

Levi-Strauss, Claude. (1963). *The Structural Study of Myth..* (Chapter 12: “Structure and Dialectics”) Suffolk: Basic Books.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Introduction:** Interrelations between myth and ritual reveal that they are mutually redundant.

### **I. Mythical bricolar opposition exists.**

A. The homology (orderly correspondence) between myth and ritual reveals the former to exist on the conceptual level and the latter on the level of action.

1. There are exceptions to this rule: myth and ritual can be dialectical when reduced to their standard elements.
2. The relationship between statics and dynamics concerns structural analysis and dialectical method.

B. The Myth of the Pregnant Boy reveals the origin of shamanistic powers.

1. An ignorant young boy becomes a hero after noticing his power to cure the sick: he kills the jealous old medicine man after being made pregnant by the latter and is subsequently healed when the sympathetic magical animals abort his fetus.
2. The myth is built on oppositions of: 1) initiated shaman vs. non-initiated shaman, 2) child vs. old man, 3) confusion of sexes vs. differentiation of sexes, 4) fertility of the child vs. sterility of the old man, 5) irreversible relationships of the son's fertilization vs. the revenge of the father, 6) real plant magic vs. symbolic animal magic, and 7) magic by introduction vs. magic by extraction.

### **II. Mythical bricolar opposition reveals a struggle for access to God.**

A. Constructing a myth by its internal oppositions characterizes details of the text.

1. A murderer lowers his victim on a rope into the subterranean world to get feathers furnishes rules of transformation in our structural analysis, to shift from one variant to another.
2. The pregnant boy broke the rule (and therefore revealed its existence) of shamans only being replaced post-mortem.

B. Sometimes bricolar presence is understood better through comparison and contrast with myths of other geographical/social contexts.

1. The Pawnee have the most complex myths, as well as age-grade transitions achieved by purchase.
  2. Yet the Pawnee's concept of sex identity is confused, as seen in their myths, as well as access into the middle world.
- C. The Hidatsa and Haku rituals parallel birth control (via abortion) with access to God.
1. The Hidatsa myth views magical animals as abortionists and magical fathers as the source of life.
  2. The Haku kinship system is similar to that of Crow-Omaha, where the descendants, through a perverse act, are identified with the Tirawa, the Supreme Deity.

**III. Mythical bricolage redefines the supernatural guidelines for cultural norms.**

- A. In Haku myth and ritual, the three protagonists (son, father and wife) are identified by roles that are subsequently compromised.
1. The identification of age/gender are confused in Haku myth.
  2. Because of the age/gender's confused identification in Haku myth, there is also confusion of age/gender roles.
- B. Structural dialectics promote historical determinism by providing the tool of a formulation of hypothetical geographical and historical problems.
1. The four functions of elder/younger and male/female are applied to three symbols of father, mother and child through three possible alliances of rejection, solicitation and negotiation.
  2. The dialectical relationship between myth and ritual is understood both through comparison within the confines of the same society and also with the beliefs and practices of neighboring societies.

**Conclusion: In mythology, as in linguistics, formal analysis immediately raises the question of meaning.**

APPENDIX  
 ENDNOTES  
 BIBLIOGRAPHY