Blavatsky, or Gurdjieff. These "independent teachers" or "enlightened masters" all falsely profess to be teaching secret traditions when in fact they each "teach from himself or herself."[4] Castaneda, like these other self-styled "masters," wrote with forceful rhetoric to convince readers that he had found the answer to the problems of existence. In spite of the hostility shown by Castaneda, Blavatsky, and Gurdjieff to the Enlightenment and the scientific worldview it encouraged, they all owe much in their efforts to establish new sacred traditions to the sceptical Enlightenment view which emphasized religious toleration and the basic oneness of human nature.[5] All three attempted to re-enchant the world and bring back the mystery. The context in which all three invented popular sacred traditions was a disenchanted world.

In attempting to understand "invented traditions" it should be stated from the outset that, unlike Hobsbawm and Ranger,[6] I do not distinguish between genuine, real, old traditions and traditions that are invented, contrived, and new in quite the way that they do. Although a distinction between authentic ethnographic reporting and the fictitious can be made, nevertheless creativity, omission, or distortion is inevitable in the description of any culture, tradition, or religion. Anthony Giddens observed that "All traditions ... are invented traditions. No traditional societies were wholly traditional, and traditions and customs have been invented for a diversity of reasons. We shouldn't suppose that the conscious construction of tradition is found only in the modern period."[7] Movement, change, imagination, and debate are essential in the formation of traditions. The notion of "invented tradition" itself demands questioning, since it insinuates the idea of true and original sacred traditions and neglects the constant creativity of human beings.[8] It is rather scholars who have shaped and prioritized the notion of a true original. As we shall see, the example of Castaneda shows that whether or not a sacred tradition is genuine or original is less important than its appeal; to succeed, any tradition has to appeal to a section of the world wishing to believe its "truth" at a particular point in history. It also has to gain "authenticity" from some creative

[4] Rawlinson, *Book of Enlightened Masters*, p. 25.
[5] See Hanegraff, *New Age Religion*, pp. 443–55.
[6] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*.
[7] Giddens, "Runaway World."
[8] See Carrithers, "Why Anthropologists should study Rhetoric."

figure. I suggest that the sacred tradition of don Juan has a place in the imagining of Western religions and in the discipline of anthropology because it located and communicated the tension between Western scientific rationality and the power of altered states of consciousness; between science and imagination; between the exotic and the familiar; between "disenchantment" and the magic of the sorcerer. What the invention of sacred traditions can tell us about the creators, the followers, and the eras in which they arise is often more interesting than the focus on the "legitimacy" or "truth" of their worldviews.

BACKGROUND

Carlos Castaneda's first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, a Master's dissertation, was praised in its foreword by Professor Walter Goldschmidt, an anthropologist at UCLA, for trying to explain the world of don Juan from inside, in terms of its own inner logic, bridging "for us the world of the Yaqui sorcerer with our own, the world of non-ordinary reality with the world of ordinary reality."[9] Published by Simon & Schuster, the book went straight to the top of the bestseller list. His four subsequent books also became bestsellers, and Castaneda became a key figure in the New Age. Much to his annoyance, reviewers called him "one of the Godfathers of the New Age."[10]

Carlos Castaneda's authority and popularity relied heavily on his reputation as an anthropologist, recording spiritual and hallucinogenic experiences and his in-depth conversations with an Indian sorcerer, eliciting his sacred tradition. Eager to secure his status as a *bona fide* anthropologist, he submitted *Journey to Ixtlan* as his doctoral dissertation. As this secretive yet experience-seeking anthropologist, he inspired millions desirous of an alternative to Western logic and modern rationality. Though other anthropologists were recording Indian worldviews similar to those of don Juan,[11] no one had found such systematic philosophizing as apparently possessed by this sorcerer.[12] Castaneda's influence spread well beyond anthropology, even to the front cover of *Time* magazine (March 5, 1973).

[9] Foreword to Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, p. 10.

[10] Wallace, *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, p. 16. [11] Myerhoff, *Peyote Hunt*; Harner, *The Jivaro*.

[12] Marcel Griaule's *Dieu d'Eaux* (1948), first published in English as *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* in 1965, showed that Ogotemmêli had more cultural wisdom than don Juan. Ogotemmêli had a deep knowledge of Dogon myth, religion, and philosophy, whereas Castaneda's don Juan is individualistic – his knowledge is that of the individual sorcerer – yet Griaule's book, though a classic, is not a bestseller.

The early books outlined Castaneda's struggles with don Juan's path to be "a man of knowledge" – someone who has direct knowledge of the world as opposed to academic knowledge which transcends experience, such as having sufficient clarity of mind and energy to become a warrior, to lead a warrior's life, and to accept and overcome fear.[13] The sacred tradition involved the acceptance of the existence of separate but equal realities, and the aim was to test all of Castaneda's Western presuppositions. To achieve that, he had to have an ally, "a power capable of transforming a man beyond the boundaries of himself,"[14] and in the early books the "allies" were hallucinogens (peyote, *datura*, and mushrooms), since states of non-ordinary reality allow people to "see" not hallucinations but concrete, although unordinary, aspects of the reality of everyday life. He has famous visionary encounters with Mescalito and he flies as a crow. He has twenty-two drug experiments in the first two books,[15] but in the third book Castaneda experiences non-ordinary events without drugs. He sees a bridge and sleeps in a cave, neither of which exists in ordinary reality; he sees mountains as a web of light fibres; and don Genaro, don Juan's sorcerer friend, is able to leap 10 miles to a mountaintop. The later books further describe ideas of knowledge and power, apparently gained from don Juan, and relate extraordinary magical struggles between sorcerers. Castaneda also articulates a whole metaphysics about the nature and role of perception in molding the world. By the 1980s his embodiment of don Juan made him a man with "special powers," a *nagual*, surrounded by an inner group of "witches" (Carol Tiggs, Florinder Grau, Taisha Abelar) and an outer "cult" group, largely despised but encountered in workshops costing $600 a head.

At first, the extraordinary material apparently obtained during twelve years (1960–72) of apprenticeship with a medicine man was seen as serious ethnography. More philosophical Socratic conversations than conventional anthropology, here was an Indian *brujo* revealing his secret knowledge to an eager student. Gradually, however, the anthropological world became dubious about Castaneda's "fieldwork." In spite of numerous Californian students' attempts, no one else could find don Juan; anthropologists doubted whether don Juan's "teachings" were Yaqui (Yaqui don't use *datura*), and hallucinogenic mushrooms do not grow in the Sonoran Desert, where Castaneda supposedly took them with don Juan. There were no field notes, and much of the dialogue did not fit with the claim that they were translated from Spanish. In 1976 a psychologist, Richard de

[13] Castaneda, *Separate Reality*, pp. 12, 197. [14] Ibid., 199.
[15] De Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*, pp. 166–8.

Mille, wrote a devastating critique of Castaneda's books, giving detailed evidence suggesting a hoax. Weston La Barre described the work as pseudo-ethnography,[16] and Gordon Wasson, an expert on sacred mushrooms, received an evasive reply to his letter questioning his description of the mushrooms used.[17] Critics saw pseudo-anthropology and the appropriation of American Indian traditions for material gain, exploitation, and a pandering to New Age desires for ancient traditions, magic, and self-empowerment. As Castaneda's books became increasingly full of "New Age" occult and Castaneda became wealthier from sales and expensive workshops, the voices about a fictitious hoax became more vocal. By the 1980s many were convinced that Castaneda was a habitual falsifier.

That he invented his sacred tradition, or rather compiled it from numerous sources other than from any one person called don Juan, has been argued fully.[18] But if the fieldwork is a hoax, what emerges just as strongly is the sense that it is not a "complete spoof" like the work of Lobsang Rampa,[19] but a work of art, an allegory conveying a "truth" about reality better than any nonfiction work could. For some, Castaneda's authenticity remains a mystery; for others, in many ways it does not matter. He may be lying but what he says is true. The faithful remain and discussions continue.[20]

PUBLIC RESPONSE

The authority of Carlos Castaneda's books was constructed in part by this public debate and his emergence in the public arena. As Bruner suggests, "For ethnographers, tourists, and indigenous peoples the question is not if authenticity is inherent in an object, as if it were a thing out there to be discovered or unearthed, but rather, how is authenticity constructed .... What are the processes of production of authenticity? ... authenticity, too is something sought, fought over, and reinvented."[21] The public debate about Carlos Castaneda in the late sixties created a significant don Juan / Carlos Castaneda discourse about alternative realities. Many claimed that the validity of the books came from making the traditions of shamanism and the notion of non-ordinary reality available to a wide audience. For them this was more important than whether they came from authentic anthropological fieldwork. Roger Jellinek wrote in 1971:

[16] De Mille, *Don Juan Papers*, p. 105. [17] See ibid., pp. 319–32.
[18] See Noel, *Seeing Castaneda*; de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*; *Don Juan Papers*; Wallace, *Sorcerer's Apprentice*; Runyan Castaneda, *Magical Journey*.
[19] Leach, "High School Review," p. 37. [20] Krippner, "Castaneda."
[21] Bruner, "Epilogue," p. 326.

One can't exaggerate the significance of what Castaneda has done. He is describing a shamanistic tradition, a pre-logical cultural form that is no-one-knows how old. It has been described often ... But it seems that no other outsider, and certainly not a "Westerner," has ever participated in its mysteries from within; nor has anyone described them so well.[22]

Similarly, Michael Harner congratulated him "regardless of the questions that have been raised regarding their degree of fictionalization" for having "performed the valuable service of introducing many Westerners to the adventure and excitement of shamanism."[23]

A different response, equally endowing Castaneda with scholarly legitimacy, are those arguing that, since shamanism is a worldwide phenomenon, parallels are inevitable and what is significant is the *experience*. C. J. S. Clarke, a professor of applied mathematics, is convinced by the significance of Castaneda's experiences. Although he accepts evidence showing that Castanda's books are fiction, he does not see this as detracting from their value: "The close parallels between what Castaneda describes and other areas of shamanic experience show that he is presenting genuine anthropological material ... the books bring together and comment upon a wide range of genuine experiences of alternative reality."[24] For Clarke, the books are depictions of experiences, and the exploration of these experiences and new paradigms is an essential part of science. Michael Harner supports this view, defending Castaneda from de Mille's accusations of plagiarism by stating that the latter must be "unaware that remarkable parallels exist in shamanic belief and practice throughout the primitive world."[25] In Harner's view, Castaneda shows the "process" of becoming a shaman, and it is this experience of non-ordinary reality which gives the books validity.[26] Ethnography from the books is therefore cited in Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* as shamanic parallels; Castaneda's distinction between "ordinary reality" and "non-ordinary reality" is adopted and becomes central to Harner's "core shamanism" and to neo-shamanism. Harner accounts for "the deep-seated, emotional hostility that greeted the works of Castaneda" in terms of prejudice, not ethnocentrism but *cognicentrism*, prejudice against the concept of non-ordinary reality by those who have never experienced it.[27] For Harner, those who cannot appreciate Castaneda are simply prejudiced. Harner said, "I think Castaneda's work is 110 percent valid. He conveys a deep truth, though his specific details can often be justifiably questioned."[28]

[22] Jellinek, quoted in Thompson, "Carlos Castaneda Speaks."
[23] Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. xxiii. [24] Clarke, *Reality*, p. 163.
[25] In de Mille, *Don Juan Papers*, p. 40. [26] Harner, *Way of the Shaman*.
[27] Ibid., p. xx. [28] In de Mille, *Don Juan Papers*, p. 22.

Castaneda's don Juan needed authentication by academics, and for many Michael Harner's position in an "academic foundation" and his reputation as an expert on shamanism made his acceptance of Castaneda invaluable. Harner's own workshops also validate Castaneda, since they rely on Castaneda's distinction between "non-ordinary reality" and "ordinary reality" and offer the experience that many could not obtain through just reading the books. One believer writes:

I became interested in different paths, including the internal martial arts, ecstatic Christianity, Eastern religions and philosophies, and meditation. All the while, I yearned for the kinds of experiences Carlos Castaneda described in his first five books. Then I met Michael Harner, taking the Basic workshop in 1981, and felt that I had found what I had been looking for: a spirituality that offered direct experience, promoted intimacy with the natural world, enabled one to help others, and demanded personal freedom.[29]

It is quite common for followers of Castaneda and the Warrior Path or the Toltec path to see those who classify Castaneda's work as "fiction" as being hindered by their lack of experience of other realities.

Castaneda's work can only really be appreciated if you can "read between the lines" . . . all great works of spiritual import (including the Bible) speak deeply to those who have EXPERIENCED a deeper journey and a deeper calling of Reality than simply the alignment or nonalignment of "factual data."[30]

Nevil Drury, a New Age author, similarly focuses on the significance of Castaneda's experiences:

Carlos himself is probably the actual visionary and many of the shamanistic perspectives have probably been implanted in the personage of the real, partially real, and unreal being known as don Juan. In this sense it hardly matters to the person interested in consciousness and states of perception whether don Juan is real or not since the fiction, if it is that, is authentic.[31]

Transpersonal experiences, trance states, altered states of consciousness, and alternative reality are the terminology for the new don Juan debates and have become an empirical foundation for a spiritual worldview; psychology is sacralized and religion psychologized. It may all be in the mind, but what is in the mind is real and can shift our view of the world.[32] Authenticity for many in the New Age is considered a matter of personal interpretation, and since Carlos has clearly experienced non-ordinary reality, what he says must be true even if it is put in a fictional form.

[29] <www.shamanism.org>. [30] <www.newvision-psychic.com>.
[31] Drury, *Elements*, 87. [32] See Hanegraaff, *New Age*, pp. 224–9.

Debates in anthropology have contributed to the case for the validity and "sacredness" of the books. Some anthropologists could find similarities in their own fieldwork with shamans and had "validating experiences." Marton describes his own validating experience of the Afro-Cuban Orisha path.[33] Peters, Grindal, and Stoller produced ethnographies in the 1980s which contributed to the reflexive, narrative, novelistic tradition of Castaneda. Creativity in anthropology became central to how cultural worlds are represented[34] – a case well argued by Marcus Clifford.[35] Although many anthropologists recognize the significance of Castaneda in opening up these issues of experimental writing and the predicament of ethnography – that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures[36] – most anthropologists reject Castaneda since he refused to make available ways of evaluating and monitoring his information.[37] He is the trickster of anthropology. As tricksters in myths often are, he was clever and unprincipled, a master of inversion, contradiction and ambiguity, and he delighted in giving an alternative way to that of ordinary anthropology. He certainly encouraged more self-reflective ethnographies which no longer claim to have the "truth" about any society. Professor Stan Wilk has argued that the books complement scientific anthropology, a mythic study of science to complete the scientific study of myth. "The Don Juan books are 'beneficially viewed as a sacred text' which prepares us 'to witness, to accept without really understanding.' "[38] Carlos Castaneda's ambiguous legacy to anthropology is fully documented by Yves Marton.[39]

In contrast to the ambiguous response of anthropologists, millions of readers responded to Castaneda by buying the books (some eight million in seventeen languages). These books reflected their new interest in non-rational approaches to reality. Castaneda was articulating what people around him were increasingly feeling, that is, a growing dislike of an overly rational, scientific, materialistic world that had no understanding or feeling for "other realities," such as those to be experienced on hallucinogenic drugs. The counter-culture in 1968 was ready for an alternative to the dominant scientific view. In the 1950s and '60s California was alive with students experimenting with drugs. Aldous Huxley had taken mescaline in 1953 and in 1954 he described his experiences with hallucinatory drugs in

[33] Marton, "Experiential Approach," p. 278.
[34] Peters, *Ecstasy and Healing*; Grindal, "Into the Heart"; Stoller, *Fusion of Worlds*.
[35] Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*; *Routes*. [36] Marton, "Experiential Approach."
[37] Marcus and Fisher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, p. 40.
[38] In de Mille, *Don Juan Papers*. [39] Marton, "Experiential Approach," pp. 273–97.

The Doors of Perception. Castaneda was much intrigued by Huxley, who represented for the generation of the 1960s a new freedom to explore other realities, a freedom from the whole Western industrial complex. The success of Castaneda's portrayal of don Juan's ancient sacred tradition makes sense against the background of opposition to modern "Enlightenment" views of reality, raising issues about consciousness, the nature of reality, and the nature of the person. He made famous the notion of "non-ordinary reality." As de Mille says in his first critique of Castaneda, "Castaneda was kicking some very big true ideas around: There is more than one kind of reality. There is magic that is not illusion. The world is that which comes out of what can be ... Responsibility gives power. But greater than power is knowledge."[40]

The new religion of Toltec Warriors, based on don Juan's Toltec warrior tradition, which Castaneda created around him in the counterculture of the 1970s and '80s, played on the mystery and the fascination of the hippies and beats, and on the anthropological academe for exploring and validating the existence of other realities. He had identified a Western wish to break out of the scientific paradigm and to experience, like Castaneda, the insider's view. He provided them with Tensegrity, dance moves similar to Gurdjieff's, and opened the way for Harner to develop "core shamanism" for the development of neo-shamanism for everyone.

This popularity of neo-shamanism continued and spread with Nevil Drury, Harley SwiftDeer, Archie LameDeer, Lynn Andrews, Jonathan Horwitz and Sun Bear. SwiftDeer, for example, founded the "Deer Tribe Metis Medicine Society Shamanic Lodge of Ceremonial Medicine" in 1986 and claims that he and Carlos Castaneda studied under the same Native American medicine men and took part together in meetings in Mexico. They created a mythical role for Castaneda, claiming that his books used the secret teachings of the "Twisted Hairs Council of Elders," who collected an eclectic body of traditional and powerful knowledge from American Indians from both North and South America. Members say because the planet was in such crisis, Carlos Castaneda was given the knowledge and told to reveal it to the world as a hook to "wake people up to how the world should be."[41] They claim that SwiftDeer and the Deer tribe are modern-day representatives of an ancient lineage of sacred knowledge which has evolved over thousands of years. Their references to an ancient lineage and to Castaneda himself are the strategies for authenticating this new tradition of "personal growth and spiritual awakening." Other leaders of

[40] De Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*, p. 16. [41] Deer Tribe, personal communication.

neo-shamanic groups, such as Michael Harner and Victor Sanchez, have similarly created a mythical role for Castaneda in their own creations.

So why did so many endow him with such authority? De Mille wondered why he didn't dismiss Castaneda.

> My friend supplied the answer. Castaneda wasn't a common con man, he lied to bring the truth. His stories are packed with truth, though they are not true stories as he says they are. This is a sham-man bearing gifts, an ambiguous spellbinder dealing simultaneously in contrary commodities – wisdom and deception.[42]

We have seen from the range of responses and disagreements that the authenticity was fought over, claimed, and counter-claimed, and in the very process of discussion authenticity was both created and destroyed, invented and reinvented. If what he wrote was purely from his imagination, for many believers and academics it didn't matter. The books contain deep truths. They make shamanism available to a wide audience. They are innovative ethnography. They confront the hegemony of the Western scientific tradition. The planet is in crisis and needs these books to change us. The tradition presented in Castaneda's books is presented, like Theosophy before it, as an ancient tradition. The authority of don Juan is gained from his status as a wise "sorcerer" who has insight and knowledge unavailable to the rest of us. He was invented, imagined, a construct.

CHARISMA, RHETORIC, AND ALLEGORY

We have seen that Castaneda achieved legitimate authority through academic status, public debate, and public response to the fictive tradition of a wise sorcerer. In this section I examine how he achieved legitimate authority and power through the use of charisma, rhetoric, and allegory.

Many new traditions achieve authenticity through the charisma of their leaders. Max Weber, in his classic text on authority and power, differentiates between legal/rational authority (university or government hierarchies), traditional authority (the Queen) and charismatic authority (prophets, shamans, and some religious leaders), depending on the leader's *charis* ("gift of grace"). There is no appointment, dismissal, or promotion in charismatic authority; it depends on its recognition by followers. According to Weber, charisma is "applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least

[42] De Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*, p. 41.

specifically exceptional powers or qualities."[43] It is hard to assess the extent to which Castaneda's authority can be located in charisma. The sociological term as defined by Weber (and further elaborated by Brian Wilson, Roy Wallis, and Eileen Barker[44]) illuminates some of Castaneda's success as a popular figure. It is hard, however, to detach from Castaneda's power the traditional authority gained from academic status (which he fought for) and the authority of the one he embodied, that is don Juan. I think it is important in this case to identify the specific tools and techniques of Castaneda's authenticity and authority, which are overwhelmingly constructed through public discussion, his use of rhetoric and metaphor (in the form of allegory), and the strategy of reported discourse and performance. Followers believed that Castaneda must have been an extraordinary person because of the way he reported his meetings with don Juan and persuaded his readers to become involved in that interaction and his learning process. Inspired by don Juan's vision, as portrayed by Carlos, followers described Castaneda as having enormous gifts and magical powers. Carlos Castaneda was famous – hundreds of thousands of students were challenged by one or more of his books; they were trying out the drugs, seeking out don Juan. The reality was usually a disappointment. As his ex-wife Margaret Runyan puts it:

> There were students eating raw peyote and snorting mescaline through rolled $20 bills, trying to share in this thing that was happening. It was as if they thought maybe something phenomenal was going to happen when Castaneda walked into the auditorium . . . Only he didn't look like Castaneda, or rather like everybody's ideal of Castaneda. He was short and slightly paunchy with glistening black hair trimmed short and brown suit with white shirt and narrow tan and cream tie. He had this dour sedentary look . . . This was the purveyor of the new mysticism – a guy who looked like a Cuban bellhop.[45]

He was not charismatic in the popular sense of a quality of a person, the "big man theory." His early public lectures were not successful and often led people to wonder if Castaneda had sent some understudy to speak for him. The myth developed that the real Castaneda was in hiding, a recluse. But for numerous others, the readers worldwide, the charismatic image and the rhetoric remained.

Much of Castaneda's power was created by myth, the allegory of his meetings with don Juan, and the mystery of Carlos himself – "even his

[43] Weber, *Theory of Social*, p. 358.

[44] Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium*; *The Noble Savages*; Wallis, "Social Construction of Charisma"; Barker, "Charismatization."

[45] Runyan Castaneda, *Magical Journey*, pp. 165–6.

close friends aren't sure who he is."[46] The art of the hunter, the sorcerer, according to don Juan, is to become inaccessible. Castaneda used this as his explanation for refusing to be photographed or recorded or to reveal biographical data. In order to become don Juan's apprentice, Castaneda claims, he was told in December 1960 to "erase his personal history":

> What shamans like don Juan seek is a state of fluidity where the personal "me" does not count. He believed that an absence of photographs and biographical data affects whomever enters into this field of action in a positive, though subliminal way. We are endlessly accustomed to using photographs, recordings and biographical data, all of which spring from the idea of personal importance. Don Juan said it was better not to know anything about a shaman; in this way, instead of encountering a person, one encounters an idea that can be sustained.[47]

The image that is sustained is that of the warrior with a different way of being in the world, living

> by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting. In other words, a man of knowledge has no honor, no dignity, no family, no name, no country, but only life to be lived, and under these circumstances his only tie to his fellow men is his controlled folly.[48]

The rhetoric is skillful. Many tried to copy Castaneda, seeking to be spiritual adventurers unafraid to push against the boundaries of convention.

Castaneda had always been skilled at self-mystification. Though born in Peru, he had changed his year of birth, location, family background, and early education. After separating from friends and his wife Margaret in the summer of 1960, Castaneda became elusive, living his own metaphorical life,

> constantly constructing a separate reality by deliberately transforming common social meanings into uncommon ones – going to Mexico in the blink of an eye, telling you he is *in* Mexico as he stands talking to you in Los Angeles . . . what makes it metaphorical rather than insane is that Castaneda knows which reality is ordinary and which is nonordinary, though his listener may not.[49]

According to Barbara Meyerhoff, when Castaneda met the shaman Ramón, "being around the two of them was like entering a separate reality. They really saw and believed and dwelt in another realm."[50]

Castaneda persuaded people through the rhetoric, allegory, and performances in the books. "As Carlos uses traps and bare hands to catch rabbits, Castaneda uses stories and gestures to catch people."[51] Persuasion lies

[46] Ibid., p. 17. [47] Rivas, "Navigating." [48] Castaneda, *Separate Reality*, p. 98.
[49] De Mille, *Don Juan Papers*, p. 376. [50] Ibid., p. 344. [51] Ibid., p. 380.

behind the ubiquitous conversations between Carlos and don Juan. Readers are charmed and drawn in by these conversations, identifying with Castaneda and yet feeling superior at his irritating inability to escape his Western logic. The skill of his rhetoric lay in describing another reality, denying the validity of our own ordinary reality and conveying this through the allegory of ethnographic fieldwork and his struggle to understand another worldview. The academic validation of his ethnography as factual is fundamental to the creation of this allegory. Fantasy is not just fantasy. It is also ethnography going further than anthropologists had yet dared to tread. Castaneda created a vision suggesting that Yaqui sorcerers know the right way to live; he showed readers what they could be. Rhetoric persuaded thousands that they could voice protest, oppose the conventional view, follow the "path," and practice magic. They could learn to "see" the ultimate nature of things by adopting "allies" and learning the art of dreaming, the art of stalking, the importance of celibacy, "controlled folly," and "being impeccable." He made philosophical, mystical ideas accessible; he made himself the authority on don Juan, and embodied don Juan. But, as Bharati said,

> There is nothing in Castaneda's mysticism that you cannot find, sometimes in the same words, in Hindu and Buddhist tantrism or in the official Patanjali yoga, which is perfectly exoteric and comprehensible to westerners . . . Stir together bits of Blavatsky, dollops of David Neel, gobs of Gurdjieff, sops of Ouspensky, snatches of Govinda, yards of Amerindian folklore, and a series of programmatic LSD trips, and you have the don Carlos idiom.[52]

Michael Carrithers emphasizes the extent to which humans are not just culture-bearing but culture-creating and culture-changing beings. "Attending to the rhetorical dimension of life requires attending to the rhetorical will, the work on social situations that the persuading agent intends."[53] The appeal of Castaneda's rhetoric can be seen in the light of this. Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff claimed: "The form he teaches in is essential. It's as important as the content. His allegory. His mirroring. He gives us in a concrete form things we had abstractly conceptualized but didn't know how to articulate or use. He does that beautifully. That's where he's a gifted teacher."[54] Myerhoff appreciated Castaneda as being more than a manipulative deceiver, seeing him as embodying don Juan, and possibly through don Juan as expressing a sub-personality of his own.

[52] Ibid., p. 148. [53] Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures.*
[54] In de Mille, *Don Juan Papers*, p. 345.

She argued that people were not stupid in accepting his work but that many *were ready to believe*, since "His allegories, the stories he tells, seem to validate everybody."[55]

Castaneda fits into a pattern of gurus and tricksters who work creatively and inventively with the works and teachings of others to persuade us that they have access to an ancient sacred tradition. And that sacred tradition attracted followers. Central to this is skillful rhetoric – the ability to capture the imagination of audiences as well as offer them spiritual insights and codes of behavior. If we define religion as a system of stories[56] (and, after all, myths are the backbone for many indigenous systems of thought, which change and develop over time with each new storyteller), Castaneda was the storyteller who was able to retell the old stories to capture imaginations. The stories had been told before but never with such persuasive force, never with such an aura of mystique. Moreover, they voiced a nostalgia for a different reality, responding to a discontent with Western culture. "For a generation of people hungry for a different way of life, the message was clear. Native Americans possessed a vast wisdom, a spirituality lost to us."[57] As are myths, it does not matter whether don Juan really existed, because the function of the books was to encourage a fundamental reconsideration of what reality is.

CONCLUSIONS

Carlos Castaneda created the sacred tradition of a sorcerer who supposedly existed somewhere in Mexico. His success in both hoodwinking the academic world into accepting his work as authentic and at the same time establishing a popular new religion, neo-shamanism, with its own ancient sacred tradition, can best be understood in terms of a particular form of "charismatic authority," involving skillful rhetoric so that he was able to make believable the sorcery apprenticeship he described. The teachings of don Juan, which he described with such rhetorical force, echoed the experiences of those who had tried hallucinogens and those who experienced the impact of a more mystical or spiritual, less rational view of the world. He managed a continuing dialectic between his own creativity and the sources he drew on to create the sacred tradition. In arguing this, I am following Roy Wallis's extension of Weber's understanding of

[55] In Ibid., p. 340. [56] See Tilley, *Story Theology*; Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative*.
[57] Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, p. 136.

charismatic authority, and James Fernandez's arguments about the power of metaphor in creating rhetorical devices, as well as Carrithers's comments on the persuasiveness of rhetorical narratives.[58] Wallis and Barker make clear the extent to which charismatic authority involves the active involvement of followers in creating charisma.[59] What we see here is the part that rhetoric can play in this relationship. Castaneda's devotees and the anthropological academe were persuaded by rhetorical mastery to bestow on him the authority of recognition, which by the 1990s allowed him to expand his authority into a dogmatic cult.

Why look at Carlos Castaneda as an example of the invention of a sacred tradition? Because although the "eclectic metaphysical conversations in the desert were scholastic allegories,"[60] his skill in creating a sacred tradition lay in precisely this – to be the ultimate Trickster Prophet, using the trickster role, rhetoric, allegory, and myth-making to persuade his readers. And in doing so he succeeded in challenging not only scholarly truth and what this means, but in creating the framework for a new religious tradition challenging the old world order and central tenets of the Western world. The worldview described by Castaneda's don Juan radically challenged modernity, rationality, and consciousness, calling us to believe as fact that magic is not an illusion, that there is more than one reality. The Yaqui "separate reality" was clearly governed by different laws, and although some anthropologists have written about magical phenomena as objectively real, none had experienced the reality in the way described by Castaneda. But because he presented the material in his first four books as social science, material collected from a Yaqui sorcerer, the charlatan trickster forced anthropology to confront the myth-making element in ethnography[61] and to accept that there is no "true" ethnography. By creating mystique and by embodying don Juan he took on the authority of the sorcerer's tradition. The myth he established became the inspiration and the basis upon which Michael Harner could build to create the neo-shamanic movement that has spread from the United States to Europe and is now, ironically, reintroducing shamanism to indigenous peoples who have rejected their own sacred traditions.

[58] Wallis, "Social Construction"; Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances*; Carrithers, "Why Anthropologists should Study Rhetoric."

[59] Wallis, "Social Construction"; Barker, "Charismatization."

[60] Clifton, *Witchcraft and Shamanism*, Foreword. [61] See Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

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