

4-30-2016

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Deon Liebenberg

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

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Recommended Citation

Liebenberg, Deon (2016). "The Bird-Nester, the Jaguar and the Fire-Theft: A New Approach to the Culture-Nature Dimension in Amazonian Myth," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 2, 15-29.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol14/iss1/2>

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The Bird-Nester, the Jaguar and the Fire-Theft: A New Approach to the Culture-Nature Dimension in Amazonian Myth

Deon Liebenberg

Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Cape Town, South Africa

Introduction: The Bird-Nester and The Jaguar

The relationship between culture and nature in Amerindian myth is a remarkably rich and sophisticated one that sometimes appears paradoxical in character. The last-mentioned feature will be the focus of this article, which will attempt to demonstrate that there is a clear and consistent logic that underlies it. Whereas virtually all the myths and related ethnographic material that form the central part of the discussion are from Amazonia, some material from North America and elsewhere is used for comparative purposes.

Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, with regard to his perspectivist theory, states that:

where our modern, anthropological multiculturalist ontology is founded on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures, the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity—or, in other words, one “culture,” multiple “natures.” (2004: 6)

This concept of a single culture common to humans and animals is, in a certain sense, implicit in Amerindian myth, as this article will demonstrate. Nevertheless, Terence Turner, referring to a set of Ge and Bororo myths, which Claude Lévi-Strauss takes as the point of departure of *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970), criticizes Viveiros De Castro for proceeding from an erroneous assumption that ancestral humans (in these myths) were already cultural beings and that animals, by identifying themselves with them, came to share a common cultural identity with humans (2009: 18). Furthermore:

The myth tells how the contemporary forms of each became differentiated through a process in which the ancestral humans transformed themselves into modern humans through their invention of culture, while the ancestral forms of the animals became less like humans, losing their proto-cultural possessions, and thereby became totally natural beings like modern animals, completely lacking cultural traits. The perspectivist interpretation of the myth is wrong as far as this set of myths is concerned. The whole point of these myths is not how animals became and continue to be identified with humans, thus subverting the contrast between nature and culture, but how animals and humans became fully differentiated from each other, thus giving rise to the contemporary differentiation of nature and culture (2009: 18-9).

The Ge bird-nester, in the above myth, acquires fire, roasts meat, and learns the art of hunting with bow and arrow from a jaguar that, in some versions, is exceedingly friendly and helpful.¹ In a Sherente version the jaguar also gives him adornments. Prior to this acquisition of the arts of civilization, humankind lived in a state of nature, indicated in these myths primarily by the fact that people ate their meat raw, along with rotten wood (see below). After giving the arts of civilization to humankind, the jaguar regresses from his cultural state to his present natural state. He no longer hunts with bow and arrow or uses fire, and he now eats his meat raw. He loses his eminently civil nature and becomes the sworn enemy of humankind (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 66-73). This jaguar, whose passage

from culture to nature coincides with humankind's passage from nature to culture, is a very interesting figure.

There are numerous Amazonian myths that express this motif in various ways. A common mythic motif states that animals were originally humans who were subsequently transformed into animals. Thus, in a Toba-Pilaga myth, *The Origin of Animals*, the first humans were subjected to an ordeal by tickling. Those who laughed were transformed into wild animals, while those who maintained self-control became jaguars or men who hunted jaguars (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 120). Many myths relate the origin of a particular species of animal, such as a Mundurucu myth, *The Origin of Wild Pigs*, in which some humans of the mythic age are transformed into pigs, and a Mataco myth, *The Origin of the Jaguar*, in which a woman becomes a jaguar (1970: 85, 99). These transformations represent a progression (or regression) from culture to nature (compare Lévi-Strauss 1970: 94). This is supported by the fact that, in the Mundurucu myth, the humans are at first transformed into an equivalent of domesticated pigs: they are kept in a type of pig-sty in the village and killed one by one for meat until someone allows them to escape and they flee into the forest, thereby becoming the wild pigs of today. Thus their transformation or regression from cultural to natural creatures takes place in three stages, with the last two stages corresponding, in reverse order, to the human cultural progression from a hunter-gatherer to a farming economy. By implication, the first stage should correspond to a state of human culture that is even higher than that of a farming economy, in other words, an ideal state of culture. This notion is borne out by the material reviewed below (see, for example, the Ofaié-Chavanté myth in which the wild honey of today has its origin in the ideal, cultivated honey of the mythic age, below).

The Ge jaguar's regression from a cultural to a natural state, which is at the centre of Turner's discussion above, forms part of a general mythic pattern, and as such is homologous with the transformation of humans (as cultural creatures) into wild animals, fully natural and lacking in any cultural traits. Part of this same mythic pattern is the transformation, in a Tupi myth, *The Origin of Night*, of a basket, i.e. a human artifact, into a jaguar (see below). In all three cases the progression is from culture to nature. The jaguar of the Ge myths initially behaves, in every respect, like a highly civilized human (or supernatural) being – one who is master of the arts of civilization. This figure's transformation into a wild animal state is homologous with that of the cultural artifact in the Tupi myth (which also becomes a wild jaguar) and the human wife in the Mataco myth who likewise becomes a ferocious cannibalistic jaguar.

This transformation of humans into animals is part of a much larger set of myths in which humans are variously transformed into animals, plants, heavenly bodies, and other natural phenomena. In a Toba-Pilaga myth, *The Origin of Tobacco*, the tobacco plant originates from the ashes of a cannibalistic woman, while a Warao myth, *The Origin of the Stars*, tells of how a young woman and her husband become the constellations of the Pleiades and the Hyades respectively, while his severed leg becomes Orion's Belt. The myth also states that, when his leg is cut off by a pursuing sister-in-law, it becomes the mother of birds (*Tinamus* species) (1970: 99-100, 109-10). In a Bororo myth, *The Origin of the Stars*, a group of children who flee to the sky become stars, while their pursuing mothers, who fall back down to earth when the creeper they are climbing is cut, become 'animals and wild beasts' (1970: 115). In a Cashinawa myth, *The Origin of the Moon*, (from eastern Peru), the hero's severed head becomes the moon while his eyes become the stars and his blood the rainbow (1978, 95-97). Thus animals, plants and numerous other natural phenomena, from topographical to meteorological and astronomical, are, according to the myths, transformations of humans who lived during the mythic age. By implication, the natural world as we know it today did not exist.

According to Lévi-Strauss all the myths analyzed throughout the four volumes of the *Mythologiques* are variations on a great theme: "the passage from nature to culture, which must be paid for with a definitive breakdown of communication between the heavenly and earthly realms. And the result for humanity is the problems treated by this mythology" (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon 1991, 136; see also Lévi-Strauss 1970, 187, 1981, 590-2, 602). The termination of the mythic age, which is often described in terms of this definitive disjunction of the sky and the earth, is widely presented as entailing a progression from culture to nature. The Ge Bird-nester myth indicates that the human passage from nature to culture is concomitant with the jaguar's passage from culture to nature. It can be shown that the jaguar's fate is no mere regression to a wild state to complement the human passage to a cultural state, but emblematic of a fundamental feature of the mythic age as

presented in Amerindian myth. Before discussing this issue, some general remarks about the mythic age and its relationship to the present age need to be made.

The Mythic Age

A fundamental concept in Amerindian myth is that of the mythic age. This age, which is set in the time of the Beginning, is sometimes portrayed as a time of perpetual daylight (the so-called “long day”) or perpetual night (the “long night”). It is also often presented as a time of perpetual life, and sometimes as a paradisiacal age. According to some myths, night, death, or disease escapes from a sealed container when it is opened up, usually in response to a noise from within the container. This brings the mythic age to an end. Continuous daylight is replaced by the alternation of night and day, just as immortality is forever lost and replaced by the alternation of life and death. Daily, monthly, seasonal, menstrual and human periodicity is thus established as a characteristic feature of the present age (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 59-60, 149-61, 1973, 416-7, 1978, 156, 174-5, 221-2, 279-80, 500-6, 1981, 186, 589-90; Hugh-Jones 1979, 267-8; Frazer 1919, 282; Eliade 1960, 59-60).

This mysterious sealed container has a biological counterpart in the sealed womb (or woman without a vagina), and it is only with the opening up of a mythic woman’s sealed womb by means of a sharp instrument that vaginas and menstrual periodicity come into existence (see, for example, Hugh-Jones 1979, 303-4; Lévi-Strauss 1970, 130, 1981, 153).² Sometimes the sealed container takes on the form of a cosmic womb. In a Zuni emergence myth from New Mexico, the sealed womb of the earth-mother is opened up by the thunderbolt knives of the hero twins to release the ancestors along with all the other creatures of nature onto the earth’s surface (Eliade 1967a, 130-5). In a Caraja myth, *How Men Lost Immortality* (from Brazil), the first humans emerge from the bowels of the earth, where they had been living, in response to the call of a *seriema* bird (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 149-50). Thus, the protagonists, who are *inside* the earth, emerge in response to a noise from *outside* this telluric container, but with the same result as in the above myths where the noise comes from within the sealed container – the loss of immortality. Death enters this world with the opening up of the sealed container, thereby bringing the mythic age to an end.

From the Continuous to the Discrete

The mythic theme in which a continuous entity is fragmented into discrete units is a fundamental feature of American myths, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrates in great depth (1970, 50-5, 155-60, 219-26, 278-81, 319-27, 341, 1978, 339, 360-3, 1981, 466-9, 501-3, 586, 590-2, 674-80). The fragmentation of continuous daylight into discrete units of alternating night and day, which transforms the mythic age into the present world (see above), has a spatial counterpart in the cosmogonic fragmentation of some or other manifestation of primordial wholeness, i.e. the spatially continuous (Eliade 1965, 115). Thus, for example, a primordial giant is cut into pieces which become the sky and the earth as well as the heavenly bodies, mountains, plants, animals and the rest of nature. This creation myth is found amongst the Algonquin of Canada as well as the Aztecs of Mexico. It is also found in China, India, ancient Babylon and Northern Europe (Leeming 2010, 18, 36-7, 55).

A fundamental motif in this myth is the separation of the sky and the earth which is often presented as the violent separation of a cosmic couple who represent primordial wholeness by being fixed in a sexual embrace which is “too close” – either because it is incestuous or because it physically cramps their offspring who are trapped in the darkness and confinement between them (Leeming 2010, 16-9, 117-8, 78; Seidenberg 1970, 188-9). Here again the continuous is transformed into the discrete.

In American myths dealing with the long day and its counterpart, the long night, the fragmentation of the continuous is represented either diachronically or synchronically, i.e. through the dividing up of continuous daylight into the regular alternation of day and night, or through a transformation of absolute night into a night-sky differentiated by the moon, stars, Milky Way, comets and shooting stars, and a homologous transformation of absolute day into daylight moderated by the rainbow and winter clouds (Lévi-Strauss 1978, 153-4, 157-8). The fact that same mythic event is expressed diachronically in some myths and synchronically in others indicates that space and time are homologous in this context.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that the conjunction of the sky and the earth, which is conceived in vertical and spatial terms in myths dealing with the origin of cooking

fire and related themes, is expressed in horizontal and temporal terms in the myths which deal with the canoe journey of the Sun and the Moon. Thus, the long day or night, which is “brought to an end by the introduction of the regular alternation between life and death, and between day and night,” replaces the conjunction and subsequent disjunction of the sky and the earth.³ As the myths move from the vertical to the horizontal axis, the cooking fire (or domestic hearth) is replaced by the canoe in its mediating function (1978, 181-2, 188, 157-8).

This indicates that the long day and its inevitable termination are conceived, not only in temporal terms, but also in homologous spatial terms. It follows that a ritual return to the long day (or primordial mythic age) can be achieved by bringing about its spatial counterpart: through the conjunction of the sky and the earth a return to primordial wholeness (the spatially continuous) is affected. This is done by means of the ritual ascent up the cosmic ladder, pole, tree or homologous device. The progression from the continuous to the discrete (the separation of the sky and the earth) is thus reversed, as happens in certain myths and rites (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 289-91, 302-5, 320, 324; Hugh-Jones 1979, 153-4). Lévi-Strauss therefore provides compelling support for Mircea Eliade’s thesis that the ritual ascent to the sky is in effect a return to the primordial age (Eliade 1960, 59-72, 95-8, 110-5, see also 1963, 10-53, 79-88, 1965, 114-5).

By ascending this cosmic ladder, celebrants return to the sacred time when the sky and the earth were one. If the ritual ascent to heaven is a return to the primordial age, then the heaven thus attained would be homologous with the primordial age itself and assume the attributes of that age. The importance of this point will emerge later on.

From Culture to Nature

One of the most prominently featured myths in the second volume of the *Mythologiques* is the Tupi myth *The Origin of Night* (Lévi-Strauss’s M326a). When a sealed container, a palm nut, is opened, night escapes and brings the long day to an end. Darkness falls immediately, while simultaneously, human artifacts are transformed into animals, birds and fish. A basket is turned into a jaguar, a man and his canoe become a duck, and so on (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 416-7). Lévi-Strauss discusses this theme at length, and since it is fundamental to the main argument of this article, it will be treated in some detail here. The following brief survey will show that it is not only very widespread, but is also found in culturally and economically diverse societies ranging from hunter-gatherers to so-called high civilizations. This is relevant to Lévi-Strauss’s own analysis of the theme, which will be dealt with further on (see below).

The Barasana of the Vaupés region of Amazon have a myth about the origin of night which is very similar to this Tupi myth (Hugh-Jones 1979, 176). When night is released from the sealed container, the heroes turn into various nocturnal animals. An arrow cane becomes the tail of the anteater (1979, 267-8).⁴

They also have myth in which the goddess Romi Kumu creates the sky and the earth. Having done so,

She made a door in the edge of the earth, the Water Door, in the east. There was lots of water outside, and when she opened the door the waters came in and flooded the earth. The waters rose inside the house. All the possessions inside the house became alive. The manioc-beer trough and the long tube for sieving coca became anacondas; the post on which resin is put to light the house became a cayman and the potsherds and other flat objects became piranha fish... (Hugh-Jones 1979, 263).

In the Tupi myth, the long day is brought to an end by a long night, which is subsequently divided into alternating periods of day and night. The Barasana, in their version of this myth, associate this long night with torrential rains which darken the sky and cause the flood (Hugh-Jones 1979, 176-7). Thus the floodwaters in the above myth are homologous with the night or darkness which is released from the palm nut in the Tupi myth.

Note that, in the Barasana myth, the flooding of the earth is homologized with the flooding of the house. The Barasana *maloca* or ritual longhouse is a model of the universe. The roof represents the sky, the house posts are the mountains that support the sky, and the floor represents the earth. The men’s door represents the Water Door in the east where the sun rises (Hugh-Jones 1979, 151). This myth therefore could be read to imply that the

universe, in the mythic age, was a purely cultural thing: a ritual longhouse containing artifacts, which was subsequently transformed into the natural universe, filled with wild creatures, that we know today.

This is further supported by the first part of the above myth. Romi Kumu creates the universe by modelling a cassava griddle and three pot-supports out of clay. The griddle becomes the sky while the pot-supports become the mountains which hold up the sky (1979, 263).

The Bella Coola, of the Pacific Northwest coast of North America, believe in a heaven, Nusmāta (“The House of Myths”), which is a house that resembles those on earth, but is boundless in size. When someone dies, his or her spirit goes up to Nusmāta to live forever. It is the home of the supreme deity, who, in the Beginning, created four supernatural Carpenters.⁵ They in turn made a team of workers who chiselled from wood the first people as well as the animals, birds, trees, flowers, fish, mountains, rivers, and perhaps even the moon and stars. The Carpenters carved and painted each bird and animal according to the Creator’s instructions, thereby endowing them with their distinctive plumage or fur. They also equipped them with tools – sharp incisors, strong talons, etc. (McIlwraith 1948, 34-7). This entire Creation takes place within the celestial house (1948, 34), as if inside a carpenter’s workshop, which suggests that this sacred cultural space with its archetypal artifacts represents the archetypal form of the universe and all the natural phenomena in it.⁶ This myth is an elaborate version of a creation myth with a global distribution, in which the first humans/creatures were fashioned out of clay, stone or wood (see below).

In the Zuni creation myth, the All-father Awonawilona creates the Earth-mother and the Sky-father. The Earth-mother then summons up a great terraced bowl with water in it, as a model of how the earth shall be, with the terraces representing the mountainous topography of the earth, etc. Next she spits on the water, hits it rapidly and stirs it with her fingers so that foam forms, gathers at the terraced rim and rises higher and higher. She then blows across the terraces with her warm breath, causing white flecks of the foam to break away and float over above the water where the cold breath of the Sky-father shatters them to produce a fine mist and spray. As she then announces, this is the archetypal form of the meteorological cycle that, in the natural world, would produce rain (Eliade 1967a, 131-2). Thus the terraced bowl, a cultural object, is the archetypal form of the earth while a cultural act (the Earth-mother spitting in the bowl, stirring up the water etc.) is the prototype for a natural event, the cycle which produces rain.

This concept has an exact counterpart in actual rainmaking rituals performed in the Americas and many other parts of the world (Frazer [1922] 1987, 62-78). The following example is typical. In a village near Dorpat, in Russia, three men would climb up the trees of a sacred grove. One of them would imitate thunder by drumming on a kettle or cask with a hammer while a second imitated lightning by knocking two fire-brands together to produce sparks and the third imitated rain by sprinkling water from a vessel with a bunch of twigs ([1922] 1987, 63).

The same principle can be found in acts of sorcery in many parts of the world. Typically, as in an Ojibwa example, an image of an intended victim is penetrated with a sharp instrument or weapon in the belief that this act will cause the same harm to the actual victim (Frazer [1922] 1987, 12-3).

Returning for a moment to the Bella-Coola: their Winter Ceremonial features a dance in which a large masked figure carved out of wood, representing Mother Nature, “gives birth” to a sequence of masked dancers who represent all the flowers and trees – in the order in which they will appear or sprout new leaves in the following spring (McIlwraith 1948, 196-200). As with the magic rites above, a cultural event – here entailing drama, dance, music and fine art – is the archetypal form of the natural event that will follow.

Likewise, the Mbuti Pygmies of central Africa have a Morning Fire Ceremony in which a model of the universe, that is, of the village and the surrounding forest, is created. Within this microcosm, long twigs stripped of bark are laid out in the direction the hunt will take. After the actual hunt, the slain animals are placed within the ritual circle representing the village before being shared out (Zuesse 1979, 24-5). The model of the cosmos used in the Pygmy rite assumes an archetypal character and nature becomes the copy of this archetype: what happens in the model through cultural means will be repeated in nature “in the flesh” (compare Zuesse 1979, 26).

The Ritual Structure as a Model of the Universe

As we have seen, the Barasana longhouse is a model of the universe, while the Bella Coola heaven, in the form of a cosmic house, expresses the same concept. Amongst the Lenape or Delaware Indians of Eastern North America, the erection of a huge rectangular structure, the "Big House," represented a ritual recreation of the world and marked the beginning of a new year (Eliade 1967a, 159). This concept is also found, for example, amongst the Californian Karok, Hupa and Yurok: at the end of every year a shaman ritually returns to the mythic age to rebuild a sacred cabin, thereby recreating the universe (which the cabin represents), an event which coincides with the advent of the New Year (Eliade 1963, 43-6).

When an Altaic shaman (from Siberia) makes his ecstatic journey to the heavens, he does so by ascending a stairway or ladder inside a yurt. This stairway consists of nine or more steps notched into the trunk of a young birch tree stripped of its lower branches. This tree is the cosmic tree which at the same time serves as the cosmic ladder or stairway. The seven, nine, or twelve notches represent the heavens (Eliade 1967a, 216 n. 1), and each time the shaman climbs up another step he reaches a higher heaven (1967a, 211-16). If the tree is the cosmic tree, then the yurt which encloses it is the universe, containing all seven, nine, or twelve heavens. This is a good example of the universe presented in its primordial, purely cultural form.

"[In] ancient Egypt the king, as the representative of the sun, walked solemnly round the walls of a temple in order to ensure that the sun should perform his daily journey round the sky without the interruption of an eclipse or other mishap" (Frazer [1922] 1987, 78). If the king represents the sun, then the temple around which he walks must represent the world or universe, as is the case with the other ritual structures referred to above, and his archetypal act of walking around the temple is repeated on a cosmic scale by nature itself.

In certain cultures, the temple, palace or ziggurat is a model of the cosmic mountain. But since the cosmic mountain, like the cosmic tree, conjoins the sky and the earth, or the various layers of heaven, earth and underworld (compare the Altaic rite above), the symbolism is essentially the same: "[The] ziggurat was a cosmic mountain, i.e., a symbolic image of the cosmos, the seven stories representing the seven planetary heavens..." (Eliade 1954, 12-7). Sometimes the temple or sacred city has a celestial archetype, as in the Biblical concept of the heavenly Jerusalem (1954, 6-11, 17). In these cases, the purely cultural character of the archetypal form (of the universe) is expressed.

In myth as well as in practice, the Barasana ritual longhouse is identified with the universe, and, in the above myth, the artifacts inside this longhouse are transformed into wild animals (i.e. nature) at the end of the mythic age. This progression, which also occurs in the Tupi myth (M326a), is homologous with the one in the Bella Coola creation myth in which artifacts sculpted out of wood inside the celestial house become all of living nature.

Creation by Thought

In the Zuni creation myth referred to above, the All-father Awonawilona performs the initial stage of the cosmogony by means of pure thought: he "conceived within himself and thought outward in space" and created "by means of his innate knowledge" (Eliade 1967a, 130-31). According to the Winnebago of Wisconsin the Creator made the earth, the seas and the heavenly lights by thought, and then proceeded to create the first man by fashioning him out of a piece of earth, in His own image (1967a, 83-4). The Omaha of Midwestern North America believe that, in the Beginning, all things were in the mind of Wakonda, the Creator (1967a, 84-5). The Uitoto of Columbia, South America, state that the universe was created from mere appearance which was grasped by the Creator, He-who-is-appearance-only, through the agency of a dream (1967a, 85).

Thus cosmogonic primacy is given to the idea, the mental image, the dream image, and the illusion (mere appearance). This is logically extended to the work of art – the mental image fashioned in clay, carved in wood, etc. The Winnebago creator proceeds from creation by thought to modelling the first humans out of earth. This connection is particularly clear among the Unambal of Northwest Australia, according to whom Wallanganda, the lord of heaven, projected images from his dreams onto rocks and into caves in the form of paintings, which he then transformed into living creatures. These paintings, which can still be seen there today, are the spiritual centers of the creatures which they represent

(Eliade 1967b, 226). The very widespread type of creation myth, found in all parts of the world, which states that the first humans were fashioned out of clay, wood or stone (Leeming 2010, 312-3) is essentially a variant of the “creation from pure thought” myth since the creator is giving plastic expression to an idea in his mind through the medium of clay, stone or wood (2010, 8).

The ritual recreation of the universe by erecting or repairing a ritual structure, as found amongst the Lenape, Karok, Hupa and Yurok, is a cosmogony in a purely cultural and archetypal form. Likewise, the creation of all of nature, including the trees, mountains, rivers and heavenly bodies, by a team of carpenters inside the cosmic house Nusmāta, in the Bella Coola creation myth, is a cosmogony which is entirely cultural in character. The same applies to the Pygmy, Altaic, and Egyptian rites referred to above: not only does the sacred space operate as the archetypal form of the universe, but the ritual actions which take place within this space partake of the same archetypal character. These cosmogonies, both ritual and mythic, are homologous with the mythic creation of the cosmos from pure thought or mental image, since these cultural acts performed by carpenters and the like are physical expressions of ideas born in the human mind.

All the examples are manifestations of the concept that culture has precedence over nature, that ideas and images conceived inside the human mind, as well as the man-made artifacts and rituals which are physical expressions of these ideas, stand in an archetypal relationship to the natural phenomena to which they refer. These cultural forms are the originals of which nature is the copy.

From Nature to Culture

The heavenly otherworld is a spatial counterpart of the mythic age (see above). And, by virtue of “the reciprocal convertibility of the horizontal and vertical axes, joining respectively the near and the far and the low and the high” (Lévi-Strauss 1981, 469, see also 1978, 157-8, 181-9, 1981, 446-7, 503), this also applies to otherworlds which are horizontally rather than vertically remote. In a Bororo myth, *The Origin of Water, Adornments, and Funeral Rites* (Lévi-Strauss’s M2), the hero Baitogogo brings adornments, ornaments and instruments back from an idyllic, verdant landscape to give to his former tribesmen (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 49-50). In the Bororo bird-nester myth (M1), the hero uses a team of helpful birds and a grasshopper to bring back three musical instruments from the aquatic region of souls, also referred to as the “nest of souls” (1970, 35). This expedition is analogous to his ill-fated subsequent attempt to capture macaws from the nest high up on a cliff (1970, 36), in that the Bororo use macaw feathers in the making of diadems and crowns, as well as to decorate bows and other objects (1970, 47). The theft of fire often occurs, in North American myth, from a celestial otherworld or a horizontally remote equivalent (Lévi-Strauss 1981, 458-9, 462-9; Teit 1917a, 2, 1917b, 443). As stated above, the Sherente bird-nester learns the arts of civilization – hunting with a bow and arrow, making fire and cooking meat – from a jaguar who also gives him ornaments (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 72-3). This jaguar’s abode is analogous to the otherworld from which the arts of civilization are stolen or otherwise acquired in such myths (see below).

As we have seen, humankind progresses from the raw to the cooked, and therefore from nature to culture, in these myths, as opposed to the jaguar who regresses from culture to nature. Lévi-Strauss states that, “meat was a sign of the proximity of the sky to the earth, and of the sun to mankind. One myth says so explicitly: ‘A long time ago the Tenetehara did not have fire. Meat was cooked in the sun, *which at the time was closer to the earth*’” (1970, 289). According to this myth the lack of cooking fire denotes the primordial conjunction of the sky and the earth. On the other hand, an Eastern Timbira version of the bird-nester tale states that men originally *had* fire, but that the two civilizing heroes, who formerly lived with them, departed, taking fire with them and thereby reducing men to eating their meat raw and sun-dried. Fire was then obtained again when the bird-nester stole it from the jaguar (1970, 71). This version is highly significant, as will be shown below. The departure of the civilizing heroes is homologous with the disjunction of the sky and the earth, which normally signifies the end of the mythic age (see below).

Before trying to resolve this anomaly, it is necessary to look at the mythology of honey and the rather complex relationship of this natural substance to the above.

From Cultivated Honey to Wild Honey

Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that, in both North and South American myths featuring the bird-nester, the origin of cooking fire is associated with the origin of adornments, which in turn is associated with the origin of honey – except that in the North American myths honey is replaced by another condiment, salt, since this particular part of North America is too far north for native American bees to survive there.⁷ Furthermore, in both hemispheres the myths also associate the origin of cooking fire with that of hunting, which in turn is associated with the origin of tobacco. Honey and salt are both natural substances, and in the myths they represent the possibility of man's regression to a natural state. In contrast to these condiments, tobacco is presented as an aspect of culture and as the supreme means of communicating with the supernatural world (1981, 99-103, 143-7).

As Lévi-Strauss points out, “ornaments provide a condiment for the human body, just as flavors added to food constitute its ornamentation” (1981, 99). However, adornments are eminently cultural, so that they would not, in this respect, provide a logical transition from cooking fire to honey or salt in terms of the regressive mythic role which he attributes to these condiments.

In the second volume of the *Mythologiques*, *From Honey to Ashes*, Lévi-Strauss discusses a body of related myths which deal with a primordial golden age characterized variously by the abundance of honey and game as well as by a *superlative culture*, all of which are subsequently lost (1973, 210-4, 259-60, 243-4, 237-8, 188, 183-4, see also 1981, 466). He uses one of these myths to introduce his extensive treatment of the subject of honey in this volume. In this myth, *The Origin of Honey*, told by the Ofaié-Chavanté of the southern Mato Grosso in South America, honey, during the mythic age, was cultivated in plantations, but, after a certain event, it became wild – a natural substance found in many varieties (1973, 70-2).

Just as, in the Tupi myth (M326a), man-made artifacts are transformed into wild animals when the sealed palm nut is opened and night is released, so cultivated honey (which is presented as being derived from a cultivated plant) is turned into wild honey, a natural substance, under similar circumstances. The bees, which are said to have tended the honey plantation during its cultural phase, are released from the plantation to invade the forest just as night is released from the sealed container in the Tupi myth. Furthermore, the homology between the release of the bees and that of night is underlined by the fact that, in the Tupi myth, as well as in its analogues from the Vaupés region of Amazonia, noise-making flying insects are said to be released from the sealed container along with night. In some variants the night in question actually takes the form of a dark cloud of flying ants, while in the main Barasana ceremony, *He House*, the ritual “opening up” of the sacred wax gourd, which is homologous with the opening up of the palm nut in M326a, is said to be accompanied by the buzzing sound of *werea* bees (Hugh-Jones 1979, 176-7).

When night is released from the sealed container in these myths, the long day (the continuous) is fragmented into discrete units of night and day. Likewise, when the bees (and honey) are released from the plantation, a uniform substance – cultivated honey – is “fragmented” to become the great diversity of types of wild honey which are found in the forest these days (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 74). Moreover, honey has now become difficult to obtain, being available only in discrete amounts scattered all over the forest in relatively inaccessible places – as opposed to the plenitude of honey (an abundant and therefore spatially continuous supply) which was available in the plantation.⁸ Thus the honey myth expresses in spatial terms that which is treated in temporal terms in the myths about the release of night from the sealed container.

The golden age, or idyllic mythic age, is thus characterized by a plenitude of honey, which, furthermore, is a uniform substance, thereby representing primordial wholeness. Moreover, a central motif of these honey myths is that of a sealed container which is pierced or opened up (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 92-7, 111). As shown above, this refers to the mythic age and its termination or loss through the opening up of such a container. In an Arawak myth from Guiana, *Why Honey is so Scarce Now*, this is indicated by the fact that the hero opens up a hole in the hollow trunk of a tree in order to find honey, instead of which he finds Maba, a beautiful nude girl who is the personification of honey (1973, 153-4). This myth postpones the loss of the mythic age so that its idyllic nature can first be elaborated: she becomes his wife and they live a blissful life of plenitude until he breaks his promise never to mention her name in front of his guests. As he does so, she turns into a bee and leaves him, and this explains the present scarcity of honey. This injunction not to speak her name out loud is an inversion of the injunction, in the Tupi myth M326a, not

to open the sealed palm nut (in response to the sounds made by insect and frogs from within the container). By uttering her name, he effectively draws her out of the cocoon of silence inside which she was hiding her true identity. This “cocoon” is homologous with the hollow tree inside which she was hidden before.

In the Tupi myth, *The Origin of Night*, a canoe and its human occupant are transformed into a duck at the moment when the long day comes to an end. Lévi-Strauss shows that this motif also occurs in the Waroa myth, *The Story of Haburi*. The hero makes a series of canoes from various materials, and each successive canoe is stolen by and transformed into part of the anatomy of a different species of duck. In some versions he is presented as the “father of inventions”, and his departure at the end of the myth deprives humanity of a superlative culture. In an analogous Taulipang myth this golden age is characterized by magical self-working agricultural implements. Because of the loss of these marvelous manifestations of a super-civilization, which coincides with the transformation of the hero into a duck, men now have to toil in the fields (1973, 211-3).

Thus, at the instant that night falls, in the Tupi myth, culture turns into nature. However, this is no ordinary culture, but a super-culture that is lost forever at this world-changing moment. Lévi-Strauss’s describes this as a super-civilization which departs from this world along with Haburi (or Aboré), the “father of inventions,” when canoes start changing into ducks.⁹ Likewise, in the Ge bird-nester myths, the progression (or regression) from culture to nature of that master of the arts of civilization, the jaguar, signals the loss of this otherworldly culture (compare Lévi-Strauss 1970, 83, 87, 91, 94, 97-8; see also below). This jaguar’s regression is homologous with Haburi’s departure.

By the same token, the honey that is lost at the end of the golden age is a superlative honey, a cultivated honey that is equivalent to this super-culture. It is therefore logical that the origin of honey should, in myth, be associated with the origin of adornments, as well as with the origin of cooking fire, the art of hunting, and tobacco.¹⁰ Adornments, cooking fire, the art of hunting, and tobacco are examples of culture.

The Persistence of Culture in the World of Nature

According to Lévi-Strauss the underlying theme of Amerindian myth is “the passage from nature to culture, which must be paid for with a definitive breakdown of communication between the heavenly and earthly realms” (see above). However, the above material shows that the termination of the mythic age, of which the disjunction of the sky and the earth is a manifestation, signifies a passage from culture to nature. Lévi-Strauss argues that the establishment of the zoological order in myth makes

“nature accessible to conceptual thought through the introduction of the discontinuity between the species, [which] allows culture to assert a hold over nature and to overcome its absence of differentiation” (1981, 592, see also 1970, 341).

Nevertheless, the myths seem to present an opposite argument: it is through the fragmentation of the continuous that discrete elements of alternating day and night, life and death, and so on are established, and this progression is repeated in spatial terms to explain the creation of the whole natural world, from the sky and the earth to the zoological order (see above). The Tupi and Barasana myths referred to above make it clear that this progression from the continuous to the discrete is accompanied by the transformation of culture into nature. That these two progressions are homologous is succinctly expressed in this Tupi myth, *The Origin of Night* (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 416-7). When night is released from the sealed palm nut, darkness falls instantly. Realizing what has happened, the daughter of the Snake decides to separate night from day, thereby fragmenting continuous time into discrete units. In order to do this, she transforms a ball of thread (i.e. a continuous, cultural object) into an *inhambu* bird (a natural creature whose song at dawn marks the discrete units of day and night), while another ball of thread is simultaneously transformed into a *cujubim* bird, whose calls at regular intervals throughout the night fragment it into discrete temporal units. Thus the cultural/continuous is transformed into the natural/discrete. Culture, in its pure form, therefore belongs to the mythic age or to its spatial counterpart, the heavenly otherworld.¹¹

The anomaly referred to above can now be resolved as follows. According to the myths, if culture was transformed into nature at the end of the mythic age, how can there still be culture in this world of periodicity and nature? Since culture properly belongs in the mythic age or the otherworld, it could only find its way into this natural world if it was stolen from the otherworld or if it was brought from the otherworld by a divine benefactor. Hence the myths in which cooking fire, musical instruments, adornments, sacred rites, the art of hunting, agriculture, and other aspects of culture are stolen from the otherworld or brought to our world by a culture hero or supernatural being who teaches humankind these arts of civilization (see below).

The culture which humans possess here on earth mediates between the sky and the earth because it mediates between pure culture, which is sacred and celestial in character, and pure nature, which is earthly and subject to the various forms of periodicity (compare Lévi-Strauss 1970, 293, 1981, 590-2). Even though they have lost the world of pure culture (which Aboré took with him when he departed) humans maintain a strong link with that world by means of their cultural possessions here on earth. Without this mediating culture humans would be completely absorbed in the world of nature – as happened to that former master of culture, the jaguar, in the Ge myths.¹² That is why, unlike wild animals that eat their meat raw, as this unfortunate jaguar does now, humans interpose a cultural system of cooking between themselves and nature. This is perhaps also why “the conjunction of a member of the social group with nature must be mediated through the intervention of cooking fire.” Thus the newborn child, the woman who has just given birth and the pubescent girl, i.e. individuals who are deeply involved in a natural process and therefore “raw,” are ceremonially “cooked” (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 336).

The Origin of Cultivated Plants

A set of Ge myths, *The Origin of Cultivated Plants*, features a hero who falls in love with a star who appears to him in the form of a beautiful young woman.¹³ He marries her and she introduces him to cultivated plants. She also teaches him and the other people how to cultivate them. At the time humans had no knowledge of agriculture, and they ate rotten wood with their meat instead of vegetables. In several versions they ate their meat raw. In most versions, Star-woman leads them to a large tree laden with maize cobs. They decide to chop down the tree, but since the wood is particularly hard, or since the notch they have cut closes up again when they pause for breath, they send a boy or two to go and fetch another axe from the village. On the way back to the village the boys eat the meat of an opossum, and instantly become senile, stooping old men. Having taught the people how to make a clearing and plant the maize, Star-woman departs for the sky. In some versions the incident with the boys who become senile after eating the opossum is replaced by that of Star-woman losing her virginity by being raped. She avenges herself by killing her attackers and departs for the sky (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 165-9).

Lévi-Strauss discusses these last two incidents as different forms of the theme of the loss of immortality, and states that, according to these myths, mortality is the price that humans have to pay for acquiring cultivated plants, i.e. for the passage from nature to culture (1970, 169). However, as the following analysis will show, this is not entirely true.

At the start of the myth the sky is already in a state of disjunction with the earth, as is the case in a set of North American myths, *The Conquest of Fire in the Sky*, as told by the Puget Sound Salish, the Skagit, the Snohomish, the Quileute, the Cowlitz River Sahaptin,¹⁴ the Klikitat, the Kalispel, the Sanpoil, and the Okanagon (Lévi-Strauss 1981, 462-9). Mortality is the concomitant of this disjunction, which is already a fact in the Ge myths. This is testified by the presence of rotten wood, which humans eat instead of vegetables.^{14,15}

In the North American myths, the sky is then conjoined to the earth by means of an arrow-ladder. This cosmic ladder is homologous with the huge tree from which a limitless supply of maize-cobs grows, in the Ge myths. This is a variant of the cosmic tree that, like the arrow-ladder, conjoins heaven and earth (Eliade 1960, 59-60, 63-6; Lévi-Strauss 1970, 289-91, 293, 1981, 31-2, 462-5, 501-3, 601).¹⁶ In the Ge myths the conjunction of the sky and the earth is represented by Star-woman coming down to earth (instead of earthlings going up to the sky as in the fire-theft myths) and marrying the hero. The conjunction of sky and earth is widely represented in myth as the sexual conjunction of a man and a woman of which one is celestial and the other terrestrial (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 289; Leeming 2010, 16-9, 103, 117-8, 78; Seidenberg 1970, 188-9).

Thus a return to primordial wholeness, to the state in which sky and earth are still one, is effected so that culture can be obtained from heaven. This return to the continuous is also expressed by the fact that the Ge hero keeps his tiny wife hidden in a gourd.¹⁷ This motif represents the sealed container and thereby signifies the mythic age (see above).

This return to the continuous is inevitably followed by its fragmentation, which, in the fire-theft myths, is expressed by means of the breaking of the arrow-ladder (a continuous entity which conjoins sky and earth). In the Ge myths it is expressed, amongst other things, by the cutting down of the “cosmic” maize-bearing tree. Unlike the true cosmic tree, which expresses the continuous through the conjunction of the sky and the earth, this tree expresses the continuous through a limitless supply of maize (see also note 16 above).

In the North American myths this disjunction of the sky and the earth results in the death of many of the earthlings who went up to the sky to steal fire (1981, 467-8). Thus the motif of the loss of immortality, which properly belongs with the original cosmogonic separation of the sky and the earth (see note 14 above), is repeated in a weaker form as the death of a limited number of people. In the Ge myths this disjunction, i.e. the felling of the tree, is causally related to the sudden and dramatic aging of the boys who were sent to fetch another axe. Here again, the motif is presented in a weaker form.

The fire-theft myths also present the cosmogony itself (i.e. the separation of the sky and the earth) in a weaker form as the fragmentation of the arrow-ladder, which disjoins the sky from the earth. Furthermore, the cosmogony is repeated on a small scale when a few species of animals acquire their present-day anatomical peculiarities as a result of their fall from the sky due to the breaking of the arrow-ladder. Thus, for example, the fragmentation of the bones of the Sucker-fish explains its present anatomical state. Significantly, the different species of salmon and trout, which make up a major part of the diet of these societies, are excluded, and the three or four species of fish which are mentioned are either inedible or little appreciated (1981, 468). Through this device the myths indicate that this is a weak replica of the true creation (compare Lévi-Strauss 1981, 468-9).

The Ge myths also represent the disjunction of the sky and the earth by means of the departure of Star-woman for the sky, which disjoins her from her human husband who stays behind on earth. Furthermore, Star-woman, who had remained a virgin throughout her marriage with the hero, is raped, or gives in to her husband’s amorous demands, after which she departs for the sky. The mythic age is often characterized as one during which there was no sexual intercourse (or sex organs), and the introduction of sex coincides with the termination of this age, as well as with the loss of immortality. Sex and death are complementary aspects of the eternal cycle of death and birth, that is, of periodicity, which, in all its various forms, characterizes the present age that ensues at the end of the mythic age (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 155-7, 1978, 175, 179-80, 1981, 134-8, 590).

As mentioned above, the theme of the loss of immortality is represented in a weak form as the sudden and dramatic aging of a boy or boys as a result of them eating an opossum. However, in a Timbira version, the boy gets the meat from an *old* man who is roasting the opossum, so that, as with the presence of rotten wood, mortality is already in evidence. This weak form of the loss of immortality is directly caused by the eating of the forbidden opossum. Earlier on in an Apinaye version Star-woman turns into an opossum in order to guide her mother-in-law towards the maize-bearing tree. Therefore, in terms of the equivalence of sex and eating that is widely expressed in South American mythology and folklore, this eating of the opossum is homologous with the rape of Star-woman, at the same point in the tale, in other versions. In everyday language, South American Indians would talk about “eating” a woman when they refer to having sexual intercourse with her (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 265, 269).¹⁸ Thus Star-woman is “eaten” both metaphorically, by her husband or the rapists, and literally, as an opossum, by the disobedient boys. The latter motif can therefore be seen as a variant of the theme of the loss of immortality caused by the introduction of sex.

Therefore, the loss of immortality is not a price that humans have to pay for the transition from nature to culture, as Lévi-Strauss argues (1970, 164-5). Immortality is already lost at the start of the myth, as the presence of rotten wood and an old man indicate. The myth establishes a temporary rejoining of sky and earth (which amounts to a return to the mythic age), so that humans may acquire culture (agriculture) from heaven. This temporary conjunction is signified in various ways (cosmic marriage, sealed container, cosmic tree). When sky and earth are separated again, the myth repeats one or more of the motifs which normally signify the ending of the mythic age, as would be appropriate at such a point. This includes the loss of immortality, which is presented in a weak form, as if to indicate that it is merely an echo of what happened when the sky and the earth were originally

separated. The same applies to the *Conquest of Fire in the Sky* set of myths. The temporary conjunction of the sky and the earth by means of the construction and destruction of the arrow-ladder signifies a return to primordial wholeness so that culture (cooking fire) can be stolen from the heavenly otherworld/mythic age. The subsequent return to the world of the present, i.e. the world of nature, is signified by a reiteration, in weaker form, of several motifs associated with the termination of the mythic age (see above). The motif of the loss of immortality therefore primarily marks the return from primordial wholeness to the present world of nature. Importantly, this temporary conjunction of the sky and the earth in order to obtain culture from heaven is also found in ritual (see below).

Significantly, a Timbira version states that Star-woman would have revealed many more cultural secrets to humans had her husband not forced her to yield to his amorous demands (1970, 166). Thus, as is the case with Haburi (Aboré), the master of inventions, her departure for the sky deprives humankind of a super-civilization, equivalent to that of the otherworld.¹⁹

Conclusion

At the climax of the Sherente's most important festival, the Great Fast, a celebrant climbs up a very tall pole, called "the road to the sky," to receive celestial fire from the Sun, which he then brings back down to earth where it is used to rekindle every hearth in the village. As Lévi-Strauss points out, this rite has its mythic counterpart in the Sherente version of the bird-nester tale, in which a boy likewise climbs up a pole and fire, stolen from the jaguar, is subsequently used for cooking. Thus, in both myth and ritual, the sky and the earth are conjoined by means of a cosmic pole so that culture can be obtained from heaven (1970, 291).

The bird-nester myth, like the Star-woman myth and the fire-theft myth, resolves the mythic paradox of the persistence of culture in the natural world of the present age, and thereby serves as the charter for equivalent rites such as the Sherenteone in which human connection with the world of the sacred is periodically re-established by ritually acquiring fire, i.e. culture, from heaven. Culture, in all its various forms, keeps humans in contact with the sacred – the mythic age or its spatial counterpart, the heavenly otherworld, from which it was brought or stolen. By doing so, it prevents humans from sharing the fate of the Ge jaguar, the former master of culture: that of being absorbed completely into the natural world in which they must live. Cooking fire and other forms of culture enable humans to maintain an intermediate position between the sacred world of pure culture, and the present world of pure nature. In this sense cooking fire mediates between the sky and the earth (compare Lévi-Strauss 1970, 293-6). Contrary to Lévi-Strauss's persistent claim that there is no final meaning in a myth (Lévi-Strauss and Eribon 1991, 142, Lévi-Strauss 1981, 619), his key myth of the bird-nester therefore appears to convey a very specific meaning that is fundamental to a particular religious worldview. Furthermore, his argument that the basic theme of all these myths is "a passage from nature to culture . . ." is an oversimplification that, to some extent, obscures the underlying meaning of the myths.

Notes

¹ In the myth, *The Origin of Fire*, as told variously by the Ge societies of the Kayapo-Gorotire, the Kayapo-Kubenkranken, the Apinaye, the Timbira, the Kraho, and the Sherente

² Lévi-Strauss also presents numerous instances of mythic characters "who are blocked or pierced above or below, or at the front or the back, and whose positive or negative disability may affect the vagina or the anus, the mouth, the eyes, the nostrils or the ears" (1973, 203-4, 1978, 185-6). That the woman without a vagina constitutes the primary form of this motif is suggested by the fact that the piercing action often takes on a sexual character, as in a Nootka myth in which the hero "cures his supernatural protectresses of blindness by

piercing eyes for them with the tip of his penis” (1981, 462, 404, see also 1970, 310-1, 1973, 203-4).

³ The conjunction of sky and earth – i.e. the state of primordial wholeness – is the spatial counterpart of continuous time

⁴ The humans who are turned into wild animals, along with their artifacts, stand on the side of culture (like the artifacts themselves) and in opposition to nature (see above)

⁵ All the masks representing trees, flowers, animals, etc. used in the Bella Coola Winter Ceremonial (see below) are made by actual carpenters (McIlwraith 1948, 197) – in emulation of these supernatural carpenters.

⁶ Compare this to the Barasana creation myth in which household objects, inside the ritual longhouse which represents the universe, are transformed into living creatures (see above).

⁷ Lévi-Strauss also shows that the mythology of maple syrup in North America corresponds point by point to the mythology of honey in South America (1978, 416-9).

⁸ However, the myth states that, because it was so easy to harvest, this abundant supply ran the constant risk of being depleted, a problem which was remedied by making honey wild and relatively inaccessible (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 74).

⁹ In the Haburi myth canoes change into ducks, while in the Tupi myth it is a canoe and its human occupant together that become a duck, and in the Taulipang myth it is a man alone who is thus transformed. The transformation of humans into animals at the termination of the mythic age is homologous with the changing of human artifacts into animals. In both cases culture is transformed into nature, humans being cultural creatures as opposed to animals, which represent the category of nature (see above).

¹⁰ However, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrates throughout *From Honey to Ashes* (1973), there is an opposition between tobacco and honey. Tobacco not only represents culture, but is also the supreme means of communication with the otherworld, which greatly enhances its cultural status. The reverse is true of honey, which, in spite of its eminently cultural origin, can also, along with sexual desire, represent the seductive power of nature, so that honey plays an equivocal role in South American myths. “[In] South America, the function of tobacco consists in restoring what the function of honey destroyed, that is in re-establishing between man and the supernatural that communication which the seductive power of honey (which is none other than that of nature) had caused to be interrupted . . .” (1973, 260).

¹¹ The heavenly otherworld also has a horizontally remote counterpart – a paradise island, island of the dead etc. which is separated from our world, not by a vertical expanse of air, but by a horizontal expanse of water, as in the Bororo bird-nester myth M1 (see above).

¹²As mentioned above, this jaguar’s regression from culture to nature is homologous with that of human artifacts and people who turn into wild animals in the various myths referred to above.

¹³As told by the Apinaye, the Timbira, the Kraho, the Kayapo-Gorotire, the Kayapo-Kubenkranken, and the Sherente.

¹⁴The disjunction of the sky and the earth is homologous with the opening up of the sealed container in that it brings about the end of the mythic age through the fragmentation of the continuous, which entails, amongst other things, the loss of immortality (see above).

¹⁵In the Caraja myth *How men lost immortality* (above), the loss of immortality is signalled by the discovery of dead wood on the surface of the earth, after the ancestors have emerged from the bowels of the earth (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 149-50).

¹⁶Before humans learned to cultivate maize, it grew in limitless quantities from a huge tree whose wood was particularly hard. This is homologous with the “super-honey” which grew in plantations and was equally abundant (see above). After cutting down the tree, this abundance is lost, as with the super-honey, and humans have to toil in order to obtain maize or honey. That this maize belonged to the mythic age or otherworld is further indicated by the fact that it grew from a tree with virtually indestructible hard wood (immortality) as well as by the fact that it was limitless in quantity (the continuous) (compare Lévi-Strauss 1970, 169).

¹⁷For a discussion of this motif, see Lévi-Strauss 1981, 40-4.

¹⁸For an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon amongst the Mehinaku of the Upper Xingu region of Amazonia, see Gregor 1985, 69-91.

¹⁹Likewise, the departure of Maba, the “honey-mother,” at the end of the Arawak myth (see above), deprives humanity of the paradisiacal existence that characterizes the mythic age or otherworld.

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