

1896). The cosmos itself was divided into seven regions: north, south, east, west, zenith, nadir, and center. Everything in the cosmos was allocated to one or other of these regions.

Although modes of symbolic classification based on the number seven and those based upon nine are not universal, all societies impose some measure of classification upon their world. Yet in so doing societies invariably find that in some important ways their classification, which is a cultural construction or reconfiguration of empirical reality, clashes with their experience of reality. One strategy by which society evades this conflict is, according to Lévi-Strauss, myth. An alternative strategy to cope with such apparent contradictions has been proposed by Mary Douglas (Reading 2–4). This is the concept of pollution.

A given myth does not necessarily correspond to a given ritual (see Reading 4–1), but there are societies where myths are dramatized in rituals. A good example is to be found among the Australian Aboriginal societies, whose rituals are an essential feature of their cosmology, whose dominant concept is that of the “Dreaming,” a notion that refers to a time when the world was created and before human beings appeared. In myths of the Dreaming, the Earth is often imagined as starting with a flat plain, unmarked by any topographic features, after which ancestral beings commence to emerge from within the Earth and begin shaping its topography. Myths describe how every action of the ancestral beings has an impact on the landscape. The opening from which an ancestral being emerged from the ground might become a waterhole or perhaps the entrance to a cave; at sites where ancestral beings stuck their digging sticks into the ground, trees might sprout. These ancestral beings were complex forms of energy capable of transforming their own bodies into the shapes of such creatures as the kangaroo and caterpillar or into the shapes of inanimate objects like rocks and trees, and ritual provides the means whereby the Aborigines can tap into the resources of the Dreaming and exploit them for their present-day lives. In performing these rituals, Aborigines are able to assume the identities of their

Dreamtime ancestors and once having done so command the awesome power these supernaturals possess (Morphy 1998, p. 185).

READING 2–1

THE ROLE OF MYTH IN LIFE

Bronislaw Malinowski

Malinowski argues here that myth is “a hard-working, extremely important cultural force,” rejecting the claim that myths can be considered as texts loaded with meaning accessible only through symbols or tools for exercises in cognitive problem solving. His position is thus the opposite of that of Lévi-Strauss, and he further differs from Lévi-Strauss in downplaying the “mere examination of texts.” Malinowski properly insists on extending the meaning of narratives to include their manner of recitation and the social contexts in which they are recited since performance, he correctly observes, is an essential aspect of myth. The way the narrator presents himself or herself, the response the audience makes to the narrator’s presentation, and the narrator’s own reaction to the audience members’ responses are, in Malinowski’s view, as essential in the study of myth as the narrative.

Field research has demonstrated that myth-as-charter, myth-as-performance, and myth-as-text are viable alternatives as media for interpretation. Indeed, there are other interesting perspectives, including myth-as-history, myth-as-ethnography, and myth-as-psychoanalysis.

Bronislaw Malinowski’s considerable reputation was built upon his skill as an indomitable fieldworker and this reading reveals his ethnographic expertise at work. Thus, in classifying the different genres of narrative, Malinowski quite correctly insists on using the indigenous categories of the local society itself rather than rely on the alien Western categories of narrative. Most anthropologists would probably take issue with his characterizing folktales as something “seasonal,” however, and would wish him to define “legend” more precisely, but we should

Source: Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Role of Myth in Life,” in *magic, science and religion and other essays* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984 [1948]), pp. 96–11)

note that it is only after he has told us how the Trobrianders themselves classify oral literature that he imposes his western labels. A generation of ethnographers—including Edward Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, and Edmund Leach—was inspired by the abundance and exactitude of the information Malinowski collected during his fieldwork, but mythology, however, figured low on their list of research priorities. Only as late as 1955, with the publication of a paper by Lévi-Strauss entitled “The Structural Study of Myth,” did myth return as a major anthropological concern.

By the examination of a typical Melanesian culture and by a survey of the opinions, traditions, and behavior of these natives, I propose to show how deeply the sacred tradition, the myth, enters into their pursuits, and how strongly it controls their moral and social behavior. In other words, the thesis of the present work is that an intimate connection exists between the word, the mythos, the sacred tales of a tribe, on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their moral deeds, their social organization, and even their practical activities, on the other.

In order to gain a background for our description of the Melanesian facts, I shall briefly summarize the present state of the science of mythology. Even a superficial survey of the literature would reveal that there is no monotony to complain of as regards the variety of opinions or the acrimony of polemics. To take only the recent up-to-date theories advanced in explanation of the nature of myth, legend, and fairy tale, we should have to head the list, at least as regards output and self-assertion, by the so-called school of Nature-mythology which flourishes mainly in Germany. The writers of this school maintain that primitive man is highly interested in natural phenomena, and that his interest is predominantly of a theoretical, contemplative, and poetical character. In trying to express and interpret the phases of the moon, or the regular and yet changing path of the sun across the skies, primitive man constructs symbolic personified rhapsodies. To writers of this school every myth possesses as its kernel or ultimate reality some natural phenomenon or other, elaborately woven into a tale to an extent which sometimes almost masks and obliterates it. There is not

much agreement among these students as to what type of natural phenomenon lies at the bottom of most mythological productions. There are extreme lunar mythologists so completely moonstruck with their idea that they will not admit that any other phenomenon could lend itself to a savage rhapsodic interpretation except that of earth's nocturnal satellite. The Society for the Comparative Study of Myth, founded in Berlin in 1906, and counting among its supporters such famous scholars as Ehrenreich, Siecke, Winckler, and many others, carried on their business under the sign of the moon. Others, like Frobenius for instance, regard the sun as the only subject around which primitive man has spun his symbolic tales. Then there is the school of meteorological interpreters who regard wind, weather, and colors of the skies as the essence of myth. To this belonged such well-known writers of the older generation as Max Müller and Kuhn. Some of these departmental mythologists fight fiercely for their heavenly body or principle; others have a more catholic taste, and prepare to agree that primeval man has made his mythological brew from all the heavenly bodies taken together.

I have tried to state fairly and plausibly this naturalistic interpretation of myths, but as a matter of fact this theory seems to me to be one of the most extravagant views ever advanced by an anthropologist or humanist—and that means a great deal. It has received an absolutely destructive criticism from the great psychologist Wundt, and appears absolutely untenable in the light of any of Sir James Frazer's writings. From my own study of living myths among savages, I should say that primitive man has to a very limited extent the purely artistic or scientific interest in nature; there is but little room for symbolism in his ideas and tales; and myth, in fact, is not an idle rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings, but a hard-working, extremely important cultural force. Besides ignoring the cultural function of myth, this theory imputes to primitive man a number of imaginary interests, and it confuses several clearly distinguishable types of story, the fairy tale, the legend, the saga, and the sacred tale or myth.

In strong contrast to this theory which makes myth naturalistic, symbolic, and imaginary, stands the theory which regards a sacred tale as a true historical record of the past. This view, recently supported by the so-called Historical School in Germany and America, and represented in England by Dr. Rivers, covers but part of the truth. There is no denying that history, as well as natural environment, must have left a profound imprint on all cultural achievements, hence also on myths. But to take all mythology as mere chronicle is as incorrect as to regard it as the primitive naturalist's musings. It also endows primitive man with a sort of scientific impulse and desire for knowledge. Although the savage has something of the antiquarian as well as of the naturalist in his composition, he is, above all, actively engaged in a number of practical pursuits, and has to struggle with various difficulties; all his interests are tuned up to this general pragmatic outlook. Mythology, the sacred lore of the tribe, is, as we shall see, a powerful means of assisting primitive man, of allowing him to make the two ends of his cultural patrimony meet. We shall see, moreover, that the immense services to primitive culture performed by myth are done in connection with religious ritual, moral influence, and sociological principle. Now religion and morals draw only to a very limited extent upon an interest in science or in past history, and myth is thus based upon an entirely different mental attitude.

The close connection between religion and myth which has been overlooked by many students has been recognized by others. Psychologists like Wundt, sociologists like Durkheim, Hubert, and Mauss, anthropologists like Crawley, classical scholars like Miss Jane Harrison have all understood the intimate association between myth and ritual, between sacred tradition and the norms of social structure. All of these writers have been to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the work of Sir James Frazer. In spite of the fact that the great British anthropologist, as well as most of his followers, have a clear vision of the sociological and ritual importance of myth, the facts which I shall present will allow us to clarify and formulate more

precisely the main principles of a sociological theory of myth.

I might present an even more extensive survey of the opinions, divisions, and controversies of learned mythologists. The science of mythology has been the meeting point of various scholarships: the classical humanist must decide for himself whether Zeus is the moon, or the sun, or a strictly historical personality; and whether his ox-eyed spouse is the morning star, or a cow, or a personification of the wind—the loquacity of wives being proverbial. Then all these questions have to be rediscussed upon the stage of mythology by the various tribes of archaeologists, Chaldean and Egyptian, Indian and Chinese, Peruvian and Mayan. The historian and the sociologist, the student of literature, the grammarian, the Germanist and the Romanist, the Celtic scholar and the Slavist discuss, each little crowd among themselves. Nor is mythology quite safe from logicians and psychologists, from the metaphysician and the epistemologist—to say nothing of such visitors as the theosophist, the modern astrologist, and the Christian Scientist. Finally, we have the psychoanalyst who has come at last to teach us that the myth is a daydream of the race, and that we can only explain it by turning our back upon nature, history, and culture, and diving deep into the dark pools of the subconscious, where at the bottom there lie the usual paraphernalia and symbols of psychoanalytic exegesis. So that when at last the poor anthropologist and student of folklore come to the feast, there are hardly any crumbs left for them!

If I have conveyed an impression of chaos and confusion, if I have inspired a sinking feeling towards the incredible mythological controversy with all the dust and din which it raises, I have achieved exactly what I wanted. For I shall invite my readers to step outside the closed study of the theorist into the open air of the anthropological field, and to follow me in my mental flight back to the years which I spent among a Melanesian tribe of New Guinea. There, paddling on the lagoon, watching the natives under the blazing sun at their garden work, following them through the patches of jungle, and on the winding beaches and reefs, we shall

learn about their life. And again, observing their ceremonies in the cool of the afternoon or in the shadows of the evening, sharing their meals round their fires, we shall be able to listen to their stories.

For the anthropologist—one and only among the many participants in the mythological contest—has the unique advantage of being able to step back behind the savage whenever he feels that his theories become involved and the flow of his argumentative eloquence runs dry. The anthropologist is not bound to the scanty remnants of culture, broken tablets, tarnished texts, or fragmentary inscriptions. He need not fill out immense gaps with voluminous, but conjectural, comments. The anthropologist has the myth-maker at his elbow. Not only can he take down as full a text as exists, with all its variations, and control it over and over; he has also a host of authentic commentators to draw upon; still more he has the fullness of life itself from which the myth has been born. And as we shall see, in this live context there is as much to be learned about the myth as in the narrative itself.

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to the savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption by Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross. As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage.

The limitation of the study of myth to the mere examination of texts has been fatal to a proper understanding of its nature. The forms of myth which come to us from classical antiquity and from the ancient sacred books of the East and other similar sources have come down to us without the context of living faith, without the possibility of obtaining comments from true believers, without the concomitant knowledge of their social organization, their practiced morals, and their popular cus-

toms—at least without the full information which the modern fieldworker can easily obtain. Moreover, there is no doubt that in their present literary form these tales have suffered a very considerable transformation at the hands of scribes, commentators, learned priests, and theologians. It is necessary to go back to primitive mythology in order to learn the secret of its life in the study of a myth which is still alive—before, mummified in priestly wisdom, it has been enshrined in the indestructible but lifeless repository of dead religions.

Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.

I shall try to prove all these contentions by the study of various myths; but to make our analysis conclusive it will first be necessary to give an account not merely of myth, but also of fairy tale, legend, and historical record.

Let us then float over in spirit to the shores of a Trobriand lagoon, and penetrate into the life of the natives—see them at work, see them at play, and listen to their stories. Late in November the wet weather is setting in. There is little to do in the gardens, the fishing season is not in full swing as yet, overseas sailing looms ahead in the future, while the festive mood still lingers after the harvest dancing and feasting. Sociability is in the air, time lies on their hands, while bad weather keeps them often at home. Let us step through the twilight of the approaching evening into one of their villages and sit at the fireside, where the flickering light draws

more and more people as the evening falls and the conversation brightens. Sooner or later a man will be asked to tell a story, for this is the season of fairy tales. If he is a good reciter, he will soon provoke laughter, rejoinders, and interruptions, and his tale will develop into a regular performance.

At this time of the year folk tales of a special type called *kukwanebu* are habitually recited in the villages. There is a vague belief, not very seriously taken, that their recital has a beneficial influence on the new crops recently planted in the gardens. In order to produce this effect, a short ditty in which an allusion is made to some very fertile wild plants, the *kasiyena*, must always be recited at the end.

Every story is "owned" by a member of the community. Each story, though known by many, may be recited only by the "owner"; he may, however, present it to someone else by teaching that person and authorizing him to retell it. But not all the "owners" know how to thrill and to raise a hearty laugh, which is one of the main ends of such stories. A good raconteur has to change his voice in the dialogue, chant the ditties with due temperament, gesticulate, and in general play to the gallery. Some of these tales are certainly "smoking-room" stories, of others I will give one or two examples.

Thus there is the maiden in distress and the heroic rescue. Two women go out in search of birds' eggs. One discovers a nest under a tree, the other warns her: "These are eggs of a snake, don't touch them." "Oh, no! They are eggs of a bird," she replies and carries them away. The mother snake comes back, and finding the nest empty starts in search of the eggs. She enters the nearest village and sings a ditty:

I wend my way as I wriggle along,
The eggs of a bird it is licit to eat;
The eggs of a friend are forbidden to touch.

This journey lasts long, for the snake is traced from one village to the other and everywhere has to sing her ditty. Finally, entering the village of the two women, she sees the culprit roasting the eggs, coils around her, and enters her body. The victim is laid down helpless and ailing. But the hero is nigh; a

man from a neighboring village dreams of the dramatic situation, arrives on the spot, pulls out the snake, cuts it to pieces, and marries both women, thus carrying off a double prize for his prowess.

In another story we learn of a happy family, a father and two daughters, who sail from their home in the northern coral archipelagoes, and run to the southwest till they come to the wild steep slopes of the rock island *Gumasila*. The father lies down on a platform and falls asleep. An ogre comes out of the jungle, eats the father, captures and ravishes one of the daughters, while the other succeeds in escaping. The sister from the woods supplies the captive one with a piece of lawyer cane, and when the ogre lies down and falls asleep they cut him in half and escape.

A woman lives in the village of *Okopukopu* at the head of a creek with her five children. A monstrously big stingaree paddles up the creek, flops across the village, enters the hut, and to the tune of a ditty cuts off the woman's finger. One son tries to kill the monster and fails. Every day the same performance is repeated till on the fifth day the youngest son succeeds in killing the giant fish.

A louse and a butterfly embark on a bit of aviation, the louse as a passenger, the butterfly as aeroplane and pilot. In the middle of the performance, while flying overseas just between the beach of *Wawela* and the island of *Kitava*, the louse emits a loud shriek, the butterfly is shaken, and the louse falls off and is drowned.

A man whose mother-in-law is a cannibal is sufficiently careless to go away and leave her in charge of his three children. Naturally she tries to eat them; they escape in time, however, climb a palm, and keep her (through a somewhat lengthy story) at bay, until the father arrives and kills her. There is another story about a visit to the Sun, another about an ogre devastating gardens, another about a woman who was so greedy that she stole all food at funeral distributions, and many similar ones.

In this place, however, we are not so much concentrating our attention on the text of the narratives, as on their sociological reference. The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest

of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text; and the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time setting—the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural role of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality.

I pass now to another class of stories. These have no special season, there is no stereotyped way of telling them, and the recital has not the character of a performance, nor has it any magical effect. And yet these tales are more important than the foregoing class; for they are believed to be true, and the information which they contain is both more valuable and more relevant than that of the *kukwanebu*. When a party goes on a distant visit or sails on an expedition, the younger members, keenly interested in the landscape, in new communities, in new people, and perhaps even new customs, will express their wonder and make inquiries. The older and more experienced will supply them with information and comment, and this always takes the form of a concrete narrative. An old man will perhaps tell his own experiences about fights and expeditions, about famous magic and extraordinary economic achievements. With this he may mix the reminiscences of his father, hearsay tales and legends, which have passed through many generations. Thus memories of great droughts and devastating famines are conserved for many years, together with the descriptions of the hardships, struggles, and crimes of the exasperated population.

A number of stories about sailors driven out of their course and landing among cannibals and hos-

tile tribes are remembered, some of them set to song, others formed into historic legends. A famous subject for song and story is the charm, skill, and performance of famous dancers. There are tales about distant volcanic islands; about hot springs in which once a party of unwary bathers were boiled to death; about mysterious countries inhabited by entirely different men or women; about strange adventures which have happened to sailors in distant seas; monstrous fish and octopi, jumping rocks and disguised sorcerers. Stories again are told, some recent, some ancient, about seers and visitors to the land of the dead, enumerating their most famous and significant exploits. There are also stories associated with natural phenomena; a petrified canoe, a man changed into a rock, and a red patch on the coral rock left by a party who ate too much betel nut.

We have here a variety of tales which might be subdivided into historical accounts directly witnessed by the narrator, or at least vouched for by someone within living memory; legends, in which the continuity of testimony is broken, but which fall within the range of things ordinarily experienced by the tribesmen; and hearsay tales about distant countries and ancient happenings of a time which falls outside the range of present-day culture. To the natives, however, all these classes imperceptibly shade into each other; they are designated by the same name, *libwogwo*; they are all regarded as true; they are not recited as a performance, nor told for amusement at a special season. Their subject matter also shows a substantial unity. They all refer to subjects intensely stimulating to the natives; they all are connected with activities such as economic pursuits, warfare, adventure, success in dancing and in ceremonial exchange. Moreover, since they record singularly great achievements in all such pursuits, they redound to the credit of some individual and his descendants or of a whole community; and hence they are kept alive by the ambition of those whose ancestry they glorify. The stories told in explanation of peculiarities of features of the landscape frequently have a sociological context, that is, they enumerate whose clan or family performed the

deed. When this is not the case, they are isolated fragmentary comments upon some natural feature, clinging to it as an obvious survival.

In all this it is once more clear that we can neither fully grasp the meaning of the text, nor the sociological nature of the story, nor the natives' attitude towards it and interest in it, if we study the narrative on paper. These tales live in the memory of man, in the way in which they are told, and even more in the complex interest which keeps them alive, which makes the narrator recite with pride or regret, which makes the listener follow eagerly, wistfully, with hopes and ambitions roused. Thus the essence of a legend, even more than that of a fairy tale, is not to be found in a mere perusal of the story, but in the combined study of the narrative and its context in the social and cultural life of the natives.

But it is only when we pass to the third and most important class of tales, the sacred tales or myths, and contrast them with the legends, that the nature of all three classes comes into relief. This third class is called by the natives *liliu*, and I want to emphasize that I am reproducing *prima facie* the natives' own classification and nomenclature, and limiting myself to a few comments on its accuracy. The third class of stories stands very much apart from the other two. If the first are told for amusement, the second to make a serious statement and satisfy social ambition, the third are regarded, not merely as true, but as venerable and sacred, and they play a highly important cultural part. The folk tale, as we know, is a seasonal performance and an act of sociability. The legend, provoked by contact with unusual reality, opens up past historical vistas. The myth comes into play when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity.

In the subsequent chapters of this book we will examine a number of myths in detail, but for the moment let us glance at the subjects of some typical myths. Take, for instance, the annual feast of the return of the dead. Elaborate arrangements are made for it, especially an enormous display of food. When this feast approaches, tales are told of how death began to chastise man, and how the power of eternal rejuvenation was lost. It is told why the spir-

its have to leave the village and do not remain at the fireside, finally why they return once in a year. Again, at certain seasons in preparation for an overseas expedition, canoes are overhauled and new ones built to the accompaniment of a special magic. In this there are mythological allusions in the spells, and even the sacred acts contain elements which are only comprehensible when the story of the flying canoe, its ritual, and its magic are told. In connection with ceremonial trading, the rules, the magic, even the geographical routes are associated with corresponding mythology. There is no important magic, no ceremony, no ritual without belief; and the belief is spun out into accounts of concrete precedent. The union is very intimate, for myth is not only looked upon as a commentary of additional information, but it is a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide to the activities with which it is connected. On the other hand the rituals, ceremonies, customs, and social organization contain at times direct references to myth, and they are regarded as the results of mythical event. The cultural fact is a monument in which the myth is embodied; while the myth is believed to be the real cause which has brought about the moral rule, the social grouping, the rite, or the custom. Thus these stories form an integral part of culture. Their existence and influence not merely transcend the act of telling the narrative, not only do they draw their substance from life and its interests—they govern and control many cultural features, they form the dogmatic backbone of primitive civilization.

This is perhaps the most important point of the thesis which I am urging: I maintain that there exists a special class of stories, regarded as sacred, embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization, and which form an integral and active part of primitive culture. These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.

In order to make the point at issue quite clear, let us once more compare our conclusions with the current views of modern anthropology, not in order idly to criticize other opinions, but so that we may link our results to the present state of knowledge, give due acknowledgment for what we have received, and state where we have to differ clearly and precisely.

It will be best to quote a condensed and authoritative statement, and I shall choose for this purpose of definition an analysis given in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, by the late Miss C. S. Burne and Professor J. L. Myres. Under the heading "Stories, Sayings, and Songs," we are informed that "this section includes many intellectual efforts of peoples" which "represent the earliest attempt to exercise reason, imagination, and memory." With some apprehension we ask where is left the emotion, the interest, and ambition, the social role of all the stories, and the deep connection with cultural values of the more serious ones? After a brief classification of stories in the usual manner we read about the sacred tales: "Myths are stories which, however marvelous and improbable to us, are nevertheless related in all good faith, because they are intended, or believed by the teller, to explain by means of something concrete and intelligible an abstract idea or such vague and difficult conceptions as Creation, Death, distinctions of race or animal species, the different occupations of men and women; the origins of rites and customs, or striking natural objects or prehistoric monuments; the meaning of the names of persons or places. Such stories are sometimes described as etiological, because their purpose is to explain why something exists or happens."¹

Here we have in a nutshell all that modern science at its best has to say upon the subject. Would our Melaneseans agree, however, with this opinion? Certainly not. They do not want to "explain," to make "intelligible" anything which happens in their myths—above all not an abstract idea. Of that there can be found to my knowledge no instance either in Melanesia or in any other savage community. The few abstract ideas which the natives possess carry their concrete commentary in the very word which expresses them. When being is described by verbs to

lie, to sit, to stand, when cause and effect are expressed by words signifying foundation and the past standing upon it, when various concrete nouns tend towards the meaning of space, the word and the relation to concrete reality make the abstract idea sufficiently "intelligible." Nor would a Trobriander or any other native agree with the view that "Creation, Death, distinctions of race or animal species, the different occupations of men and women" are "vague and difficult conceptions." Nothing is more familiar to the native than the different occupations of the male and female sex; there is nothing to be explained about it. But though familiar, such differences are at times irksome, unpleasant, or at least limiting, and there is the need to justify them, to vouch for their antiquity and reality, in short to buttress their validity. Death, alas, is not vague, or abstract, or difficult to grasp for any human being. It is only too hauntingly real, too concrete, too easy to comprehend for anyone who has had an experience affecting his near relatives or a personal foreboding. If it were vague or unreal, man would have no desire so much as to mention it; but the idea of death is fraught with horror, with a desire to remove its threat, with the vague hope that it may be, not explained, but rather explained away, made unreal, and actually denied. Myth, warranting the belief in immortality, in eternal youth, in a life beyond the grave, is not an intellectual reaction upon a puzzle, but an explicit act of faith born from the innermost instinctive and emotional reaction to the most formidable and haunting idea. Nor are the stories about "the origins of rites and customs" told in mere explanation of them. They never explain in any sense of the word; they always state a precedent which constitutes an ideal and a warrant for its continuance, and sometimes practical directions for the procedure.

We have, therefore, to disagree on every point with this excellent though concise statement of present-day mythological opinion. This definition would create an imaginary, non-existent class of narrative, the etiological myth, corresponding to a non-existent desire to explain, leading a futile existence as an "intellectual effort," and remaining outside native culture and social organization with their

pragmatic interests. The whole treatment appears to us faulty, because myths are treated as mere stories, because they are regarded as a primitive intellectual armchair occupation, because they are torn out of their life context, and studied from what they look like on paper, and not from what they do in life. Such a definition would make it impossible either to see clearly the nature of myth or to reach a satisfactory classification of folk tales. In fact we would also have to disagree with the definition of legend and of fairy tale given subsequently by the writers in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*.

But above all, this point of view would be fatal to efficient field work, for it would make the observer satisfied with the mere writing down of narratives. The intellectual nature of a story is exhausted with its text, but the functional, cultural, and pragmatic aspect of any native tale is manifested as much in its enactment, embodiment, and contextual relations as in the text. It is easier to write down the story than to observe the diffuse, complex ways in which it enters into life, or to study its function by the observation of the vast social and cultural realities into which it enters. And this is the reason why we have so many texts and why we know so little about the very nature of myth.

ENDNOTE

1. Quoted from *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, pp. 210 and 211.

READING 2-2

GENESIS AS MYTH*

Edmund Leach

Edmund Leach (1910–1989), was an outstanding British social anthropologist of the period after World War II, who adopted various approaches to the study of human

behavior in society, among them the structural-functional, and in the 1950s became attracted to the structural approach that Lévi-Strauss was just pioneering. During the 1960s and 1970s, he produced a series of structural analyses on myths drawn from the Bible, in part because he wanted to show how Lévi-Strauss's approach could be useful not just for obscure myths told by nonliterate people, but to give us fresh perspectives on literary narratives familiar to Westerners. "Genesis as Myth" is chosen as a case study in the structural analysis of myth because since it is one of his earliest structural studies, Leach takes particular pains to make explicit the basic assumptions underlying the structural approach. Note that he insists (following Lévi-Strauss) that all variants of a narrative be included in the analysis—not just a single one, however famous it may be, or the most complete, or the earliest version. Nor is he at all concerned with trying to determine which version of Genesis is the "best" or most "original." He explains the importance complementary (or binary) oppositions, and the significance of mediation. In true structuralist manner, we are presented with repetitions and inversions galore, and Leach ends up claiming to detect three "messages" in the stories. The term, endogamy, it might be worth noting here, means marrying within one's own group.

Although this kind of analysis has been challenged by some scholars as being too dependent upon the analyst's own interpretation, even critics concede that structural analysis has returned myth to a central place in anthropology, and this reading demonstrates why.

A distinguished German theologian has defined myth as 'the expression of unobservable realities in terms of observable phenomena.'¹ All stories which occur in the Bible are myths for the devout Christian, whether they correspond to historical fact or not. All human societies have myths in this sense, and normally the myths to which the greatest importance is attached are those which are the least probable. The non-rationality of myth is its very essence, for religion requires a demonstration of faith by the suspension of critical doubt.

But if myths do not mean what they appear to mean, how do they come to mean anything at all? What is the nature of the esoteric mode of communication by which myth is felt to give 'expression to unobservable realities'?

*References such as (iv. 3) refer to the third verse of the fourth chapter of the book Genesis (English Authorized Version) unless otherwise stated.

Source: In *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays*, by Edmund Leach. London, United Kingdom: Jonathan Cape, 1969. Pages 7-23.

This is an old problem which has lately taken on a new shape because, if myth be a mode of communication, then a part of the theory which is embodied in digital computer systems ought to be relevant. The merit of this approach is that it draws special attention to precisely those features of myth which have formerly been regarded as accidental defects. It is common to all mythological systems that all important stories recur in several different versions. Man is created in Genesis (i. 27) and then he is created all over again (ii. 7). And, as if two first men were not enough, we also have Noah in chapter viii. Likewise in the New Testament, why must there be four gospels each telling the 'same' story yet sometimes flatly contradictory on details of fact? Another noticeable characteristic of mythical stories is their markedly binary aspect; myth is constantly setting up opposing categories: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'; 'They crucified Him and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst'; 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord.' So always it is in myth—God against the world and the world itself for ever dividing into opposites on either side: male and female, living and dead, good and evil, first and last . . .

Now, in the language of communication engineers, the first of these common characteristics of myth is called *redundancy*, while the second is strongly reminiscent of the unit of information—the *bit*. 'Information' in this technical sense is a measure of the freedom of choice in selecting a message. If there are only two messages and it is arbitrary which you choose then 'information is unity', that is = 1 bit.*²

Communication engineers employ these concepts for the analysis of problems which arise when a particular individual (the sender) wishes to transmit a coded message correctly to another individual (the receiver) against a background of interference (noise). 'Information' refers on the one hand to the degrees of choice open to the sender in encoding his transmission, and on the other to the degrees of

choice open to the receiver in interpreting what he receives (which will include noise in addition to the original transmitted signal). In this situation a high level of redundancy makes it easy to correct errors introduced by noise.

Now in the mind of the believer, myth does indeed convey messages which are the Word of God. To such a man the redundancy of myth is a very reassuring fact. Any particular myth in isolation is like a coded message badly snarled up with noisy interference. Even the most confident devotee might feel a little uncertain as to what precisely is being said. But, as a result of redundancy, the believer can feel that, even when the details vary, each alternative version of a myth confirms his understanding and reinforces the essential meaning of all the others.

The anthropologist's viewpoint is different. He rejects the idea of a supernatural sender. He observes only a variety of possible receivers. Here redundancy increases information—that is the uncertainty of the possible means of decoding the message. This explains what is surely the most striking of all religious phenomena—the passionate adherence to sectarian belief. The whole of Christendom shares a single corpus of mythology so it is surely very remarkable that the members of each particular Christian sect are able to convince themselves that they alone possess the secret of revealed truth. The abstract propositions of communication theory help us to understand this paradox.

But if the true believer can interpret his own mythology in almost any way he chooses, what principle governs the formation of the original myth? Is it random chance that a myth assumes one pattern rather than another? The binary structure of myth suggests otherwise.

Binary oppositions are intrinsic to the process of human thought. Any description of the world must discriminate categories in the form '*p* is what not-*p* is not'. An object is alive or not alive and one could not formulate the concept 'alive' except as the converse of its partner 'dead'. So also human beings are male or not male, and persons of the opposite sex are either available as sexual partners or not avail-

*Bit stands for 'binary digit'.

able. Universally these are the most fundamentally important oppositions in all human experience.

Religion everywhere is preoccupied with the first, the antinomy of life and death. Religion seeks to deny the binary link between the two words; it does this by creating the mystical idea of 'another world', a land of the dead where life is perpetual. The attributes of this other world are necessarily those which are not of this world; imperfection here is balanced by perfection there. But this logical ordering of ideas has a disconcerting consequence—God comes to belong to the other world. The central 'problem' of religion is then to re-establish some kind of bridge between Man and God.

This pattern is built into the structure of every mythical system; the myth first discriminates between gods and men and then becomes preoccupied with the relations and intermediaries which link men and gods together. This much is already implicit in our initial definition.

So too with sex relations. Every human society has rules of incest and exogamy. Though the rules vary they always have the implication that for any particular male individual all women are divided by at least one binary distinction, there are women of *our kind* with whom sex relations would be incestuous and there are women of the *other kind* with whom sex relations are allowed. But here again we are immediately led into paradox. How was it in the beginning? If our first parents were persons of two kinds, what was that other kind? But if they were both of our kind, then their relations must have been incestuous and we are all born in sin. The myths of the world offer many different solutions to this childish intellectual puzzle, but the prominence which it receives shows that it entails the most profound moral issues. The crux is as before. If the logic of our thought leads us to distinguish *we* from *they*, how can we bridge the gap and establish social and sexual relations with 'the others' without throwing our categories into confusion?

So, despite all variations of theology, this aspect of myth is a constant. In every myth system we will find a persistent sequence of binary discriminations as between human/superhuman, mortal/immortal,

male/female, legitimate/illegitimate, good/bad . . . followed by a 'mediation' of the paired categories thus distinguished.

'Mediation' (in this sense) is always achieved by introducing a third category which is 'abnormal' or 'anomalous' in terms of ordinary 'rational' categories. Thus myths are full of fabulous monsters, incarnate gods, virgin mothers. This middle ground is abnormal, non-natural, holy. It is typically the focus of all taboo and ritual observance.

This approach to myth analysis derives originally from the techniques of structural linguistics associated with the name of Roman Jakobson³ but is more immediately due to Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of whose examples may serve to illustrate the general principle.

Certain Pueblo Indian myths focus on the opposition between life and death. In these myths we find a threefold category distinction: agriculture (means to life), war (means to death), and hunting (a mediating category since it means to life for men but means to death for animals). Other myths of the same cluster deploy a different triad: grass-eating animals (which live without killing), predators (which live by killing), and carrion-eating creatures (mediators, since they eat meat but do not kill in order to eat). In accumulation this total set of associated symbols serves to imply that life and death are *not* just the back and the front of the same penny, that death is *not* the necessary consequence of life.⁴

My Fig. 1 has been designed to display an analogous structure for the case of the first four chapters of Genesis. The three horizontal bands of the diagram correspond to (i) the story of the seven-day creation, (ii) the story of the Garden of Eden, and (iii) the story of Cain and Abel. The diagram can also be read vertically: column 1 in band (ii) corresponds to column 1 in band (i) and so on. The detailed analysis is as follows:—

UPPER BAND

First Day. (i. 1–5; not on diagram). Heaven distinguished from Earth; Light from Darkness; Day from Night; Evening from Morning.

Second Day. (i. 6–8; col. 1 of diagram). (Fertile) water (rain) above; (infertile) water (sea) below. Mediated by firmament (sky).

Third Day. (i. 9–10; col. 2 and i. 11–12; col. 3). Sea opposed to dry land. Mediated by ‘grass, herb-yielding seed (cereals), fruit trees’. These grow on dry land but need water. They are classed as things ‘whose seed is in itself’ and thereby contrasted with bisexual animals, birds, etc.

The creation of the world as a static (that is, dead) entity is now complete and this whole phase of the creation is opposed to the creation of moving (that is, living) things.

Fourth Day. (i. 13–18; col. 4). Mobile sun and moon are placed in the fixed firmament of col. 1. Light and darkness become alternations (life and death become alternates).

Fifth Day. (i. 20–3; col. 5). Fish and birds are living things corresponding to the sea/land opposition of col. 2 but they also mediate the col. 1 oppositions between sky and earth and between salt water and fresh water.

Sixth Day. (i. 24–5; col. 6). Cattle (domestic animals), beasts (wild animals), creeping things. These correspond to the static triad of col. 3. But only the grass is allocated to the animals. Everything else, including the meat of the animals, is for Man’s use (i. 29–30). Later at Leviticus xi creatures which do not fit this exact ordering of the world—for instance water creatures with no fins, animals and birds which eat meat or fish, etc.—are classed as ‘abominations’ Creeping Things are anomalous with respect to the major categories, Fowl, Fish, Cattle, Beast, and are thus abominations *ab initio* (Leviticus xi. 41–2). This classification in turn leads to an anomalous contradiction. In order to allow the Israelites to eat locusts the author of Leviticus xi had to introduce a special qualification to the prohibition against eating creeping things: ‘Yet these *ye may* eat: of every flying creeping thing that goeth on all four which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth’ (v. 21). The procedures of binary discrimination could scarcely be carried further!

(i. 26–7; col. 7). Man and Woman are created simultaneously.

The whole system of living creatures is instructed to ‘be fruitful and multiply’, but the problems of Life versus Death, and Incest versus Procreation are not faced at all.

CENTRE BAND

The Garden of Eden story which now follows tackles from the start these very problems which have been evaded in the first version. We start again with the opposition Heaven versus Earth, but this is mediated by a fertilizing mist drawn from the dry infertile earth (ii. 4–6). This theme, which blurs the distinction life/death, is repeated. Living Adam is formed from the dead dust of the ground (ii. 7); so are the animals (ii. 19); the garden is fertilized by a river which ‘went out of Eden’ (ii. 10); finally fertile Eve is formed from a rib of infertile Adam (ii. 22–3).

The opposition Heaven/Earth is followed by further oppositions—Man/Garden (ii. 15); Tree of Life/Tree of Death (ii. 9, 17); the latter is called the tree of the ‘knowledge of good and evil’ which means the knowledge of sexual difference.

Recurrent also is the theme that unity in the other world (Eden, Paradise) becomes duality in this world. Outside Eden the river splits into four and divides the world into separate lands (ii. 10–14). In Eden, Adam can exist by himself, Life can exist by itself; in this world, there are men and women, life and death. This repeats the contrast between monosexual plants and bisexual animals which is stressed in the first story.

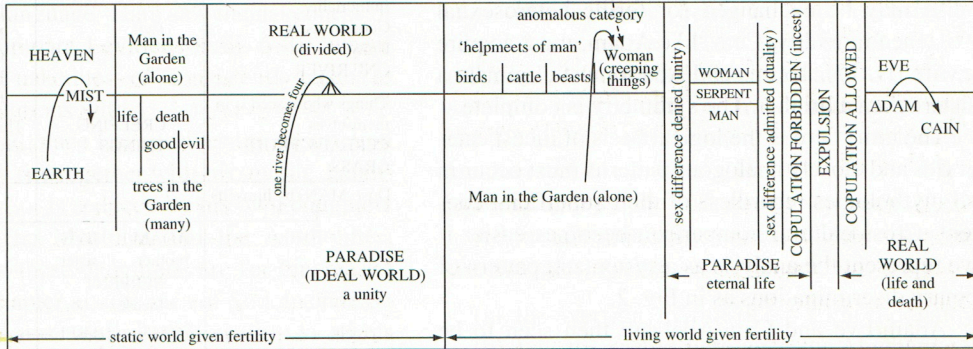
The other living creatures are now created specifically because of the loneliness of Man in Eden (ii. 18). The categories are Cattle, Birds, Beasts. None of these are adequate as a helpmeet for Man. So finally Eve is drawn from Adam’s rib . . . ‘they are of one flesh’ (ii. 18–24).

Comparison of Band 1 and Band 2 at this stage shows that Eve in the second story replaces the ‘Creeping Things’ of the first story. Just as Creeping Things were anomalous with respect to Fish, Fowl,

Genesis i. 1-ii. 3 and v. 1-8

static world (death)			moving world (life)			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2nd day		3rd day		4th day	6th day	
'waters above' (rain)				(life-death alternative)		
firmament (sky)				sun (day)	moon (night)	birds
'waters below' (ocean)		land	grass	cereals	fruit trees	
		sea				fish
					cattle	beasts
						'creeping things'
						Man and Woman
						SETH → ENOS

Genesis ii. 4
Genesis iv. 1



Genesis iv, 2-16

	LIFE	moving world	cattle sheep	ABEL (herdsman)	WEST (death) static	FRATRICIDE EXPULSION COPULATION	EAST (life) mobile
	DEATH	static world	cereals	CAIN (gardener)	men without women in Eden		Cain's wife Cain Enoch Men with women in Nod (wandering)

FIGURE 1 The four chapters of Genesis contain three separate creation stories. Horizontal bands correspond to (a) seven-day creation; (b) Garden of Eden; and (c) Cain and Abel. Each story sets up the opposition Death versus Life, God versus Man. World is 'made alive' by using categories of 'woman' and 'creeping thing' to mediate this opposition.

Cattle and Beast so Eve is anomalous to the opposition Man versus Animal. And, as a final mediation (chapter iii), the Serpent, a creeping thing, is anomalous to the opposition Man versus Woman.

Christian artists have always been sensitive to this fact; they manage to give the monster a somewhat hermaphrodite appearance while still indicating some kind of identification between the Serpent and Eve herself. Hugo Van der Goes, in 'The Fall' at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, puts Eve and the Serpent in the same posture. Michaelangelo makes Adam and Eve both gaze with loving adoration on the Serpent, but the Serpent has Eve's face.⁵

Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and become aware of sexual difference; death becomes inevitable (iii. 3-8). But now for the first time pregnancy and reproduction become possible. Eve does not become pregnant until after she has been expelled from Paradise (iv. 1).

LOWER BAND

Cain the Gardener and Abel the Herdsman repeat the antithesis between the first three days of the Creation and the last three days in the first story. Abel's living world is more pleasing to God (iv.

4–5). Cain's fratricide compares with Adam's incest and so God's questioning and cursing of Cain (iv. 9–12) has the same form and sequence as God's questioning and cursing of Adam, Eve and the Serpent (ii. 9–19). The latter part of iii. 16 is later repeated exactly (iv. 7), so Cain's sin was not only fratricide but also incestuous homosexuality. In order that immortal monosexual existence in Paradise may be exchanged for fertile heterosexual existence in reality, Cain, like Adam, must acquire a wife (iv. 17). To this end Adam must eliminate a sister: Cain a brother. The symmetry is complete.

The issue here is the logical basis of incest categories and closely analogous patterns must occur in all mythologies regardless of their superficial content. Cross-cultural comparison becomes easier if we represent the analysis as a systematic pattern of binary discriminations as in Fig. 2.

Adam/Eve and Cain/Abel are then seen to be variants of a theme which can also occur in other forms, as in the well-known myth of Oedipus. The actual symbolism in these two cases is nearly identical. Oedipus, like Adam and Cain, is initially earthbound and immobile. The conclusion of the Athenian version of the Oedipus story is that he is an exiled wanderer, protected by the gods. So also is Cain (iv. 14–15). The Bible also includes the converse of this pattern. In Genesis xxviii Jacob is a lonely exile and wanderer under God's protection, but (xxxii. 24–32) he is renamed Israel and thus given the status of a first ancestor with a territorial autochthonous base, and he is tamed by God. Although Jacob dies abroad in Egypt he is buried on his own ancestral soil in Israel (xl. 29–32; l. 5–7).

In the Oedipus story, in place of Eve's Serpent we have Jocasta's Sphinx. Like Jocasta the Sphinx is female, like Jocasta the Sphinx commits suicide, like the Serpent the Sphinx leads men to their doom by verbal cunning, like the Serpent the Sphinx is an anomalous monster. Eve listens to the Serpent's words and betrays Adam into incest; Oedipus solves the Sphinx riddle and is led into incest. Again, Oedipus's patricide replaces Cain's fratricide—Oedipus, incidentally, meets Laius 'at a cross roads'.

Perfect Ideal categories	Confused anomalous categories (sacred)	Imperfect real categories
HEAVEN The other world Paradise, Eden Things by themselves LIGHT DARKNESS DAY NIGHT DUST Life by itself Immortality Good by itself Unity ONE RIVER Things whose seed is in themselves CEREALS FRUIT GRASS	FIRMAMENT Sky Death Evil CREEPING THINGS	EARTH This world Things in pairs DAY+ SUN NIGHT+ MOON Air Sea Freshwater Land BIRDS FISH PLANTS Life+Death Mortality Good +Evil Division FOUR RIVERS Things with two sexes CATTLE BEASTS
Dust—MAN (by himself)		Meat
Cereals	ADAM brother EVE sister SERPENT incest CAIN fratricide ABEL homosexual incest	Castle
WEST	EXPULSION FROM PARADISE	EAST Beginning of real life in real world Adam+Eve (as wife) Cain+Wife Procreation

FIGURE 2 Incest categories have a logical basis in all myths. Similarity between myths is seen most clearly if they are analyzed in a binary form as shown in this table.

Parallels of this kind seem too close to be accidental, but this kind of algebra is unfamiliar and more evidence will be needed to convince the skeptical. Genesis contains several further examples of first ancestors.

Firstly, Noah survived the destruction of the world by flood together with three sons and their wives. Prior to this the population of the world had included three kinds of being—'sons of God', 'daughters of men' and 'giants' who were the offspring of the union of the other two (vi. 1–4). Since the forbears of Noah's daughters-in-law have all been destroyed by the Flood, Noah becomes a unique ancestor of all mankind without the implica-

tion of incest. Chapter ix. 1–7 addressed to Noah is almost the duplicate of i. 27–30 addressed to Adam.

Though heterosexual incest is evaded, the theme of homosexual incest in the Cain and Abel story recurs in the Noah saga when drunken Noah is seduced by his own son Ham (ix. 21–5). The Canaanites, descendants of Ham, are for this reason accursed. (That a homosexual act is intended is evident from the language ‘Ham saw the nakedness of his father’. Compare Leviticus xviii. 6–19, where ‘to uncover the nakedness of’ consistently means to have sexual relations with.)

In the second place Lot survives the destruction of the world by fire together with two nubile daughters. Drunken Lot is seduced by his own daughters (xix. 30–8). The Moabites and the Ammonites, descendants of these daughters, are for this reason accursed. In chapter xix the men of Sodom endeavour to have homosexual relations with two angels who are visiting Lot. Lot offers his nubile daughters instead but they escape unscathed. The implication is that Lot’s incest is less grave than heterosexual relations with a foreigner, and still less grave than homosexual relations.

Thirdly, the affair of the Sodomites and the Angels contains echoes of ‘the sons of God’ and ‘the daughters of men’ but links superficially with chapter xviii where Abraham receives a visit from God and two angels who promise that his ageing and barren wife Sarah shall bear a son. Sarah is Abraham’s half-sister by the same father (xx. 12) and his relations with her are unambiguously incestuous (Leviticus xviii. 9). Abraham *loans Sarah* to Pharaoh saying that she is his sister (xii. 19). He does the same with King Abimelech (xx. 2). Isaac repeats the game with Abimelech (xxvi. 9–11) but with a difference. Isaac’s wife Rebekah is his father’s brother’s son’s daughter (second cousin) and the relation is *not* in fact incestuous. The barrenness of Sarah is an aspect of her incest. The supernatural intervention which ultimately ensures that she shall bear a child is evidence that the incest is condoned. Pharaoh and Abimelech both suffer supernatural penalties for the lesser

offence of adultery, but Abraham, the incestuous husband, survives unscathed.

There are other stories in the same set. Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian slave, bears a son Ishmael to Abraham whose descendants are wanderers of low status. Sarah’s son Isaac is marked out as of higher status than the sons of Abraham’s concubines, who are sent away to ‘the east country’ (c.f. wandering Cain who made his home in Nod ‘eastward of Eden’). Isaac marries a kinswoman in preference to a Canaanite woman. Esau’s marriage to a Hittite woman is marked as a sin. In contrast his younger and favoured twin brother Jacob marries two daughters of his mother’s brother who is in turn Jacob’s father’s father’s brother’s son’s son.

All in all, this long series of repetitive and inverted tales asserts:

- (a) the overriding virtue of close kin endogamy;
- (b) that the sacred hero-ancestor Abraham can carry this so far that he marries his paternal half-sister (an incestuous relationship). Abraham is thus likened to Pharaoh, for the Pharaohs of Egypt regularly married their paternal half-sisters; and
- (c) that a rank order is established which places the tribal neighbours of the Israelites in varying degrees of inferior status depending upon the nature of the defect in their original ancestry as compared with the pure descent of Jacob (Israel).

The myth requires that the Israelites be descended unambiguously from Terah the father of Abraham. This is achieved only at the cost of a breach of the incest rule; but by reciting a large number of similar stories which entail even greater breaches of sexual morality the relations of Abraham and Sarah finally stand out as uniquely virtuous. Just as Adam and Eve are virtuous as compared to Cain and Abel, so Abraham’s incest can pass unnoticed in the context of such outrageous characters as Ham, Lot’s daughters, and the men of Sodom.

I have concentrated here upon the issue of sexual rules and transgressions so as to show how

a multiplicity of repetitions, inversions and variations can add up to a consistent 'message'. I do not wish to imply that this is the only structural pattern which these myths contain.

The novelty of the analysis which I have presented does not lie in the facts but in the procedure. Instead of taking each myth as a thing in itself with a 'meaning' peculiar to itself it is assumed, from the start, that every myth is one of a complex and that any pattern which occurs in one myth will recur, in the same or other variations, in other parts of the complex. The structure that is common to all variations becomes apparent when different versions are 'superimposed' one upon the other.

Whenever a corpus of mythology is recited in its religious setting such structural patterns are 'felt' to be present, and convey meaning much as poetry conveys meaning. Even though the ordinary listener is not fully conscious of what has been communicated, the 'message' is there in a quite objective sense. If the labour of programming could be performed the actual analysis could be done by a computer far better than by any human. Furthermore it seems evident that much the same patterns exist in the most diverse kinds of mythology. This seems to me to be a fact of great psychological, sociological and scientific significance. Here truly are observable phenomena which are the expression of unobservable realities.

NOTES

1. J. Schniewind in H. W. Bartsch, 'Kerygma and Myth: a Theological Debate' (London, S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 47.
2. C. Shannon and W. Weaver, 'The Mathematical Theory of Communication' (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1949).
3. R. Jakobson and M. Halle, 'Fundamentals of Language' (The Hague, Mouton, 1956).
4. C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth,' *Myth: a Symposium*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1955).
5. G. Groddeck, 'The World of Man' (London, C. W. Daniel, 1934).

See also E. R. Leach, 'Lévi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden,' *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 23, 4 (New York, 1961), pp. 386-96.

READING 2-3

THE DOGON

Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen

The cosmological ingenuity myths can reveal is seen to advantage in the traditions of the Dogon, a population living in Mali. Dogon myths seek to account for the origin of the cosmos and the place of humanity within it. As a blueprint for the creation of the cosmos and its development, as well as the order inherent in human organization, the Dogon cycle of myths is intriguingly subtle. Although abbreviated, Griaule and Dieterlen's summary of Dogon myths conveys a sense of the harmony that blends the individual, society, and cosmos into a single, all-embracing unity.

The Dogon are well-known among religious scholars for the intricacy of their beliefs and rituals. Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, together with other French ethnographers, spent decades of fieldwork researching them. This reading, though lacking any explicit theoretical slant or analytical focus gives us an excellent corrective to the presumptions of scholars such as Tylor, Frazer, Freud, and Durkheim that "primitive" religion lacked the sophistication of the world religions.

INTRODUCTION

At the present stage of studies of the Dogon, and precisely because these studies seek to penetrate deeply into the mentality of the people, it is not possible to present a brief and clear-cut account of the relationship between their cosmogony and their social organization. The reader is warned from the outset, therefore, that he will not find here an exhaustive presentation of Dogon thought from the point of view with which this book is concerned; only certain institutions and concepts among those

Source: Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, "The Dogon," in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, ed. Daryll Forde (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 83-89. Reprinted with permission.