

The story of the Bird-Nester (Seminar)

An introduction to the science of mythology

Chris Knight

16/01/24

Chris Knight will introduce Claude Lévi-Strauss's great contribution to the Science of Mythology. He's speaking LIVE in the Daryll Forde Seminar Room, 2nd Floor, UCL Anthropology Dept. You can join us on ZOOM (ID 384 186 2174 Passcode Wawilak)

Chris writes: According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, all the world's magical narratives are variations on a theme, ultimately a single myth. In this talk, we will explore Lévi-Strauss key myth, a Bororo narrative concerning a 'bird-nester', examining its variants and asking whether the investigation of myths can be a genuine science.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-0dCJxiV6g>

Welcome everybody to, to radical anthropology and we, we are so happy to see, lots of people in the class today because last week was a real struggle trying to smuggle people through their lines.

and hopefully we might get a few more people joining late as well.

But thank you very much for coming on time in that window of time.

cause it makes things much easier for us to, to bring it, bring people through.

so we do regularly in this term, this is spring January, winter term, the, a study of an intensive study of mythology.

and last, last term, I dunno who you were here, but we had some fairytale, which sort of stands in for indigenous, European lost traditions.

But of course, if we can go to other parts and this week it's gonna be South America, Amazon.

Next week we're gonna go to Aboriginal Australia and later in the time we got some more, fairy tale as well with, with Herlan Ska who's, who's Chris's colleague.

But of course, those, the, the ethnographies from Amazon and Australia give us a much more of a fleshing out of how the mythology is situated in, in ritual and its relationship with the cultures concerned.

so Chris, we, I'm handing over to Chris to tell us about the burden.

Levi STR's key myth from mythology, the bird nester, and an introduction to the science of mythology.

Thanks, Chris.

So, And you wanna be in the camera, which is, that's correct.

I, I have a memory of, being a student who had, supposed to be studying Russian at Sussex University, in the, in the sixties.

and, I was a bit lost.

I, when I was at school, I loved mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

And, I actually got a, scholarship, but from the Canadian mathematical Congress to go to McGill University to study maths.

cause my family lived in Canada and then we all moved back to England and I've sort of, I did a, I did physics, math, physical chemistry at school and all the time I was thinking, Hmm, I love all this, but I also want, I want something human.

I kind of feel, felt a sort of, I sort of rawness about the sort of constriction that I was in to sort of objects and energy and molecules and, and stuff.

And, I was told that the only way I could go to university and, get outta math, physics and chemistry into something, into one of the humanities was to study Russian for scientists who then my science, background and my arts future in, in, in at college would be sort of kind of meshed together.

So I ended up doing Russian, and all the time I felt, no, I've got really interested in Russian language.

I want to do other things. I, I've quite a long story short by saying that I, I'd already sort of done my degree and I was doing a, an then field, a post-graduate and I, I, I read about this astonishing thing going on across the channel.

There was a person called Claude Le TROs, and what Claude Le TROs was doing. So I understood none of it had been translated.

Then this, this was the sixth thing.

He was, applying the methods of science to all the things which scientists can't really discuss.

Art, music, religion, culture all, all the things which I, I I've been trying myself to get into.

And, I I, I've, I found a copy in French of, this, the elementary structures of kinship.

And, it was clear that what Levy trying to do was to, was to find a kind of a simple formula, maybe on the model of Einstein's formula E equals mc squared, A simple formula which would account for all the different range of complicated, sometimes very complicated kinship structures, systems of kinship and marriage around the whole planet and what David did in that early book, the elementary structures was so how, what seemed at first sight to be rather bizarre, taboo do about what you mustn't do with your mother-in-law and the kind of house in certain systems of kinship.

You have a man, like in Australia with a, with an eight section system, every man in that traditional kinship system has to marry.

You have to marry your mother's, mother's, brother's, daughter's, daughter, nobody else.

Luckily the category mother's, mother's, brother's, daughter's, daughter includes a vast number of women all over the continent, actually.

but, but only within anything, anything, anyone else, any other woman of your generation that would be, that would be counted as kind of incest and what Levi stress managed to show.

With that, you have a kind of, almost a kind of plumbing system where in, in these complicated systems of, of kinship, women circulate this way.

animal kangaroos and Australia circulate this way.

The, you have a kind of system of everything's moving around and, and you and the whole fabric of kinship has been connected up by these flows of, of men, women, animals, all in different directions and the reason why there are certain taboos is to stop the flows going backwards, or the wrong way to stop everything sort of falling apart in order to make sure that the whole thing holds together.

You need, men must avoid having sex with their own sisters.

cause men have to make sure that their sisters goes elsewhere and, and there needs complicated systems all kind of can be understood of so many different expressions of a very simple principle of exchange.

So just as, the, lemme just use this example.

If you have a box of chocolates, the particular box of chocolates with all the ribbon or the decorations, it's there not to eat just dazzle all by ourselves.

The whole point of having a box of chocolates is to make a gift of it.

It idea was that the spirit of the gift, the idea that what you have, you have in order to enjoy the pleasure of making a gift of it, that actually applies to relationships within the sexism.

So the reason we don't practice incest is because if you had incest, you wouldn't make connections.

The whole point is that a woman should give away her brother to somebody else.

A man should give away sister to somebody else, and you get these systems of exchange.

So that was LE's Elementary Structures.

Levi STRs explains that his real aim in writing the elementary structures was to discover, something universal about the architecture of the human brain.

This idea of the human brain, unlike a chimpanzee brain as a sort of structure which governs these processes of giving and receiving.

and, he, he, he, he worried after a few years that he hadn't really proved that this, the, this common underlying structure lying behind the world's kinship systems, gave us a picture of the brain.

He said, the problem is with kinship is that kinship structures are mixed up with like real life, with ecology, with demography, with economics.

People actually do have bodies and they move around in the real world and do things.

So how do we know? He said, how do we know that the structures, which you find, if you make the kind of studies and comparisons that made, how do we know that these emanate from the architecture of the, of the mind? So I'll just read 'em out in this through cure, he says, behind what seemed to be the superficial contingency and incoherent diversity of the laws governing marriage, I discerned a small number of simple principles, thanks to which a very complex mass of customs of practices at first I'd observed and generally held to be observed, could be reduced to a meaningful system.

This is, this is the, the overture, the course to the first volume of his work on, on myth with.

so, however, there was nothing to guarantee that the obligations came from within.

So you see what he's saying? He's saying, if you study kinship, you can't be sure that the beautiful patterns you find emanate from inside the brain.

It could come from outside.

It could become from just the, the way in which people have to organize things, given circumstances given the climate, ecology, demography, blah, blah and so on.

So perhaps they were merely the reflection in men's minds or certain social demands that have been objectified in institutions.

If so, their effect on the psychological level would be the result of mechanisms about which all that remains to be determined is their mode of operation.

I he's always guess we were discussing this earlier.

He always, he the longest possible sentences to make it his thought.

Extremely complex. But it, it lemme show one of those people who, during the early page of the Cold War, and I've written a whole book about this in my book on No Chomsky, the whole point of what the, of the CIA's funding of all kinds of magazines and journals and forms of thought was to, oppose the Soviet Union and in doing that, oppose Marxist and as everybody knows, I think Karl Marx kind of invented in many ways, modern his, the modern historical method, which states that the ideas in people's heads, get in your head because of the way you lead your life.

So the way in which people make a living makes them interact with each other and their, their interrelationship, which with each other in the course of making a living, then trying expression in the head and that's called materialism.

It means that the body is important, the way the body interacts with other bodies is important and the ideas you have in your head aren't there simply because your brain is got a certain genetic architecture.

The idea, the ideas in your head are put there by the kind of experiences you have in the course of, ultimately in the course of making a living.

So what happened was that, in the early years of the Cold War, huge efforts were made in the West to turn Marxism upside down.

So, so that instead of having a, an, an idea that the body comes first and the bodies interrelate with each other, you have the, you have basically mind, ever matter, mind governs matter ideas govern history.

The head comes first, the body does what it's told, put it all the other way around and so, so what Levy TROs was doing in that spirit was to kind of prove, prove that kinship systems, but ritual systems and everything else kind of come outta the head thankss to the way in which the human brain is organized and part of that was the idea that chimpanzees have brains, of course, but they're kind of analog.

They're messy, they're complex in a sort of messy way.

But part of the idea was that the human brain is digital.

So inside the human brain, unlike enough, zebra, you have on off switches, okay? Incest, marriage, heaven, earth, um contrary flick by switches rather as language itself.

The sound systems of language are, are, are, are human speech are the kind of digital format.

so because Levi says was not satisfied that he proved that with his work on kinship, he turned to mythology.

So he says, the experiment I'm now embarking on with mythology will consequently be more decisive.

Mythology has no obvious practical function unlike the phenomena previously studied.

It is not directly linked with a different kind of reality, which is endowed with a higher degree of objectivity than its own and who's injunctions it might therefore transmit to minds that seem perfectly free to indulge their creative spontaneity and so if it were possible to prove in this instance too, that the apparent arbitrariness of the mind, its supposedly spontaneous flow of inspiration and its seemingly uncontrolled.

Inventiveness imply, sorry about all this.

The long sentences imply the existence of laws operating at a deeper level.

We would inevitably be forced to conclude that when the mind is left to commune with itself, and the longer has to come to terms with objects, it is in a sense reduced to imitating itself as object and that since the laws governing its operations are not fundamentally different from how it exhibits, it, it in its other functions, it shows itself to be a, the nature of a thing among things, sorry, slate that translate all that he's saying in a mess.

Anything can happen. You don't have gravity, you can just jump up in the air.

You don't even have deaths.

You can die and come at live again.

You can any in a mess, anything can happen.

It's all the normal constraints that you find in real life.

All the constraints of physics, chemistry, biology those don't apply the myth 'cause hey, it's a myth.

You can, you can just say anything you like and he then says, right, given that in myths, the mind is just communing.

I agree with itself in myth, your brain is just sort of imagining things quite free of the real world, given that supposing you find even on the level of mythology that laws, much like the laws of physics still apply.

Only some things can happen, other things can't happen.

Then where do these laws come from? And he's saying, right, there's only one place.

It can come from the innate genetic architecture of the uniquely human brain.

It must be the brain itself, which is imposing limits on what you can say in a myth which is argument, right? I just think about this. It is true and I, I was, I'm, I was amazed that I read all this in, in middle of it is true that in myths not anything can happen.

It's, it's quite surprising, but it kind of laws or rules which are actually very surprising.

one of the things which happened as I was learning about this, I, I mentioned earlier this evening class, the radical anthropology group.

We go back to, we go back to, what is it, 1978 and I remember giving a discuss, giving a talk on Le Bird Ismy, the first myth in the, in the, in the, in the, in the first volume and one of my students from the back of the class, max Pearson, he was, he told me about jack in the bean stalk.

jack in the bean stalk, just so, is, probably a, a, a Cornish, version of the very same myth that Levi so begins with in his middle logic.

So jack and the beans stalk, you have the earth and you have the sky and you have a connection between the two.

It's a bean stalk, of course, and up and down between earth and sky goes the hero Jack.

because up and down, up and down, up and down and when he is up in the sky, he is hungry.

Not only is he hungry far from eating any food, he himself is the food of the giant, of the top of the beanstalk.

I'm pretty sure all of you have been to pantomime and you all remember Fifi fo thumb, smell the blood of an English man.

Okay? So the giant smells jack's blood and wants to eat him.

So can you see, being eaten is the exact opposite of eating.

You are the food, someone else is eating you and in this case you, because you smell of blood.

He goes up and down three times and, and it comes down from the other world, comes down from this world where when he is up there, it's true that the giant's wife is kind to him and she hides him in round things, which are rather womb like.

I mean, he said he's put in an oven or a huge big big, big pan and he's, he's kind of safe there with, with, but he, but he doesn't feel very safe because evidently the giant could smell his blood.

But what he does is he runs down and he steals from the, the, the sky, a treasure and it's a goose that loads the golden eggs.

It's the, it's the heart that the, that, that, that, that sings and it's of course he's dead up three times and he have these three treasures and, and a bag of gold and on the final coming down the, the, the bean stalked the giant is chasing him down, chasing him down.

And, and Jack, what happens at the very end of it all chop chops, the bean stalked down, the giant comes crashing down and from on heaven and earth have been separated.

You can't keep moving up and down between heaven and earth anymore because the green stalks been chopped down.

well around the world we have versions of that story and in the more detailed versions, one of the consequences of the fact that you can go to the other world and come back and go to the other world and come back while the umbilical cord or the tree or the or the bean stalk is still intact or the rope, very often, if you can keep going to the other world and coming back, the other world is the land of the dead.

Okay? So you die as you go to the other world, but you can come back.

So death is not fixed. Death is not permanent and the way I put it, try to be more simple than is this, there's a common structure to all the magical myths and fairytales of the whole world and it is this, you start out alive and in this world, you have ordinary, everyday things going on.

you have cooking, you can see what you're doing 'cause there's light.

You, you, you, you, you eat food, you have sex, all sorts of things.

and that's, this is this world, the world we all live in.

and then triggered by what's often a flow of blood, but often something symbolic of that, something red.

Perhaps you switch from this world to the other world, the world of the dead.

So you were alive and now you're dead and there's nothing magic about that. What? Nothing magic about that. And then comes the magic bit.

You come back from the dead. That is magic.

That's the biggest trick of all.

The biggest magical trick you can have is to come back from the dead and it's, I mean, I could, I we could discuss the trickster figure among hunter gatherers.

The, the trickster is the, is the kind of, is hunter gatherers don't have God, they don't have almighty God, this powerful death prop's patriarch.

They have the trickster who's a subject of fun and laughter and his, his biggest trick is to die and come alive again and when you think about dying and come alive again, there's something can be something comical about that.

We've been to punch and Judy shows.

I mean, the kids watching punch and Judy, you have punch, you have punch, throws the baby against the wall.

Judy's very upset about it.

She gets the policeman, the policeman comes with a big trotman bangs punch on the head, and he's dead.

Yes, he's dead. He pops up again, he is alive again.

All the kids laugh. So coming up from coming back to life from the dead is is also a kind of trick in the sense of a, of a joke and honestly, what's missing from so many accounts of hunter gatherer and other stories is the humor.

So I, I want, I want to stress that popping back from death to life is, is funny as far as people are concerned that tell these, tell these stories.

then if so we have life, death, life, death, life, death.

This, well, the other one, this, well, the other world, this world, well, the other world tell me, because all the world myths, all these myths are also centered on what's often called cosmology about the celestial beings.

I mean, tell me the most obvious thing about dying and coming alive again, what does this sing in the sky, which most clearly does that the sun basically, back to the shaking your head.

Why are you shaking your head legs? Oh, the moon.

Of course, of course they both do it.

Both the sun and the moon do it.

now across the world, I'm gonna get to Levi Bird nest in a moment across the world, we have of course ancient beliefs, crystallized in folk law, but of course particularly in myths and fairytales.

And, yeah, it's true that anthropologists are usually quite open-minded, ? Yeah. Although we're supposed to be scientists, we also, yeah, yeah, we can have two eyes seen.

We can say yes, indigenous beliefs have their ability to, but you'll find there's a kind of reluctance on the part of people in my discipline, anthropologists, but also historians and social scientists and myth.

It's kind of, of reluctance to take too seriously.

one particular indigenous belief, and that's the most probably the most universal of all indigenous beliefs, which are this magical connection with life followed death and that is that menstruation in women has something to do with the moon.

Now you'll find enormous, absolutely astonishing, enormous resistance to that idea.

Just look it up. You could wiki, look up a book called Menstruation.

Look, I mean, it will find huge resistance to the idea that human female menstruation could possibly in real life have anything to do with the moon.

I mean, nevermind the fact that our word menstruation means moon, change that all over the world.

As you menstruate, you're visiting the moon, the moon's your other husband, all these things.

It's really important for a scientists to make really clear, we're above all that stuff.

Camilla was mentioning as a, a program on the radio not so long ago on, it was about menstruation, wasn't it? Yeah. And what's the first, Camilla, tell us what the, what the first thing was we had, you all need to know, It's Gabriela, who's only just finished her PhD with, doing a lot of work on, understanding of, of premenstrual syndrome.

And, and she did a little podcast recording, which you can probably find online if you look for five things you didn't know about menstruation, as Gabriela.

And, the first thing she came up with, the first image of the podcast was a beautiful mystical full moon and then it said, but menstruation has got nothing to do with the moon and you think, well, why did you need to show the moon in that case? Why is that? It's like, it's still there, like a haunting ghost, even so, So menstruate. The first thing you have to know is that menstruation has got nothing to do with the moon.

which of course Sort of could be true, couldn't it? Because I mean your cycle is very raised in lengths.

There's no way that everyone in the whole planet is synchronizing with a moon, everyone mentoring at the same time.

A dark moon, for example.

the, the length is quite variable.

So when you're quite young in your teens, it's the cycle is gonna be fairly long, quite a bit over 29.5 days.

As you get older, it speeds up a bit.

still the fact is that chimpanzees, our closest climate relatives have a, a length menstrual cycle of 36 days, omas equally closely related to us genetically 40 days.

Look at the range of primates.

It'll be more than the moon's length, less than the moon's length.

Quite, very, quite a scatter of all the primates.

There's only one where the average length of the menstrual cycle is.

Guess what? 29.5 days.

The length it takes for the moon to pass through its phases as seen from Earth and of course, I'm always told Chris, don't worry about it.

It's a coincidence. It's just a meaningless coincidence.

Which of course is quite true.

It could be a meaningless coincidence.

My point is always don't dismiss it as a coincidence until you've explored whether there might not have been in the evils, may past some adaptive reason for having a cycle of that length.

One possibility being of course that we evolved in Africa, and the reason why we were a social creature, why we formed large groups, compacted quite closely together is to, as Robin Dunbar's pointed out in major, climatologists safety in numbers, because the lions are a brilliant night vision.

They're quite laser creatures and they like to just eat you, on a night when there's no moon.

So you need to especially sing and dance and keep safe on moonless nights and if you want to look from romance traveling across the landscape, the best safest time to could do that is around full moon, which would then make sense that you ovulate around full moon and you ate around darman.

I'm only just saying this quickly now, it's not going to go into it all.

It's just that I'm just suggesting that we need to at least admit the possibility that if you like indigenous wisdom across the planet has some basis, some basis in truth.

Maybe it's there maybe have been in the past, some connection between menstruation movement, which would then explain all these, ways of talking about things.

I'm now gonna read out, the key myths, I suppose my little preamble there was to say, if there's some taboo in our own culture, which stops you considering what I just mentioned, the link between menstruation and the moon as a possibility, supposing the

world's myths about deaths and new life and presuppose that idea, that's the whole point of them.

Can you see why, if there's a taboo around mentioning that, it's gonna rather stop you from understanding the myths, isn't it? I mean, if, if that's taboo subject, you can't really go there because it's not scientific and we've all gotta be scientific and the whole point of research myth and a, is the science of mythology.

He's trying to make mythology, the study myth, a sort of conventional natural science, a science, much like the rest of natural science, nothing mystical about it, nothing every fairy, nothing emotional, nothing deeply meaningful, that it's just proper science like looking at crystals or looking at, can you see why if the sort of core of all these ideas you're not allowed to talk about, or at least not allowed to take seriously, can you see how that's gonna obstruct any full understanding of the myths? okay, I think I made my point, right? He myth the Macaws and their nest.

This is the number one myth of met, the first one in mythology, the raw and the cooked.

I'm have time to read the whole thing out.

It's a two pages, I think I have.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I would do. Okay, it's from the Barro.

Ah, okay. It's arrived. Ah, great. Everyone's here.

Fantastic. the Burro Indians of Central Brazil, the macros and their nest.

In olden times, the women used to go into the forest to gather the palms used in the making of ba.

These were penis sheaths, which were presented to adolescents at their initiation ceremony.

One youth secretly author his mother caught her unawares and raped her.

Okay? So young men need to be initiated and this miss is telling us that women weren't very good at keeping their sons in line, controlling them through initiation, because here we have a woman whose own son took advantage of his mother while she was looking for a penis sheath and raped her.

When the woman returned from the forest, her husband noticed feathers caught in her bark cloth belt, which was similar to those worn by youths as an adornment, suspecting that something untoward had occurred.

He decreed that a dance should take place in order to find out which youth was wearing a similar adornment.

But to his amazement, he discovered that his son was the only one.

The man ordered another dance with the same result, convinced now of his misfortune and anxious to avenge himself.

He sent his son to the nest of souls with instruction to bring back the great dance rattle ba, which he covered it.

So we have the nest of souls, which you could translate as kind of the land of the dead and in the land of dead, unlike checking the beanstalk where you find harp, which plays itself, or geese, which lays golden eggs.

You find this, this, this rattle, this great dance rattle, which is very valuable, gives you magic.

The young man consulted his grandmother, who revealed to him the mortal danger that such an undertaking involved.

She advised him to obtain the help of the hummingbird when the hero accompanied by the hummingbird reached the aquatic region of souls.

So the other world is, is wet, it's an aquatic region of the dead.

He waited on the shore while the hummingbird definitely stole the rattle.

By cutting the short cord from it was hanging, the instrument fell into the water, making a, a loud noise, Joe.

So we have the world of the, of the dead where this, where this magical rattle, which makes a sound, is the hummingbird sees it and it drops into the water and makes a loud noise.

I just want you to bear in mind, we have noise and water and magical noise making power alerted by this noise.

The souls fired arrows from their bows, but the hummingbird flew so fast that he reached the shore safe and sound with the stolen rattle.

So the father hadn't succeeded.

His son is still alive with more evidence.

His son's got as kind of as a result of the incest, actually he's got magical shamanic power.

The father then ordered the son to fetch the small rattle, got on into the souls, and the same episode was repeated for the same details.

Only this time the helpful animal was a quick flying, ATU, which is the kind of dove.

So that's the second expedition to the other world.

Now we have a third expedition.

The young man stole some bori.

These are jingling bells made from the hooves of the kitti tube, which are strung on a piece of grass and worn as anklets.

So basically noise making instruments stolen from the land of the dead, who was helped by the large grasshopper, which flew more slowly than the birds, so that the arrows pierced it several times, but did not kill it.

Okay? Furious yet the foiling of his plans.

The father invited his son to come with him to capture the macaws, which were nesting in the face of a cliff.

The macaws of these large parrots with brilliant red feathers used in male initiation, which you have all these feathers to prove your status as, as an initiated man.

but the, the, the Macaws are nesting in the face of a cliff right up high.

The grandmother did not know how to ward off this fresh danger, but gave her grandson a magic wand to which he could cling if he happened to fall the two men.

So we've got father and son arrived at the foot of the rock.

The father erected a long pole and ordered his son to climb it.

The latter had hardly reached the nest.

When the father knocked the pole down, the boy only just had time to thrust the wand into a crevice.

He remained suspended in the void, crying for help.

While the father went off, our hero noticed a creeper within reach of his hand.

He grasped hold of it and with difficulty, dragged himself to the top of the rock.

After rest, he set out to look for food, made a bow and arrows outta branches, and hunted the lizards, which a banded on the plateau.

He killed a lot of them and hooked the surplus one to his belt and to the strips of cotton wound around his legs and ankles.

Do you remember I said, when you're in the other world, when you're in this world, ordinary things happen among them cooking and feasting on roast meat and marital sex as well.

In the other world, there's no cooking and you're gonna be hungry.

Right? And I mentioned Jacqueline, the beanstalks, not just hungry, but is if there is any food up there, he is the food of the, of the drought.

So here we have in the birdies, the little episode, which focuses on the hunger of the hero while he's in the other world up in his, with the, with the land of the souls.

So he killed a lot of, lizards and hooked the surface one through his belt, and to the strips of cotton wound around his legs and ankles.

So he's got all these dead lizards around his, around his middle.

But the dead lizards went bad and gave off such a vile smell that the hero fainted.

The vultures fell upon him, devoured, first of all the lizards, and then attacked the body of the unfortunate youth, beginning with his buttocks.

So they eat his buttocks off pain restored into consciousness, and the hero drove off his attackers, which however, had completely nwd away his hindquarters, having eaten their fill.

The birds were prepared to save his life, taking hold of his belt and the strips of cotton round his arms and legs with their beets.

They lifted him into the air and deposited him gently at the foot of the mountain.

The hero regained consciousness as if we were awakened from a dream.

He was hungry and it wild fruits.

But notice that since he had no rectum, he was unable to retain the food which passed through his body without even being digested, got no behind.

Everything he eats, just goes straight through him.

The youth was at first nonplused, and then he remembered a tale told him by his grandmother, which they hearer solve the same problem by molding for himself and artificial behind made out of dough, made from pounded tubers.

Oh, that's the solution. All you should all remember this, by the way.

Do you ever find yourself in the other, the other world in your backside? We need by vultures. Remember this granny's advice.

You make an artificial rectal and behind that.

So after making his body whole again by this means, and eating his fill, he returned to his village only to find that he, it had been abandoned.

He wandered around for a long time looking for his family.

One day he spotted foot and stick marks, which he recognized as being those of his grandmother.

He followed the tracks, but being anxious not to reveal his presence, he took on the appearance of a lizard whose antics fascinated the old woman and her other grandson, the hero's younger brother.

Finally, after a long interval, he decided to reveal himself to them.

In order to reestablish contact with his grandmother.

The hero went through a series of transformations turning himself into four birds and a butterfly, blah, blah, blah, all unidentified.

So in all these stories, it's quite easy actually to turn yourself into all kinds of creatures, insects, butterflies, lizards I mean, it's just kind of normal that you can, you can change your skin is the way it's put.

On that particular night, there was a violent wind accompanied by a thunderstorm, which put out all the fires in the village except the grandmothers.

Next morning everybody came and asked her for hot embers.

In particular, the second wife of the father who had tried to kill his son.

She recognized her stepson, who was supposed to be dead and ran to warn her husband, as if there were nothing wrong.

The latter that the husband picked up his ceremonial rattle and welcomed his son with a songs of greeting for return travelers.

However, the hero was full of thoughts of revenge.

One day, while he was walking in the forest with his little brother, he broke off a branch of the a ap tree, which was shaped like a deer's antler.

So once again, he's turning into an animal, putting antlers on his head.

The child acting on his elder brother's instructions, then managed to make the father promise to order a collective hunt in the guise of a mere, a small rodent.

He secretly kept watched to discover where their father was lying in, wait for the game.

The hero then dawned the false actors changed into a deer and rushed at his father with such ferocity that he impaled him on the horns.

Without stopping, he galloped toward a lake into which he dropped his victim, who was immediately devoured by the buoy gorge spirits who are carnivorous fish.

All that remained after the gruesome feast were the bare bones which lay on the bottom of the lake and the lungs, which floated on the surface in the form of a chronic plants, which leaves it is safe, resembled lungs.

When he returned to the village, the hero took his revenge on his father's wives, one of whom was his own mother.

Great. to describe that myth as a little bit, patriarchal would be an understatement.

Of course, TROs points out a puzzle, which is that it's the young man who rapes his mother, who commits incest, who is the hero.

He's the one who wins and he comes back from the other world with the most coveted type of power, which is rainmaking power, somewhere down the rains and it puts out everyone's fire except the fire of his grandmother.

So the rainmaker has his semantic power, thanks to an episode of incestuous maternal Rape and every says points out that, that in all of his myths, there's always at the core of the story, something which is labeled as incest and what Levi says, he, he described, he, he sort of re he he kind of recodes incest.

He calls it excessive intimacy between kin.

So from a patriarchy standpoint, if a, a mother is too close from the patriarchy standpoint, too close to a son, you denounce her as having sex with a son.

If a, if a boy is too close to his mother, that's really worrying.

It's probably some kind of incest going on.

So there's this idea about incest, but whilst that's true, whilst there's this idea that, excessive blood intimacy, intimacy, whether your own blood is incest, is some, is some kind of a wrong.

That in no myth, I would say probably I, no, I would actually say this and I think would say the same thing.

In no miss is the good way to get magical power to have sex with your wife or husband.

There's no story which says marital sex gives you literal power.

It's also, it is always got to be if you like, the wrong kind of sex, which gets you to having, I wanted to just accentuate again, just the, the point about how these things connect up.

Look, what Debbie says, finds out through mythology, through, through all these stories, is that, certain things are sort of interchangeable with each other and other things are absolutely not to be confused.

So the things which can be exchanged for one another or can blur into another one.

Another are noise with wetness, with blood, with blood, sort of kin of intimacy, hunger, darkness, rawness, all those things can go together.

So there's like a realm, which is in the dark, in the wet with the blood, with no cooking, no light, no fire, and therefore no feasting on red meat and quite a few other things. Did I say noise? Okay, smell as well. The smell of blood is gonna be there.

So there's all those things kind of go together and they belong in the world of the dead and then there's another lot of things which go together and those are kind of the opposite.

So the opposite of noise is some kind of perhaps calm or maybe musical sounds.

the opposite of inces is of course, marriage.

The opposite of the raw is the cook.

This whole volume is called the raw versus it's a cooked that those two raw and cook, they're just labels for these two opposite things and they, they all go together.

And, and what's amazing is that the, the storytellers never make a mistake.

They never seem to get it wrong.

So lemme start it onto something.

How is it that these things all go together? Give if it, if it was true, they don't, they miss anything that happened.

Why don't, why don't the storytellers just make you go to the other world and eat and eat roast meat? Why don't they just make you go to the other world and have, and with marriage in heaven, why don't they make, why don't they make like lots of noise when you're having a wedding in the middle of the wedding ceremony? Why don't they have to keep people up bleeding during the during the wedding ceremony, all sorts of things.

They don't. But now what Le show says is that the reason they don't is because the architecture of the human brain forbids it and I'm just thinking, when I read all this, I thought, I, I've got a human brain, you've got human brain, I can easily think of anything happening.

I can easily just make a story up myself and, and, and all the wrong things happen.

I mean, why not? Why can't I, why can't Jack go to up, up the beans stalk and find lots and lots of food on each leaf? He's got the bean stalk. Why doesn't he eat stuff? Why does he have to be hungry? Is it cause of the nature of the human brain? I just, I remember just thinking this is, this is just not very lightly.

so I'm gonna go back to Jack and the Bean stalk because it's the, I find it the simplest way to explain the bird estimate.

so we know we have two versions of Jack and the Bean Stalk.

The earliest known published edition appeared in London in 1734, under the title Enchantment demonstrated in the story of Jack Spprt and the Enchanted Bean.

Now, that's the earliest version, but it's not the one we all know about when we go to Panama, that one is a later thing published first.

The first copy we have is 1807, and it's a sixth bullet booklet called The History of Jack and the Brain Stalk.

so right, the th the earlier version is significant in it, in that it is the earliest known one and it has some details which are interesting.

Now remember I talked about incest that's in the, in the burden of Miss.

Tell me what you think about this.

You're told that although Jack was a smart large boy, nevertheless quote his grandmother and he laid together and between Wilds, the good old woman instructed Jack in many things.

It sounds a bit naughty, don't you think? The woman says to her grandson, Jack says she, as you are a comfortable bedfellow to me, what grandmother talk Your grandson, you are a comfortable bedfellow to me.

I must tell you that I have a bean in my house, which will make your fortune.

Well, I mean, this is really, I don't know, scandal, isn't it? The Oldman accidentally loses the bean from her purse and falls into the acid of the half where the cat finds it just as jacket's making his grandmother's fire.

So Jack make wants, wants to make the fire, but it doesn't quite work out that way.

Odds Bud says, Jack, with its bean, I'll sit in in our garden and see what it will come to for.

I always loved beans and bacon and then what was wonderful, the bean was no sooner put into the ground, but the sprout of it jumped outta the earth and grew so quickly that it gave Jack Philip on the nose and made him bleed furiously.

What? The bean makes him bleed from the nose, right? Bleeding furiously from his nose.

Jack runs through his grandmother crying, save me, I'm killed.

She tells him that now her enchantment will be broken in one hour's time, whereupon she'll be transformed.

Angry at Jack's theft of her bean.

She tries to thrash him, but he escapes up the bean stalk, which is now a mile high.

As her hour expires, the old woman turns into a monstrous toad and crawls into a cellar on her way to the shades.

Meanwhile, Jack climbs and climbs.

Now, what I do know is that baby says is right about hunger.

If you are moving into the other world, and especially if you're bleeding, when you think about it, what's, what's if you don't forget? These stories come from a very long time in the past when we used to be a hundred and gatherers and we would cl we would catch animals and bring back the meat home and then as long as it was bleeding and raw, this is the raw and the cooked theme of TROs.

You can't eat it. Not because he, could there's nothing wrong with blood.

It's quite nutritious, but the, the very powerful taboos against eating raw meat in with the blood in meat in so many traditional cultures.

So what do you do to the meat to make it culturally edible? How do you remove the visible blood from the meat? You stick it in the fire. It's been in the fire for a few minutes, maybe half an hour.

Take it out. You can look inside. Is there some blood? Oh my god, it's so blood in the meat when you put it back again only when all the visible blood has been removed from the meat, is it properly cooked and therefore rendered available as food.

Any blood is like the reverse of cooking.

Now, if you are cooking meat while bleeding, that's not gonna work, is it? I mean, you don't wanna be menstruating while you're cooking, not bleeding while in any form while cooking meat.

cause you want them, you want to remove the blood from the meat.

You don't wanna put more blood into it.

That's gonna make it more even more water causing than it was before.

So can you see what's happening here? There's gonna be hunger because you can't eat the meat.

Now this is just so brilliant, this version of Jack and the Bean stalk, but it just, it brings it all out.

Jack's climbing up the bean stalk, bleeding from the nose.

He calls at an inn in a town on one of the bean stalks leaves here.

He's thought to rest for a time and goes strutting like a crow in a gutter had crows moving a gutter and his beautiful image struggling around from foot to foot, whatever to eat.

Landlord says he oh, everything in the world says as the landlord, why then says, Jack, give me a neck of mutton and broth.

Oh, that says a landlord tomorrow's market day.

How unfortunate it is.

I cannot get you a neck and mu if tonight, if it was to save my soul, well then get me something else.

If Jack having any veal, no indeed, sir, not at present, but as a fine calf fating at Mr.

Jenkinson's that will be killed on Saturday next.

But having any beef in your house says, Jack, why truly sir is the landlord if you've been here on Monday last, I believe though I sit that I should not sit.

You never source a finer sir loin of beef as we had and plum pudding two, which justice you d here and their clerks and constables entirely demolished and though I've got nothing by them yet the company was a great credit to my house Zs of Jack, have you nothing in the house.

I'm hungry, I'm starving.

Jack, hear a c**k crowing and demand that this be killed.

Embroided the landlord refuses because the c**k belongs to the squire.

Jack asked for a hand to be killed, but all the hands are incubating eggs, which should hatch in a week.

Have you no eggs in the house, Jack? No sir.

Deeded answers the landlord, but just eggs, which we make of chalk.

Why they says, Jack, what the devil have you got? Why? To tell you the truth, sir, I don't know that I have anything in the house to eat.

It's making a point, doesn't it? There's no food around when you're in the other world, especially if you're bleeding.

So, okay, so we need to explain these things.

what do I do next? Levy STRs is absolutely determined not to go down the road that I would go down or that any materials would go down, or anybody that thinks the body is kind of important and the mind is, reflects things in the body.

So for that reason, he won't do the kind of obvious thing, right? You know, I mentioned, I read it out from Debbie STRs.

He says, myths are the minds communing, oddly with itself in mythology, you're just the mind is just talking to itself.

Actually reminds me of, of you Chomsky, who says language claim in a sudden, miraculous moment where upon the first person to speak began talking to itself.

There's this strange idea.

You've got, you've gotta, you gotta magnify the significance of mind over matter, the mind over the body.

Now, in real life things aren't like that. In real life.

Myths are connected like the other world, if you like, the world of mythic narrative is connected to this practical world through a genuine rope, which is ritual performance. cause the rituals are myths acted out.

You act out the celestial beings on this earth through performance and across the world, took quite recently and certainly among hunter dollars to this day, the most important rituals of what we call initiation.

Because the way in which the moral values and structures and culture of a of any community gets passed from generation to generation.

It doesn't just happen. You don't necessarily let it happen.

Young kids sort of vaguely learn what their parents do.

No, no, no. You initiate the kids, you take the kids and you put them through an experience.

and in Africa, among hunter gatherers, particularly what we call immediate return hunter gatherers, which tend to be gender egalitarian, the most important rituals, and this certainly applies to the Kalahari sun, but many others as well, are actually the girls initiation rituals.

So girl comes of age, what's the sign that she has come of age? She bleeds. And what happens is that there's a big ceremony to celebrate the fact that she's showing fertility and we call it, a it's a first menstruation ceremony, but it's also of course a girl's initiation.

Richard, it's initiation of, in a sense that this girl actually comes of age.

She joins the community of women, and that's a very powerful experience, which she won't forget.

Of course, boys also have initiation rituals not always as important as the girls initiation rituals, although of course in other cultures, more, more around hierarchical cultures, they, it may be much more important.

But when the boys go through their initiation, they surprisingly, perhaps you'll find that they also have to bleed and they bleed from the nose, from the ears, maybe from the penis, maybe from the arm, but some kind of male shedding of blood is needed to signify and, and create experience of, of becoming initiated and the whole experience of initiation is experienced as a kind of death, because to be initiated is to be twice born.

You were born, you grew up eight years old, nine years old, 10 years old, whatever.

When you go, when it goes through an initiation, right? It's as if you've died, kind of gone back into the womb and very, very explicitly that the experiences of initiation are, are those of going back into a great womb and then coming out again and being born like a second time.

the, the story of of, of, the bird nester.

we got it.

Now, the story of the bird nester, of course we know that it's about initiation, don't we? Because it, it begins that way.

A a woman is collecting pa palms to make a penis sheath for her son and her son takes advantage of her and rapes her and sort of what happens in the rest of the story is that his initiation is a consequence of that.

So he goes into the land of the dead and he comes out with magical power.

It was, I don't think it's all that difficult, is it? To see the whole of that story as a description of the experience of going to the, into the land of the dead and coming out powerful and of course the critical point about initiation is that it's, it's really the opposite of marriage.

I mean, may we often people who don't know much about under gatherers are not but an anthropologist.

Yeah. All cultures have marriage, have weddings under gatherers.

Yeah, of course. People get together and it's, and it's acknowledged socially and it's an element of commitment builds up.

But hunter gatherers don't have weddings in the sense that we think of them where somebody, where the priest or somebody makes a, it makes them say, I I choose this woman and till death to you partner, I can, a man has conjugal rights and his wife hunter gatherers do bride service.

Some, a young man will have, if he wants some a, a sexual relationship, he's gotta go prove himself to be a hunter.

and he's gotta prove himself to be a generous hunter and bring meat to his in-laws.

and he has to keep on doing it and he, and in a bride service society bride service advocate, it's not bride price, young man has to provide for his, sweetheart, if you like, and her mom and other relatives.

As soon as he shows himself to be lazy or useless, he's out.

He goes back again. So there's no con, A man doesn't have conjugal rights in that sense.

You don't have a wedding, but they do have initiation as the condition of even being able to do this before, like usually it would with a boy.

It, it's his first kill.

He makes his first kill of a, of a large animal and that kind of is his initiation.

But of course there's a, there's a ceremony around it as around it as well.

I'm, I I'm not quite sure I can find that.

It's the space here and we where have all this, just trying to look this time.

It's just that, it is just that when, let, let me, alright, I'll leave it.

When Le Str says, he's he's desperate to cut the myths away from life.

So what he says is that myths are digital structured, sort of intelligence, ritual he says is a bastard and you might think, why am I using that word? Is because it's the word he uses.

Ritual is the bastardization of thought.

Now what his complaint is, he says, look, there are rituals where everything's wrong. Sorry, let's explain all that to tease it out.

He has a theory about the origins of culture, a theory about the transition in the evolutionary past from nature to culture, from nature to we humans who have language, culture, music, religion, all those things that transition.

and he says there are rituals which mix everything up.

So for him, the transition from nature to culture is separating males from females establishing a rule against incest and doing that in order to make a categorical sanction between humans and animals.

So you have male, female, human, animal, all these things nicely distinguished and then he says, Hey, ritual, it just, it just mudds everything up.

He says, you get these shamans and they've got antlers, okay? They're mixing up human and animal.

You've got these shaman, they're cross-dressing.

They're like females, but they're supposed to be males.

So that's all wrong. So he finds all these rituals all wrong and the reason he knows they're wrong is because his theory doesn't match what he finds in the ritual.

So instead of coming across all the rituals, I think he maybe by series wrong, which he ought to have done.

He thinks no, it's the rituals which are wrong and he calls them, a bastard and of course when he, when he just think of why did he, why did he use that word? Well, of course, from a patriarchal standpoint, a bastard is somebody who's like mixed up who his dad is and, who, and it could be anyone, could she could have had sex with anyone.

Well, it's a bastard. He, you can see how deeply patriarchal demonstrated assumptions are as he approaches all these things.

so when, when it comes to the, the, the McCall feathers and the story, he won't connect them to the rituals.

But, but we know from other sources, and I'm thinking particularly of Terrence Turner, I wish I I, I probably find it before when we have a discussion, teth Turner in his own discussion of the initiation ritual of the boys in roughly the same area, not quite the same tribe Aurora, but we, we know how widespread these patterns are.

the, the McCaw feathers are these bright red feathers, which it's not just that during and boys initiation ritual, everyone has to wear the feathers.

The men and the boys turn into McCaw.

They fla their wings, they make t that the cause, they turn into McCaw and they, they will say, if you ask them, we are macca and it's kind of a metaphor, but it's, like a realized metaphor.

We really arm a cause while we are undergoing initiation and of course, the, all the mythology about these red feathers is that they come from the moon's blood or the blood of some other creature.

Some, some, and also amplification of that, of that basic idea.

So, I've gotta finish in a minute.

The reality is these myths have their structure, not in my view, because of the architecture of the human brain.

Because when we did become human, what happened was I don't wanna go through the whole argument, but what happened was that evolving, human females needed to be able to establish what was really the basic rule of culture, kind of like the ancestor be, but in some ways more fundamental and that's a simple idea that women need it at beginning of time.

No means no, we don't accept rape.

if a son, father, man approaches us and we don't want him, we link up with each other, put on a ceremony.

Ideally, we can just laugh the guy out of court because he's making such an idiot of himself.

But if need be, we've drawn us on support from my sons and brothers and, and indicate no means no.

Now, that is a, is a form of resistance to, chaos, which involves collectivism and clearly as young girls come of age, they have to be initiated into that logic that no means no and there are reasons why the most likely time to signal no is during the period of menstruation, using the blood of menstruation to mark the body as sacred and we we've gone into this earlier last term, but also I'm sure we, it'll come, come out again.

So, okay, so in the myths, which describe as I've been mentioning, you first we're alive, then there's a flow of blood, and we go into the other world and that other world is a world of darkness, rawness, wetness, all those things.

Can you see what's really going on? All the myths, and actually, lemme just has to admit this.

In, in, in, in, in the work, he kind of doesn't seem a bit awkward about it.

He, it's not his theory really, but he, he kind of has, he concedes with all sorts of detail that the myth is saying, this, women die temporarily.

Menstruation is a form of death, but it's death, like the death of the moon.

You come back from the day the moon dies and comes an IBI again and women bleed and women's bleeding is a little death.

It's a temporary death.

But while women are temporarily dead, they're secluded.

Secluded. What does seclusion mean? It means you keep away from male contact.

Women are, are with their own blood with each other, therefore with their sons.

Note that story, how it begins.

It's saying that what we're saying is that women with their sons on essentially on sex, right? Saying no means no, of course, they're not gonna be having sex with their sons.

Is this, is, this is actually a resistance section.

They'd be drawing on their, on their male kin to defend themselves.

But of course, when patriarchy comes along and has to find excuses for overthrowing that whole system, it accuses women as in this story, oh, you can't even control your own sons.

You know, when you're with them, they rape you.

That's clearly an ideological assertion used in order to justify a, a a, a change of social structure.

now the last part of it is just this, the reason why the land of the dead, if you like, has these features is because they are, you can just work out what these features are.

They're the features of going into menstrual seclusion.

When you're in menstrual seclusion in any of these cultures, you're in the dark.

One of the most famous statements to describe what has to happen to a girl when she bleeds the sun may not shine on her head, nor her feet touch the ground.

She has to be between heaven and earth.

She can't be in this world. She's in seclusion and of course there's no, no cooking, of course there's no food.

Of course, she's on a kind of diet. She eats special food.

She's kind of fasting, writing seclusion, and all these things go together.

The seclusion, the wetness, the kinship intimacy, all those things come together just as when she comes outta seclusion.

She's no longer a sister or a mother to her son.

She now comes out, she, she met her more fos into op into the opposite kinship identity.

She's now in, in the, in a relationship of wife, not sister.

cooking not raw, the cook, not the raw.

All those features of the, of this, of this, of these myths, which leverage those argues are kind of universal.

There echoes, if you like, of this basic structure where women would use their menstrual blood and each other's blood and augment it, of course with, with cosmetic structures, ochre, in order to signal this fundamental thing, which is, again, for me actually, it's, it's like saying I'm not very religious, although I was brought up a Catholic.

But they're all the, those religious religions have one thing which is very important, which is this idea that some things are sacred, and the body really has to be sacred.

If the body isn't sacred, nothing is and women need that more than men.

cause men are better at some things than women are and I'm thinking of violence.

I mean, if the world was about violence, if the way, the way to get ahead was to use violence, men will be better at it than women.

But of course, as we became human with our systems of morality, our language, our cult and so on, violence was no longer as a result of that transition, the way to get ahead.

There were other ways of of of, of, establishing your, your status in society apart from violence.

So, but, but the idea that some things are sacred is absolutely critical.

and it was done that way and these stories kind of echo that.

And, I, okay, just, just perhaps the last bit of it.

I mean, today, looking around the world, it's all a bit sad, I think, I dunno, and a bit of a mess.

The planet seems to be disintegrating.

All these different tribes, all these different re fundamentalisms and nationalisms.

What is still inspiring about David Research's work is this, that he was the first to convincingly show us in all the world's magical myths and fairytales of variations on a theme as he puts it at the end, the last part of it, the last chapter of the last voting mythology.

He said, in the end, we have one myth only.

So he is really saying that planet earth to this day is embraced by this fabric of mythology.

Like one miss right around the world, showing that actually all the world's religions are at bottom one.

They all have the same source, okay? They come from the same place, the same basic ritual condition and for me, that's always been an inspiration.

No one's done that better than Betty TROs, except that somehow he kind of, cause his politics was strange, and his sex, its ideology was strange.

He never quite worked out what that ultimate myth is all about.

And, so although the moon comes up a lot, menstruation comes up an enormous amount.

It's sort of, despite his theory.

And, there's no need for that.

If we just, if we just have the courage to break that taboo, which is more powerful actually within western science than it is in any traditional society.

The degree I'm talking about, menstruation of the moon as relevant to human history.

If we have the courage to break that taboo and get to the secret of all these things, we can, we, we can gain a, gain, a glimpse of this universal property of being human, this feature of being human, that we all share and, and which we can find information about from the world's myths that's from no other source.

so that's it.

okay.

Chris, thank you so much for, for, taking us through those, those stories.

They're amazing. some, there would be many more, bird nesters to talk about on different continents because I've got some bird nesters stories from Za people.

and Eleanor, you are here as well.

You can tell us something about that, and from Australia, and we are gonna hear more mythology from Australia.

But any, let's focus on the fairytale in the Roro story tonight.

any questions, people in the room or any questions on Zoom? If you wanna raise your hand or wave about me? Questions, comments? Anything Rory? Would I say The idea of like, of eating meat whilst it's bloody Mm-Hmm. Does that have any link to the idea? Like to warming being unci killing you? Is that a, is there anything, So the question if you didn't hear on Zoom is about the idea of eating meats bloody, and the, and is that linked to raw meat being uns, sanitary and unhealthy? Yeah. Chris, do you wanna say you need to be camera? I don't, I, I, I, I don't think so, to be honest.

I mean, I, I mean, chimpanzees eat raw meat quite happily.

They eat monkeys while they're still alive and, and sort of kill them by eating them. And, so do other carnivals.

I I don't, I don't think that kind of, materialism really works.

So my own view, is very different.

um, just think of kosher, think of the laws of ous.

Think of, I dunno, all the world's religions seem to have, ideas about what you do with animals when you kill them and as far as I can work out, the idea is that you can kill, but not to eat.

So you may kill an animal for God to make a sacrifice, maybe for your in-laws to offer up the, the meat, but to simply use violence for your own in, for your own good, to shed blood and eat the bloody meat, right the way chimpanzees do.

That's almost the core sin at the root of the world's religions.

So, I mean, again, it's, we need to go into a little bit more as some other point, but I, my own view is that this, I mean, to use the labor assert word, it's part of, it's like the spirit of the gift.

Bloody meat must be given, your system must be given.

You must, you, you mustn't consume your own flesh, your own blood.

and there are reasons why women manage to get men to understand that they can use violence.

But when they do use violence, they mustn't use it against other, other, against children or against women in Africa.

You, you, you, the pressure would be to go, go away. Yes.

You, we know that hunting is violence.

Kill zebra, come back, you want sex.

Well come back with a zebra and we'll think about it.

But, but, but as I put that, by the way, in my first book, blood relations menstruation and the original culture, the first few chapters are about what I call the own kill

rule, the hundred own kill rule, right? The lowest man in the community is the man who kills an animal and just eats it.

So halal kosher, all those things are about how you, when you kill an animal, you must make an offering of it, not eat it while it's, and, and that, and of course with hunter gatherers, the offering means you give it to your in-laws and they alone have the right to be the women who have custodianship of the fire and be in a position to use that fire to remove the, if you like, the pollution of the blood.

Which by the way, in another, another whole part of the theater of course, is, is that that blood is then linked to menstruation in ways which, um I invite you to, to explore.

But it's too much to talk about here.

manchego, do you wanna go? Yes. We've been having a, on the same subject, we've been having a pretty long discussion here about, the blood and all that and I, I pointed out that African herders, they rarely kill an animal.

What they'll do is they, they take the blood and they mix it with milk, and they, they just eat it there and it was pointed out, by one of us, I can't remember which one, at the moment, they're not, they're not up here, that it comes out, that blood comes out hot.

So it's it's, it's already cooked, apparently in, in the animal.

So I don't know if that is a good interpretation or not, but I thought it was interesting.

It's already cooked. Yeah, I mean, the point is, the animal's not killed.

You're just borrowing a bit of its blood and that's a right, the rule is you don't kill, you don't use violence and shed blood to kill in order to eat yourself.

And, but just borrowing a bit of blood from the animal, yeah, I mean, that's kind a different, different, a different thing and I mean, obviously, I mean, it'd be ridiculous to say that all the world's religions are the same.

And, and perhaps I should have stressed that more with Levy Tross.

Levy Tross is not saying, when he says one myth only, he is definitely not saying we've just got one myth.

Now that would be so, so boring.

What he's looking for is like a common standard of measurement of all the world's myths.

It's rather like saying, I, can I just say this because it, I need to explain it.

It's not in direct response to the question here, but it's like, lemme say, it's not saying all the world's myths are just the same.

He's, he's saying, if you have, if imagine you, you're trying to look at different buildings, as, as an architect, and you've got, you've got metric in one case, you've got feet and inches in another, you've got some other standard with, and some other, you're just saying you dunno where you are in order to be able to tell the difference between the buildings in terms of this scale and size and so on, you need a common standard of measurement just used meters, for example, and centimeters.

So he's saying, in order to understand just precisely how the differences vary how they differ from one another, you need some common picture of what's behind them all.

So, so then he can measure those differences.

So he is interested not in sameness, but in the, in the, in the same underlying structure, which of course, as I mentioned, he thinks it's a, it's the architecture of the grain.

But I mean, the point is, as I say, more than anyone else, he did show us how to connect the myths through their differences.

It's like you have simple mathematical operations, which you can perform on these myths to turn them inside out, left to right, various other operations on them to show how they're different from something which you hold in common and without that common basis, you wouldn't know where you are and you just get a headache as you look at all the different myths where you are just see one miss and then another, and then another another and before long you, you can't remember anything and you're just defeated by it.

All Levi says, shows us how to relate the myths to each other.

So, and again, what's what I'm trying to say is I'm not, it'd be ridiculous to say all the well's rituals are the same, but having said that, hunter gatherers don't have weddings and they do have initiation, and there are common features between those rituals of initiation, which I argue account for the underlying structures of world mythologies More.

Question two, I was gonna, just, ask you to elaborate about the noise because you kind of, you, you were pulling out noise in many of the stories in Jack and Bean stores and in, the bar story.

But what about that, how can we link that in? I think, I think when you would bring terms together at the end, can we say a bit more about, Well, okay, yes, I mean of noise.

First of all, you get loud bangs and crashes in the other world, and, and, and it's just one of those, it's, this is just a fact.

I, I'm not, I haven't explained it, but it, it's just a fact.

in we, we have these noise making instruments in these stories, these rattles, which make a noise in aboriginal Australia, of course, you have the bullroarer, you have the woo woo woo woo woo sound, and it's very clear from the myths associated with the bullroarer and the way in which the bullroarers are used in ritual, that there's woo woo, woo woo sound, is something we've all heard before when we were in the womb of a mother.

It's like the sound of a heart pump.

The sound of a pulse, the sound of a beating of your mother's heart.

so that's, that's, so, I, I suppose a simple way of saying it is that supposedly you wanted, to have a nice peaceful bit of romantic sex with your partner.

What do you want? Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Going on all around you.

no, supposedly you wanted to break up couples.

You think, hang on a bit, you're all having sex. No, no, no.

Come on, we've gotta organize. Girls go, come on, come on.

We've gotta give these guys a message. Come on.

No more sex until you've got a Debra and now you say, whoa, whoa, that might work.

So, so the noise is the love that, so the noise is this sort of, I mean, the blood is a loud signal visually, it's a very loud striking color, which is a shocking color and then it, if, if you want to add to the color of blood, the sound it makes, then you've got all these rattles and bullroarers and trumpets and things.

The trumpet, by the way, the sacred trumpets, they, they make a huge farting sound.

They're not, they're not like what we, I mean, of course a trumpet does that.

You have to sort of purse your lips and do a raspberry into a trumpet if you're a trumpet player.

But these are, these are not exactly music, they're not exactly harmony.

They're, they're, they, they cause, tension and, make it difficult to relax, which may be what you want and in relation to, for instance, girls' first menstruation, there is a lot of these, so-called noise making instrument.

There, there are instruments of darkness.

And, and, and wherever men have these noise making instruments, these trumpets, the ballers, they always have a miss.

We stole these things from women.

So the bullroarer came from women and she kept it up her vagina, which it was a hiding place for the bullroarer and at some point some male hero, what would I hear, know, he meant to steal it.

But the trumpets, bullroarers, I mean, there's no exception to that by the way.

These male instruments of darkness as calls suddenly these trumpets and, and sacred noise making instruments, they're all associated with the men's house, the men's cult with male initiation and there's not an except to this rule that the boys are told these things once belong to women.

We have robbed them from women.

It's just, it's just everywhere.

Of course, anthropologists being not very native people very often.

Oh yeah. It's just interesting, isn't it? How myths always turn the world upside down.

Whatever's the opposite of what happens now is gonna be in a myth and that's not a very profound thought is far more than just playing around with patterns.

There are reasons why all the world's myths about the origin of these noise making instruments attribute them to women.

and it's because women were the first to establish them that their bodies are sacred, making a lot of noise.

Thanks. Any questions, comments? anyone on zoom would like to chip in some more? No, Eloise, But it just, I don't know.

I don't, and still don't understand why.

so saying can be woman who's like a the child.

Is it what it means? Like why does it start with sex? Why does the man that raise his why, why is that specifically? Can you just clarify for Yes.

So was that, was that Yes. Yeah, sorry.

I mean, I mean, yes, I, I've skipped so many stages in the argument that I'm not surprised that it doesn't add up all very well.

So why would a story about a young man raping his mother who's fetching a penis sheath for him, why would that relate to all the myths which say that women must have power, power, and went into menstrual seclusion and there was some experience of solidarity in that, given that these myths are sort of saying the opposite.

Is that kind of what you're arguing? Yeah.

Well, all I can say is that the world was turned upside down, by men around most of the world and so we just get, we just get opposite messages being transmitted.

I mean, okay, so as I was mentioning, whenever men go through male initiation, as I mentioned, they, they, in order to prove their commitment to the barrel to the, to the community into which they're being meant being initiated, they have to plead.

and okay, and the men say, and it's a particularly clear in Aboriginal Australia when you have sub incision where the men, in order to, in order to be initiated, the boys, placed on their back on a table made of other Ben Kneeing down and the initiated takes their penis and pulls it back and it's a sharp stone and puts it into the restal canal right deep and rips up the whole penis and it all splays out with a huge amount of blood, very, very, very painful and they say, this is us menstruated and we need to menstruate.

cause all sacred power comes from love and menstruate.

I mean, it's very hard for us to relate to that.

I, I do agree, but don't forget the circumcision.

There's a version of that, all sorts of other forms of initiation or virtue of that.

I mentioned, Jack in the Beans dog, the nosebleed, in Papua New Guinea, this, what is it called, the High Valley, Ruper, what was it? Richard Breed? Is it, anyways, Han Highland public beginning, how does a boy, how do boys prove they're real men? Well, what you do, you have a huge, you have a kind of a, a a, a bank.

All the men are, are, are watching.

The boy very, very bravely comes up to full view of everybody and he has this very sharp, grass and he, he puts it up his nostrils and he goes right up his nostrils and down into his, throat and he goes, and, and it's, I mean, it's hard to stay standing.

It's so painful, you can imagine and he paused with blood from his nose.

so I think Dr. Le Beanstalk was a Cornish version of that, probably 'cause it, it's got this l breed in it.

So can you see how, I mean, okay, when I first, okay, when I first learned about this, it was here, it was a lecture given by Mary Douglas, I think it was in 1978 and she was talking about how all over the world men use, the, the book she was talking about was the island of menstruating men, the world Gao islanders, you can find, get it, get, I'm sure you can get the island of mens Ian hog and the island of men to men.

She was describing how sometimes men feel a bit, you, I dunno, lethargic a little, don't have any energy, a bit tired.

They're not very have, they want some energy and so they want to, so what you do is you go to the edge of the island, you go to the water, you take a big sharp shell, you lift up your penis, you scratch it all up with, and you, and you bleed all over the place and you bake all the water, all from the life and you do this at New Moon and once your, once your penis is covered in blood, you're not gonna be having sex with a woman and the, and the, the argument is that having sex with women means you lose your energy.

I mean, it's nice to have sex with a woman according to the, but it is not good for your spiritual power or your real potency.

So you, you do this menstruation stuff to keep apart from the opposite sex and then as you come back from the shore, you're feeling energized.

It's strong over. And so that's what you do.

So, so men turned the sex strike against.

So that's that, that not having sex with women, there's a whole book on that called wear Loss, by the way.

It's another thing is the idea that men, when you have sex, you lose your, your, your brain because your, your head is like a huge bone inside of which is the wear loss, the marrow and so semen is brain marrow, skull marrow, you don't wanna give it to women, you wanna hold it yourself.

If the women have it, you're giving them your power.

So I mean, that's another whole a acts as all this.

So I'm just saying, I don't think any of this can be understood without understanding that things started out one way round and then turned it the other way round.

When men found that they, whatever reason that, I mean, you can go into the reasons are reasons why men had to do men, when men had to do the menstruating, things went pear shaped.

Just, did you want us Why is the int Oh, right, thank you. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. Yeah, very good question. Yeah.

Okay, so there's different theories to the origin of the incest taboo.

I mean, it's clear that incest isn't too good over a long period of time.

You know the genes need to be spread around, about if too much in, in inbreeding isn't all that good, but it's not sufficiently harmful for it to explain this extraordinary strong taboo on incest that all human cultures have.

It's like if you have sex with your sister, if you're an older brother and you have sex with your sister, the likelihood is the baby will be fine.

but in no culture do women allow it.

and it's not just about incest within the nuclear family, it's also about how the fact is that in traditional hunter gather cultures, this, this taboo applies much more widely.

It's called zomy a whole bunch of, if if you're a young man, a whole bunch of women are categorized as your sisters and you must have sex with them.

And, so, okay, so Levi stress has an explanation and it's called the exchange of women.

He thinks that men establish the ancestor group.

How do they do it? Why do they do it? It's 'cause you had a group of men over here and they were having sex with their own sisters and daughters.

So you have males who are selfish holding onto their females, having sex with 'em, and another group of men do the same over there and then one day, thanks to the brain becoming digital or thanks, it doesn't quite say thanks to what really men have.

The, these men have the, oh, if we were to give our sisters and daughters to those men, and if those men were then in return that could give to their sisters and daughters, they'd have a relationship between us men.

So women are the sort of instruments of men's sort of bargaining relationships who believes in that scene that men invented the incest to be.

As soon as you think about it, you just realize that it's women who suffer from incest.

It's women can only have a few babies.

So if, if there are genetic, consequences for a man who cares, you've got you, you, you can have a hundred ed babies by having sex, you have sex with your sister and then another one.

I mean, it doesn't make any sense.

And, and then of course we know that among chimpanzees, the female chimpanzees don't like being approached sexually by their sons and fathers and brothers.

They're the ones who resist.

So I mean, on any Darwinian basis, the idea that men invented the ancestor be just does not rise up.

It must have been women who invented the ancestor be.

So that's what I think that women needed just be able to signal no draw in their sons and brothers to, as part of their coalition in order to signal no and in the, in the course of wi boys growing up with their mothers asserting this, this rule that un what perver sex isn't allowed.

The boys identify, identify with their mothers and of course, within the coalition, those boys aren't gonna be able to have sex with their mothers and sisters.

This myth, of course, is a, is a extremely patriarchal and so it starts out with the accusation. Women can't do it.

Women can't measure up.

Look, this woman was raped by her own son.

Women can't do it. Women can't maintain the incest, we men will have to do it for them.

So that's that. So that these patriarchal myths are doing that, that they're justifying turning everything upside down so that men have to menstruate, men have to impose the NCES degree and so on and of course, Levy strokes kind of goes, goes along with that because he thinks men invented cooking, men invented menstruation, menstrual syncing with the moon, everything Levy says everything of culture was a male invention. Men and culture, women and nature, culture has a dominate nature. Women therefore have to be dominated by men.

So research internalizes the ideological message of these myths, which I just think is, it's not just sort of, I dunno, politically unpleasant.

It just, it, it means you can't make sense of the stories in my view and he doesn't, he, he details the stories, but you never get a feeling that you are, you never, you never, he never even really tells you what this ultimate myth is.

He never really clarifies what this elementary structure, this deep structure behind all the worst myths is she's unable to spell it out, which is obviously a big problem.

One of the reasons why Levy Strauss lost all his influence for people is because people read through these, these four volumes and just thought, well, where are we? I mean, he ends up in his rather pathetic conclusion 'to be or not to be'.

I mean, it's just, that's what the myth are saying to be or not to be and it's just like, it's, it's feeble.

While still being incredibly accurate about the structures.

Yeah. It's such a parallel, some part of me won't have a word said against it, it's just because it's so clever and it's so scholarly and so conscientious and so detailed. He, he does let all the details of the stories come out. It's just that when he tries to explain them, he, I mean he just fails rather tragically.

I'd just like to mention that the very first story that I heard when I went to visit the Hadza was exactly a bird nester story.

In fact, it was a Hadza version of Jack and the Beanstalk pretty much with, a husband, well with the, the, hero being an old ogre woman called we aware and we've been learning even more stories about we aware just recently from Eleanor, but she had a giant millet field and she was supposed to have died and, and been buried and her daughter with the husband went away because she died.

But then they visited again the grave, which very unhas thing to do and she'd come back, she'd come back to life again with all these incredible millets growing right up, right up, right up to, so Beanstalks really and she sends her son-in-law up a great a baba, making four some birds that are in the nest, in the hole and as he's playing, and he makes the pegs that hadza hunters put into the, the trunks, the bare baths, and he's trying to grasp these hor these little chicks and throw.

So just when, you had in the story that all these things about the, the birds that are carrying off and, and he grasps these birds and throws them down to the, and

what he's trying to do is she is actually eating this ogres mother-in-law is eating his like shins as he's going up and so he throws down the birds to make her run after the birds and, and, and enable him to come right down.

Now in Hadzer initiation from, for young men, which they do after first kill when they killed an ever met animal, there is indeed a, a a no, they, they fake, it's, it's funny, they call it fake.

They, they describe it as fake nosebleed, but how can you make a fake nose bleed? And so you actually make a nose bleed.

It's, it's like, so that is the, the blood that's having, so they haven't bag on the nose, they, something happens. Yeah, yeah. So it's a bit mysterious, but exactly yeah, they're doing a nose bit as well.

So there's a lot of obviously connections. But what's quite interesting in the bird nest diversions and there's an another bird nester, called DCO is a, where we are reco one, is that it is instead of a father and son, it is a mother and a daughter as a team who then become potentially antagonistic to each other. So it's kind of female intergenerational antagonism instead of a... but the same format.

So next week Chris is gonna take us through, the, the stories of the Australian Aboriginal Rainbow Snake, which should help again to solidify some of the, themes that you've been hearing tonight.

Just to say, I read Bird Myth where he says this myth, the bird myth is found in Amazonia among the burro, and then he goes up to the, to the northwest coast of, of, of United States, the Klamath River area and finds, guess what? A bird nest myth. Almost the same.

So when I read it, I thought, oh, I, and I just went to the library and got a little book by somebody called Robinson Aboriginal Australian Myths and I opened it up and the first thing I looked at was, my God, it's a bird. I mean, really, it was so, so stunning. So I'll mention those Australian Aboriginal versions and hopefully be able to fill in some of the gaps. I really apologize for having covered probably too much, tried to cover too much, this evening and probably some huge gaps were left unexplained and, so maybe next week's talk will help it make sense a little bit more.

The Ted K Archive

Chris Knight

The story of the Bird-Nester (Seminar)

An introduction to the science of mythology

16/01/24

<www.vimeo.com/907062899> & <www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-OdCJxiV6g>

www.thetedkarchive.com