

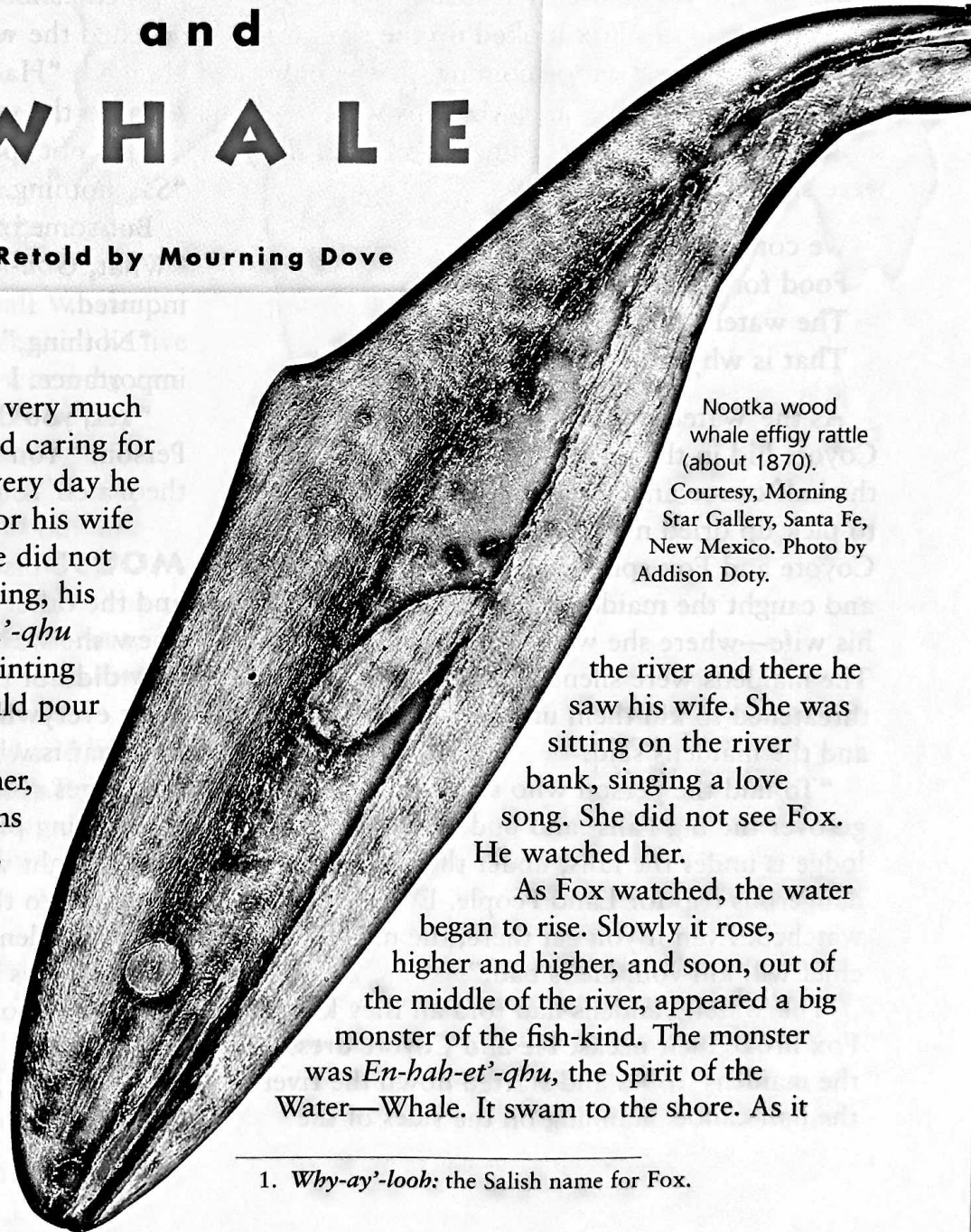
OKANOAGAN

FOX
and
COYOTE
and
WHALE

Retold by Mourning Dove

FOX had a beautiful wife. He was very much in love with her, but she had stopped caring for him. Fox was a great hunter, and every day he brought home food and fine skins for his wife to make into robes and clothing. He did not know that, while he was away hunting, his wife would sit beside the *Swah-netk'-qhu* and sing love songs to the water. Painting her face with bright colors, she would pour out her love thoughts in song.

Coyote came to visit his twin brother, and he soon noticed the strange actions of his sister-in-law. He spoke to Fox. "*Why-ay'-looh*,"¹ he said, "I think your wife is in love with somebody else." But Fox could not believe she loved anyone but him. He was blinded by his love for her. Then, one sun, he and Coyote returned from a hunt and she was not in the lodge. So Fox started to look for her. He walked down toward



Nootka wood
whale effigy rattle
(about 1870).

Courtesy, Morning
Star Gallery, Santa Fe,
New Mexico. Photo by
Addison Doty.

the river and there he saw his wife. She was sitting on the river bank, singing a love song. She did not see Fox. He watched her.

As Fox watched, the water began to rise. Slowly it rose, higher and higher, and soon, out of the middle of the river, appeared a big monster of the fish-kind. The monster was *En-hah-et'-qhu*, the Spirit of the Water—Whale. It swam to the shore. As it

1. *Why-ay'-looh*: the Salish name for Fox.

touched dry land, it changed into a tall handsome man with long braided hair. This monster-man made love to the wife of Fox.

Sad at heart, Fox turned away. He went to his lodge. He said nothing, but he wondered how he could win back his wife's love. He worried about her as the suns passed. She grew pale and thin. Nothing that Fox could do pleased her. Her thoughts always were with the man who was not a man but a monster. One day when Fox and Coyote came home from hunting, she was gone, and the fire in the lodge was cold. Fox called and called. He got no answer. His heart was heavy.

A few suns later Fox looked up the river and saw an odd-shaped canoe coming. It was only half of a canoe. Two Water Maidens were standing in it, rocking it from side to side. They were singing:

We come for food,
Food for the Chief's stolen wife.
The water-food does not suit her.
That is why we come! We come!

As the Water Maidens approached, Fox and Coyote hid in the tepee. The maidens beached the half-canoe and entered the lodge. They began to pick up dried meat to take to the stolen wife. Coyote and Fox sprang from their hiding places and caught the maidens, and Fox asked about his wife—where she was and how to get to her. The maidens were silent. Then the brothers threatened to kill them unless they answered, and the maidens said:

"To find the person who stole her, you must go over the Big Falls² and under the water. His lodge is under the falls, under the water—a dangerous trip for Land People. Every trail is watched. Even if you get there, the mighty Whale chief will kill you. He is bad."

The Water Maidens had told all they knew, so Fox broke their necks. He and Coyote dressed in the maidens' robes and started down the river in the half-canoe. Standing on the sides of the

strange craft, they rocked it as they had seen the maidens do, and rode it down the river and over the roaring falls. "Let me do all the talking," Fox warned Coyote. "I know better what to say." Down through the pouring, flashing waters they shot with the half-canoe. The thunder of the falls hurt their ears. And then, suddenly, they were landing at a great encampment of Water People, a strange kind of people to them. All of the people were strange except *Gou-kouh-whay'-na*—Mouse. She was there. She knew them and they knew her. Fox jumped ashore. Coyote, following, tripped and touched the water, and Mouse, the Sly One, laughed. "Ha-ha!" said Mouse, "Coyote nearly fell into the water."

"Do not speak," Fox whispered to Mouse. "Say nothing. I will pay you well."

But some of the Water People had heard. "What, *Gou-kouh-whay'-na*, did you say?" they inquired.

"Nothing," Mouse answered. "Nothing of importance. I was just joking."

"Yes, you did say something," said a Water Person. "You said that Coyote nearly fell into the water. You cannot fool me."

MOUSE insisted that she had not said that, and the other Water People believed her. They knew she was a fickle person and giddy, and they did not think much of her because she went everywhere to steal. She went everywhere, and that is why she understood all the different languages.

Carrying packs of dried meat and berries they had brought with them, Coyote and Fox made their way to the lodge of Whale, the chief. He and the stolen wife sat side by side in the lodge. The wife was glad to get the meat and berries, her kind of food.

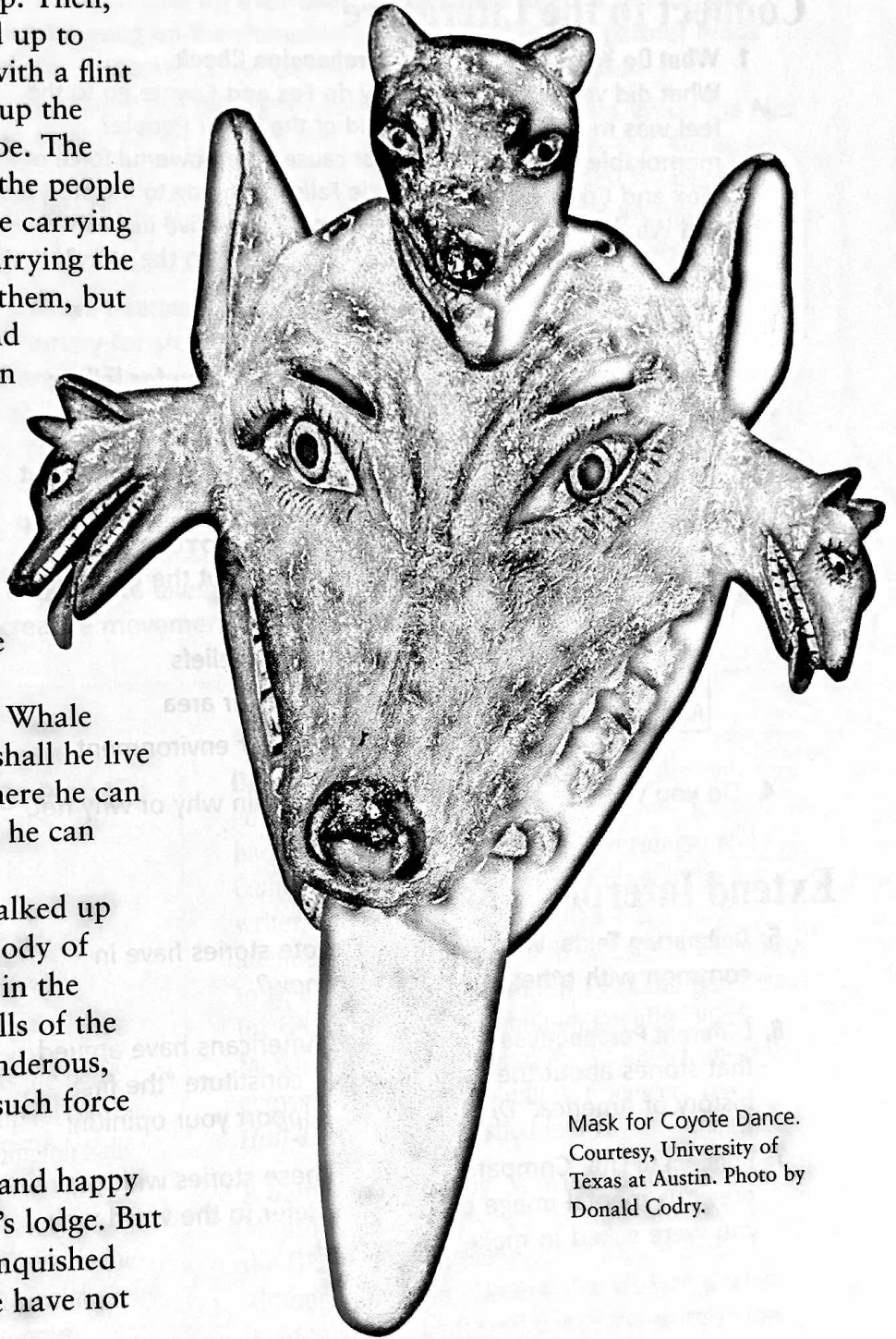
2. **Big Falls:** Kettle Falls on the Columbia River in northeastern Washington.

FOX AND COYOTE kept their robes over their faces until everyone else was asleep. Then, when everything was quiet, Fox slipped up to Whale and cut off the monster's head with a flint knife. At the same time Coyote picked up the stolen wife and ran for the broken canoe. The noise they made awoke the camp, and the people rushed out of their lodges to see Coyote carrying off Fox's wife and Fox close behind, carrying the head of their chief. The people chased them, but the three got into the broken canoe, and Fox quickly put Coyote and the woman into his *shoo'-mesh*³ pipe. Then Fox pushed the half-canoe into the water and it shot up to the river's surface below the falls. There Fox landed. He took Coyote and his twice-stolen wife out of the medicine pipe, and the head of the Whale Monster he threw toward the setting sun.

"In the Big Salt Water (ocean) shall Whale Monster stay," said Fox. "No longer shall he live in the smaller waters, in the rivers, where he can make love to the wives of men, where he can lure wives from their husbands."

As Fox and his wife and brother walked up the bank to their tepee, the headless body of Whale Monster turned over and over in the depths of the river, making the Big Falls of the *Swah-netk'-qhu* more fearful and thunderous, the way they are today, spilling with such force over the great rocks.

The wife of Fox became contented and happy again, glad to be back in her husband's lodge. But since that day Whale Monster was vanquished the Land People and the Water People have not loved each other. Fox made it so. ❖



Mask for Coyote Dance.
Courtesy, University of
Texas at Austin. Photo by
Donald Codry.

3. *shoo'-mesh*: the Salish word for medicine, or magic power.

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What did you feel was most memorable about "Fox and Coyote and Whale"?

Comprehension Check

- Why do Fox and Coyote go to the world of the Water People?
- What caused the powerful force of Kettle Falls, according to the story?
- Why don't whales live in fresh waters, according to the story?

Think Critically

2. What might be Okanogan storytellers' purpose for telling this story?

3. **ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES FOR READING TRICKSTER TALES** Share details about Okanogan culture that you recorded in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** as you read the story. What did you learn about the Okanogan people and their way of life?

THINK ABOUT

- their values, attitudes, and beliefs
- geographical features of their area
- the ways they adapt to their environment

4. Do you view Coyote as admirable? Explain why or why not.

Extend Interpretations

5. **Comparing Texts** What do these Coyote stories have in common with other folk tales you know?

6. **Different Perspectives** Some Native Americans have argued that stories about the Animal People constitute "the first history of America." Do you agree? Support your opinion.

7. **Connect to Life** Compare Coyote in these stories with your previous mental image of a coyote. Refer to the word web you were asked to make on page 39.

Literary Analysis

TRICKSTER TALE A **trickster tale** is a folk tale about an animal or person who engages in deceit, violence, and magic. Besides Coyote, tricksters in Native American oral traditions also include Raven, Mink, Hare, and Blue Jay. In tales from other world cultures, the trickster is a spider, a rabbit, or a fox. According to the folklorist Stith Thompson, a trickster "may appear in any one of three roles: the beneficent culture hero, the clever deceiver, or the numskull."

Paired Activity Create a three-column chart that classifies tricksters according to Stith Thompson's categories. Then meet with a partner to analyze the roles that Coyote plays in "Coyote and the Buffalo" and "Fox and Coyote and Whale." Fill in the chart with examples to support your findings. In each tale, which role of trickster seems the most dominant?

| Culture Hero | Clever Deceiver | Numskull |
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