Open access • Journal Article • DOI:10.2307/1159451

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Published on: 01 Dec 1975 - Africa (Cambridge University Press (CUP))

Topics: Myth and ritual, Social order, Comparative mythology, The Imaginary and Civilization

REPRINTED FROM

AFRICA

VOL. XLV, NO. 4, DECEMBER 1975

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE DRUNKEN KING?

*LUC DE HEUSCH**

WESTERN scientific culture finds itself in a singular position with respect to the magico-religious system embodied in medieval culture from which, after strenuous resistence from the contemporary ecclesiastical authorities, it originally broke free. That is to say, it has still not succeeded in forming a theory concerning that very class of phenomena with which it was sometimes obliged violently to struggle in order to constitute itself as an autonomous discipline. And we, despite the proliferation of ethnographic and historical studies of extremely high quality, are hardly more advanced than in 1902, when Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert (1950: 138) wrote: 'Until now the history of religions has relied on a rag-bag of vague ideas . . . the science of religions does not yet possess a scientific nomenclature'. Half a century later, Lévi-Strauss was indeed to note the progressive disaffection of anthropology with the systematic study of religious phenomena. It is true that in England Frazer's great breakthrough gave impetus to the study of comparative mythology, but that trend was abruptly to be interrupted by the triumph of Functionalist doctrine. Now, however, there does at last seem to be a revival of interest both in France and in England. The reawakening concern with religious anthropology is evidenced in Great Britain by the publication of a number of important studies which attach due importance to symbolic systems, even if all attempt, more or less successfully, to preserve a link with the social order. There seems to me here imperceptibly to be a return to the position of the great master of British anthropology Evans-Pritchard, to whose memory I here pay homage. In the declaration with which he prefaced *Nuer Religion* (1950: viii) this author maintained that religion was a phenomenon *sui generis*, whatever relation it might sustain with other aspects of the total culture. No doubt in opposition to Evans-Pritchard, however, I would maintain that this phenomenon has no transcendental privilege: it is simply a particular language, a system of communication with a phantom universe, the imaginary.

My intention here is to try to demonstrate how myth and ritual, the two poles of this symbolic system, are linked in the form of an autonomous dialectic, something much more than a simple concern to document or validate the social order. I should like to refer to my work *Le Roi ivre* (1972), whose central theme is the cycle of myths concerning the founding of the State in Central Africa. I think that ethno-historians, particularly Jan Vansina, have too readily believed themselves able to interpret the legendary chronicle of the Luba kingdom as a historical text, portraying the arrival of an invading people endowed with what is presented in the legend as a superior civilization. The function of this crucial text is thus said simply to be the legitimation of the sacred power of a new dynasty. It is a curious fact that no field-worker, not even Father Tempels, even though he claimed (albeit dubiously) to have constructed a Bantu philosophy from Luba belief, has noted that all the mythical thought of the Luba is condensed in this one narrative. We will therefore outline some of its implications.

* This lecture was delivered in 1973 at University College, London at the invitation of the British Academy.

It is my contention that we here find ourselves, with respect to the Luba, in the same situation as Dumézil, when he found that the chronicle relating to the first three kings of ancient Rome was no more than a transposition into pseudo-historical terms of a mythical structure shared by almost all Indo-European cultures. I make no claim, at this stage in my research, that all Bantu societies, even though like the Indo-Europeans they form a homogeneous linguistic group, today share a common heritage born from a single historical root. I was nevertheless struck when I discovered that the mythology concerning the foundation of the Lunda empire—whose ruling dynasty is related to that of the Luba—constitutes a *transformation* (in Lévi-Strauss's sense) of the Luba myths. Moreover, the first part of the Lunda mythology, in its turn, is absolutely the same as a Kuba myth, which explains two institutions essential to this third kingdom, whose history and political organization Jan Vansina studied for several years. Thus we can demonstrate that the royal ideologies of the three Luba, Lunda, and Kuba kingdoms belong to a single symbolic system. But the Kuba narratives are evidently further removed from the Luba–Lunda cycle than either of these latter is from the other. To simplify my account, I will only take into account the Luba and Lunda myths. Moreover, I will confine myself to a single level, that of the symbolic code.

Nkongolo, the autochthonous Luba chief, was supplanted by a new dynasty in Shakespearian circumstances. Nkongolo personifies the Rainbow Serpent—even his name itself gives us a clue to this. He is associated with terrestrial water and the dry season, and against his will becomes the brother-in-law of Mbidi Kiluwe, a hunter-hero and celestial being who brings to earth the new and more elevated customs of the sacred kingship. Nkongolo and Mbidi are opposed at all levels, and particularly in the following: the first is a terrestrial and aquatic being who throws himself unsuccessfully against the moist sky in an attempt to impress upon it the burning rule of the rainbow. The second, coming from an elevated country, overcomes unharmed the barrier of flames thrown up by Nkongolo, and it is easy to see—even though the message is coded in the form of metaphor—that he brings rain. The two heroes avoid and cannot tolerate each other. It is evident that we do not here possess a Froissartian chronicle but rather a symbolic drama utilizing contradictory traits in nature and culture to portray the great cosmological rhythm upon which life depends. Effectively, Nkongolo denotes sterility, Mbidi fertility. It is the imagery of a true philosophical discourse, not military reportage. But the contradictory elements of the myth are truly dialectical, for they admit a mediating element. The marriage of Mbidi Kiluwe with one of Nkongolo's two sisters leads to the birth of a third hero, Kalala Tlunga. Raised at the home of Nkongolo his maternal uncle, with whom he enters into conflict, he then returns to his celestial father and comes back with an army which defeats that of Nkongolo. With his own hand Kalala decapitates his uncle, inheriting his terrestrial power, just as he had inherited the mystical power of his celestial father. Thus he who becomes the sole heir to both achieves, in the form of the storm, the violent transition from the dry to the rainy season; whereas the arrival of his father, Mbidi Kiluwe, who disappears almost as soon as he had arrived, symbolizes the welcome apparition of the first rains, interrupted by the return of the dry season.

I have attempted to show that the rites of the King's coronation re-enact the myth

of origin which, in the last resort, explains that in his person the King unites the lineages of Nkongolo and Mbidi; in other words, the contradictory properties of the universe.

What, then, happens to this symbolic code in the mythology of the foundation of the *Lunda* State? The hero is an exiled Luba prince; he himself replicates the person of Mbidi Kiluwe first of all because he is presented as a wandering hunter. But whereas, in the Luba myth, he is married for the briefest period necessary to impregnate the two sisters of the hostile and sterile autochthonous chief, in the Lunda cycle the stranger permanently marries a sterile *Queen* whose two *brothers* do not hesitate to make apparent their hostility to the new arrival. The first transformation is, therefore, a general permutation of sex. Secondly, to the two sisters of one man (Nkongolo) there corresponds in the other myth the two brothers of one woman.

The principle of the double sibling is itself a structural feature, but for lack of space I must forgo a discussion of this aspect. It is sufficient to note that one of Nkongolo's sisters presents the hunter with twin children and the second a single son, which is to be his sole heir. These two marriages have very different metaphorical implications. This curious mirror image might have been fortuitous, gratuitous, or even aesthetic had there not been very clear indications of the reversal of structure from other points of view. For instance Lueji, who falls madly in love with the foreign hunter, is herself the symmetric image and inverse of Nkongolo, who has a strong dislike for another hunter, his brother-in-law. The transformation of hate to love is accompanied by another transformation, a displacement: in the Lunda myth it is two brothers-in-law of the newcomer who display hostility towards him. It is a remarkable fact that in another Lunda myth these two perish through the fault of their uterine nephews, like Nkongolo.

Let us examine more deeply the inverse symmetry which we have revealed between the king Nkongolo and the queen Lueji. Each one constitutes a host and an autochthone; they are the representatives of a poor and uncultured initial civilization. Nkongolo is characterized by too open a mouth: he laughs thunderously, he eats and drinks in public (something which is strictly forbidden in the code of good manners introduced by the new dynasty), he even drinks 'like a bottomless pit'.[1] If Nkongolo is a being who is 'open' (uncontrolled) at the top, then Lueji may be defined as too open (uncontrolled) at the base; that is, in the strongest version of the myth she suffers from menorrhea—a continuous menstrual flow. Now in both cases this lack of control over the bodily openings is a sign of sterility. A popular saying among the Luba makes clear the structural transition from Nkongolo to Lueji. The expression 'the pit of Nkongolo', which relates to an episode of the myth that, unhappily, I must forbear discussing, is used today to describe a sterile woman. The symmetry between the two figures goes even further: the bleeding sex of Lueji corresponds to the bleeding head of Nkongolo when he is finally decapitated.

According to the Luba story, this beheading puts an end to the dry season. We therefore immediately begin to suspect that menstrual blood has a cosmological dimension, that in the visual code it is a structural transformation of the rainbow, for both are inimical to fertility, the first in preventing the formation of the foetus,

[1] In this respect he is one of the two principal mythological characters who justify the title of my book *Le Roi ivre*.

the second in holding back the rain. Both phenomena oppose the principle of continuity to that of discontinuity which characterizes equally the seasonal and biological rhythms. In this respect both rainbow and menstrual flow are images of continuous time and of non-life. Moreover, the most distant ancestor known of Lueji is none other than the rainbow. A third Lunda myth which describes the origin of the universe, presents the rainbow as a female spirit and sets her in opposition to her celestial husband who is master of thunder and of the rain. You will note that the transformation of the image of the rainbow into that of a continuous stream of menstrual blood also embodies a transformation of a purely formal kind: the rainbow, as the Luba put it, throws itself from the ground to 'burn' the rain, whereas menstrual blood flows downwards and stems the renewal of life. These two opposed movements participate in a significant dynamic process for the bloody head of Nkongolo, which gives an inverse image of the sex of Lueji, in the end mysteriously raises towards heaven by the sudden eruption of a termite mound.

The encounters that both Lueji and Nkongolo sustain with a hunter hero thus give expression to the double opposition between, on the one hand, sterility and fecundity and, on the other, drought and rain. The marriage of the hunter to Lueji, moreover, is also condemned to sterility; the new dynasty can perpetuate itself only through the hero's second marriage with another Lunda woman. Whatever the real historical significance of the breach which is thus established between the two dynasties, it is clear that this discontinuity serves primarily a mythological function: it gives witness to a cosmological dialectic cloaked in the images of a spurious historical narrative.

The Ndembu, who belong to the Lunda culture, possess a very short version of the Lueji cycle. This will allow us to introduce some new developments. From the Ndembu version we learn that in order to put an end to her menstrual flow, Lueji becomes the first to submit to the ritual known as *nkula*, which today is performed on behalf of women suffering from menstrual disorders. Let us look at the form of this ritual as it is described by Turner. From our point of view it is extremely interesting to discover that the theme of fecundity is brought into the rite through the introduction of the hunter's role. Dressed in the skins of animals and carrying bow and arrows the patient performs the hunter's dance. The Ndembu consider that hunting is a particular form of sexual activity: the feminine form of the bow completes the phallic form of the arrow. The hunter, moreover, is thought to be a virile lover. It must here be recalled that the Lunda myth of foundation insists on the physical attraction which the hunter exercises over Lueji. The myth brings together the princess who had been a disdainful virgin before becoming a barren wife and a huntsman who must become a provider of children just as he is a provider of game. Blood spilled in the hunt is thus, in Ndembu symbolism, the analogue of the blood of childbirth. Lueji's marriage has thus the function of overcoming the fundamental opposition between sterility and fertility, an opposition which is given expression in the form of two sorts of blood, that of women and that of animals. And in the same way, in the sphere of ritual the transformation of a barren woman into a hunter renders her once more capable of giving birth.

Once again we are unable to deduce any historical information whatsoever from the arrival of a band of Luba immigrants at Lueji's court, for the hunt (to which they

had devoted themselves entirely during their wanderings) is a metaphor. But this metaphorical sense cannot be studied in isolation, since the symbolism of hunting is no more than an aspect of the signification of blood; a field of meaning which we will now endeavour to reconstruct through the medium of Turner's (1962) valuable ethnography.

The Ndembu distinguish three types of blood, each equally connoted by the colour red. First: the blood of the hunt (*mashi awubinda*), violent and beneficial to man. Second: maternal blood (*mashi amama*), good, peaceful, and evoked particularly in the rite of *nkula*. Third: the blood of homicide, circumcision, and warfare (*mashi awubanji*), evocative of courage and transgression.

It seems to me that the second category, that which sets women's blood apart from the two categories that are spilled by men, calls for a particularly careful analysis. In effect, menstrual blood should not be confused with the blood of childbirth, which feeds the embryo. In the *nkula* ritual the first is replaced by the second only at the cost of a transformation which, as we have seen, utilizes the blood of the hunt. The feminine condition which forms an obstacle to childbirth renders the patient a true wounded animal. She can escape from this disastrous situation only by transforming herself into the hunter. In other words, the ritual is conducted as if there were the same link between the afflicted and pregnant woman as between the quarry and the hunter. In another passage (1967: 70) Turner himself clearly distinguishes between menstrual blood (*mashi awambanda ejima*) and that of childbirth (*mashi alesumu amama*). He fails, however, to realize that the model which most satisfactorily takes account of these facts is a ternary or triangular structure of which the three poles would be menstrual blood, the blood of the chase, and that of warfare. Half-way between these poles we may situate the ambiguous cases. It is already clear that the blood of childbirth is situated midway between menstruation and the hunt. We shall see later why circumcision is situated between menstruation and warfare.

The three poles of the triangle constitute just as well the framework of the Lunda cycle. I have dwelt upon the opposition between the hunt and menstruation; it remains only to say a word concerning warfare. On the arrival of the hunter hero before Lueji he declares to her, according to one of our versions, that he has left the court of his brother the Luba king because the latter had reproached him for never making war. He then himself makes his position clear in an illuminating phrase which simultaneously demonstrates the similarity and the difference between hunting and warfare: 'I prefer to hunt animals than to hunt men'.

This opposition seems, in Lunda thought, to be quite insurmountable, and I found no term that might have been placed between the two poles of hunting and warfare even though there are mediating terms upon the other two axes. More precisely, the transition from a peaceful hunter hero to a conquering and war-like hero is achieved through time: a warrior king succeeds the hunter king. In the Lunda cycle it is the hunter's son who establishes the powerful military structure of the empire, while his grandson declares his desire for conquests immediately he has been crowned. Thereafter the ritual of investiture prescribes that the new king lead a victorious military campaign before establishing his capital. The hunting of men, in other words the enlargement of the State, has replaced the hunting of animals. Finally, this opposition indicates, no doubt, that the magico-religious aspect of the

kingship, linked with hunting as a metaphor for fertility, should be distinguished from its politico-military aspect.

We will, then, return to the question posed above, namely: where is circumcision situated in the tripartite model of types of blood? Once again Turner's extremely detailed analysis aids our discussion, and we will pause to demonstrate in some detail how his data illustrates our contention concerning the interaction between the structures of ritual action and mythological thought. The Ndembu are unanimous in recognizing that the novice's blood belongs to the category of 'the blood of homicide', in other words that of warfare. But on the other hand, 'novices are implicitly treated like brides at their first menstruation'. During the period of their ritual seclusion, the novices are considered to be 'brides' of the principal officiant. The Ndembu circumcision rite, then, clearly transforms the young boys from the state of feminine sterility to the virility of the wounded warrior. We will place circumcision between menstruation and warfare.

One methodological conclusion thus becomes evident: the exegesis which Turner's informants provide concerning Ndembu ritual must be considered an integral part of the classificatory mode of thought established in mythology. In the last resort ritual activity is firmly based on a mythological system.

Let us take the analysis further. In the system of Ndembu belief blood, in all its aspects, depends upon a code of a higher order, that of colours: a code which is itself characterized by the principle of a ternary structure (Turner, 1967: ch. iii). In effect, the Ndembu manipulate the three symbolic colours red, white, and black during the course of their ritual. I would like here to defend Turner's discovery against the interpretation of it which he himself puts forwards. As you know, he feels himself constrained to reduce the triad of colours to a simple duality, but at the cost of ambiguity. Turner considers that the fundamental opposition is that which sets black against white.

Black	*White*
absence of purity	purity
evil	good
death	life
sorcery	friendship
etc.	etc.

Turner notes that in many rites 'black' signs are absent; to use them would in effect be to invoke sorcery and death. This, according to him, is why the opposition red/white is the only one present, the first sometimes acquiring the maleficent properties of black. Turner considers that in Ndembu thought the colour red represents an ambivalent symbolic category, while white is positive and black negative. The Ndembu say explicitly 'redness acts both for good and evil'. Menstrual blood, for example, is 'black' blood while the blood spilled by a hunter is beneficial and associated with whiteness, etc.

Contrary to what Turner supposes, however, these examples provide no evidence at all in favour of a reduction of the theoretical ternary structure to one that is in practice binary. I will try on my part to take account of the ambivalence of red, paying due attention to the triad elicited by the author himself but then immediately

abandoned at the cost of a grave logical contradiction. For if red may be substituted for black and forms a component in a binary system whose other term is white, then it may not equally be associated with the latter term except at the cost of serious confusion.

Red is an independent symbolic category and the triad of colours must be taken at its full value. Turner himself provides all the evidence without drawing the evident conclusion: red and white together oppose black, he says, to the extent that both connote 'activity'; while red and white also oppose each other in the way that 'the preservation and continuance of life' (white) is opposed to 'discontinuity and danger' (red). From this it seems preferable to throw out the idea of an ambiguous 'red' category. But then a new problem presents itself. What does red signify in itself, when it has been separated from all associations with black or white? We will begin by eliminating all those forms of blood tainted with black or white, particularly menstrual blood (black) and the blood of the hunt (white). From the three poles of our initial triangle only the blood of homicide and that of war remain. Now Turner recognizes explicitly that war and peace are opposed to each other like red and white and that both these colours are opposed to black, the category of death and of negativity. It must therefore be concluded that the red of warfare has a positive sense and that it is the pure red for which we have been looking. A short note by Turner tells us apropos of this that 'the blood of homicide is a mark of courage'. This should not surprise us in a society organized for conquest.

It remains only to clarify the position of those terms linked with red which are called 'ambivalent'; we will locate them either on the axis that links red with white or that which links it with black. The unfertilizing sperm of impotent men is, like menstrual blood, situated between red and black, because it is made of 'blackened blood'. On the other hand, fertile sperm, which is considered to be 'whitened' blood, is located between red and white along with the blood of the hunt, 'ritually associated with white symbolism'.

The blood of childbirth, equally associated with white, is described as menstrual blood coagulated around the foetus. It must therefore be placed on a new axis which links menstruation (located between red and black) with the point midway between red and white at which the hunt and fertilizing sperm have already been placed. Thus we find, inside the more general triangle of colours, the triangle of aspects of blood which we have already depicted. We have, then, explained the reasons that make it possible to locate circumcision in a semantic field realized between menstruation and warfare. The more general perspective which we adopt here confirms this position, for Turner's informants state that the blood of uncircumcised boys 'lacks whiteness', just as does that of afflicted women. These two forms of blood must then clearly be situated on the axis linking red to black. Finally, the position of menstrual blood—between red and black—is identical to that of a fourth species of blood of which we have so far said nothing: the 'blood of sorcery'.

The category black, that of death, hatred, and disorder, does admit of at least one positive trait, albeit a suspect one: that of sexual passion, which opens the door to fertility (white) just as it does to the transgressions of adultery. We must therefore set it between black and white. Turner notes in this respect that during the girls' initiation old women blacken the initiates' vulvas with the black sap of certain trees

in order to augment their sexual attractiveness. Thus blackened, the vulva becomes an ambivalent symbol evoking, in Turner's own terms: 'sexual lust and adultery (which sometimes leads to murder and to sorcery)'. This is why particularly dark-skinned women are especially prized as mistresses but not as wives. With regard to this Turner cites the Wagnerian concept of the mortal passion. Now it is a passion of precisely this sort which Lueji demonstrates towards our stranger-hero, a passion which ruptures the harmony of the autochthonous group, provokes a disastrous emigration and opens the way to sterility.

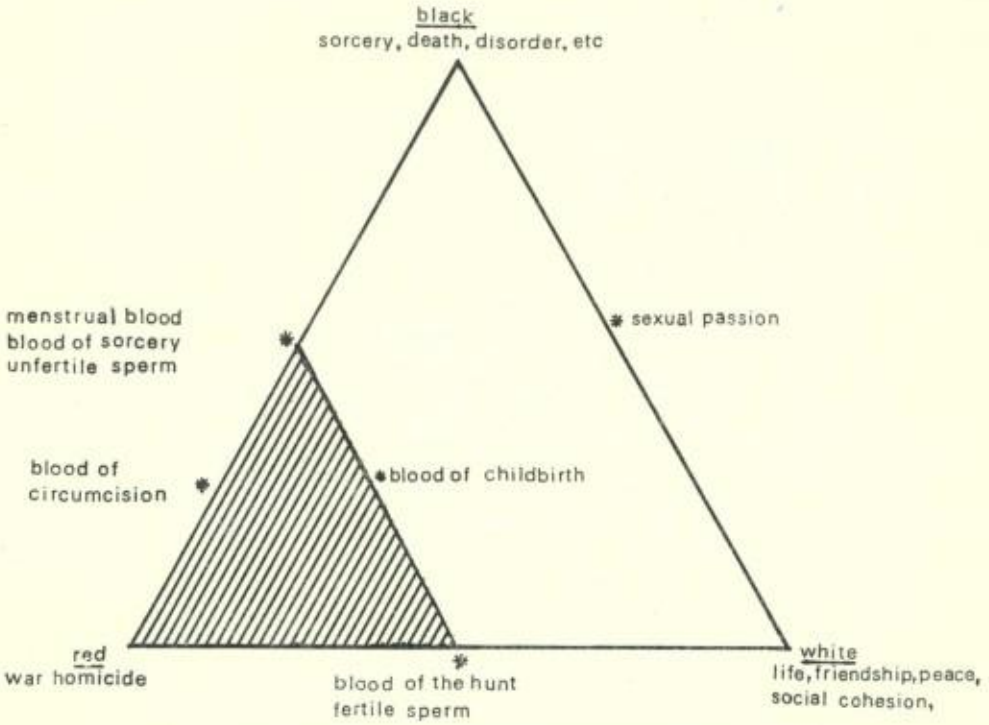

FIG. 1. Semantic field of colours among the Ndembu.

I have limited myself to describing some of the principal aspects of the symbolic system which belongs to a homogeneous historico-cultural zone defined by the former Luba and Lunda kingdoms. It is not possible, here, to describe the new transformations which the system undergoes outside the zone under consideration, as, for example, in the Kuba kingdom. Here the transformations affect both code and message and we find awaiting us a drunken culture hero who is an exact African replica of Noah. In one of the Kuba myths this primordial, drunk, and incestuous king is presented as the ultimate source of all fertility and, moreover, of cultural progress. In another spectacular inversion, this solar demiurge represents a beneficial dry season analogous to the pleasant warmth of the domestic hearth and opposed to the cold of the rainy season.

Let it suffice for me to say here that the analysis of a number of very brief accounts of myths, carried out in the same way, illuminates in an interesting fashion the sym-

bolism of young people's initiation as described by Vansina. Likewise, the decoding of Lunda myths allows us to go further in the understanding of the ritual structures noted by Turner. I have chosen to base myself upon the most reliable ethnographic studies, in my attempt to show that myths and rites each illuminate the other, even though these two authors have not accorded myth the attention it deserves. Myth and rite in no way constitute autonomous provinces in the empire of visionary thought. Rites are spun from the semantic web of myth. They are always in some way the enactment of classificatory thought, and that thought is global in its scope: it develops a discourse upon the family, the kingship, work, death, etc. From the sociological point of view, the mythical cycle of the Luba, in association with all the other codes, demonstrates the superiority of the patrilineal system over the matrilineal, which is treated as an absurd hypothesis. The Luba who put forward this discourse have a patrilineal system and their conclusion is undeniably comprehensible within the perspective of classical functionalism. But, strangely enough, the mythology of the matrilineal Kuba maintains the same proposition in reverse. There matrilineality is presented as the outcome of the break-up of the primordial patrilineal family which resulted from conflict between the culture hero and his sons. This theme reappears in other matrilineal societies in Central Africa and one cannot escape the conclusion that mythical thought, far from purely and simply reflecting the social order, presents a dialectical discourse towards its subject of the same type as the discourse held with respect to the succession of the seasons or the tragic opposition between fecundity and sterility. In the same way, in realizing Nkongolo's act of incest during the rites of his initiation, the Luba king re-enacts the drama of the dynasty's foundation, negating the law of exogamy.

If my conclusion runs the danger of appearing heretical to those who remain faithful in one way or another to the functionalist approach, it also diverges in part from the latest theory of Lévi-Strauss, however much the method I have employed derives directly from his. In the astounding pages that bring to a conclusion the final volumes of Mythologiques, Lévi-Strauss maintains that ritual activity reverses the direction taken by myth: The first endeavours desperately to rediscover the unity and continuity of lived experience (*le vécu*) while the second 'breaks the flow into gross distinctive units between which it institutes divisions'. In other words, ritual would take the opposite path to classificatory thought. In effect Lévi-Strauss considers that the property of ritual action is, if one leaves aside the explicit or implicit mythology that forms its justification, to conduct actions and to manipulate objects so as to render it unnecessary to use speech. And in choosing to do so ritual founders in meaningless repetition which empties mythological discourse of all its sense.

The central African rituals which I have been describing are based entirely upon a symbolic language constructed in myth. Far from leading mythical thought to its destruction they contribute to the wealth of the system by drawing upon tangible signs which derive their meaning and currency from the words of articulated language, the primary constituent of myth. It is, on the other hand, no less true that at certain times in the history of religions men do seem to have been tempted to turn their backs upon the dialectical rigour of reasoning in order to gain some mystical experience in which the whole fabric of everyday communication, based as it is upon classificatory thought, becomes disordered. But even within the mythological system

itself one finds traces of this process. Jean de la Croix, the poet of the absurd, who made his task the impossible reconciliation of day and night, is vigorously opposed in this respect to Thomas Aquinas, founder of medieval and modern speculative thought. In this matter the Church has always preferred the doctors of the Sorbonne to the suspect solitude of Jean de la Croix. We may conclude that while certain figures have adopted a position similar to that outlined by Lévi-Strauss there is nothing in the history of religions to suggest this is the only attitude taken. Flight to or welcoming of the mystical approach, denying mythological speculation, cannot be considered a good point of departure for the comparative study of ritual, even where such an attitude characterizes a whole community and not simply a genial or schizophrenic individual. And yet it remains no less true that the anthropology of religion, once it becomes a true critical science, will have to confront this new problem in the internal dialectic of rite and myth.

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Résumé

LE ROI IVRE

ILLUSTRANT la méthode structuraliste mise en œuvre dans son ouvrage *Le Roi ivre ou l'origine de l'État*, l'auteur espère démontrer que le mythe relatif à l'origine de l'empire lunda est une transformation systématique de la geste de fondation du royaume luba (Zaïre). Les deux récits ont pour héros un chasseur aux mœurs raffinées qui entre en contact avec une civilisation plus grossière. Le prince luba Mbidi Kiluwe suscite l'hostilité du souverain autochtone Nkongolo dont il épouse les deux sœurs, alors que son homologue dans le récit lunda vit un véritable roman d'amour avec la princesse Lueji. Mais Lueji est l'image symétrique et inverse de Nkongolo et la rencontre connote l'opposition de la stérilité et de la fécondité, de la sécheresse et de la pluie. Le sang menstruel qui marque très fortement le personnage de Lueji est la transformation de la figure cosmogonique de l'arc-en-ciel, incarnée par Nkongolo.

Les Ndembu de Zambie possèdent une courte version du mythe lunda. L'auteur propose ici une réinterprétation structuraliste des intéressantes données fournies par Turner sur le code des couleurs, en montrant que rites et mythe forment dans l'ensemble de l'aire culturelle influencée par les Lunda un seul ensemble symbolique. Les rituels ndembu font état de plusieurs types de sang. Cette catégorie, connotée par la couleur rouge, relève d'un champ sémantique susceptible d'être présenté schématiquement par une structure ternaire; celle-ci se retrouve dans le mythe lunda qui oppose deux à deux la chasse, la menstruation et la guerre. Ce 'triangle rouge' à son tour n'est qu'un sous-ensemble d'une figure symbolique générale, également ternaire, où prennent place les diverses valeurs accordées respectivement au rouge, au blanc et au noir.