The Wedding

(If, if she were to have a child,
she could be worth twice as much.)

Igor Stravinski, Les Noces, scene iv.

All the rainbow myths we have examined associate the phenomenon either with the origin of fish poison and diseases or with the colored plumage of birds. But the way in which the rainbow is introduced varies according to the type of link chosen: it may be an agent, or it may be the passive object of an action that is done to it.

It is, directly or indirectly, because of its malevolence that the living rainbow causes poison and disease to appear: it acts as their moral cause. Of the colored plumage of birds it is merely the physical cause, since the birds were not to acquire their distinctive plumage until they had previously killed the rainbow and divided its skin among themselves. To use a different kind of vocabulary, we might say that the rainbow signifies poison and diseases, but that its logical function, when it applies to the colored plumage of birds, changes from signifying to being signified.

When we met this problem for the first time, we solved it by appealing to a dialectic of short and long intervals. We had seen that disease and poison present a dual character. Both imply that life and death, nature and culture, are in a transitive relation, and that the changeover from one to the other takes place progressively without there being any means of detecting the intermediary stages. Furthermore, disease and poison are essentially “chromatic” entities, producing what might be called “diatonic” effects; since fish poison, like epidemics, creates large gaps in the populations affected by it. The Guarayu of Bolivia draw a rational conclusion from the similarity between fish poison and epidemics; they believe that all diseases are the result of poisoning, and that if men were not poisoned, they would never die (Cardus, p. 172).

Because poison and disease can be seen as “chromatic” entities, they have
a feature in common with the rainbow, which makes the latter appropriate to signify them. On the other hand, empirical observation of the havoc they cause leads to the inference—or confirms the hypothesis—that the continuous contains the discontinuous and even gives rise to it. But as soon as the rainbow is no longer considered as an agent and is turned into an object of action, the preceding relation is reversed. A signifying chromaticism, the negative form of the diatonic order (since this order is merely the residue of a wrecked continuum), gives way to a signified chromaticism: positive raw material out of which an order, which is also diatonic, can be constructed, and which, like the other, will be credited to nature. The decimation of any given population (whether it is a human population killed off by epidemics, or fish destroyed by poison) is symmetrical with the general discontinuity of the species: it is isomorphic with it, within any one genus. I had already arrived at this conclusion earlier by means of a different argument (Part One, 1, d).

Let us recall the circumstances in which the Vilela hero of M113 changed into a chromatic entity "whose colors could be seen gleaming from afar, in spite of the darkness of the night" (Lehmann-Nitsche 2, p. 222). The transformation occurred after he had picked up different-colored stones at the water side and made himself a necklace with them—in other words, a multicolored entity composed of previously scattered elements, between which the intervals became very small once the elements were threaded together. The process, as described in the myth, is all the more significant, since I think it would be difficult to find a necklace answering to this description in any ethnographic collection emanating from tropical America, where the necklaces worn by the natives are notably sober in color and regular and repetitive in pattern. They are almost invariably made from black and white beads—small disks carved out of the shells of either aquatic mollusks, or palm nuts. The many varieties of trade beads are more or less disregarded: white and black, used alternately, remain the most highly prized colors. Beads of a different color are sometimes accepted and used to make monochrome necklaces—blue, for instance, when this color (which the native languages rarely distinguish from black) has a religious connotation (Huxley, p. 47; Nino, p. 197). I never saw the natives of the seven or eight tribes with whom I lived make use of the (quite superfluous) variety of beads we distributed among them (L.-S. 3, p. 260) to make multicolored necklaces, as the impudent hero of the Vilela myth does. . . .

It was noted that formerly Bororo women were reluctant to accept striped or flowered material that was offered to them:

At first, we blamed fashion or whim. We learned that their attitude was determined by religious ideas. The priests . . . explained that striped or flowered materials belonged to the kingdom of souls, and that for this reason the women were forbidden to accept them, even as presents, unless it was to adorn the person who represented the deceased man's soul during the funeral rites, or to reward the priest entrusted with the conjuring up of souls; and even he could not wear them until he had informed the souls of his intention to do so.

The same author adds that the Bororo prescribed the use of light- or plain-colored materials (Colb. 3, p. 131; EB, Vol. I, p. 174). In 1935 the natives put forward arguments of the same kind to explain to us why their pottery was dark colored and totally devoid of decoration. Such hatred of polychromatism is no doubt a rather exceptional phenomenon in South America. Yet the Bororo are merely carrying to extremes an attitude they share with other communities, who display it in a more subtle way. In one of their myths (M111) the Tucuna relate that ritual musical instruments used always to be painted a uniform red. A god ordered the civilizing hero to use instead "clay of different colors" which was to be found not far from a stream, but he must not touch it with his hands. He was to collect it in his blowgun by thrusting the latter into the ground several times, until he had obtained samples of every variety. After that he had to extract the colors by cleaning out the gun with a rod, and then use them to paint with. It is further stated that this kind of painting is the chief cause of the taboo affecting musical instruments, at which women are not allowed to look. Another myth (M145) explains that a woman hid in a tree in order to satisfy her curiosity. But as

The ancient Egyptians also seem to have made use of the contrast between chromaticism and monochromatism, but to evolve a liturgy of costume that was the opposite of the Bororo's: "As to the sacred vestments, that of Isis is parti-colored and of different hues; for her power is about matter, which becomes everything and receives everything, as light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and ending. But that of Osiris has no shade, no variety of colors, but only one simple one, resembling light. For the first principle is untempered and that which is first and of an intelligible nature is unmixed; which is the reason why, after they have once made use of this garment, they lay it up and keep it close, invisible and not to be touched. But those of Isis are used often. For sensible things, when they are of daily use and familiar to us, afford us many opportunities to display them and to see them in their various mutations; but the apprehension of what is intelligible, sincere and holy, darting through the soul like a flash of lightning, attends but to some one single glance or glimpse of its object" (Plutarch, "Of Isis and Osiris" lxviii, trans. by William Baxter).

20 They are so even among the Chiriguano, who live not far from the Vilela, and who, according to certain travelers, had necklaces made of coral and malachite; this assertion was, however, disproved by B. de Nino (p. 197). It is not impossible that the curious invention of the Vilela myth was suggested to the natives by old necklaces of Andean origin. But as the colored stones theme also occurs in Guiana, where it is associated with the spirit of the rainbow (Goeje, p. 33)—and we know from other sources that the Carib name for rainbow also denotes the opossum (cf. above, p. 249)—it seems that the origin of the theme belongs to the realm of speculation rather than to that of experience.
soon as the instruments appeared, she was fascinated by the way in which they were decorated. She mistook a trumpet for an alligator: "She urinated much, and pa! fell." The musicians rushed at her and cut her into little pieces, which they cured. And they forced even her mother and sister to take part in the feast (Nim. 13, pp. 77–8, 134).

These stories call for several comments. First of all, it will be remembered that the Tucuna regard one of the two rainbows as the master of potter's clay (cf. pp. 246 ff.). Secondly, the very special method imposed on the hero with regard to the preparation of the colors, would seem to lead inevitably to a partial mixture, so that the colors on the instruments would blend into each other, like the colors of the rainbow. Finally, the description of the guilty woman's death—she sits fascinated on the branch of the tree, then urinates, and falls—corresponds exactly to what happens when a monkey is hit by an arrow poisoned with curare, as I myself have observed among the Nambikwara; the fact is, moreover, confirmed independently by the source I am using: "The effect (of the poison) on the wounded animal is to produce immediately incontinence of feces and urine, the creature falling in about three minutes." (Nim. 13, p. 30). Here again, then, we have the triple association of the rainbow, chromatism, and poison; the difference between the Bororo and the Tucuna is that the latter seem to restrict to the female sex the poisonous effects of chromatistic decoration.

Tucuna pottery is crudely decorated with brown designs on a white ground. These designs may be geometrical, or zoomorphic; and Nimuendaju does not think that even in former times they were any more delicately drawn (13, plate 6 and pp. 47–8). This is not true of other Amazonian tribes, who used to make very beautiful and intricate polychrome pottery. Now technical and artistic skill of this kind is accompanied by a significant bent of the mythology of the rainbow:

**Miss. Amazonia (Teffe Lake). “The origin of painted earthenware”**

There was once a young woman who had no manual skill whatever, and the pottery she made was shapeless. To mock her, her sisters-in-law molded clay around her head and told her to bake this clay to make a pot.

One day an old woman appeared and the young woman told her of her misfortunes. The old woman was a tender-hearted sprite who taught the young woman how to make magnificent pots. On taking leave of the young woman, the sprite told her that she would henceforth appear in the form of a snake, and that the young woman should not be afraid to embrace it. The heroine did as she was told, and the snake at once turned into a sprite, who showed her protégée how to paint earthenware pots: "She took some white clay and smoothed it evenly around the pots. Then, with yellow clay, brown clay, and rucu (urucu: *Bixa orellana*) she drew beautiful variegated patterns and said to the young woman: "There are two kinds of painting: Indian painting and flower painting. The kind of painting that draws the lizard's head, the Great Snake's tracks, the branch of the pepper tree, the breast of Boyusu the rainbow serpent, etc., is what we call Indian painting, and the other is the kind that consists in painting flowers."

"Then the sprite took black varnish and used it to decorate and give luster to numerous gourds, on the insides of which she drew a variety of patterns: the shell of the land tortoise, shafts of rain, a meandering river, a fishhook, and a great many pretty designs..." (Tastevin 3, pp. 192–8.)

Consequently, in a culture that produces polychrome pottery, the rainbow takes on an ambiguous and equivocal meaning. Its awesome power can become protective and indulgent. In this second aspect the poison (which was distilled by the rainbow in its other aspect) regresses, as it were, to the state of excrement that must not be thought repulsive: the umbrian brown used for brown painting is called the "Great Snake's excrement" (*ibid.*, p. 198). While the female potters thought of the rainbow in the guise of an old sprite, men did likewise but with erotic intent: to them the rainbow appeared as a bewitching mistress (*ibid.*, p. 197).28 We notice here, then, a movement which is the reverse of the one that led us (pp. 274, ff.) from the love philter to the death philter and from the seducing animal to poison. This retrograde movement is the characteristic feature of an aesthetic which, unlike that of the Bororo, compromises with chromatism.29

But there is in tropical America one field in which polychromatism seems to be universally and unreservedly accepted. I am referring to the feather ornaments, of which the Bororo offer sumptuous examples.30 There is a good reason why the myths of this part of the world should present the problem...
of the diversity of species by referring initially (M18c) or exclusively (M17b, M17c, M17d, etc.) to birds. The use of feathers for practical purposes no doubt raised a theoretical difficulty that the myths help to overcome.

It may be objected that, according to certain myths of Guiana, the burned and dismembered body of a snake gave rise, not to birds endowed with their distinctive plumage, but to vegetable talismans (Roth 1, pp. 283-6; Gillin, pp. 192-4; Orico 2, pp. 227-32). These talismans consisted mainly of varieties of Caladium, each of which was given a specific magic function. Here again, then, it is a question of specific diversity being used to express significant contrasts. The terminology of scientific botany, which groups the numerous varieties of aroids with their brilliant and variegated leaves under the one heading of Caladium bicolor, underlines in its own way the most remarkable characteristic of these leaves, which can be looked upon as the vegetable equivalents of feathers. So in spite of this apparent exception, the problem still centers around the question of feathers.

The way feathers are chosen for making adornments would seem to be inspired by a veritable chromatic frenzy. Green shades into yellow, then into orange or red, which finally ends in blue through a sudden return to green, or through the medium of purple; or blue merges into yellow, which in turn fades into an ash gray. The least likely transitions occur: from blue to orange, from red to green, from yellow to violet. . . . When the feathers are uniform in color, artistry makes good the deficiency by means of clever pasting, or by the juxtaposition of differently tinted feathers (D. and B. Ribeiro). However, the myths exist and proclaim the priority of the universal discontinuity of the species over the internal continuity of the chromaticism peculiar to each one. Unlike the art-lover, the Indian does not look upon a feather as an aesthetic object which must be described, and whose every nuance must be analyzed. Each type of feather is, on the contrary, apprehended in its totality; and in that totality the distinctive identity of a particular species is conveyed in tangible terms, so that it cannot be confused with any other species, for ever since the fragmentation of the rainbow's body, each species has been inevitably determined in accordance with the part it played in the dismemberment.

Consequently, every time colors occur in myths, we must consider what type of polychromaticism is involved: do the colors shade into one another, so that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins; or on the contrary, do bold colors or groups of blended colors form a series of contrasting sets? An Amazonian myth (M18c) provides a striking illustration of the first type, in a description of the signs preceding the flood that destroyed humanity: "The sun and the moon became red, blue, and yellow; and the wild beasts, even the jaguar and other fierce animals, moved fearlessly among men . . ." (Barbosa Rodrigues, p. 214). The Mundurucu refer to the same predominance of short intervals in graphic and acoustical terms when they relate that the serpent Muyusu—that is, the rainbow—being anxious to teach men how to write, attracted their attention by imitating the voices of all kinds of animals (Kruse 2, p. 623). It is, incidentally, worthy of note that when the natives imitate writing, they do so by drawing wavy lines, as if writing consisted, not of differently shaped characters, but of a series of fluxions (Figure 19). On the other hand, a Mundurucu myth (M18s) ostentatiously chooses a visual code to illustrate the other type of polychromaticism, which is expressed by means of long intervals; it tells how the demiurge, by painting men various colors—green, red, black, and yellow—divided them out among the tribes and turned some into animals (Barbosa Rodrigues, pp. 245-51). According to one of their traditions, the Bororo descended from the larva of a lepidopteron which they called aororo or aroro. And as the larva were marked with three bold, vivid colors—red, yellow, and black—the Bororo adopted these colors as their distinctive emblem (Colb. 1, p. 51; EB, Vol. I, p. 175). Each type of polychromaticism corresponds to either confusion or differentiation.

As additional proof of the reality of this dialectic of long and short intervals, we could quote a Guianian myth about the origin of the colored plumage of birds (M18c; Brett, pp. 29-30; Roth 1, p. 212). Unfortunately it would be impossible, as Koch-Grünberg clearly realizes (1, p. 278 ff.), to analyze this myth without putting it into its context within the vast pan-American set known as "the visit to the sky"; and this would require a separate volume. No doubt we should arrive at the conclusion that the mar-

Figure 19. A page of "writing" by a Nambikwara Indian (cf. L.-S. 3, pp. 314-15).
riage of a mortal and a vulture-woman who is "covered in bugs" (Van Coll, p. 482), or who fouls the floor of the hut with her excrement (Wirth in Baldus 2, p. 23), can be interpreted as a transformation of the marriage of a mortal with an opossum-star, since both wives have the same celestial nature and the same ambiguity. The comparison seems to be made spontaneously in an Amazonian myth of uncertain origin (M187), which tells the story of a woman who spurned an odious suitor and called him an "opossum." But when the latter persisted and finally seduced her, he proved to be a vulture, and the woman was impregnated with his foul smell. According to the same myth, the vultures fish with poison and feed on carrion swarming with worms (Amorim, pp. 435-40).

While I do not propose to embark on such a vast subject as the "visit to the sky" myths, I can at least compare M188 and M181 in order to show that the first, which deals with the colors of birds, is completely symmetrical with the second, which explains the origin of the use of poison for hunting —and probably for warlike purposes, too (cf. pp. 273-4). The comparison therefore confirms that, in accordance with what the "dialectic of intervals" would lead us to deduce a priori, a myth about the origin of the colored plumage of birds, in its inverted form, becomes a myth about the origin of poison; and therefore that it is possible to commute, so to speak, from the short interval register to the long interval register, and reciprocally.

\[
\begin{align*}
M_{181} & \{ \begin{align*}
\text{The hero marries a monkey-woman;} \\
\text{he visits his parents (human);} \\
\text{he is abandoned at the top of a tree when he visits his parents-in-law (animal).}
\end{align*} \\
M_{188} & \{ \begin{align*}
\text{The hero marries a vulture-woman;} \\
\text{he visits his parents-in-law (animal);} \\
\text{he is abandoned at the top of a tree on the occasion of a proposed visit to his parents (human).}
\end{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
M_{181} & \{ \begin{align*}
\text{He is able to climb down with the help of sticky lianas,} \\
\text{he is adopted by the birds.}
\end{align*} \\
M_{188} & \{ \begin{align*}
\text{He is able to climb down in spite of a thorny trunk,} \\
\text{helped by spiders and birds (≠vultures);}
\end{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

At the beginning of this fifth section I discussed the contrast between silence and noise. Once the problem of noise had been broached from this angle, I was led to reflect on the circumstances in which noise is prescribed by custom. They turned out to be linked to either the social or the cosmic order. Between these two types of order there soon appeared a third which acts as a mediating term: this is the zoological order. I showed that this order is also mediatory on another level, too, and does not differ from those instruments of disorder—the rainbow, epidemics, and fish or hunting poisons—except through the widening of the gaps among their constituent elements. Biological discontinuity therefore manifests itself in the myths in two ways—one positive, the other negative: as zoological discontinuity it provides a transition between the cosmic order and the social order; and as demographic discontinuity it fulfills the same function between order and disorder. At the same time as along these two new axes we perceived fresh links between myths which I had already been prompted to compare for very different reasons, we discovered unexpected shortcuts which brought us back to our starting point—that is, to myths whose hero is a bird-nester. I thus established the objective existence, in mythological thought, of patterns that had had to be laboriously reconstituted when I was viewing mythological thought from the outside.

In connection with silence and noise we came up against a difficulty that related to the unequal distribution of noisemaking rituals in illiterate societies and in the Western popular tradition; the latter applies them indiscriminately to cosmological or sociological situations; the former seems to restrict them to cosmological situations. I therefore put forward the suggestion (pp. 300 ff.) that the explanation why reprehensible unions were not punished by charivari in illiterate societies was the inappropriateness
of the category of noise for such humble purposes. It is as if people belonging
to these societies were afraid that such a moralizing utilization of noise by
humans might constitute an immoderate abuse.

There are nevertheless instances where the contrast between silence and
noise is clearly indicated. Among the Warramunga of Australia, when a sick
man was on his deathbed, noise was prescribed before his death, and silence
afterward (Spencer and Gillen, pp. 516-17, 525-6). Correspondingly, the
great Bororo rite of the visit of the souls (which is a kind of symbolic and
temporary resurrection of the ancestors) begins at night in darkness and in
total silence and after all fires have been extinguished. The souls are fright-
ened of noise; but their arrival is greeted by a tremendous outburst of noise.
The same thing happens when an animal that has been killed during a
hunt is brought into the village, and when the shaman invokes the spirits so
that they may take possession of him (Colb. 3, pp. 93, 100-102).

On the other hand, noise has its opposite: silence, which has been used
not only in the popular tradition of the West, but also in a considerable
number of illiterate societies to mark certain kinds of social relations. I am
thinking, in particular, of a set of customs to which Frazer (1, passim; 2, Vol.
IV, pp. 233-7) refers on two occasions, and which consisted in the imposition
of a period of silence on widows or widowers, and even more frequently on
newly wedded couples.

In various regions of Australia, Oceania, and Africa, young married couples
had to remain silent for a period of time varying from two months to a year,
according to the locality. A similar custom has been observed in America,
the Caucasus, and Sardinia. The ban on speech was usually lifted on the
birth of the first child. Discussing the significance of this custom, Frazer
concludes: "More probably the silence of the wife till her first child is born
rests on some superstitious belief touching her first pregnancy which as yet
we do not understand" (2, Vol. IV, pp. 236-7).

The question at issue is not pregnancy but birth. If, as I have tried to show
elsewhere (L-S. 2 and 4, passim), every marriage disturbs the equilibrium of
the social group, as long as the family is restricted to the husband and wife
and remains childless (for although marriage is part of the great game of
matrimonial alliances, it temporarily withdraws pawns from the board before restoring them in the form of descendants), it follows that the con-
junction of a man and a woman is, in miniature and on a different level, an
event that, symbolically speaking, bears some analogy to the much-feared union of the sky and the earth. The birth of a child, who is a potential,
available spouse for a future spouse procreated in a different family, does
more than merely testify to the re-entry, into the cycle of matrimonial
exchanges, of a family that had been outside it as long as it remained sterile;
it marks the emergence of a third term, which acts as mediator between
the two poles and establishes a certain distance between them, with the
result that the group is given a double security at once social and psy-
chological. The child (especially the first-born) plays, between husband and
wife, a part similar to that played by cooking fire between sky and earth.
The nonmediated couple is discordant, and noisemaking is appropriate to it,
as is testified by the rowdy celebrations on wedding nights. So the couple
itself must become silent before the contrast between silence and noise can
be transcended through the birth of the first child, which re-establishes the
dialogue. This explains partly at least why charivari was carried out by
the age class of the young, and why the "Abbot of Youth" was entrusted
with the task of collecting the dues that had to be paid in order to obtain
exemption.

Several facts confirm that a marriage that is still sterile and also a first
(or recent) birth are isomorphic with astronomical phenomena. The silence
that precedes the first birth could correspond to the old Lapp belief that the
new moon and the aurora borealis must not be annoyed by any kind of
communities, eclipses that were marked by noisemaking were also the particular
concern of pregnant women and young mothers. During an eclipse the
Micmac of eastern Canada made their women go outside the huts and take
care of their children (W. D. and R. S. Wallis, p. 98). At Jemez, a pueblo in
New Mexico, it was believed that eclipses caused abortions, so pregnant
women had to remain indoors, or if they were absolutely obliged to go out,
they had to put a key or an arrowhead in their girdles to prevent the moon
from devouring the fetus or to keep the child from being afflicted with a
harelip; according to Parsons, this belief was of Spanish origin, but during
the pre-Columbian period also, the Indians were afraid that any pregnant
woman rash enough to go out during an eclipse would give birth to a monster
(Parsons 2, Vol. I, p. 181, n. 1). Even today, the Maya-speaking Pocomchi
have the following rules which must be obeyed during an eclipse: "First
your head is covered. And if you are a (pregnant) girl or even a boy who
has just married and has a wife, you should go into the house. . . . It is not
good to observe the moon in its struggle." The informant also comments that
the time of "the new moon is not good for any kind of planting. . . . It is
best at the time of the full moon. . . . When the moon begins to wane, it
is not good, for it becomes wormy" (Mayers, pp. 38-9).

There are, then, occasions when illiterate societies mark certain sociological
situations by stipulating silence or, conversely, establish a link between
certain sociological situations and cosmological phenomena that call for
noisemaking. Nor are the traditional societies of Europe indifferent to the
metaphysical and cosmological projection of their social customs. It is a
striking fact that the songs sung during charivari sometimes make use of
metaphors similar to those employed by so-called primitives to explain
eclipses. In Brittany people used to shout, "Charivari, an old cat and a
young mouse!” (V.G., I.e., p. 626). To quote a fact of quite a different order, it is well known that in the old days the ringing of bells was supposed to avert atmospheric disasters.

Although it did not actually give rise to charivari, the marriage of a younger son or daughter was viewed with disfavor if it preceded that of the older children. On the other hand, special celebrations marked the marriage of the youngest child. One such ceremony could be interpreted in the light of the foregoing remarks, although I am aware that its documentary basis is rather uncertain.

In the wooded district of La Vendée and further to the north, when the youngest child is married, on the morning of the wedding, friends and relatives plant an alder tree along the route which the wedding procession is to follow on its way to church. They decorate it with a crown of foliage and natural flowers and surround it with bundles of sticks and faggots. A huge bladder filled with water is placed at the top of the tree. On her return from the religious ceremony, the young bride is asked to light the fire and the husband has to shoot at, and burst, the bladder. If he succeeds with the first or second shot, he opens the ball with his young wife: if not, the honor of the first dance goes to the best man. (V.G., I.e., pp. 639-40.)

The same author also mentions that the custom occurs elsewhere in La Vendée and in Anjou and Le Poitou, but perhaps in connection with all marriages (cf. pp. 484-5).

Unlike the reprehensible unions punished by charivari, the marriage of the youngest child is eminently desirable, since it marks the close of a cycle. It is the opposite of remarriage, which removes a partner from the normal cycle of marital exchanges, instead of completing that cycle. The last marriage ensures the union of a man or woman who ought to be married, all the more so since he or she was the last member of the family after his or her brothers and sisters to remain in a state of disjunction. Now the rite described by Van Gennep links this desirable social conjunction with a conjunction between the elements, water and fire, to which one is tempted to attribute cosmological significance. Admittedly in the Vendean custom, water is “above” and fire “below.” But French society is definitely patrilineal, and this is not true of the Ge, with the exception of the Sherente, whose patrilineal system is not nearly as clearly defined as the French one. This difference would explain why in the French custom the man deals with the bladder full of water which occupies a celestial position at the top of the tree whereas it represents the atmospheric sky, whereas the woman deals with fire—terrestrial among the Ge also—but here one degree lower and indeed chthonic, since the wood to be kindled is placed below a crown of greenery decked with natural flowers, representing the earth and its vegetable adornment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ empyrean sky</td>
<td>♦ atmospheric sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ atmospheric sky</td>
<td>+ earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ earth</td>
<td>+ fire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will quite justifiably be objected that what I have just formulated is an oversimplification of relations that are much more complex. We have only to refer back to the myth of the star who married a mortal (Maurice) to confirm that among all the Ge tribes, whether they are matrilineal or patrilineal, the woman is in the sky position, and the man in the earth position. The reversal imposed by the infrastructure occurs elsewhere: from being a benefactor of humanity and the introducer of cultivated plants, the Sherente heroine changes into a cannibalistic princess. Whereas in the other versions she was disgusted by the rotten food eaten by prehurticultural men, now it is the man, on reaching heaven, who feels revulsion at the sight of the smoked and roasted bodies. Therefore I have emphasized that among the Sherente another myth deals with the origin of cultivated plants (Maurice), and that in it mother’s milk appears as a correlative term within an implicit pair of polar opposites; the blood from deforation is the other term, according to a Kraho myth (Maurice; see pp. 166-7).

Conversely, if we compare two matrilineal tribes like the Iroquois and the Mandan of North America, whose mode of life includes both agriculture and hunting, we are at first surprised to discover that, in spite of the features they have in common, their respective mythological systems link the high and the low with opposite sexual poles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iroquois</th>
<th>Mandan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ sky</td>
<td>+ fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ earth</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But the direction of the original movement that brought about the birth of humanity is correspondingly reversed in each system: for the Iroquois, it is a descent or a fall; for the Mandan, it is an ascent or an emergence. By
integrating the two patterns, we can confirm that the apparent contradiction is resolved within the compass of a single formula:

\[
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It would therefore be naïve to suppose that there is always and in all circumstances a simple correlation between mythological imagery and social structures—a correlation expressed by means of the same polar opposites; for instance, that dioscuric myths are the normal accompaniment of dual organizations; or that in patrilineal societies the sky must be masculine, the earth feminine, while the opposite relation automatically prevails in matrilin- eal societies.

To argue in this way would be to disregard a significant fact: the number of contrasts used by mythological thought varies from set to set. Certain sets merely contrast sky and earth, the high and the low. Others subdivide these unitary categories into subsets, which they use to convey contrasts not less fundamental than the previous ones. Thus the male/female polarity can belong entirely to the "high" category where the two principles coexist (or perhaps clash), in the form of the moon and the sun if these celestial bodies are endowed with different sexes, the evening star and the morning star, the atmospheric sky and the empyrean sky, etc. Or it may be that the male/ female polarity is shifted completely into the "low" category: earth and water, the vegetable covering of the world and the chthonic kingdom beneath, etc. In systems such as these the contrast between high and low, which is essential in other contexts, may either cease to be relevant or function only as one transformation among others, relevance occurring in such a case at the level of the set or "bundle" of polar opposites, rather than at the level of each of them considered separately.

Often also it is not sufficiently taken into account that the mythological system is relatively autonomous when compared with the other manifestations of the life and thought of the group. Up to a point all are interdependent, but their interdependence does not result in rigid relations which impose automatic adjustments among the various levels. It is a question rather of long-term pressures, within the limits of which the mythological system can, in a sense, argue with itself and acquire dialectical depth: that is, be always commenting on its more direct modalities of insertion into reality, although the comment may take the form of a plea in favor or a denial. It is thus very rare for a mythological system, if it is at all resourceful, not eventually to exhaust all the possible codings of a single message, even if this is achieved through the apparent inversion of certain signs.

The same community—or communities that are geographically, linguistically, or culturally close to each other—sometimes invents myths that systematically tackle a given problem by envisaging, in one variant after another, the several different ways in which it may be solved. There is, for instance, the problem of mediation, from the Messiah to the Manichean opposite, by way of the androgyne, the trickster, and the Dioscuri; or the problem of dioscurism itself, which may be treated by trying out all possible formulas, one after the other: a divisible hero, identical twins, mutually hostile brothers, a grandmother and a grandson, or an old sorcerer and a young hero; or again, the problem of the duality of the sexes, by switching around the male and female principles in a succession of different relations: sky and earth, ascension and descent, activity and passivity, beneficence and maleficence, the vegetable and the animal, etc.

Have we to conclude that, this being so, no structural study is possible? For if the myths of a particular society admit of every kind of combination, the set as a whole becomes a nonredundant language; since all combinations are equally meaningful, at a pinch each one could be made to convey anything we liked. In this case mythography would be reduced to a form of hollowa.

The difficulty is a real one, as we can see from reading certain works that purport to be studies of myths. But the fact is that most authors have failed to recognize the three methodological rules that make it possible to rediscover the indispensable redundancy of mythic language without which there can be neither grammar nor syntax. However, this redundancy must be sought in those places where it actually exists.

To begin with, the numerous versions—which may at times be so different as to seem to contradict each other—are not all situated on the same level of mythological thought. They must be put into an order that itself varies according to the particular context but is a "natural" property of the given society. Among the Pueblo three levels are easily discernible: first, myths of origin and emergence, which, in theory, are common to an entire community, although each religious brotherhood gives them a slightly different meaning in accordance with its functions and prerogatives, and although there may also exist esoteric or exoteric variants; next, migration myths which have a more legendary character and use identical themes and motifs but are skillfully adjusted so as to account for the privileges and obligations of each individual clan; finally, village tales which are part of the common heritage like the first set of myths, but in which the great logical or cosmological contrasts have been toned down and reduced to the scale of social relations. It can frequently be noticed that when we move from the first set to the second and from the second to the third, the high/low axis becomes interchangeable with other axes: first, north/south, then east/west. Similarly, among the Bororo and the Ge, the moon and sun cycle remains distinct from the cycle of the other great cultural heroes, and the system of permutations is not exactly the same for each of them.

Secondly, the formal analysis of each version allows us to fix the number of variables it uses, and its relative degree of complexity. All the versions can therefore be arranged in a logical order.

Finally, each version provides a particular image of reality: social and
economic relations, technical activities, relation to the world, etc.; and
ethnographic observation must decide whether this image corresponds to
the facts. External criticism thus allows, at least as a working hypothesis,
to replace the relational orders we have already obtained by an absolute
order, constructed according to the rule that the myths, whose subject
matter expresses directly observed reality, are myths of the first rank, the
others being myths of the second, third, and fourth ranks, etc., and further
removed from the type that is logically the most simple (since there is no
question here of historical priority) in that they have to be subjected to a
greater number of transformations—unwound, as it were—to be brought back
to the simple type. Thus, redundancy, far from being expressed in the subject
matter of the myth, as is too often believed, is revealed at the end of a
reductive or critical process; the formal structure of each version provides the
raw material, which is treated by means of a methodical comparison of
content and context.

Having made the methodological remarks above, I can continue more con-
fidently with the comparison of those customs that are called, respectively,
primitive and traditional. From various areas of France we have evidence
of identical customs intended to hasten the marriages of young men and
young women who have remained celibate too long (these young people are
“Baitogogos” according to the meaning I have given to the term on page 57,
customs that Van Gennep finds puzzling. At the beginning of the nineteenth
century, in the St. Omer district:

If a younger daughter was married first, this was a sad day for her poor
er elder sister, for at some point during the celebrations, she would, willy-nilly,
be seized upon, lifted up and laid on the top of the oven, so that she might
be warmed up, as the saying was, since her situation seemed to indicate that
she had remained insensitive to love. A similar custom existed during Napoleon
III’s reign, at Wavrin, in the Lille area. . . .

In the Somme district, the Pas de Calais, the north, Hainault, Walloon
Brabant, and the Belgian part of the Ardennes and Luxemburg, “all that
remains is a set phrase which varies from one locality to another: it is said
that the elder sister must danser sur le cul du four or must be portée sur la
voute or sur la culotte du four. These expressions are used almost everywhere
in the Pas de Calais and the north, although no one can now explain their
origin.” Not unreasonably, Van Gennep rejects the erotic interpretation that
Saintyves put forward, and expresses his preference for a different one, based
on the use of the top of the oven as a storage place for discarded objects
(I.e.t. I, Vol. II, pp. 631-3). In several areas of England the penalty was dif-
f erent; the unmarried elder sister was obliged to dance barefoot (Frazier 3,
Vol. II, p. 288; Westermarck, Vol. I, pp. 373-4); whereas in France, in the

Upper Forez, Isère, Ardèche, and Gard areas, the unmarried elder brother
and sister were forced to eat a salad consisting of onions, nettles, and roots, or
of clover and oats; this was termed “making them eat salad” or “making them
eat turnip” (Van Gennep, Vol. II, pp. 630-2; Fortier-Beaulieu 1, pp. 296-7).
Instead of interpreting these customs separately, we must compare and
contrast them before we can isolate their common features and hope to
understand them. They all seem to depend, more or less explicitly, on the
contrast between the cooked (the oven) and the raw (salad), or between
nature and culture, the two contrasts being readily confused in linguistic
usage. In eighteenth-century French “to dance barefoot” might have been
expressed by the phrase danser à cru (“to dance raw”); compare chaussier des
bottes à cru “to wear boots without stockings” and monter à cru “to ride
bareback.” In English, “to sleep naked” can still be expressed colloquially as
“to sleep in the raw.”

On the other hand, it may be that the symbolic “roasting” of the elder,

![Figure 20](image)

Figure 20. The cosmological and sociological connotations of the
processes of putrefaction and cooking.

unmarried sister should be linked up with other beliefs and customs long
prevailing in remote societies. In Cambodia—as well as in Malaysia, Siam,
and various regions of Indonesia—a woman who had just given birth was
laid on a bed or a raised grill under which there burned a slow fire. But, on
the contrary, when a young girl had her first period she had to “go into
the shade” and remain away from sunlight (Porée-Maspero, pp. 31, 39). In
America, Pueblo women gave birth over a heap of hot sand, which was
perhaps intended to transform the child into a “cooked person”—in con-
trast with natural creatures and natural or manufactured objects, which are
“raw persons” (cf. Bunzel, p. 483). It was the habit of various Californian
tribes to put women who had just given birth and pubescent girls into
owens, hollowed out in the ground. After being covered with mats and hot stones, they were conscientiously “cooked”; the Yurok, incidentally, used the same expression “cooking the pains” to refer to all curative rites (Elmenfeldt, p. 154). This practice was accompanied by others, even more widespread: for instance, pubescent girls were required to use combs and head-scratchers, so as to avoid touching their hair or their faces with their hands, as well as drinking tubes and tongs with which to pick up their food.

This rapid summary of customs, which ought to be systematically noted down and classified, does at least allow us to suggest a tentative definition: the individuals who are “cooked” are those deeply involved in a physiological process: the newborn child, the woman who has just given birth, or the pubescent girl. The conjunction of a member of the social group with nature must be mediated through the intervention of cooking fire, whose normal function is to mediate the conjunction of the raw product and the human consumer, and whose operation thus has the effect of making sure that a natural creature is at one and the same time cooked and socialized:

Unlike the deer, the Tarahumara does not eat the grass, but he interposes between the grass and his animal hunger a complicated cultural cycle involving the care and the use of domestic animals. . . . Nor like the coyote does the Tarahumara avail himself of meat torn from a scarcely dead animal and eaten raw. The Tarahumara interposes between his meat and his hunger a cultural system of cooking. (Zingg, p. 83.)

This perceptive analysis, which is based on the observation of a Mexican tribe, could be applied to many other communities, as is suggested by the fact that almost identical conceptions expressed in very similar language are to be found in a Filipinno tribe:

The Hanunoo regard as a “real” food only that which is prepared for human consumption by cooking. Hence, ripe bananas which must be eaten raw are considered as “snack” foods. Raw foods such as pre-ripe bananas, root crops, cereals, cucumbers, tomatoes and onions are never eaten raw. A meal must include cooked food. In fact, meals are usually enumerated by the term: pag‘apuy, “fire making.” (Conklin, p. 185.)

We must add the mediatory function of utensils to that of symbolic cooking: the head-scratcher, the drinking tube, and the fork are intermediaries between the subject and his body, which is now “naturalized,” or between the subject and the physical world. Although normally unnecessary, their use becomes indispensable when the potential charge of the two poles, or of one of them, has increased to such an extent that insulators must be inserted to prevent the possibility of a short circuit. This function is also performed by cooking, in its peculiar way: when food is cooked, meat does not need to be directly exposed to the sun. Exposure to the sun is generally avoided by women who have just given birth and by pubescent girls.

Among the Pueblo Indians an individual who had been struck by lightning—that is, who had entered into conjunction with celestial fire—was treated by means of raw food. It often happens, too, that conjunction is manifested in the form of a saturation of the individual by himself; he is too full of humors that threaten him with decay, hence such necessary practices as fasting, scarification, and the swallowing of emetics—at puberty or on the birth of the first child. In the Carib speech of the West Indies the phrase that was used to refer to a first-born child meant literally “my fasting-matter.” Even today the Carib Negroes of British Honduras forbid pregnant women to bathe in the sea in case they should provoke a storm. The old Carib communities of the West Indies referred to the periods of retreats and fasting prescribed at puberty or at the birth of a first child, and also on the loss of a close relative or a murder of an enemy, as suenemali “withdrawal from exposure”: the exposure results from an excess of body heat, which makes the subject too directly and intensely “vulnerable” to others and to the external world (Taylor, pp. 343-9). In this sense the problem is how to prevent over-communication.

It will be objected that traditional customs are less logical than primitive customs. The latter always operate along the same lines: the “cooking” of women and adolescent girls corresponds to the need for their relations with themselves and the world to be mediated by the use of “hypercultural” utensils; whereas in Europe the placing of the unmarried elder sister on the stove, on the one hand, and the removal of the shoes and the feeding with raw food, on the other, should, according to my interpretation, be given opposite meanings.

It should be noted, in the first place, that the unmarried elder sister is in a symmetrical but reverse situation to the one in which the young mother or pubescent girl finds herself. The unmarried sister calls for mediatisation because of the deficiency from which she is suffering, and not because of a superfluity of which she might be the temporary source. To repeat a formula I have already used for the solution of a difficulty of the same kind (cf. p. 293), the unmarried elder sister belongs to “the world of roteness,” whereas the young mother and pubescent girl belong to the “burned world.” In the case of the first, cooking and even raw food supply something that was lacking: they move her one or two places up the scale, as it were. Cooking and raw food have the opposite effect on the others: by regulating or dulling their ardor, they correct its excesses.

The explanation above seems to me to be acceptable, if incomplete: it has some bearing on the subject matter but fails to deal with the form. Now, in this last respect, the rites appear as a “paralanguage” which can be employed in two ways. Either simultaneously or alternatively, rites provide man with the means either of modifying a practical situation or of characterizing and describing it. What usually happens is that the two functions overlap or
translate two complementary aspects of the same process. But where the power of magical thought is tending to weaken, and when the rites take on a vestigial character, only the second function survives, and the first is lost. To come back to the charivari, it would be rash to suppose that even deep in the folk subconscious, noisemaking fulfilled the same function as that ascribed to it by the native at the time of an eclipse—that is, to scare away a devouring monster, whether that monster is carrying out its ravages on a social or a cosmological level. In French villages the din of the charivari perhaps did not serve a practical purpose (except that it had the secondary effect of humiliating the guilty person), but it is clear that it still had a meaning. It signified the breaking of a chain, the emergence of a social discontinuity which could not be really corrected by the compensatory continuity of noise, since the latter operates on a different level and belongs to a different code; but which it indicates objectively and which it seems at least to be, metaphorically, to counterbalance.

The same goes for the customs I have just been discussing. The putting unto the oven, like the roasting of women in childbirth or pubescent girls, may be a symbolic gesture intended to mediate a person who, still unmarried, has remained imprisoned in nature and rawness, and perhaps even destined to decay. But the barefoot dance and the giving of the salad do less to change this situation than to signify it, in relation to the "low" and to the earth. In the same way, the symbolic demediation of the bride, which is an anticipation of the wedding night, consists of stealing her garter which is connected with the "middle" world.

We can derive a certain comfort—or, on the other hand, become convinced of the futility of so much effort—from the fact that these interpretations, which have been so laboriously deduced from remote and initially incomprehensible myths, link up with universal analogies which are immediately perceptible in our use of words, whatever our native language happens to be. I pointed out a little earlier that in French and no doubt in other languages, too, the implicit equivalence of the two contrasts—nature/culture, raw/cooked—was openly expressed in the figurative use of the word cru to denote, between the human body and material objects, the absence of the normal cultural intermediary, such as a saddle, stockings, clothes, etc. We also say, when speaking of those people whose behavior would formerly have provoked charivari because it deflects marriage toward ends other than those desired within the given culture, that they are corrompus "corrupt, tainted." When we use the term in this way, we rarely think of the literal meaning. The physical sense may, however, be more conscious in the mind of someone who silently insults an old maid by calling her sexe mois "moldy vagina." Be that as it may, we are careful not to reverse the epithets and re-establish, within the category of decay, the fundamental contrast between rapid destruction and slow destruction by means of which the myths distinguish between the categories of the rotten and the burned:

When the myths that were the starting point of this study describe a hero covered with bird droppings and vermin or changed into stinking carrion, they are not embroidering "crudely" on metaphors that are still used today even in our societies, as is indicated by this adverb which suggested itself spontaneously. In fact, the opposite is true: thanks to the myths, we discover that metaphors are based on an intuitive sense of the logical relations between one realm and other realms; metaphor reintegrates the first realm with the totality of the others, in spite of the fact that reflective thought struggles to separate them. Metaphor, far from being a decoration that is added to language, purifies it and restores it to its original nature, through momentarily obliterating one of the innumerable synecdoches that make up speech.

It follows, therefore, that when myths and rites display a predilection for hyperbole, they are not making an artificial use of rhetoric. Emphatic statement is natural to them; it is a direct expression of their properties; it is the visible shadow of a hidden logical structure. Mythic thought, when it inserts the pattern of human relations into a cosmological context which seems to extend beyond them on all sides but which as we have proved, is, when taken in its entirety, isomorphic with them and in its way able both to include them and to imitate them, is echoing a linguistic process the importance of which does not need to be stressed.

I am thinking, for instance, of reduplication, which is common to all languages, although present to a greater or lesser degree. It is more often noticeable in childhood language (Jakobson, pp. 541-2); this is certainly not because of any illusory primitive character, but because, since it is a fundamental process, it is one that the child cannot avoid once he begins speaking. Moreover, no other process makes a greater contribution to the establishment of linguistic behavior.

Even at the babbling stage the phoneme group /pa/ can be heard. But the difference between /pa/ and /papa/ does not reside simply in reduplication: /pa/ is a noise, /papa/ is a word. The reduplication indicates intent on the part of the speaker; it endows the second syllable with a function different from that which would have been performed by the first separately, or in the form of a potentially limitless series of identical sounds /papapapa/ produced by mere babbling. Therefore the second /pa/ is not
the level we imagine we have singled out will elude our grasp and automatically resume its place in a system involving a multiplicity of levels. Then, and then only, can the part be fitted into a figurative interpretation, through the operation of a whole capable of fulfilling this function, because a tacit synecdoche has in the first place isolated the part that the more eloquent metaphors of the myth now refer back to the whole for significance.

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