

The Structural Politics of *Totem and Taboo*

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Abstract

Freud's *Totem and Taboo* was one of the more controversial additions to the literature of religious theory. The two major hypotheses of the work are the parallel between ontogenetic and phylogenetic evolution, and the primal horde parricide. The first hypothesis has rarely been taken seriously. The second, although never verified with anthropological evidence, has generated further hypotheses based upon its value as a symbolic representation rather than an actual occurrence. Paul Roazen has suggested that the primal horde parricide hypothesis possesses characteristics similar to those of most social contract theories. He posited, in light of this, that *Totem and Taboo* ought to be considered a kind of social contract, although it has never been thought of this way.

The major school of philosophical thought which has continued to maintain interest in *Totem and Taboo*, long after the main anthropological assertions have been dispelled, is the French structuralist movement and its successors. Through the work of Lévi-Strauss, carried on with theorists such as Lacan, Bataille, and Derrida, *Totem and Taboo* has maintained value as important work. The French structuralists have sustained a tradition that began with Rousseau of combining mathematical reasoning and linguistic theory together with anthropological speculation raised in *Totem and Taboo*. Thus in light of Roazen's hypothesis and the structuralist treatment of *Totem and Taboo*, together with Bryan Skyrms's recent work on Rousseau and the mathematics of social contract theory, I posit that *Totem and Taboo* is comparable to Rousseau's *Social Contract*, in which human nature, politics, myth and mathematics merge. Implicitly *Totem and Taboo* contains a novel theory of the political development of society.

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Introduction

*Totem and Taboo*¹ is the centerpiece of Freud's application of psychoanalytic theory to society, and especially to religion. It stands as his main anthropological effort, and his first work directed toward society rather than individuals; it also founds his later works concerning religion and society: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, *The Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Moses and Monotheism*. For some loyal followers, *Totem and Taboo* marked the end of the rational medical scientist and the beginning of a strange new Freud who composed social theories and myths. There has never been any anthropological evidence for the primal horde totemic social structure Freud imagines in *Totem and Taboo*. Philosophically the primal parricide argument amounts to a vicious circle, presupposing the condition – Oedipal rivalry – for which it is intended to explain. Nonetheless, other than the anthropological use of a few basic psychoanalytic tools such as ambivalence or projection, it is the primal parricide hypothesis which has generated the most philosophic inquiry.

One important but isolated thinker, the late Canadian political theorist Paul Roazen, has extolled the unique perspective of viewing Freud as a “social contract thinker”² whose work thus exhibits the same kind of circular reasoning present in all social contracts. A social contract not only “assumes the ability to make and keep a promise,” but presupposes what it sets out to explain – the existence of social organization and its common language.³ Since political scientists have tended “to rescue social contract thinkers from the test of historical truth by interpreting their ideas as moral theories, or as logical fictions having explanatory value,”⁴ Roazen marvels at why the same has not been done with *Totem and Taboo*, which in general has had little impact on political theory.⁵

The primal horde hypothesis of *Totem and Taboo* has found its most receptive audience in French philosophical circles. There have been two divergent lines of development. The first direction has evaluation the real or symbolic value of the primal horde parricide. This includes thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur, George Devereux, and especially René Girard. Ricoeur's overall review is fairly negative. For him, the primal horde story creates a vicious circle, that is, at best, a heuristic device in Freud's fantastic attempt to verify his Oedipus complex using ethnographic data.⁶ Ricoeur nonetheless does assert that the myth

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York, Norton, 1999 (1913)). References noted as *TT*.

² Paul Roazen, *Freud: Political and Social Thought* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 136, 154.

³ Here Edwin R. Wallace, *Freud and Anthropology* (New York: International University Presses, 1983), 171n17, notes Jerome Neu, “Genetic Explanation in *Totem and Taboo*” in *Philosophers on Freud*, ed. R. Wolheim (New York: Aronson, 1977), 383: “Social contracts cannot explain the origin of obligation because they presuppose a prior obligation to obey controls, and are therefore circular.”

⁴ Roazen, *Freud: Political and Social Thought*, 154.

⁵ The work of Herbert Marcuse being the major exception to this, noted below.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

has symbolic value. Devereux believes that Freud used this device to “condense into a single event a development lasting many millennia ... without realizing he was doing this.”⁷ Most recently, in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard recognizes *Totem and Taboo* as valuable for the violent aspects of the primal horde murder, and he asserts that this is “directed toward a general theory of sacrifice.”⁸ Girard lauds Freud’s connection of sacrifice to the violent murder aroused by sexual and aggressive desires. The channelling of cultural violence, adopted through mimetic rivalry, onto a scapegoat explains the sacrifice and its substitutions, and for Girard the primal horde parricide is the paradigmatic prototype.⁹

The second line of reasoning on *Totem and Taboo* has been developed by French linguistic-structuralist thinkers. These theorists are notable for having associated the mythic value of the primal horde parricide with various types of mathematical tool usage, developing this into a unique line of inquiry in the philosophy of religion. This type of inquiry began in France, long before Freud, with Rousseau’s discussion of primitive society and religion together with politics and mathematics in his *Social Contract*. It was resurrected by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss with his work on *Totem and Taboo* and the problem of incest, and continues via psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan with several later post-structuralist thinkers as Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou. This impels a detailed comparison of Freud to the Rousseau, via the work of the structuralism, notably Lévi-Strauss and his commentators, especially Lacan and Georges Bataille. Lacan believed that a thorough and detailed analysis of *Totem and Taboo* was warranted: “One would need to study how it is composed; it is one of the most twisted things one can imagine.”¹⁰ This exegesis, and an analysis of the French structuralist response to *Totem and Taboo*, is the current aim of this dissertation. The primary argument is that *Totem and Taboo* is, unlike Freud’s other work, a return to Rousseau and his *Social Contract* as Roazen asserts. This argument is founded on the tendency that these French structuralists treat *Totem and Taboo* in tandem with both mathematical and politico-economic reasoning, and are thus implicitly, if unintentionally, dealing with the work as if it were a social contract.

⁷ George Devereux, *Mohave Ethnopsychiatry* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1969), 360.

⁸ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 198.

⁹ As part of this line of development, Georges Bataille might also be included. Obeyesekere suggests that Girard’s thought is a systematization of Bataille’s – see Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 309n4. However, while Bataille does not explicitly discuss *Totem and Taboo*, although he does consider the problem of incest and transgression of prohibition, and especially from the vantage point of Lévi-Strauss. This is in conjunction with the global economic theory of consumption, impelling a mathematical model. See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. II & III* (New York, Zone Books, 1999(1976)). Thus I have included Bataille together with the structuralists in the second line of French thought, although arguably, as Obeyesekere notes, he has also influenced Girard. Bataille is a particularly difficult thinker to categorize, given that he was not an academic writer, never subscribing to one particular school of thought.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, Seminar XVII*, trans. R. Grigg (New York, Norton, 2007), 111. Here “twisted” refers to convoluted, not the negative sense often used colloquially in English.

Chapter I: *Totem and Taboo* – Freud's Myth

In the first essay of *Totem and Taboo* Freud articulates his theory that there exists a clear “comparison between the psychology of primitive peoples, as is taught by social anthropology, and the psychology of neurotics, as has been revealed by psychoanalysis.” (TT, 3) The broader philosophical assertion is that the phylogenetic development of humanity as a whole parallels the ontogenetic development of the individual. The second and third essays move into a primarily psychological realm of analysis, supported by examples from a wide range of cultures. Here is introduced the idea of ambivalence as a primary psychic conflict (TT, 37-8), and of projection as the resolution of the conflict of ambivalence. Freud viewed animism entirely as a psychological construction in which “primitive man transferred [projected] structural relations within his own psyche onto the outer world,” (TT, 114) thus prefiguring Lévi-Strauss and structural anthropology.

The fourth essay of *Totem and Taboo* contains the primal horde parricide hypothesis. Freud asserts that the Darwinian primal horde, a societal state in which one strong male dominates several females and expels his sons from the horde on their maturity, does not account for totemism. “This earliest state of society has never been observed. The most primitive kind of organization encountered consists of bands of males composed of members with equal rights subject to the restrictions of the totemic system including inheritance through the mother.” (TT, 175) Freud argues that the horde-society which Darwin posited must have transformed into the matrilineal clan via primal parricide: “One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde.” (TT, 176) Through devouring their father, the sons acquire his strength by identification. This act, celebrated and repeated during the totemic feast, is the origin of “social organization, morality and religion.” (TT, 176)

The sense of guilt resulting from this act impelled the brothers to erect the two totemic taboos – not to kill or eat the totem animal, except during the celebratory feast, and the incest prohibition. These taboos represent obedience and remorse toward the slain father, and correspond to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex (TT, 178). Once the father was overthrown, none possessed enough power to rule the horde, although each individual brother had desired the role. The only peaceful solution was the erection of the incest taboo. Freud thus merges psychoanalysis, anthropological observation and Darwin, in his hypothesis and claims that traces of this primal parricide recur regularly in myth, literature, and human history (TT, 192).

There are two primary assumptions which found *Totem and Taboo*. The claim of the correlation between ontogeny and phylogeny, based on the social evolution hypothesis of Herbert Spencer, has rarely been taken seriously and was

already outdated by and the by the time Freud used it in *Totem and Taboo*.¹¹ In spite of the rejection of the primal horde hypothesis as being unfounded ethnographically, it has nonetheless generated the bulk of philosophic inquiry concerning *Totem and Taboo*. In general *Totem and Taboo* has received little attention in North America, Britain, and Germany since the mid-twentieth century.¹² In France, however, there have been several influential theorists who have discussed the work, divided into two divergent lines of interpretation. The most significant of these for the purposes of this dissertation is the structuralist lineage, initiated by Lévi-Strauss, which has tended to make use of mathematical analysis in relation to Freud's work on the problem of incest and Oedipus.

Chapter II: Lévi-Strauss – The Structural Politics of *Totem and Taboo*

In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* Lévi-Strauss investigates the problem of incest. He attacks Freud's parallel between ontogeny and phylogeny, as well as the problem of the primal horde hypothesis: "What makes *Totem and Taboo* unacceptable, as an interpretation of the prohibition of incest and its origins," he writes, "is the gratuitousness of the hypothesis of the male horde and of primitive murder, a vicious circle deriving the social state from events which presuppose it."¹³ However, Lévi-Strauss asserts that Freud's explanation functions as myth both by moulding thought and by symbolically expressing existing psychic structures: "Symbolic gratifications in which the incest urge finds its expression, according to Freud, do not commemorate an actual event. They are something else and more, the permanent expression of a desire for counter-order."¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss proposes a different theory of exogamy based on the economic value of maintaining kinship ties with neighbouring clans through the exchange of women. As a mathematical model Lévi-Strauss introduces group theory in a short essay by mathematician André Weil.¹⁵ While Weil's mathematics is accurate, the potential value for anthropology is questionable other than as a curiosity.

In the "The Structural Study of Myth," the eleventh chapter of the first volume of *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss presents a structural analysis of the Oedipus myth as an example for his general method of breaking down myths. He argues that Oedipus is "a logical tool which aids in the overcoming of the contradiction between the autochthonous origin of man, growth and the fact that

¹¹ Edwin R. Wallace, *Freud and Anthropology* (New York: International University Presses, 1983), 113-126. References to Wallace are from here and noted as W.

¹² One main exception being the work of Herbert Marcuse who weds Freudian and Marxist theory in his *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse accepts the symbolic value of the primal horde parricide, from which he generates "his own speculations about the origins of repressive civilization and its relationship to work." (W, 162) Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

¹³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (London: Eyre, 1969 (1949)), 491.

¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Kinship*, 491.

¹⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *Kinship*, 221-229. Weil was a mathematician from the University of Chicago.

humans are born from the union of a man and a woman.”¹⁶ This structural analysis has been critiqued as erroneous.¹⁷ Malinowski had serious reservations about this kind of research long before Lévi-Strauss proposed the idea. Lévi-Strauss’ brief use of mathematics in “The Structural Study of Myth” also demonstrates that he has mishandled algebraic details. I will argue that the primal horde parricide myth has its own structure, distinct from the structural interpretations of Oedipus, which is more in line with the themes of rivalry than of incest or kinship. The emphasis on rivalry in relation to *Totem and Taboo* thus concurs with more politically oriented interpretations.

Jacques Lacan discusses the main issues of *Totem and Taboo* in his seventeenth seminar, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*.¹⁸ Following Lévi-Strauss, Lacan attempts to bridge the gaps between psychoanalysis, structuralism, linguistics and philosophy, and he concurs with Lévi-Strauss that the primal horde story is Freud’s own created myth. For Lacan, the two important facets of the primal horde myth are first, brotherhood and segregation, and second, greed and the pursuit of wealth (*L*, 115-116). For Lacan the primal horde myth functions as a transformational operator in relation to broad economic issues of surplus and consumption, as hypothesized by Georges Bataille. Thus Lacan, as well Bataille in *The Accursed Share*,¹⁹ of which an entire chapter is devoted to Lévi-Strauss and the problem of incest, are the primary sources addressing Lévi-Strauss’s response to *Totem and Taboo* to be discussed in this chapter. Both Lacan and Bataille follow Lévi-Strauss in utilizing mathematical reasoning with *Totem and Taboo*. The work of all three of these French thinkers impels a comparison of *Totem and Taboo* to Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* and *Social Contract*.

Chapter III: The Return to Rousseau – *Totem and Taboo* as a Social Contract

The French response to *Totem and Taboo* has been the most extensive. Several post-structuralist thinkers have continued to compose, following the work of Lévi-Strauss and his commentators Lacan and Bataille, important discussions of mathematics in relationship to or in reaction to the interpretation of *Totem and Taboo*. Certainly this is an unusual concurrence, as Freud himself never resorted to mathematical reasoning or rhetoric, and this trend has not been observed elsewhere. In fact, the combination of mathematical and linguistic reasoning in tandem with discussions of “primitive” society began in France long before Freud with Rousseau. Jacques Derrida underscores the strong relationship between

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 224.

¹⁷ Michael P. Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss on the Oedipus Myth: A Reconsideration,” *American Anthropologist*, 80(4), 1978, 805-814.

¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, Seminar XVII* (New York: Norton, 2007(1991)). These seminars were delivered in 1969-70, but only fully compiled in France in 1991, and finally translated into English in 2007. References noted as *L*.

¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share Vol. II & III* (New York, Zone Books, 1999(1976)).

Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau, as does Lacan. The French structuralists further compound the anthropological discussions, those dealing with *Totem and Taboo*, with political theory, just as did Rousseau. Finally, matters of diet and consumption were highly significant to Rousseau's political theory, and I will demonstrate that this is equally true of *Totem and Taboo*, despite Freud's contrary assertions. Bataille's extension of the problem of incest to the economics of consumption suggests that a game theoretical analysis is the appropriate branch of mathematics for dealing with *Totem and Taboo*, rather than the pure mathematics of Lévi-Strauss or Lacan. Game theory is the mathematical basis of social contract theory.

In light of the work of Roazen on social contract theory, I will argue that the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is at the foundation of this French tendency. The *Social Contract*, which contains a chapter on primitive societies as well as a brief mathematical argument concerning ratios of power, is the progenitor of the kind of theory to which Roazen refers. Further, the structure of his *Second Discourse*, especially in its early stages, is rather similar in nature and construction to Freud's primal horde hypothesis: it explains the current state of society by recourse to a historical narrative that is based on evolutionary reasoning. Rousseau was highly significant for Lévi-Strauss, who devotes an entire chapter of the second volume of *Structural Anthropology* to Rousseau as the founding father of the social sciences. Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan all belong to the French tradition of using linguistic ideas and mathematical reasoning in conjunction with discussions of primitive societies and politics. Given this observation I will argue that it is reasonable to compare *Totem and Taboo* to Rousseau's work. A structural comparison of *The Second Discourse* and the primal parricide hypothesis will be included in this chapter.

Political philosopher Bryan Skyrms has explored the evolution of social structure by using the stag hunt analogy of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, in conjunction with the mathematics of game theory.²⁰ He has also worked on Rousseau's *Social Contract*.²¹ Skyrms's investigations of mathematics in social contract theory, beginning with the work of Rousseau, provide a sound basis for merging Roazen's hypothesis about Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, with the attempt at using mathematics which the French philosophers have made in analyzing *Totem and Taboo*. I believe his work justifies inquiry into a game theoretical mathematization of the primal horde parricide myth in the name of materializing a Freudian social contract theory comparable to Rousseau's. The final chapter of my thesis completes such an analysis. The primal horde parricide game is unlike the stag hunt game Skyrms distils from the *Second Discourse* in that it does not favour a cooperative strategy as the foundation of a stable political society.

²⁰ Bryan Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²¹ Bryan Skyrms, *The Evolution of the Social Contract* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

CHAPTER I: *Totem and Taboo* – Freud's Myth

Totem and Taboo is the centerpiece of Freud's application of psychoanalytic theory to society, and especially to religion. It stands as his only true anthropological work, and his first work major directed toward society rather than individuals. After *Totem and Taboo*, Freud's interest in general turned toward society, and other than a few important short essays, Freud did not return to the psychology of the individual. *Totem and Taboo* was also Freud's first book after his break with Jung, and his interest in anthropology may well have been sparked in reaction to Jung's writings on culture. For some loyal followers of Freud, *Totem and Taboo* marked the end of the Freud they once knew, rational scientist of medicine, and the beginning of a strange new Freud who wrote myths; the primal horde and the death instinct were Freud's least accepted hypotheses.

It is worth, then, for the purposes of this thesis, undertaking a fairly in-depth summary of *Totem and Taboo*, and an exegesis of the reactions to *Totem and Taboo*. Without fully understanding the work in detail and its overall structure, little new could be elicited. Unfortunately, all-too-few have actually attempted to unpack the arguments in order to truly understand their significance. "*Totem and Taboo*: One would need to study how it is composed; it is one of the most twisted things one can imagine."¹

There are four essays in the work. The first two were printed in Freud's own journal *Imago* in 1912; the second two in 1913, after which the entire work was published as a book. The first three essays have really to do with psychoanalysis and the comparison of the savage to the neurotic. The fundamental premise is the phylogeny reproduces ontogeny, the naturally arising premise given Freud's acceptance of Herbert Spencer's social evolutionary Darwinism. This hypothesis has rarely been taken seriously. However some of the conceptions, including ambivalence, compulsion and paranoia, have certainly found their way into anthropological thought.

In the fourth essay is the story of the Darwinian primal horde parricide; it has been suggested that this was insidiously sprung upon the reader without warning.² Nonetheless, it is this conception which has been most generative. While there has never been found any anthropological evidence for such a totemic social structure, most being matrilineal, the symbolic reinterpretation of this "scientific myth" has proved to be fertile soil.

Totem and Taboo and its primal horde found its greatest audience in French philosophical circles. In particular structuralism and its successors have absorbed the premises and, in tandem with mathematical tool usage, developed them into an entire line of inquiry in the philosophy of religion. An outline of this development, along with a few notes, will be the subject of this chapter.

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton. 2007 (1991)), 111.

² By Alfred Kroeber; discussed below.

1. Ontogeny and Phylogeny

The first *Totem and Taboo*³ essay is usually entitled “The Horror of Incest,” or sometimes “The Savage’s Dread of Incest.” It is perhaps the closest Freud ever came to writing ethnography – without actually doing any fieldwork. It is an analysis of the totemic structure of the Australian aborigines, and includes as evidence brief consideration of a few other cultural practices.

The essay opens with perhaps the most novel premise upon which the entire book is founded: that there exists a clear “comparison between the psychology of primitive peoples, as is taught by social anthropology, and the psychology of neurotics, as has been revealed by psychoanalysis.” (*TT*, 3) It is thus from this presumption that the study of psychoanalytic anthropology was spawned. The more extraordinary philosophical assertion underlying this connection is that the phylogenetic development of humanity as a whole parallels the ontogenetic development of the individual. The “mental life⁴ of prehistoric man ... [to whom] there are men still living ... who stand very near,” which of course Freud implies as the “savages” or “primitives,” are of peculiar interest as “a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.” (*TT*, 3) In this sense Freud means both the early stage of the development of humanity *and* the early stage of each individual’s maturity. The neurotic, like the savage, remains at an infantile stage of development.

This type of thinking is not novel by any means. Rousseau suggests something similar to Freud in his *Second Discourse* assertion that the corruption of both society and individuals has been the product of the forces of socialization. In fact Rousseau begins his essay by examining the origin of man “in the first embryo of the species.”⁵ In light of this Rousseau mentions the Orinoco Indians who practice the binding of boards to the foreheads and temples of their children, “which secure to them the enjoyment of some part at least, of their natural imbecility and happiness.”⁶ Nonetheless Freud’s articulation of the issue is fairly original, if a perhaps misguided branch of social Darwinism, and was taken up later by a few Jungian thinkers, most notably Erich Neumann. The relationship of ontogeny to phylogeny has more recently become part of evolutionary biological research, removed from the concerns of human social evolutionism.

³ In this chapter the edition referred to will be primarily Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989(1913)). Occasional translation notes compare to Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Vintage, 1946(1913)). Noted as *TT*.

⁴ Note that in the original German, what has usually been translated as “mental life” is *Seelenleben*, which actually encompasses much more than mental activity, and thus “mental life,” while not inaccurate, closes down some of the range of meaning from the original German (*Seele* is German for *soul*; this situation is not unlike the current use of the Greek *psyche* in *psychology*, which now implies the study of the mind, but in the original Greek refers to “words about the soul”).

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*. Ed. Susan Dunn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 (1754)), 89.

⁶ Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 96.

In light of this assumption Freud selects what he believes anthropologists have described as the most “backward and miserable of savages,” the Australian aboriginals (*TT*, 4). In this way Freud believes he has found the people who best represent the earliest stage of human evolution. These hunter-gatherers possess very little and are organized in a communal fashion, without art or religion, that resembles modern political government only vaguely. Their behaviour and language is unique, unlike the native peoples of surrounding societies, the Melanesians, Polynesians, or Malaysians. It also seems that the further toward the interior of Australia they live, the more primitive the aboriginal society. Freud speculates that this might be due to the relative scarcity of water (*TT*, 4).

Certainly it could not be expected, Freud asserts, that their moral sense would be in any sense as restrictive as that of the European. “Yet, we find that they set before themselves with the most scrupulous care and the most painful severity the aim of avoiding incestuous sexual relations.” (*TT*, 4) In fact it appears that the social organization of the aborigine of Australia is founded upon this very prohibition. Their rigid system of totemic clans is aimed primarily at preventing incestuous relations, at least of certain types – and thus the “bond between totemism and exogamy exists and is clearly a very firm one.” (*TT*, 7)

The strength and power of the totemic taboo is indicated by its periodic ceremonial breaking, and the harsh punishment, often death, meted out to anyone who breaks the taboo otherwise. Generally any kind of sexual relation within the totem, whether matrilineal or patrilineal, is forbidden, as is the consumption of the totemic animal or plant. Thus, Freud articulates the two major totemic taboos. However he is most concerned with the incest prohibition, and notes that hierarchical systems are constructed to prevent incest, sometimes even forbidding relations among different totemic groups that stem from the same clan ancestry.

However, the incest prohibition is not equivalent to exogamy. “Exogamy linked with the totem effects more than the prevention of incest with a man’s mother and sisters. It makes sexual intercourse impossible for a man with all the women of his own clan by treating them all as though they *were* his blood relatives.” (*TT*, 8) On this point Lacan will emphasize the distinction between the primal horde scenario and the Oedipus complex. Freud of course does not really consider the possibility of incest between father and daughter. What is important for him is that the blood relation is replaced by the totem kinship. “The mystery of how the real family was replaced by the totem clan must perhaps remain unsolved until the nature of the totem itself can be explained.” (*TT*, 9)

Freud then embarks upon a brief elucidation of the clan system of phatries and sub-phatries with a neat diagram and a vaguely mathematical analysis. His example includes twelve clans, four sub-phatries and two phatries (*TT*, 11-12). The discussion is clear enough, and is intended to point out the extent to which the aboriginals have gone to prevent group incest, with the erection of these institutions. This leads to his rather unusual conclusion that “these savages are

even more sensitive to incest than we, perhaps because they are more subject to temptations than we are, and hence require more extensive protection against it.” (TT, 13) His promise is that these types of incest prohibitions “extend far beyond the totemic races of Australia,” (TT, 13) and he continues with a fragmentary sketch of various examples, including Melanesia, Fiji, and Sumatra.⁷

The extent to which these various cultures have gone to prevent incest is punctuated by a discussion of one of the more strange prohibitions forbidding sexual contact between sons and their mothers-in-law, which is of course not incest in the genetic sense. Besides the usual rational reasons for such a prohibition, the mother being unwilling to relinquish control over her daughter, and so on, Freud asserts the importance of sexual elements for this prohibition. More or less this is the associative displacement of the son’s affection toward his own mother onto the mother-in-law. “I can see nothing against the presumption that it is precisely this incestuous factor in the relation that provides savages with the motive for their rules of avoidance between son-in-law and mother-in-law.” (TT, 21) While Freud draws the potential scenario, there is also very little evidence *for* such a presumption beyond the fact that the breaking of taboos against mother and mother-in-law is often followed with similar consequences.

That “savages” greatly fear incest is not Freud’s discovery. His only addition to the problem from this chapter is that “it is essentially an *infantile* feature that reveals a striking agreement with the mental life of neurotics.” (TT, 22) Since the neurotic has not been able to liberate himself or herself from the child-like conditions of incestuous psycho-sexuality, or else has returned to them through regression and inhibited development, it is reasonable by analogy to presume the same of “savages.” They are surviving examples from the childhood of humanity from when incestuous fixations of the libido still played the central role in the unconscious psychic life, just as the relation to the parents instigated by incestuous longings is the central complex of the neurotic.

Clearly Freud is still trying to centralize his Oedipus complex. In the face of disbelief, he notes that although the discovery of this significance of incest for the neurotic meets with incredulity on the part of an adult, such a rejection is a product of the adult’s deep aversion to his former incest wishes which have since succumbed to repression. Here Freud also references the researches of Otto Rank into the problem of incest found in poetry and literature, showing its interest to

⁷ A brief and minor translation note is due here: Freud suggests that the Australian Aboriginal marriage-class system is similar to the Catholic church in extending prohibition of marriage between brother and sister to marriage between cousins (TT, 13). In the Norton edition, Peter Gay translates the rest of the sentence as the prohibition extending “even to marriage between those who were merely spiritual relatives.” (TT, 13) Here Gay inserts that this refers to “godfathers, godparents and godchildren.” (TT, 13) In the Vintage edition, however, A.A. Brill has instead replaced this last with “and invented for them the grades of spiritual kinship,” (14) which has a decidedly different meaning, suggesting that spiritual kinship becomes a function of biological kinship, rather than the prohibition of marriage between godparents and godchildren.

creative writers and its multiplicity of variations and distortions providing the subject matter of poetic writing (*TT*, 23). Any argument against the existence of Oedipus may be dispelled by the countless literary references and the strength of the rejection of the problem. For “developed” humans, speaking ontogenetically or phylogenetically, the awareness of Oedipus has been long repressed. Yet for the savage, as with the neurotic, they are not fully submerged enough to escape some conscious awareness, and “are still regarded as immediate perils worthy of the most severe defensive measures.” (*TT*, 23)

Thus there is one primary assertion found in this chapter – that the psychic life of the neurotic and the savage are similar, and more broadly, that the development of the individual parallels, at least to an extent, the development of humanity as a whole. This hint of social Darwinism has been found rather offensive to many since Freud. Nonetheless there is something compelling about the argument. The main supporting evidence for this conclusion is the extremity of the fear of incestuous relations among these cultures, particularly the Australian aboriginals, who have gone to great lengths to avoid not only incestuous relations between son and mother or brother and sister, but also non-incestuous relations between son and mother-in-law which might resemble the former. Father-daughter incest seems to have been entirely undiscussed by Freud. This thus leaves the quandary of whether the problem actually concerns incest, or instead is pointing to relations between sons and clanswomen, which is no longer specifically the question of incest.

2. Ambivalence

“Taboo and the Emotional Ambivalence” moves into a more psychological realm of analysis, while containing a very many examples from a wide range of cultures. The bulk of this second chapter is devoted to comparing the totemic taboo to the compulsion neurosis. It is three times the size of the first, and includes a much broader range of ethnographic detail as well as anthropological and psychological theory. After brief etymological discussion of the word *taboo*, Freud proposes that the taboo differs from our own moral and religious prohibitions because they are not based upon any divine account; rather, “they impose themselves on their own account.” (*TT*, 24) Generally taboos have unknown origins, and are “unintelligible to us, though to those who are dominated by them, they are taken as a matter of course.” (*TT*, 25) Nonetheless, the study of the taboo may well shed some light upon modern prohibition, and the presumption is that the taboo, involving a sense of the “uncanny” or “unapproachable,” is the evolutionary precursor to the religious proscription. “The moral and conventional prohibitions by which we ourselves are governed may have some essential relationship with these primitive taboos. An explanation of taboo might throw a light upon the obscure origin of our own ‘categorical imperative.’” (*TT*, 29) That they are worthy of psychoanalytic scrutiny serves to sustain the same premise which Freud proposed in the first essay: the taboo in the life of the savage plays a similar role as the compulsion in the life of the neurotic.

The taboo is the antecedent not only of religious prohibition, but also “the earliest human penal systems may be traced back to taboo,” which involves its own unique sense of punishment (*TT*, 26). In a sense this notion is also the precursor to Freud’s later concept of the death drive, guilt, and self-punishment. “An innocent wrong-doer, who may, for instance, have eaten a forbidden animal, falls into a deep depression, anticipates death, and then dies in bitter earnest.” (*TT*, 28) Behind the basis of the taboo, Freud reveals his dynamical systems or energetics *metapsychology* in suggesting that psychically some sort of dangerous infectious psychic charge is attributed to certain objects in varying quantities. Thus a power is attached to all that is exceptional, special or uncanny – the more odd the object, the more power attached (*TT*, 29).

Freud outlines his psychological predecessor, Wilhelm Wundt, on the theory of the taboo. Essentially, Wundt believes that taboos have their origin in the fear of the effects of demonic powers, as there is little difference between the sacred or venerated and the unclean or horrific for primitive savages (*TT*, 33). From the psychoanalytic perspective, Freud argues that this theory explains nothing, since neither fear nor demons are anything but the product of psychic powers of men (*TT*, 32).

It is thus important for psychoanalysis to compare the taboo to that which so resembles it in neurotics, the obsession. The obsessive-compulsive creates their own taboos, and obey these “just as strictly as savages obey the communal

taboos of their tribe or community.” (TT, 34) At this point Freud warns that the extensive external similarity between the taboo and the compulsion may not necessarily imply the same basic motivation, for nature is full of cases where similar external forms manifest from divergent essential conditions. However, the comparison is continued, with this warning in mind (TT, 34). There are four main points of similarity deduced by Freud between taboo prohibitions and obsessional symptoms: (a) their seeming lack of motivation or puzzling origin, (b) the fact that they are enforced and maintained by internal necessity, (c) their capacity for contagious displacement and (d) their causation of ceremonial actions – the ritual in the case of the taboo, or the compulsion in the case of the obsession (TT, 37).

At this juncture, Freud outlines the basic psychoanalytic structure of the obsession. It begins with a strong desire followed by an external (authority) prohibition which becomes internalized. The prohibition does not abolish the instinctive desire, but merely represses it; thus both persist within the psyche, albeit the latter unconscious (TT, 37-8). The psychic attitude can then be said to be one of *ambivalence*. There is a simultaneous desire to perform the act and to detest it (TT, 38).⁸ Since the motivation for the prohibition, which itself remains in consciousness, is repressed and long forgotten, any attempt at disposing of that motivation is doomed because its base is long buried within the unconscious. The prohibition has a strength derived of the strength of the unsatisfied desire. And, as Freud later articulates in *Civilization and its Discontents*, the more faithful to the prohibition one is, the stronger the desire becomes in a circuitous energetic exchange. The stronger the desire, presumably out of lack of satisfaction, the stronger the restriction becomes in light of the unconscious guilt experienced for having that desire. This type of dynamic is not described in detail in *Totem and Taboo*, but is certainly outlined (TT, 39).

Considering the taboo from this perspective, although again Freud notes that the comparison can never be exactly identical, there is no use in asking a savage (or a neurotic) the true reason for their prohibition, for that motivation must be unconscious (TT, 40). In fact, the individual may consider the taboo action an abomination. Furthermore, many taboo prohibitions are distorted displacements from the true object of desire, extended to other objects by associative channels (TT, 41). This tenet makes any sort of ethnographic validation nearly impossible, and is a rhetorical technique typical of Freud.

⁸ This is Freud's first introduction to the term *ambivalent* in *Totem and Taboo*, a term he notes was coined by Bleuler (TT, 38n8). The statement after the introduction of the term is: “He is constantly wishing to perform this act (the touching), [and looks on it as his supreme enjoyment, but he must not perform it], and detests it as well.” (TT, 38) Peter Gay notes here that after 1920, the second publishing, the words in square brackets were omitted, perhaps by accident. However that phrase does alter the meaning slightly, since detesting an action and feeling prohibited from doing so are not quite equivalent, so it is uncertain as to Freud's actual conception of the concept of ambivalence here.

Nonetheless, the taboo prohibition must have originated with something which was initially strongly desired; and this desire must still persist (*TT*, 40). That unconscious desire is revealed within the taboo itself. “The two most ancient and important taboo prohibitions are the two basic laws of totemism: not to kill the totem animal, and to avoid sexual intercourse with members of the totem clan of the opposite sex.” (*TT*, 41) It must follow that these two desires are the oldest and most powerful of all human desires.⁹ These taboos are also, apparently, indicative of the “centre-point of childhood wishes and the nucleus of neuroses.” (*TT*, 41) That nucleus is of course the Oedipus complex, although at this stage Freud articulates no reason why these two taboos are related, other than loosely with the second, to incestuous desires. He asserts that it follows that taboo prohibitions concern the most powerful of human desires (*TT*, 44).

A main character of the taboo is its transmissibility. “Anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself.” (*TT*, 42) Thus the object of taboo possesses a dangerous magical power in its ability to lead one into temptation. Freud believes that this infected person or object becomes a further temptation for the transgression of the prohibition (*TT*, 42). It is notable that disobedience to the taboo also spreads contagiously (*TT*, 44).

Most importantly for the taboo, the violation can be atoned or expiated through renunciation of some other object or freedom (*TT*, 44). “This proves that obedience to the taboo injunction meant in itself the renunciation of something desirable.” (*TT*, 44) From here comes the basis of a Freudian sacrifice theory, as he concludes that atonement is at the base of taboo ceremonials rather than purification (*TT*, 44).

Since the taboo genesis is presumed to be similar to that of the neurotic symptom, that is, derived from an early external prohibition imposed externally by authority which has subsequently been internalized, that genesis can never be proved objectively. The early history of the totemic clan, just as that of the individual neurotic, can never be proved (*TT*, 45). Just as with the compulsion neurosis, only the symptoms may be observed and scrutinized, not the origin. “Our assertion that taboo originated in a primeval prohibition imposed at one time or another by some external authority is obviously incapable of demonstration.” (*TT*, 45) What is potentially verifiable, however, is that taboo and its regulations are observably founded upon ambivalence, “the ascendancy of opposing trends,” (*TT*, 46) the wish combined with repulsion.

Freud admits also that “the two fundamental prohibitions of taboo are inaccessible to our analysis” (*TT*, 46) since “we are totally ignorant of the meaning and the origin of the totemic system,” (*TT*, 41) and that other taboos are of a rather secondary, displaced nature (*TT*, 46). Instead, Freud believes that other taboos, arising from the two original ones against eating the totemic animal and

⁹ “Hunger and love are what move the world” is from Schiller’s poem which Freud later notes in *Civilizations and its Discontents*.

against men marrying or having sexual relations with women within their clan, have been extended as a means of legislation for other purposes. Chiefs or priests might instil them to protect property, for instance (*TT*, 46). This separation by Freud of taboo types into foundationally original and secondarily legislated seems entirely arbitrary. He himself asserts that even the original two primary taboos must have first, just as with the neurosis prohibition, been imposed by external authority. Nonetheless, there are many types of taboo which may be open to scrutiny, and for his investigation he classifies some of them as taboos for the treatment of enemies, rulers and the deceased. Freud concludes that all three of these taboos can be seen to be indicative of ambivalent emotional attitudes toward the objects, whether enemy, king/chief/priest, or corpse.

Two major points are worth noting here based upon Freud's considerable range of ethnographic data. The first is that the attitude toward rulers displays another trait besides that of ambivalence: the paranoiac delusion of persecution. The importance of a particular person or persons is extraordinarily heightened and their omnipotence increased to the improbable in order to make it easier to attribute to them the responsibility for everything painful which happens. Thus subjects very often take revenge in the name of guarding and venerating their rulers. This is exactly the case with the paranoiac, who founds their delusion of persecution upon "the relation of a child to his father." (*TT*, 63) Thus a second analogy may be noted between the savage and the neurotic which suggests that the importance of the relation between the savage and his ruler arises from the infantile attitude of the child to its father (*TT*, 62-63). The savage, besides resembling the ambivalent compulsive, is also similar to the delusional paranoiac.

Secondly, here Freud articulates the classic theory of ambivalence toward the deceased. Hostility is combined with affection toward the deceased, and the unconscious unacceptable hostility is projected onto the ghost or demon of the deceased, so that they become feared entities. Taboos then surround contact with the corpse, even associating with former possessions of the deceased or speaking their name in some cultures, and sometimes to the point of changing one's name if it is the same or sounds like the name of the deceased (*TT*, 77-80). Thus the mechanism of projection, the fundamental paranoiac symptom, may be linked to the treatment of the deceased as well presumably to that of rulers and enemies. However, in the case of enemies, and perhaps rulers, there may be mixed with projection of aggression a real threat of danger, in the complex weaving of intersubjectivity, which does not really exist in the case of the deceased. Important then is Freud's recognition of the mechanism of projection, and its central relation to the paranoid character together with the taboo prohibition.

On this note Freud mentions that the projection is not only a neurotic symptom, but a general facet of human existence. "Projection was not created for the purpose of defence; it also occurs where there is no conflict." (*TT*, 81) Internal perceptions of emotional and intellectual processes may combine with various unconscious sense impressions and be projected onto the external world,

when they really should remain as part of the internal. Accordingly, this process of projection evolves and becomes less problematic for the modern who possesses language. It is precisely on this point where Lacan breaks with Freud – Lacan asserts the primacy of language itself in splitting the subject and driving the process of projection.

“The function of attention was originally directed towards the stimuli that stream in from the outer world, and that function’s only information upon endo-psychic processes was received from feelings of pleasure and unpleasure. It was not until a language of abstract thought had been developed and the sensory residues of verbal presentations had been linked to the internal processes that the latter themselves gradually became capable of being perceived. Before that, owing to the projection outwards of internal perceptions, primitive men arrived at a picture of the external world which we, with our intensified conscious perception, have now to translate back into psychology.” (*TT*, 81)

Animism,¹⁰ then, is essentially the projection of the evil or unacceptable impulses toward the deceased, which manifests as ghosts or spirits (*TT*, 81). On the idea that the primitive is less psychically developed, and projects more, Freud continues also that “the psychical impulses of primitive peoples were characterized by a higher amount of ambivalence that is to be found in modern civilized man.” (83) This thinking very much demarcates the social-Darwinism premise upon which Freud’s phylogenetic development argument rests. The ambivalence, and thus the taboo, have diminished for all modern humans other than the neurotic, who regresses to the stronger infantile ambivalence almost as a kind of vestigial organ possessed only by a portion of current humanity (*TT*, 83).

Thus the taboo is here asserted to be “a symptom of ambivalence and a compromise between the two conflicting impulses [of desire and horror].” (*TT*, 83) This is clear, etymologically, since the word *taboo* itself contains ambivalent connotations between the holy and the unclean (*TT*, 84). The taboo always contains an unconscious unfulfilled wish or desire within the conscious prohibition (*TT*, 87). Thus the taboo contains the seeds of conscience, etymologically related to conscious,¹¹ which also contains the related ambivalent feelings of guilt, anxiety, self-punishment and self-reassurance (*TT*, 85). This is the line of reasoning which Freud pursues in *Civilizations and its Discontents*. It is also interesting to note that Freud believes the roots of the modern penal system lie within the taboo, and “the assumption that the prohibited impulses are present alike in the criminal and the avenging community.” (*TT*, 90)

There are external differences between the taboo and the compulsion are not so problematic as they might seem. With the taboo, punishment threatens to fall upon the transgressor, in the form of illness or death. Thus the taboo appears

¹⁰ Note that Brill in the Vintage edition sometimes translates this as “animalism” (*TT*, 86) instead of “animism.”

¹¹ Peter Gay notices that in French *conscience* has both meanings, and the German *Gewissen* for conscience contains the same root as *bewusst*., conscious, as well as *wissen*, to know (*TT*, 85n47).

essentially egotistical (*TT*, 89-90). The obsessive neurosis has apparently an altruistic or social component. Usually the compulsive fears for a loved one, that the other will be punished for the performance by the neurotic of some forbidden act (*TT*, 90). However this can easily be discovered to be a compensation for the displaced desire for the punishment or death of that same loved person (*TT*, 91).

The other major difference is that the compulsion seems to relate specifically to sexual acts, while taboos are very often relate to other acts – attacking, asserting, or gaining control. However these social instincts too are “themselves derived from a combination of egoistic and erotic components” (*TT*, 92) and Freud does not view this difference as problematic, although he presents little reasoning for this last assertion.

The taboo, then, closely resembles the obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Since the taboo is the origin of religious and moral behaviour, the comparison between the obsessional neurosis and religion follows. In fact, ending the chapter, Freud inserts his recognition that all the great social institutions resemble the neuroses, where the latter are distortions of the former. “A case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, an obsessional neurosis is a caricature of a religion, and a paranoiac delusion is a caricature of a philosophic system.” (*TT*, 92) Here then is a tripartite human anthropology. The main conclusions of this chapter are, then, that the compulsion and the taboo are nearly analogous manifestations of human behaviour, with even their differences concealing similarities, and that are both motivated by the conflict of ambivalence. This interacts with the paranoid projection of hostility most notably in the case of taboos toward the deceased. These two conceptions become more heavily related in *Civilization and its Discontents* in a rather different fashion. It is also important that Freud has articulated the two original taboos, and continued with his ontogenetic-phylogenetic argument from the previous chapter.

3. Pronoia

“Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought” is the third essay of *Totem and Taboo*. This chapter is essentially the exploration of the projection hypothesis of the previous chapter, and is the most theoretical and perhaps abstract of the four essays. It is a digression from the problem of the taboo.

Animism, or “the doctrine of souls” (*TT*, 94) is for Freud a “system of thought” (*TT*, 97) which is the most primitive of a series of three types of thought. Animism is the natural predecessor of religious thought, which is then followed by scientific thought (*TT*, 97). Once again is the social Darwinism made explicit. Freud notes Tylor’s and Wundt’s investigations into animism, and finds the justification presented by Hume in his *Natural History of Religions* fitting: ““There is a universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted and of which they are intimately conscious.”” (*TT*, 96) Essentially, the origin of this kind of thinking “must have been the problem of death,” and the natural tendency to seek immortality (*TT*, 96).

Besides “pure speculative curiosity, the practical need for controlling the world around them must have played its part.” (*TT*, 98) In fact it is the desire for control and mastery over other humans and nature which Freud asserts “went hand in hand with the animistic system.” (*TT*, 98) Somehow this is a logical conclusion, since animism is essentially the doctrine of souls, in particular of deceased humans as well as other spirits, and the overly expressed desire for control and the intense seeking of meaning is symptomatic of the paranoid delusion. Thus arose the “omnipotence of thought,” or the kind of thinking where the psychic life is raised to the same level as real life. Freud here is making the connection more or less between paranoia and pronoia, divine providence. The two ideas are allied, clinically speaking, as the paranoiac typically presumes the state of being under observation to a much greater extent than is actually present.

There are two main types of magic.¹² The first is *imitative* or *homeopathic*, where *similarity* is important – for example the belief that to make rain, one must do something that looks or seems like rain, such as a dance, especially involving water (*TT*, 99-102). The second type of magic is *contagious*, which is magic by *association*. Thus an enemy might be injured by doing something hostile to a piece of hair, nails, clothing, or against their name (*TT*, 102-106). In this latter

¹² The German word here being translated as “magic” is *Zauber* – a common German word – and sometimes *Zauberkraft*. The occasional use of *Zauberkraft* has been translated by James Strachey in the *Standard Edition Collected Works* as “thaumaturgic,” to the dismay of Alex Holder. I tend to agree that thaumaturgic is too exotic, or “a foreign body” as Holder asserts. He suggests that the better translation is “magic force,” although I prefer the more direct “witchcraft” for *Zauberkraft*. The use of the word “magic,” as used here in both texts translated by A.A. Brill and Peter Gay also seems sufficient whether referring to *Zauber* or *Zauberkraft*. Alex Holder, “A Historical-Critical Edition,” *Translating Freud*, ed. D.G. Ornston, Jr., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 81-82.

example, Freud includes cannibalism, where the motivation for consuming a human is the oral incorporation and acquisition of the character of that individual. This often extends to the eating of certain other animal or plant species, where, for example, a pregnant woman will not eat an animal that is thought to possess cowardice, which might be transmitted to her unborn child (*TT*, 102). The general character of magic, and animism, however, is the over-valuation of psychic processes, or the omnipotence of thought, which is analogous to the condition found in children. Magic almost always is motivated by some kind of wish (*TT*, 104), just as Freud reasoned for dreams in 1900 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The savage, like both the neurotic and the child, overvalues the power of their own thinking. They believe they can change the world by a thought, and often they possess guilty consciences for deeds committed in thought, “even when their actual behaviour is scrupulously considerate.” (*TT*, 107-109) In particular is the case of the compulsion, which has the intent of warding off some expected evil or punishment for obsessive thought. At the root of this is the fear of death, as it is at the base of every philosophy. The actions of the compulsive are akin to magic, and begin as a spell against unconscious evil or death wishes, “as remote as possible from anything sexual only to end by being substitutes for the forbidden sexual act which they faithfully imitate.” (*TT*, 109-110)

Here Freud rearticulates his three evolutionary phylogenetic phases of human psychic life: the animistic, where man ascribes omnipotence to himself; the religious, with omnipotence ceded to the gods; and finally the scientific, where helplessness is acknowledged and death is accepted. However, even at this last state, “there still remains a fragment of the primitive belief in the omnipotence of thought.” (*TT*, 112) This developmental chain is more or less based upon earlier psychoanalytic work where the earliest individual ontogenetic development is marked by narcissistic autoeroticism which gradually develops toward sexual libido being directed toward external objects; the religious thought stage falls between with some direction toward objects but not entirely yet distinguished from one’s own body (*TT*, 110-111). The omnipotence of thought is evidence of the contained narcissism (*TT*, 112). While for the modern citizen this is to a large extent dispensed with, traces of it still remain as noted:

“In only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thought been retained, and that is the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires, and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – as though it were something real ... ‘the magic of art.’” (*TT*, 113) Freud views animism entirely as a psychological construction, where “primitive man transferred [projected] structural relations within his own psyche onto the outer world.” (*TT*, 114) The beginnings of structuralist philosophy and anthropology certainly lies within this kind of sentiment. The universality of animism is strong evidence for those psychological structures, since “we have little knowledge of pre-animistic cultures ... no race has yet been found without conceptions of spirits.” (*TT*, 114)

Here is appended the view that magic is the fully narcissistic omnipotence of ideas, whereas animism is partially evolved toward religion, with some omnipotence conferred to spirits as a precursor to divine beings. Thus the phylogeny becomes extended, from most primitive to least, to magic, animism, religion and science. The main question becomes: “What, we may ask, can have induced a primitive man to make this first act of renunciation?” (*TT*, 114-115).

In response, Freud rearticulates that spirits or demons, the projection of emotional impulses, resemble those same projections of the paranoiac. His famous example case is Schreber, who saw “rays of God” and other spirit beings (*TT*, 115). While projection is not necessarily paranoid or neurotic, and thus Freud wishes to avoid the origins of projection in general (“as I have done elsewhere”, *TT*, 115), it is very often associated with paranoid symptom. At the least, it may be assumed that the projective response is stronger when it offers more psychic relief, like any psychoanalytic defense mechanism (*TT*, 115). For the paranoiac, projection resolves conflicts of ambivalence, such as conflicted emotions related to the death of the loved one, where hostility may be projected as a spirit. “This kind of case must seem particularly likely to provide a motive for the creation of projection.” (*TT*, 116) It also explains why, according to Freud, the first spirits were evil (*TT*, 116). It is not clear that this was the case. Freud’s reasoning, however, is that animism and magic are akin to the paranoid projection, in the same kind of analogy that the taboo was similar to the compulsion.

It is also the first response to the narcissistic omnipotence of thoughts, the creation of a system of thought through projection and expulsion of emotion. This is “man’s first theoretical achievement – the creation of spirits – [which] seems to have arisen from the same source as the first moral restrictions to which he was subjected – the observances of taboo.” (*TT*, 116) The necessity was brought about by the awareness of death, which forced the forfeiture of some omnipotence to those spirits, in “submission to the supremacy of death.” (*TT*, 116) Ambivalence is the source of taboo prohibition; the projection of the unconscious part of the ambivalent emotion the source of magic and animism.

Freud invokes Spencer’s “original duality,” (*TT*, 116-117) with the idea of the dualism between body and soul, or with other phrases such as being “beside oneself,” which is the etymological meaning of paranoia. The spirit or soul is essentially a remembrance or a bringing to consciousness of unconscious material, even if in a projected form. Animism is “a system of thought, the first complete theory of the universe” (*TT*, 118) which is explanatory just as is a philosophic system or the paranoid delusion, all of which are on the same continuum. The doctrine of souls is essentially a paranoid neurosis, arising from the compulsive neurosis of taboo prohibition ambivalence. The taboo is the early form of religion, and animism the early form of science or philosophy. Freud hedges his argument, noting that some taboos may have aesthetic or hygienic roots as well as being founded upon purely psychological motivations (*TT*, 123). But primarily for him animism is a psychological means of dealing with unconscious repressed emotion.

4. The Darwinian Primal Horde

The final chapter of *Totem and Taboo* is the most involved, the most controversial, and perhaps the most interesting. “The Return of Totemism in Childhood” or “The Infantile Recurrence of Totemism” is meant to found the origin of the two most central taboo prohibitions: that against eating the totemic animal, and that which prohibits marriage or sexual relations within the totemic clan. This latter of course refers primarily to relations between sons and the other women, disregarding the father-daughter relation. At the outset Freud promises that he is not trying to derive religion simply from a single source – the psychological – nor even that that source “occupies first place among the numerous contributory factors.” (TT, 125) Rather, it is only with a synthesis of factors that the true importance of the psychological factors for the genesis of religion will become apparent. It is an excellent rhetorical device, appeasing those sceptics who by this stage in *Totem and Taboo* were already wary.

Much of the work within this final chapter is Freud summarizing the work of other theorists. The twelve rules of the totemic clan from Reinach pertain mainly to the animal emblem (TT, 126-127); however both Frazer, focusing on the relation between totemism and exogamy, and Wundt highlight the two primary totemic taboos, against killing and eating the totemic animal and against endogamy (TT, 128-133). Freud is mainly highlighting the fact that Reinach refers to the exogamy taboo “only in passing,” in stark contrast to the findings of Wundt, Frazer and Freud himself, even though Reinach was “a writer, incidentally, who has made very valuable contributions on the subject.” (TT, 134) Freud’s aim is to investigate the relation between totemism and exogamy.

The outline of the various totemism hypotheses concerning just how totems are selected as representative of clans is divided into three main categories. “The more incontestable became the conclusion that totemism constitutes a regular phase in all cultures, the more urgent became the need for arriving at an understanding of it and for throwing light upon the puzzle of its essential nature.” (TT, 134) Freud perceives the nominalistic hypotheses, where the totem is essentially instituted in order to name, as inadequate (TT, 138). The sociological theories view totemism as an extension of the social instinct, including Durkheim and some of Frazer’s ideas, and tend to focus upon identification with other members as well as the totemic animal. Also involved are mythic accounts of sociological development describing ancient times when totem animals were eaten and marrying within the totem was allowed (TT, 144). These myths, argues Freud, are akin to Golden Age myths, projections of wish fantasies into the past rather than some kind of historical recollection (TT, 144). The psychological theories of Frazer, Wundt and others tend to focus upon the totem animal, as do most of the sociological and nominalistic theories, and thus ignore the centrality of exogamy. There are three views on the correlation between exogamy and totemism. Some, like Durkheim, view totemism as the source of exogamy, with

totemism the prior institution (*TT*, 149). Others, such as Frazer, suggest exogamy is independent of totemism, with accidental correlation (*TT*, 149+). Freud asserts that exogamy preceded the totemic system that is founded upon incest concerns.

Still others have suggested that exogamy was instilled to avoid problems of rape within clans, or arose due to feelings of familiarity with women of the same clan (*TT*, 151-152). However, these arguments can be dispelled by recognizing that the first restrictions were against mother-son or brother-sister relationships; “incest between fathers and daughters was only prevented by a further extension of the regulations.” (*TT*, 151) An “instinctive dread”¹³ of incest, while perhaps the most superficially obvious motivation, explains nothing for Freud, since incest is still prevalent and not rare even in modern society (*TT*, 152). Furthermore a prohibition would hardly be needed against something instinctively repulsive, as such an instinct would need no lawful reinforcement (*TT*, 153-154).

Rather, the psychoanalytic evidence suggests that the first individual sexual impulses are of an incestuous nature, and are repressed, playing a strong role in later neurosis development (*TT*, 154). Freud’s own bias toward the evolutionary development of thought is made clear in his assertion that incest taboos could not have arisen from hygienic or eugenic concerns. Firstly, even today it is not always easy to observe by empirical observation the detrimental results of inbreeding (*TT*, 154). “Moreover, everything we know of contemporary savages makes it highly improbable that their most remote ancestors were already concerned with the question of preserving their later progeny from injury. It is almost absurd to attribute to such improvident creatures motives to which consideration is scarcely pair in our own present-day civilization.” (*TT*, 154) Here Freud notes Darwin’s suggestion of the lack of reflection of savages (*TT*, 154n32); Rousseau made similar comments in his *Second Discourse*.

Finally, the historic explanation is “based on Darwin’s hypothesis of the social state of primitive men. Darwin deduced from the habits of the higher apes that men, too, originally lived in small groups or hordes¹⁴ within which the jealousy of the oldest and strongest male prevented sexual promiscuity.” (*TT*, 155) This social arrangement, found among gorillas and baboons, is what must have led to the rules of exogamy. Totemism was derived from this earliest of states, in contrast other hypotheses where exogamy is derived from totemism (*TT*, 156).

Into this mass of theories concerning the relationship between totemism and exogamy, “one single ray of light is thrown by psycho-analytic observation,” (*TT*, 157) the problem of children’s animal phobias. Young children, who Freud

¹³ Note that there is fairly controversial confusion between Freud’s use of *Instinkt* and *Trieb*, the latter of which, used here, is very often argued for as being translated as “drive,” rather than the use of “instinct” that is being suggested here. For example, Holder suggests that the “death-drive” is far more suitable than the “death-instinct,” although Strachey and others have often replaced *Trieb* with instinct. Holder, “A Historical-Critical Edition,” 93-95.

¹⁴ Peter Gay asserts here that Freud’s use of the concept *horde* refers not to the usual idea of a large and unorganized mass of people, but that Freud uses the word to denote a small and organized group, the “cyclopean” family ruled by one strong male individual (155n35).

has established resemble primitives in psychological organization, are often known to develop animal phobias toward animals they previously had no fear of, or of animals they have seen or read about (*TT*, 158). Although on this topic there is a “paucity of literature,” (*TT*, 159) Freud suggests that generally these phobias are displacements of the fear of the father onto animals, and that they occur much more commonly with boys. Again the conflict is one of ambivalence. “The hatred of his father that arises in a boy from rivalry for his mother has to contend against his old-established affection and admiration for the very same person.” (*TT*, 160) Ambivalence must be resolved. “The child finds relief from this conflict by displacing his hostile feelings onto a substitute for his father.” (*TT*, 160) The conflict does not end with this, the ambivalence remains, very often observed in the attitude toward the animal itself, which involves both fear and identification. “In these children’s phobias, some of the features of totemism reappear.” (*TT*, 161)

The totem animal is often seen as an ancestor or primal father by the clan members; “all we have done is to take at its literal value an expression used by these people, of which the anthropologists have been able to make very little, and which they have therefore been glad to keep in the background.” (*TT*, 163) Freudian psychoanalysis leads to the emphasis upon the fact that the totem animal is seen as the father. From this perspective, the two major totemic prohibitions, not to kill or eat the totem animal and not to have sexual relations within the totem clan, “coincide with the two crimes of Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother, as well as with the two primal wishes of children.” (*TT*, 164) These two wishes “form the nucleus of perhaps every psychoneurosis.” (*TT*, 164)

Freud inserts a fairly detailed summary and discussion of the work of Robertson Smith on the sacrificial feast, from his historically significant 1889 *The Religion of the Semites*. Much of this is summary of Robertson Smith’s argument, which essentially amounts to recognizing the sacramental consumption of otherwise forbidden totemic animal as a vitally important trait of totemic religion. Freud’s praise of Robertson Smith is staunch: “I propose that we should adopt Robertson Smith’s hypothesis.” (*TT*, 175) The social reinforcement of the communal meal has often been supported by anthropologists; however Freud is building his case for the totemic feast being an exculpatory mechanism. The fact that the death of the totem animal is compulsively lamented and then followed by holiday festivities reveals the ambivalence involved in the prohibition and its ceremonial transgression. It also demonstrates the fact that the totem animal is a substitute for the father, concerning whom ambivalence also exists (*TT*, 174-175).

The Darwinian primal horde does not explain totemism. “This earliest state of society has never been an object of observation. The most primitive kind of organization that we actually come across consists of bands of males composed of members with equal rights subject to the restrictions of the totemic system including inheritance through the mother.” (*TT*, 175) The baboon or gorilla horde that Darwin posited has no evidence to support its existence – if it did exist, it must have transformed into the current totemic system. These clans must have

resulted from the primal horde organization through the story which Freud hypothesizes (or concocts) as explanatory: “One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured [cannibal savages as they were] their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde.” (*TT*, 176) Through this devouring the sons acquired the strength of the father through identification. The totem feast is thus the “celebration, repetition, commemoration of this act out of which originated social organization, morality and religion.” (*TT*, 176)

As a result of this act, the brothers’ sense of guilt and remorse impelled them to erect the two totemic taboos – not to kill or eat the totem animal, except during the commemoration, and to prohibit sexual relations within the clan. These represent obedience and remorse toward the slain father, and correspond to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex (*TT*, 177-178). However, here Freud asserts that these two taboos are not of equal value, in contrast to many of the theorists he has mentioned. Sparing the totem animal is entirely symbolic and emotional, while there are in fact practical reasons for avoiding endogamy also (*TT*, 178). Thus here Freud reveals the intent of his project – to centralize the incest taboo at the expense of the eating taboo, in contrast to many other thinkers like Reinarch or even Robertson Smith.

Once the primal horde father was overthrown there was no one powerful enough to rule the horde, although each individual brother had desired the role. The only peaceful solution was the erection of the incest taboo. It is from this mechanism that the germ of matrilineal society must have arisen (*TT*, 179). There is no other way to merge Freud’s psychoanalytic hypothesis with Darwin’s and the anthropological evidence of matrilineal totemic clans. The totem animal became the surrogate substitute for the father, complete with the ambivalent reverence and repetitive hostile sacrifice in a sort of pledge with the father, as well as well as a sort of justification: “if you had treated us as well as the totem does, we shan’t have killed you” (*TT*, 179), glossing over the real state of affairs in order to forget the original event (*TT*, 180).

All religions, being derivations of totemism can be observed to attempt to solve the problem of ambivalence; the sacrifice shows remorse and commemorates triumph, and the celebration is compulsively repetitious (*TT*, 180-181). The idea of “common blood” and sanctification of fraternal and social feelings intermingle in the blood sacrifice with the sense of remorse and guilt; these are the origin of the religion and of society itself (*TT*, 181). Thus psychoanalysis accords more with older ideas on religion, such as those of Darwin and Robertson Smith, than the newer ideas posited by Durkheim and others on totemism (*TT*, 181). Importantly, it raises the argument for the simultaneous origin and intimate connection between exogamy and totemism (*TT*, 181)

In later religions, the totem animal returned to anthropomorphic deities and finally to the monotheistic god (*TT*, 182). The god enters the picture through various transformations of relations to the holy totem animal, including being worshipped in animal form, holding one or more animals sacred, and mythic accounts of gods appearing in the form of animals, and often in the sacred form

(*TT*, 183). God, then, is essentially the totem animal transformed into human form, evolved from an earlier to a later religious form; here again is the social-evolutionary line of reasoning. Eventually, humans are psychically estranged from animals, by living in societies more removed from nature, and the totemic system disintegrates through animal domestication (*TT*, 184). The absent murdered father is longed for through deification. One major stumbling block which Freud encounters is the anthropological evidence suggesting that in general maternal deities are found prior to paternal or other male divinities. This Freud simply admits he cannot explain, and then proceeds to ignore, although does suggest that the change to paternal deities was mirrored in social organization by a move from matriarchal to patriarchal society (*TT*, 185).

Here Freud notes Jung, who had only broken with Freud a couple of years prior, and his contrary ideas found in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, in which Jung argues that sacrifice, and death of the father are symbols of individuation or transformation (*TT*, 182). This point of the centrality of Oedipus is one of the prime conflicts between the two analysts; Freud politely includes Jung's reference out of consideration for his arguments. Perhaps he was also trying to overcome the interpersonal conflict himself in offhandedly including Jung's ideas. Surprisingly, perhaps in a gesture of complicity, Freud does admit that the psychoanalytic account of totemism does roughly concur with the "superficial" allegorical meaning, the reference being to Jung and the heroic overthrowing of the monster, in that the god is usually represented as overcoming the animal part of his nature (*TT*, 186-187).

Freud conjectures on the development from the totemic state to monotheistic religion. The father has a two-fold presence, in the form of the god and in the sacrificial animal, which conforms to the dual ambivalent emotions of the allegory and the actual historical act (*TT*, 185). The sacrifice evolves into the simple offering in combination with self-deprivation in the favour of the god, who is so far removed that communication with him is only possible through intermediary humans and spirits (*TT*, 186). A further substitution is the institution of the "divine king," made godlike by the cruel revenge of the deceased father in the form of tyrannical dominance of authority (*TT*, 187). Ambivalent feelings toward the father remain and are easily seen in attitude toward god and king both.

All kinds of transformations and their permutations lead to the various religious expressions of the world. In one direction, the animal sacrifice becomes human sacrifice as a retransformation of the original substitution of animal for father (*TT*, 188). In another, the sons disburden themselves of their guilt and sacrifice becomes beyond their responsibility. In this myth the god kills himself in the form of killing his own sacred animal in the greatest possible denial of the sense of guilt, and satisfaction obtained at substituting the higher form of god for the father substitute (*TT*, 189). Finally, the sacrifice of the god himself manifests as the commemoration of the original memory of the mythical tragedy (*TT*, 190).

Ultimately, neither the guilt nor the defiance of the son is extinguished. In the repetitious cycle the son continually endeavours to replace the father god. As

agriculture made the place of the son more important for the family, the incestuous libido finds symbolic satisfaction in labouring over mother earth. New youthful deities arise who committed incest with mother earth or maternal deities in defiance of the father, and violence, castrations, and attacks from animal-form god-fathers upon these youths (*TT*, 190), including lamentation and resurrection of these gods. Gods such as Mithras perform their own animal sacrifices; other gods such as Dionysus-Zagreus are sacrificed themselves. Finally Christ sacrifices himself, redeeming the primal sin as the son of the god and the god himself. This final sacrifice forces the conclusion that the original sin was murder (191), as the murder demands a death. “Thus we can trace through the ages the identity of the totem meal with animal sacrifice with the theanthropic human sacrifice and the Christian Eucharist.” (*TT*, 191) This latter is a fresh repetition of the guilty deed, as were the totem feast and animal sacrifices (*TT*, 192).

Traces of the primal parricide exist in myth, literature, and human history (*TT*, 192). Freud concludes with the assertion that “the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art all converge in the Oedipus complex,” (*TT*, 194) also the nucleus of the psychoanalytic neuroses (*TT*, 194). This complex founds the ambivalence of emotion, coinciding love and hate toward the same object, which seems as if it were originally foreign to emotional life (*TT*, 194).

Freud articulates two main difficulties with his overall argument in conclusion. The first is that the premise of the collective mind, that the psychic processes of the mass mirror those of the individual: “I have supposed that the sense of guilt for an action has persisted for many thousands of years and has remained operative in generations which can have had no knowledge of that action.” (*TT*, 195) Again, recognizing that “I am not alone in the responsibility for this bold procedure,” (*TT*, 196) Freud acknowledges Jung’s collective unconscious, although not explicitly. The direct explanation, however, is simpler: “no generation is able to conceal any of its more important mental processes from its successor ... even the most ruthless suppression must leave room for distorted surrogate impulses and for reactions resulting from them.” (*TT*, 197)

Secondly is the controversial issue of the actuality of the primal parricide. With the compulsion neurosis, the psychic processes attain prime importance, and very often guilt arises in the absence of actual violent deeds. “May not the same have been true of primitive men?” (*TT*, 198) To this problem Freud has two answers. The first is that “historical reality has a share [even for the neurotic]. In their childhood they turned their evil impulses into acts so far as the impotence of childhood allowed.” (*TT*, 199) And secondly is the evasion: “nor must we let ourselves be influenced too far in our judgment of primitive men by the analogy of neurotics.” (*TT*, 200) For the neurotic, action is inhibited while thought substitutes; for the primitive it is the reverse. “This is why, without laying claim to any finality of judgment, I think that it may be safely assumed that ‘in the beginning was the Deed.’”¹⁵ (*TT*, 200)

¹⁵ A translation from Goethe, *Faust*, part I.

5. Neurotic Savages and Primitive Parricides: A Typology of Responses

Thus Freud articulates more or less the two major issues that have been raised repeatedly with his major anthropological contribution: the problem of implied correlation between ontogeny and phylogeny, which includes the societal evolution hypothesis, and the actuality of the supposed primal horde incident.

“The widespread rejection of the ethnological hypotheses of *Totem and Taboo* has been documented by Wallace.”¹⁶ Little has changed anthropologically speaking on the subject since Wallace wrote, so a succinct analysis of his work, with a few additions, ought to suffice as a presentation of the current views, other than the French structuralist perspective which will comprise the following chapters on *Totem and Taboo*. The following discussion shall concern most of the major responses to Freud’s effort at social anthropology, divided into several different categories. An entire taxonomy can be organized around the nature of these responses, and this will be done following a discussion which is more or less arranged geographically. Some of the following is selected from Wallace’s presentation of the critiques in his *Freud and Anthropology*.¹⁷

Anthropologically speaking Freud’s project was doomed from the outset. His sources, according to Kluckhohn, “had been rejected by the anthropological profession before *Totem and Taboo* reached it.”¹⁸ This is in reference to sources such as Frazer and especially Herbert Spencer. The social-evolution hypothesis was already dated at the time, and unfortunately *Totem and Taboo* suffered the same fate as did those evolutionary anthropologists.¹⁹ “The critical literature on the evolutionists is simply voluminous. Indeed, much of twentieth-century anthropology can be viewed as a reaction to and commentary on evolutionist ideas.” (W, 113) Freud makes clear at the outset that his argument rests upon the belief that “primitives” are at an early stage of human evolutionary development, akin to the infantile state of individual human development. Since the neurotic remains fixed at such infantile conditions, the savage too may be compared to the neurotic. It is small wonder that *Totem and Taboo* was not well received; it was dated when it was written, and it “did not attract attention outside of psychoanalytic circles before 1920,” (W, 130) giving several more years past the anthropological rejection of the social-evolutionary hypothesis.

Wallace aptly summarizes the critique of social evolution.²⁰ Suffice it to say that “none of the five major tenets of [the cultural evolutionists] has escaped

¹⁶ James DiCenso, “*Totem and Taboo* and the Constitutive Function of Symbolic Forms” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV/3, 1996, 558.

¹⁷ Edwin R. Wallace, *Freud and Anthropology* (New York: International University Presses, 1983). Page references in this section of the essay are from here, noted as W.

¹⁸ Clyde Kluckhohn, “The Impact of Freud on Anthropology” in *Freud and Contemporary Culture*, ed. I. Gladstone (New York: International University Presses, 1957), 67.

¹⁹ A. Kardiner and E. Preble, *They Studied Man* (New York: Mentor Books, 1968 (1961)), 204.

²⁰ See Wallace, *Freud and Anthropology*, 113-126.

considerable modification.” (W, 126) The idea of the hereditary transmission of culture has long been dispensed with. The critique of the main sources Freud utilized affects the value of his work, not only because he borrowed from them, but also because his methodology “in many ways resembled theirs.” (W, 127)

Perhaps Freud’s own ambivalence toward his anthropology was prophetic. In Ernest Jones’s biography, Freud’s letters to fellow Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi are detailed. At first, as he was completing it at the end of May, 1913, Freud was optimistic about *Totem and Taboo*: “it is my greatest, best, perhaps last good work. Inner confidence tells me I am right.”²¹ Yet his assurance did not linger, and within a fortnight Freud admitted that he had “reverted very much from my original high estimate of the work, and am on the whole critical of it.”²² Ferenczi and Jones were able to reassure Freud somewhat, as did a few other psychoanalysts, including Otto Rank, Hans Sachs and Karl Abraham. Freud’s disciples even celebrated the completion of the work in late June of 1913 with a dinner, “called a totemic festival” where Freud “was presented with an Egyptian figurine which he called his totem.”²³ (W, 130) It is no small irony that Freud fluctuated radically in his estimation of his work prior to its publication considering that nearly a third of the work is devoted to the problem of emotional ambivalence. “Freud’s ambivalence is very significant – especially in light of the mixed reaction the book received from anthropologists.” (W, 130) Wallace suggests that likely Freud was already aware of the existing controversy surrounding many of the elements of his argument (W, 130). Wallace describes the major stages in the reception of *Totem and Taboo*, noting that he “cannot find one review of *Totem and Taboo* in any major British, American, French, or German anthropological journal before 1920.” (W, 131)

The first major reaction in 1920 came from two American students of Franz Boas, who is occasionally referred to by Freud. Franz Boas’ student Alfred Kroeber was highly critical of *Totem and Taboo* on several points.²⁴ Some of these are directed toward Freud’s use of Darwin and Atkinson on social evolution and Robertson Smith’s ideas on sacrifice and totemism. The majority of his problems, however, are aimed at Freud’s own methodology. Part of this includes recognition of the level of conjecture involved in the primal horde scenario and the animal phobia argument. Kroeber could also not perceive the logic of the prohibition taboo being erected because of the primal murder, even if this did happen. Also, it is not clear that exogamy and abstinence from eating the totem animal are the two fundamental taboos nor that they underlie other taboos. Freud

²¹ Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol.2 (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 353.

²² Jones, *Sigmund Freud*, 354.

²³ The religious elements of the psychoanalytic circles have been discussed by many, including Jacques Lacan in several of his seminars.

²⁴ Alfred Kroeber, “*Totem and Taboo*: an Ethnologic Psychoanalysis” *American Anthropologist* 22: 48-55.

“multiplies fractional certainties without recognizing that the multiplicity of factors must successively decrease the probability of their product.”²⁵ This is a mathematical problem based upon the statistical calculation of conjectured events, each of which decreases the overall possibility that the argument is valid.

Kroeber further calls Freud’s methodology “insidious,” inserting unexpectedly the primal horde scenario into the discussion of the parallels between the neurotic and primitive life, and disorderly, unsubstantiated, and lacking in attention to detail, albeit keen, intricate and convincing.²⁶ Nonetheless, Kroeber agrees with Freud on two points – that the taboo corresponds to the compulsion neurosis, and that there is an “unquestionable” parallel between the two taboos and emotional ambivalence. Kroeber does have some favourable views of psychoanalysis, and that it has significant contributions “which every ethnologist must sooner or later take into consideration.”²⁷ Wallace notes ironically that “Kroeber himself was undergoing a personal analysis at the very time he was writing his critique!” (W, 133) Kroeber does qualify his appraisal suggesting “if psychoanalysts wish to establish serious contacts with historical ethnology, they must first learn to know that such an ethnology exists.”²⁸

Robert Lowie was another student of Boas, who took issue with Freud in his classic *Primitive Society*, also published in 1920. He argued not only that he had observed the mother-in-law and son-in-law relationship to be respectful in most societies, not hostile, and more importantly that the psychological approach ignores the more important social determinants of behaviour. Boas himself reasoned similarly, even though he espoused a somewhat psychological approach to culture (W, 134). “Boas is an obstacle to the conjunction of psychoanalysis and anthropology. Nevertheless, Boas’ psychological orientation paved the way for anthropology’s reception of Freud – even if Boas did not intend it.” (W, 135)

Boas’ student Edward Sapir, in 1921,²⁹ advocated a psychiatric approach to anthropology. Sapir inquired into the psychological interpretation of myth, and the difference between myth and dreams or fantasies. This led to the problem of the “prototypic event.” Whether behaviour has multiple determinations or is fixed in childhood was not always clear with Freud; the problem with the fixed psychic content is the vicious circle of the present being pre-empted by its own origins. Sapir believed that “there is no permanence of psychic content. This content may diminish or increase in intensity or it may become completely transformed.”³⁰ This is not necessarily contrary to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, yet it raises the difficulty of the childhood event solely determining the response to adult

²⁵ Kroeber, “an Ethnologic Psychoanalysis,” 55.

²⁶ Kroeber, “an Ethnologic Psychoanalysis,” 55.

²⁷ Kroeber, “an Ethnologic Psychoanalysis,” 53.

²⁸ Kroeber, “an Ethnologic Psychoanalysis,” 55.

²⁹ Edward Sapir, “The Mythology of all Races” in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. D. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973 (1921)).

³⁰ Sapir, *Selected Writings*, 527.

situations to which that event has in fact led. Even more problematic is the issue of an event in human history, the primal murder, determining the behaviour of later human activities to which *that* event has led.

Margaret Mead, another of Boas' students, organized an inquiry into Freud's ideas. While certainly accepting the possibility of a universal Oedipus, "she attempted to integrate Freud's concept of ambivalence with socio-historical factors," (W, 140) rather than psychological factors. Furthermore she argued that from her ethnographic data of Manu culture, "children are actually less spontaneously animistic than either their parents or Western children." (W, 141) This contradicted both Freud himself and also Piaget's developmental ideas which had seemed to support the *Totem and Taboo* hypotheses (W, 141).

The first British response to *Totem and Taboo* was also published in 1920, by Reynold Marrett,³¹ praising the relevance of ambivalence and projection, but criticizing the comparison of the savage to the neurotic infantile and the primal horde hypothesis itself. Generally his response was favourable, however, and sparked a series of responses to Freud from British anthropologists Frazer, Westermarck and Malinowski.

James Frazer in general rejected psychoanalysis without ever really reading anything by Freud (W, 144), although Freud had been fairly positive toward Frazer in *Totem and Taboo*. Westermarck had posited the hypothetical instinctive dread of incest which Freud and Frazer both demolished rather handily, in appealing to the high incidence in the population of incest as well as the lack of need for a taboo prohibition against something which was instinctively abhorrent. Westermarck reacted negatively, almost defensively (W, 138), to both Frazer and Freud for their different critiques of the instinctive abhorrence, calling Frazer's idea a "curious misconception" and appealing to Jung's criticism of childhood incestuous desire against Freud (W, 137-38).

On the motivation for the incest taboo, Robin Fox notes that there are really only two major points of view which have dominated Western social science.³² The Freudian is the main one. Fox writes that "while his phylogenetic theory has been dismissed, Freud's point that if we do not have a strong desire to commit incest, then we should not have such fierce sanctions against it, has been generally accepted." (RF, 34) Lévi-Strauss has been one of the major proponents of this perspective, and Lacan certainly concurs. However, Edward Westermarck still supported the idea, after Freud, that people raised in close proximity seem to lack strong sexual desires for each other, and thus institute sanctions against incest out of desire for conformity.³³ This trait has come to be known as the

³¹ Reynold Marrett, "Psychoanalysis and the Savage" *Athenaeum*, 1920: 205-206. Oddly enough, a Russian sociologist Aurel Kolnai wrote *Psychoanalysis and Sociology* endorsing the primal horde parricide hypothesis (Wallace, 1983: 170n2)

³² Robin Fox, *The Challenge of Anthropology: Old Encounters and New Excursions* (New Jersey: Transaction, 1994), 33. Noted as RF.

³³ Edward Westermarck, *Three Essays on Sex and Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1934).

Westermarck effect, and some thinkers still agree with this idea, although Freud had refuted this idea in *Totem and Taboo* with the assertion mentioned above. There does seem to be some modern evidence, however, of a Westermarck effect in primates (RF, 34). Fox suggests that perhaps these two views might be rectified by assuming that only a small minority of people do not have the usual instinctive distaste for incestuous relations, and it is the repulsion of the rest which impels the taboo (RF, 35). Those who do not wish to engage in incest do not sympathize with the minority that does. However this logic hardly seems to incorporate usual psychoanalytic reasoning, and such a motivation would be unlikely to impel the construction of large scale exogamic totemic institutions that so interested Frazer, Freud and Lévi-Strauss in the first place.

Perhaps one of most important anthropological responses was Bronislaw Malinowski, “the first noted anthropologist to carry Freud’s ideas into the field.” (W, 138) This sparked an ongoing debate into the cross-cultural relevance of the Oedipus complex which still continues. Malinowski ultimately concluded that his findings contradicted a good deal of what Freud had posited in *Totem and Taboo* (W, 138). With the matrilineal structure of his Trobriand Islanders, he suggested that the Oedipal hostility was modified toward the maternal uncle rather than toward the biological father.³⁴ While a rebuttal was made suggesting that this was still evidence of a displaced Oedipus, Malinowski further criticized Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* reasoning as circular, “trying to explain the origins of culture by a process which implies the previous existence of culture,”³⁵ similar to Sapir’s critique. In spite of this, Malinowski still made use of Freud’s psychological ideas of ambivalence and projection while discarding his anthropological hypotheses (W, 140). In general, “some of Freud’s ideas stimulated further anthropological inquiry, while others led to outright dismissal.” (W, 140) Robin Fox has a long discussion of the Malinowski-Freud debate concerning cross-cultural repression in his 1980 book *The Red Lamp of Incest*,³⁶ in which he attempts to rehabilitate *Totem and Taboo*, while in the process defusing much of Malinowski’s ammunition. The debate on the cross-cultural importance of Oedipus has continued with anthropologists such as Alan Dundes, Melford Spiro, and Gananath Obeyesekere. In a later work, Fox has suggested that “there is an easy M.A. library thesis in all this for a willing student of the history of ideas.”³⁷

Father Schmidt was the premier German anthropologist in the 1930s, and in the only major German response to the work fairly heavily criticized *Totem and Taboo*, who described almost no basis for cannibalism, the totemic meal of Robertson Smith, and for the Darwinian primal horde (W, 142). The only other major German thinker was political theorist Herbert Marcuse, who wed Freudian

³⁴ see Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (London: Routledge, 1953 (1927)).

³⁵ Malinowski, *Sex and Repression*, 153.

³⁶ Robin Fox, *The Red Lamp of Incest: An Inquiry into the Origins of Mind and Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984 (1980)).

³⁷ Robin Fox, *The Challenge of Anthropology*.

and Marxist theory in his well known *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse agrees with the symbolic value of the primal horde parricide, from which he generates his own ideas concerning repressive civilization and its labour-based origins. With the symbolic primal father constraining instinctual gratification by placing the burden of work upon the sons, pleasure is suppressed as the result of the domination and “the mental preconditions for the continued functioning of domination” is created.”³⁸ Essentially, a disciplined labour force allows the ruler unrestricted enjoyment, a description of political tyranny. Marcuse is certainly one of the most positive responses to and expansion of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*.

American Morris Opler wrote several papers on psychoanalysis and anthropology in the late 1930s, mostly critiquing *Totem and Taboo* with the same kind of criticisms already noted. However, he did utilize the concept of ambivalence toward relatives and the deceased in his own ethnographic research on the Apache. Thus he continued the trend of rejecting some of Freud’s ideas while accepting others, perhaps with modifications. Furthermore, “despite his generally negative review, Opler was impressed by the relevance of Freud’s structural theory for anthropology.” (W, 148) This leads to a brief discussion of the French response to *Totem and Taboo*, the main purpose of this dissertation, and which was led mostly by the structuralist anthropologists, spilling over into the work of a few later philosophers.

“Turning to the reaction in France, we find Lévy-Bruhl, for all his attention to the primitive mentality, remarkably unaware of Freud. Yet in the writings of another great French anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss, we see the profound influence of Freudian notions of the unconscious.” (W, 154) Since Lévi-Strauss’ response is the topic of the entire upcoming second chapter, it need only be noted that this response was itself ambivalent, wavering between his two major works on the subject, volume one of *Structural Anthropology* and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. “What Lévi-Strauss underlined, then, is that Freud failed in his anthropology precisely because he abandoned the analytic method.” (W, 155) Lévi-Strauss attempted to rectify this error in his own studies of myth (W, 155), which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Lacan took up this same activity following both Lévi-Strauss and in what he labelled his return to Freud. While Lacan began as more or less a Freudian psychoanalyst in the 1930s, his seminars extended into the 1980s; some of his seminars are only now being translated into English. The main issues of *Totem and Taboo* itself are discussed in his seventeenth seminar, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, which was first printed in 1969-1970 after their deliveries, but only fully compiled in France in 1991, and finally translated into English in 2007. Here Lacan responds following Lévi-Strauss, while bridging the gaps between psychoanalysis, structuralism, linguistics and philosophy. This work is also discussed in the next chapter, as a development on Lévi-Strauss.

³⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 55-56.

Besides these important responses, a few other French scholars have studied *Totem and Taboo*. George Devereux and Paul Ricoeur have both treated the primal parricide symbolically, as a heuristic device, or a “scientific myth” as Freud had called it (W, 162). Devereux believes that Freud used this device to “condense into a single event a development lasting many millennia ... without realizing he was doing this.”³⁹ Ricoeur, in *Freud and Philosophy*,⁴⁰ more or less concurs with the conception of the primal horde story as a scientific myth, but his overall review is negative – similar to the earlier critiques, that the primal horde is a vicious circle, and that it was Freud’s fantastic attempt to verify his Oedipus complex using ethnographic data (W, 166). He also demarcates the line between the first two essays and especially the fourth. While many anthropologists adopted some of the ideas of compulsion, ambivalence and even paranoia, the primal horde hypothesis was nearly universally rejected. It can also be noted that the first two essays initially were published alone in Freud’s journal *Imago*, followed by the next publication which contained the last two essays; all four were only brought together afterward as a whole in *Totem and Taboo*, so such a division is not unreasonable.

Other than Lacan, the final and most recent French (and most significant overall) response to *Totem and Taboo* has come from the literary critic René Girard. In his *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard recognizes *Totem and Taboo* as valuable not for its psychoanalysis, but for the violent aspects of the primal horde murder, and he asserts that this is “directed toward a general theory of sacrifice,” (G, 198)⁴¹ This is almost the opposing position of most of the anthropologists who have seen value in Freud. Girard lauds Freud’s connection of sacrifice to the violent murder aroused by sexual and aggressive desires, a “collective murder” which produces “an inversion.” (G, 197) Girard in fact seems to be focusing upon the reality of the collective murder, although Wallace mistakenly asserts that “for Girard, the parricide hypothesis only confuses the issue.” (W, 168) The channelling of cultural violence which is adopted through mimetic rivalry is how Girard explains the sacrifice and its substitutions, and for him the primal horde is the prototype. Since Girard’s response to *Totem and Taboo* has been so important and influential in not only the study of religion, but literary and cultural studies in general, a few paragraphs shall be devoted to outlining it here.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard states that “contemporary criticism is almost unanimous in finding unacceptable the theories set forth in *Totem and Taboo*.” (G, 193) This is rather an overstatement, although it is clear that at least overall the response toward the arguments in *Totem and Taboo* tend toward the negative. Girard believes, however that “it is not the case” that “the theory of collective murder” has been “amply clarified.” (G, 193) This theory, the “murder

³⁹ George Devereux, *Mohave Ethnopsychiatry* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1969), 360n.

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

⁴¹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
Noted as G.

motif,” seems almost superfluous to Freud’s overall argument, since without it, “we could pass easily from the sexual privations inflicted on the young by a primordial father to the strictly cultural prohibitions.” (G, 193) Girard also marvels at the fact that Freud is criticized in *Totem and Taboo* for having treated his readers to a “particularly spectacular revelation of his own repressed desires,” (G, 194) in other words, that he has created his own myth, as shall be discussed in the next chapter. *Totem and Taboo* is unique among Freud’s works for having been the “only one thus singled out for therapeutic treatment.” (G, 194) Thus it is clear that for Girard there is something unique about *Totem and Taboo*, and in particular about the primal horde parricide hypothesis. An even more controversial theory of Freud’s, the death-instinct hypothesis, never received such a designation as being a mythological work revealing Freud’s own neuroses, and was certainly not able to be removed from *Civilizations and its Discontents* without destroying the entire argument of the essay. The primal horde parricide hypothesis is an entity of its own, with something remarkable contained in its nature – Girard has no doubt about this.

Contrary to the criticisms of Freud’s ethnographic systematization, Freud’s sharp appraisal of the range of data led him into a theoretical corner: “he was unable to formulate the hypothesis that would do justice to his discovery ... that all ritual practices, all mythical implications, have their origins in an actual murder.” (G, 201) For Girard believes that “the sacrificial act is too rich in concrete details to be only a simulation of something that never actually occurred.” (G, 201) It was this discovery, later dismissed by Freud’s critics, that led him to posit the primal parricide, depending upon Darwin’s hypothesis of the primeval horde social structure. It was the only logical conclusion Freud could have reached, according to Girard. Girard goes on to assert that an actual primal murder is really the only basis for the eternal repetition of the crime through ritual sacrifice, and that it is this facet of *Totem and Taboo* that is the most outstanding.

However Girard’s own later reasoning is at least one of the main problems with his assertion of the actuality of the primal parricide, of which it is not entirely clear whether or not Freud intended the parricide hypothesis to be actual or simply psychological. The debate surrounding this issue continues today – many important responses continually assert that the hypothesis is symbolic, that even Freud intended it to be. Boothby asserts that “in general Girard mishandles the psychoanalytic theory in accepting Freud’s story of the primal patricide as literal (when Freud himself acknowledges its likely symbolic value) and ignoring the primacy of psychic reality.”⁴² The psychic fact of the murder *intent* does seem to be as important, and more so, for Freud, than any actual murder. Girard himself provides one solution to his own problem: “what motivates prohibition [and thus transgression] is the fear of violence.” (G, 221) There need have been no actual violence to instigate the erection of a taboo prohibition, Girard is clearly

⁴² Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2001), 179.

asserting here; merely the *threat* of violence will suffice. Any perusal of a simple modern discussion of psychological anxiety disorder will elicit the clear conclusion that irrational (or rational) fears need have no basis in reality, no actual encounter, in order to exist. If prohibitions, and their transgressions involving ritual sacrifices, are motivated by the fear of violence, then no actual primal parricide need be presumed; any story or myth of violence would suffice.

Thus the French response to *Totem and Taboo* has been the most extensive. Important thinkers such as Foucault and Deleuze have argued against repression and Oedipus, respectively, from a philosophical stance. Alain Badiou has in fact followed Levi-Strauss and Lacan in bridging the work of Freud to philosophy and religious studies through the use of mathematics. In fact Foucault and Deleuze both have important discussions of mathematics in relationship to Freudian ideation; this will all be discussed in the fourth chapter of this current thesis. Levi-Strauss began introducing mathematics into philosophy in connection with Freud, and this vein has continued in the French philosophical tradition, notably with Lacan and Badiou, and a few others. Lévi-Strauss' use of mathematics will be discussed in the respective second and third chapters, while the continued use by these others will be touched upon in the fourth. For some reason, both mathematics and Freudian ideas have been adopted by French philosophers of religion when neither has seen continued usage elsewhere. Certainly this is curious as Freud himself never resorted to mathematical reasoning or rhetoric.

Besides the French response to *Totem and Taboo*, Wallace highlights a few notable thinkers who have provided useful insights. Goldenweiser deconstructed the idea of a general "totemism," and Steiner did the same for "taboo." (W, 153) In general the trend, other than in France, was a move toward simply recognizing and appreciating Freud's contribution to anthropology, and in extracting concepts still useful for anthropologists. Even Alfred Kroeber re-evaluated his prior criticisms somewhat and paid homage to Freud's efforts, even suggesting that *Totem and Taboo*, with certain modifications, might be serviceable to anthropology." (W, 149) Kroeber began to agree at least that the incest prohibition was considered by most to be the important, and perhaps the only, universal human institution (W, 150).

Sociologist Philip Rieff criticizes Freud primarily for having ignored other major themes in world mythology, especially filicide and fratricide.⁴³ However Rieff also sees Freud's work "as an indirect description of man's essential nature" as being aggressive and murdering, albeit remorseful. (W, 164) Rieff also comments on the circularity of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* project, albeit with a slightly altered vocabulary. However the circularity doesn't seem to disturb Rieff quite as it has with some of the others: "Freud used the data of anthropology as a source book for studying the irrational. The prehistoric crises of the race

⁴³ Philip Rieff, "The Meaning of History and Religion in Freud's Thought" in *Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. B. Mazlish (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971 (1951)), 23-41.

illuminate, for him, the meaning of neurotic crises among historical men. At the same time, the neurotic crises of historical men reveal the original prehistoric crises.”⁴⁴ Generally, Rieff’s work on Freud is positive.

Psychologist Gardner Lindzey reintroduces the idea of the evolutionary survival value of the incest taboo, giving it a biological basis, and suggesting that it is an assurance for the survival of the human species. “This biological guarantee for the incest taboo comes up against man’s demonstrated propensity to seek a mate with similar attitudes, needs, values, and background, as well as one in close physical or geographic proximity.” (W, 165) Without this taboo, incest would be the logical response to the drive for genetic continuity. “If the biological necessity of outbreeding led to the evolution of a set of prohibitions against this powerful [propensity], the operation of these negative sanctions against an almost equally strong counter-tendency could well constitute a psychological dilemma of enormous consequence.”⁴⁵ Lindzey thus praises Freud with a “kind of transcendental vigor”⁴⁶ in identifying this evolutionary conflict.

Classicist Norman O. Brown builds a philosophy of history upon *Totem and Taboo*. Like Girard, he identifies the primal horde hypothesis as the significant factor, and as a “simple historical explanation of origins.” (W, 165) He calls the articulation of the parricide a “super-historical archetype, eternally recurrent; a myth; an old, old story,”⁴⁷ and traces the motif from Plato and Aristotle, through Hobbes, Locke, down to Durkheim and other modern philosophers. (W, 165) Brown concurs with Melanie Klein that not only the father but also the mother combines psychologically in this archetype, an introjection of a dual organization.⁴⁸ Philosopher Jerome Neu suggests that the primal horde and Oedipus are just one possible manifestation of a more general pattern of “nuclear complexes.” He suggests that the actual murder in no way need have occurred, for as Freud himself argues, psychic reality can be as powerful as actual reality, and that the fear of loss combined with aggressive desires may lead to identification, introjection and super-ego development.⁴⁹ Scholar of religion James DiCenso has also taken the symbolic approach to *Totem and Taboo*; he also insists on focusing upon the psychic reality of the desire for murder of the father rather than, on the literal fact of the deed as Freud seemed to assert. “Despite Freud’s adamancy, the significance of *Totem and Taboo* cannot be restricted to its dubious causal-mechanistic explanatory level. What has

⁴⁴ Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 192.

⁴⁵ Gardner Lindzey, “Some Remarks Concerning Incest, the Incest Taboo, and Psychoanalytic Theory” *American Psychologist*, 1967, 22: 1055.

⁴⁶ Lindzey, 1055.

⁴⁷ Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), 3.

⁴⁸ Brown, 24.

⁴⁹ Jerome Neu, “Genetic Explanation in *Totem and Taboo*” in *Philosophers on Freud*, ed. R. Wolheim (New York: Aronson, 1977), 366-393.

occurred in the text is a figurative presentation of qualitative transformations of personality within symbolic structures.”⁵⁰

Finally, Freud’s own star pupil, Carl Jung, while hardly agreeing with the centrality of the sexual drive in Freudian theory, did laud *Totem and Taboo* as “one of the first direct contributions to the psychology of the primitive mind. It matters little that his attempt is nothing more than an application of this sex-theory, ... [it] demonstrates the possibility of a “rapprochement” between psychology and the problem of the primitive mind.”⁵¹ In some ways, Freud’s myth-making in *Totem and Taboo* more resembles the work of Carl Jung than anything else Freud has written. It is certainly ironic that it was Freud’s first book published after the break with Jung, marking a brief excursion into the anthropological concerns which so fascinated Jung.

As a final critic, political scientist Paul Roazen (W, 164) Paul Roazen views Freud as a “social contract thinker”⁵² with the same kind of circular reasoning, as Malinowski first pointed out concerning *Totem and Taboo*, present in all social contracts. A social contract not only “assumes the ability to make and keep a promise,” but “presupposes what it sets out to explain – the existence of social organization” and its common language (W, 164).⁵³ Roazen knows that political scientists have tended “to rescue social contract thinkers from the test of historical truth by interpreting their ideas as moral theories, or as logical fictions having explanatory value,”⁵⁴ and marvels at why the same has not been done with *Totem and Taboo*, and why it “has had so little effect on political theory.” (W, 164) Roazen has more recently published a work on a general application of psychoanalytic theory to political studies, and has been one of the few political theorists to suggest such an avenue.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ DiCenso, “*Totem and Taboo*,” 573.

⁵¹ Quoted in Ronald E. Martin, *The Languages of Difference: American Writers and Anthropologists Reconfigure the Primitive, 1878-1940*, 120. Noted as being quoted in Charles Roberts Aldrich, *The Primitive Mind and Modern Civilization* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1931), xvii.

⁵² Paul Roazen, *Freud: Political and Social Thought* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 136, 154.

⁵³ Here Wallace (171n17) notes Neu, 1977: 383; “Social contracts cannot explain the origin of obligation because they presuppose a prior obligation to obey controls, and are therefore circular.”

⁵⁴ Roazen, *Freud*, 154.

⁵⁵ Paul Roazen, *Political Theory and the Psychology of the Unconscious: Freud, J.S. Mill, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Fromm, Bettelheim and Erikson* (London: Open Gate Press, 2000).

6. Typological Chart of Responses

Thus there seems to be four main scales used in the evaluation of *Totem and Taboo*. The primary divide occurs between those thinkers who have focused on the anthropological psychoanalytic tools, such as ambivalence and projection, and those who have centered their responses around the primal parricide hypothesis. Of the latter – most of the former have ignored the primal parricide – there is the important division between those who assert its symbolic value, and those who maintain, in some form, its real occurrence. Then there is the separation between theorists who maintain that the symbolic value of the parricide is archetypal and those who believe it to be a socio-political symbol. Finally, of the most significance for this inquiry, is the group, primarily the French structuralists and post-structuralists, who discuss the parricide hypothesis, and *Totem and Taboo* in general, using mathematical weaponry. These divisions are not entirely mutually exclusive, but provide a novel structure, other than the simple geographic one, for categorizing the various responses, as outlined below.

Psychoanalytic Anthropological Tools	Primal Parricide Symbolism	Mathematical Utilization	Political Emphasis
Lévi-Strauss	Lévi-Strauss	Lévi-Strauss	Lévi-Strauss
	Lacan	Lacan	Lacan
Rieff	Rieff		
	Girard (actuality)		Girard
		Foucault	Foucault
		Deleuze	Deleuze
		Badiou	Badiou
Malinowski			
Kroeber			
Lowie			
Sapir			
Mead			
	Brown		
	Devereux		
	Lindzey		
	Neu		
	Ricoeur		
	DiCenso		
			Marcuse
			Roazen

7. Internal Consistency: Eating Oedipus

Besides the more general issues alive in the academic literature, there are four remarks on the internal consistency of the arguments presented within *Totem and Taboo*⁵⁶ which are worthy of consideration. The first problem is that while, presuming the two primal fundamentally basic totemic taboos, it is logical to assert that incest taboos are founded upon Oedipal anxiety; this is not directly obvious with eating taboos. While Freud criticizes thinkers such as Reinach for placing too much emphasis upon the eating taboo and ignoring the incest taboo (*TT*, 132), Freud does nearly the opposite in reducing both the primary totemic taboos to the singular Oedipus complex. This is in spite of the readiness he is to recognize the centrality of the consumption of the totemic animal. “We shall follow Robertson Smith in the assumption that sacramental killing and the common consumption of the otherwise forbidden totem animal was an important trait of the totem religion.” (*TT*, 180)⁵⁷

Secondly, in drawing the connection between the eating taboo and children’s animal phobias, Freud admits that the latter “have not yet been made the object of careful analytic investigation, although they very much merit it. The difficulties of analysing children of so tender an age have probably been the motive of such neglect.” (*TT*, 165) Freud is clear that his conclusions are based upon a very few cases because of this problem, and he illustrates three of the best known cases, where children have manifested phobias of dogs, horses or chickens. “In every case it was the same: the fear at bottom was [the displaced fear] of the father.” (*TT*, 165) However, this is not at all obvious from his presentations, and he makes rather startling inductive leaps in the analyses.

The first case is of a boy of four who runs up to a dog on the street and weeps, crying “‘Dear dog, don’t touch me, I will be good.’” (*TT*, 166) This is interpreted as implying that the boy is promising not to masturbate, which had apparently been forbidden by his father.⁵⁸ The connection appears to be a rather loose one, but Freud continues to extend the reasoning to the widespread fears of mice and rats (*TT*, 166). In the second case, a five-year-old boy manifests a phobia of horses, and refused to go on the street. “He expressed apprehension that the horse would come into the room and bite him.” (*TT*, 167) This is interpreted as fear of being punished for wanting the horse – which contained the image of the father – to die. A little later the boy identifies himself with horses, acting like one by jumping around and biting the father. While there may be some Oedipal anxiety present here, the more straightforward association is the one between biting and the animal. The third case is similar, where a boy of two

⁵⁶ The rest of the unmarked bracket page references are from Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Vintage, 1946 (1913).

⁵⁷ Freud notes his awareness of the objections of thinkers such as Hubert and Mauss to the general extension of this idea to the theory of sacrifice as a whole, but he suggests that they have not impaired in an essential way the theory of Robertson Smith. (Freud: 1946:180n74)

⁵⁸ It is unclear here whether this is actually true or inferred (*TT*, 166).

is afraid of chickens after having one snap at his penis while he tried to urinate into a coop. While the circumstance might lead to the implication of castration fears, it is possible the same problem would have arisen if the chicken tried to bite a finger – the general problem being the fear of being bitten. As the child matured, by five he became the hunter rather than the prey, just as in the previous case study: “He loved best to play killing chickens. The slaughtering of poultry was quite a festival for him. He could dance around the animals’ bodies for hours at a time in a state of intense excitement.” (*TT*, 169)⁵⁹

Before these three cases Freud also notes one where a child who is afraid of wasps because their colouring resembles that of a tiger “of which, from all that it [the child] had heard, it might well be afraid.” (*TT*, 165) Of course the child could be displacing fear of the father onto the tiger; on the other hand, it might simply be afraid of being bitten or eaten. Although not mentioned explicitly, this reasoning could easily and believably be extended to the first case of the dog phobia – and that of the rodents – where the boy simply wants to be good so that he will not be bitten. The conclusion that animal phobias are displacements of Oedipal fears of the father is not at all direct. The more obvious and parsimonious induction is that these children are afraid of being bitten or eaten.

The third issue relates to the primal horde story itself with which there are two heretofore unnoticed problems. One is just why it is the brothers might have eaten their father, when it is clear that simply killing him would have sufficed for their main purpose – access to females. Freud only discusses cannibalism in a minor passage in *Totem and Taboo* where he bases its motivations upon the oral incorporation of desirable traits (*TT*, 107). The sons may have wished to incorporate the father’s strength by eating him. But oral incorporation is very often a *conscious* motivation for cannibalism, and Freud gives little to no further consideration to any sort of *unconscious* motivation for the act. His hypothesis seeks to account for both the totemic taboos simultaneously; the eating taboo, if based upon the Oedipal guilt, can only be explained given the cannibal hypothesis which has no other motivation or reason for being introduced.

An even more difficult problem for the primal horde hypothesis is that of the supposedly prior, in evolutionary terms, patriarchal totemic clan – Freud himself acknowledges that this (at the time Freud was writing) has never been observed. As has been noted, ethnographically speaking, there is little data supporting the existence of such totemic social organizations. Clans are normally matrilineal. Freud suggests that the brothers, once having overthrown the father, must erect the incest taboo in order to assuage their guilt over the murder – denying themselves the very thing they sought, access to the females. This is also for practical considerations, since none of the brothers is strong enough alone to take the father’s place, and for them to live in peace together they must instil the exogamy condition. At this juncture Freud again elevates the status and value of the incest taboo above that of the eating taboo, because the former has practical

⁵⁹ Note, this is partly a quote from Ferenzei found in *Totem and Taboo* (169n64).

(as well as emotional) foundations, while the latter has merely emotional motives (*TT*, 185). It is here that Freud simply shrugs at the ethnography and asserts that “the germ of mother right matrilineal society must have arisen from this.” (*TT*, 186) This, however, did not match with anthropological evidence. “In this evolution I am at a loss to explain the place of the great maternal deities who perhaps everywhere preceded the paternal deities.” (*TT*, 192) It makes little sense why a totem erected in memorial for the murder of the father, supposedly arising from paternally-ruled clans, would be moulded into a female deity. For some reason, although he acknowledges it, the problem does not seem to concern Freud. He merely suggests that the change to paternal deities was mirrored in social organization by a move from matriarchal to patriarchal society (*TT*, 192).

These four problems – the subversion of the eating taboo, the problem of the animal phobia, the devouring of the father, and the problem of anthropologically prior matrilineal clans and maternal deities – all revolve around one major issue: the mother relation and eating. I would suggest that beyond all of the other scholastic issues raised concerning *Totem and Taboo*, that this is one which has been rarely discussed and which may ultimately be more important for the study of religious behaviour than has been previously acknowledged. Although, as noted, Alfred Kroeber asserted that perhaps the only important human universal institution is incest, certainly food consumption and eating taboos with their religious manifestations must be a second such human universal. In *The Challenge of Anthropology*, Robin Fox discusses concerns of food and sex in the same chapter, suggesting that these concerns are equally important, although food “is little considered in anthropology,” other than by a few thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss. Sex and hunger “are on the same circuit of the brain: the limbic system,” (*RF* 6) in opposition to other concerns such as language. Fox recognizes implication that one’s food, like one’s relatives, are for exchange but not for personal consumption, and quotes from Margaret Mead a New Guinean proverb: “your own mother, your own sister, your own pigs, your own yams which you have piled up, you may not eat.” (*RF*, 6)

Conclusions

While it appears to most current scholars that *Totem and Taboo* is an outdated curiosity with little value for further anthropological research or insight, it is clear that there are unresolved issues and further directions for investigation since its publication nearly a century ago. However, the primary facet of the work which has resisted dismissal is the symbolic value of the primal horde parricide, although as an actual ethnographic occurrence it seems almost ludicrous and has not often been accepted as factual. The ontogenetic and phylogenetic developmental correspondence has rarely been taken seriously.⁶⁰ A few of the psychoanalytic premises have been adopted and applied to anthropology when relevant; others have been discarded. But the idea of the murder of the father of the primal horde seems to conceal a symbolic value which is perhaps mythical, archetypal, universal, and representative of innate aggression, economic, sociological or even political domination.

For some reason, beyond a handful of outliers, French philosophy alone has adopted the primal horde, Oedipus and Freud into their fold where other academic circles have abandoned them decades ago. This trend began with Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists, and has continued with linguistically-oriented philosophers and thinkers such as Lacan. Parallel with this movement has been the application of mathematical ideas in an attempt to elucidate concepts which very often related to Oedipus or the primal horde parricide. It is this philosophical movement, the French structural-linguistic turn, in particular that which makes use of mathematical reasoning and rhetoric, which appears to be not only one of the most fruitful avenues of exploration into the problems of *Totem and Taboo*, but the longest-standing inquiry into the subject which few other thinkers consider worthwhile. And it is this series of thinkers, with particular emphasis upon the foundation of Lévi-Strauss, which is to be the topic of the rest of this dissertation.

Clearly, *Totem and Taboo* “awakened anthropology to psychoanalysis; scarcely one luminary anthropologist failed to at least acknowledge Freud’s work.” (W, 169) And yet at least a few thinkers have contended that the symbolic value of the primal horde parricide extends beyond anthropological concerns. There is perhaps at one unexplored avenue within *Totem and Taboo* – concerns of consumption. It is my contention that this not only concerns the personal ramifications of foodstuffs and the relationship to religious activity, but the broader economic, sociological and political implications of the ethic of consumption and its relationship to the symbolic primal horde parricide; this relationship will be explored in the later stages of this dissertation.

⁶⁰ Although Weinstein and Platt applaud the “evolutionary” development of the human perception of the universe, that is, the comparison of animism to narcissism, religion to parental attachment, and science to adult relations above the rest of *Totem and Taboo*. F. Weinstein and G. Platt, *Psychoanalytic Sociology: An Essay on the Interpretation of Historical Data and the Phenomenon of Collective Behaviour* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

CHAPTER II: French Structuralism and *Totem and Taboo*

Claude Lévi-Strauss was the first French scholar to take Freud's *Totem and Taboo* seriously. In *Elementary Structures of Kinship* Lévi-Strauss discusses the problem of incest and reduces taboos to a development in economic exchange, in contrast to Freud's psychological argument. Lévi-Strauss briefly discusses *Totem and Taboo*, noting its difference from the usual psychoanalytic method, but lauding the symbolic and mythic value of the primal horde parricide hypothesis. Furthermore, in connection to kinship, Lévi-Strauss includes a discussion of the mathematics of algebraic group theory to model marriage relations.

In *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss outlines his general method for the analysis of myths. As exemplary he derives a novel interpretation of the Oedipus myth, concluding that it is actually a myth which attempts to overcome the contradiction between sexual reproduction with male and female and birth from female only. Here Lévi-Strauss includes other examples besides Oedipus, as well as another brief discussion of mathematics.

Finally in *The Jealous Potter* Lévi-Strauss reinforces his assertion that the primal parricide is Freud's myth; however, he demonstrates here that Freud did not create this myth, but unknowingly rediscovered an old story which the Jivaro Indians had already incorporated into their mythological lore. Lévi-Strauss continues to demarcate the difference between psychoanalysis and structuralism. He suggests that Freud followed Rousseau down a misleading trail, yet Rousseau had more insightfully expressed the relation between myth and language.

There are four main points to gather from Lévi-Strauss's writings on myth, incest and *Totem and Taboo*. The first is that the primal horde parricide hypothesis is likely not the same as the Oedipus myth. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud composes a myth, abandoning his psychoanalytic method in order to comment on the political structure of society. Secondly, as already discussed at length in the previous chapter, Freud appears to have neglected the importance of the eating taboos for religion and the relationship of consumption both economically and literally in his drive to centralize the Oedipus complex. Lévi-Strauss seems at least partially aware that this is the case.

Thirdly is what Lévi-Strauss makes fairly clear as the connection between the scientific study of myth, myth itself, and politics. In fact the primal horde parricide hypothesis resembles a political theory. This is emphasized by the fourth recognition of the connection which Lévi-Strauss takes such pains to illustrate between mathematics and the study of myth. Since the political analysis of social contracts also heavily involves mathematics, Lévi-Strauss's use of mathematics for the study of kinship and myth in relation to *Totem and Taboo* and incest, and his assertion that myth is expressed in modern society, implicitly suggests a political dimension to the primal horde parricide myth of *Totem and Taboo*. The two main commentators discussed on Lévi-Strauss, myth, and the problem of incest are Jacques Lacan and Georges Bataille.

1. Kinship Structures

Lévi-Strauss's primary direct response to *Totem and Taboo* came in his 1949 *Elementary Structures of Kinship*,¹ translated into English in 1969. This is a large book devoted to kinship structures and the problem of incest from an economic perspective. Agreeing with Freud, Lévi-Strauss asserts that "the incest prohibition is at once on the threshold of culture, in culture, and in one sense culture itself." (ESK, 12) Essentially, Lévi-Strauss believes the problem of incest to be at the cause of the transition from nature to culture (ESK, 24), and concludes from his inquiry that taboos on incest and exogamy have originated mainly within a system of exchange (ESK, 478) where it becomes more economically advantageous to trade clan women than to keep them within the clan.

It is not the purpose of this work to examine Lévi-Strauss's theory of incest, but his more direct response to *Totem and Taboo*. Lévi-Strauss posits an exchange theory, essentially one of "commodity distribution and consumption," (ESK, 32) to explain the incest prohibition. A woman might be worth more to a tribe in exchange than she is if she is kept within the clan. Lévi-Strauss views the exchange of women as advantageous to culture, for the maintenance of peace relations between neighbouring clans. Economic exchange almost certainly began for humans with foodstuffs. "The group controls the distribution not only of women, but of a whole collection of valuables. Food, the most easily observed of these, is more than just the most vital commodity, for between it and women there is a whole system of real and symbolic relationships." (ESK, 32-33) This emphasis is underscored by Georges Bataille's reworking of Lévi-Strauss's exchange theory from a more global perspective of the general consumption of global energy originating with solar power.² The strong association between concerns of incest and those of consumption is important to keep in mind.

In the two pages devoted directly to *Totem and Taboo* there is no novel critique. Lévi-Strauss dispels the hypothesis that ontogeny reproduces phylogeny, suggesting that it is contradictory (ESK, 491). He also dismisses the primal parricide hypothesis because it sets out to explain events which presuppose it, thus formulating a vicious circle (ESK, 491). What the parricide hypothesis does do successfully is account for the present state of society rather than its origin, and how incest is unconsciously desired rather than explaining the origin of the prohibition (ESK, 491). The primal horde parricide is a myth, and like all myths, it symbolically expresses "an ancient and lasting dream." (ESK, 491).³

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969 (1949)). References noted as ESK.

² Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol II & III* (New York: Zone Books, 1999 (1976)), 51-52 and more generally Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol I: Consumption* (New York: Zone Books, 1988 (1963)), 1-40.

³ This noted in reference to Alfred Kroeber, "Totem and Taboo in Retrospect" *American Journal of Sociology* 45 (1939), 446-51. Bataille also makes reference to this while discussing Lévi-Strauss: Bataille, *Accursed Share Vol. II & III*, 33.

“The magic of this dream, its power to mould men’s thoughts unbeknown to them, arises precisely from the fact that the acts it evokes have never been committed, because culture has opposed them at all times and in all places ... Symbolic gratifications in which the incest urge finds its expression, according to Freud, do not therefore commemorate an actual event. They are something else, and more, the permanent expression of a desire for disorder, or rather counter-order. Festivals turn social life topsy-turvy, not because it was once like this, but because it has never been, and can never be, any different. Past characteristics have explanatory value only in so far as they coincide with present and future characteristics.” (ESK, 491)

Lévi-Strauss posits what he calls some “bold assumptions” (ESK, 492) as to the thesis of *Totem and Taboo*, assumptions which amount to the basis for structural anthropology, and which he believes may be located within Freud. “Freud has sometimes suggested that certain basic phenomena find their explanation in the permanent structure of the human mind, rather than in its history.” (ESK, 491) Anxiety, for example, may exist long before the differentiation of the ego or the super-ego. Children often seem to possess a “sense of sin” far greater than their experience would suggest. “This would be explained if, as Freud supposed, it were possible for inhibitions in the broadest sense to be organically determined and occasionally produced without the help of education.” (ESK, 492) For Lévi-Strauss, the myth both reflects inherent psychic structural relations and moulds those relations in future generations – this is true of Freud’s primal horde hypothesis as much as any other myth which both sets out to explain the past and to account for the present and the future. If this, the structuralist assumptions, may be allowed for Freud, then there is within that primal horde parricide a kind of mythic value expressed.

Nonetheless, Lévi-Strauss hesitates somewhat and asserts that Freud’s very own psychoanalytic method, the unearthing of the original situation from which the conflicts of the sick individual arose, “is contrary to that of the theory as presented in *Totem and Taboo*.” (ESK, 492) In the psychoanalytic process, the analyst progresses from experience, to myths and then to psychic structure. However in the *Totem and Taboo* story, a myth is invented to explain the facts, which is exactly what the neurotic does. Jacques Lacan also describes the hypothesis a neurotic product. Grigg states that “I take [this] to mean that the work is a product of Freud’s neurosis.”⁴ Thus Freud, according to Lévi-Strauss, in his primal horde parricide hypothesis, “behaves like the sick man instead of diagnosing him (ESK, 492). In short, Lévi-Strauss believes that what Freud has done in *Totem and Taboo* is not what he has normally done in his analysis of psychological case studies. Yet he has not entirely dismissed the work.

⁴ Russell Grigg, “Beyond The Oedipus Complex” in *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. J. Clemens and R. Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 64.

In his appendix to *Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss includes some basic work on the algebraic study of marriage laws, using mathematical group theory conceived by mathematician André Weil of the University of Chicago (ESK, 221-229). This work is entirely Weil's: "In these few pages, written at Lévi-Strauss's request, I propose to show how a certain type of marriage laws can be interpreted algebraically, and how algebra and the theory of groups of substitutions can facilitate its study and classification." (ESK, 221) Here Lévi-Strauss introduces a mathematical method for dealing with the problem of incest and kin relations. A mathematical group⁵ is a set of elements which possesses an additive operation that is associative, has an identity element, and where each member of the set has an inverse. Thus the set G is a **group** if the following axioms hold:

- (a) for every a, b and c in G , $a + (b + c) = (a + b) + c$.
- (b) there is an identity element denoted 0 such that $a + 0 = a$ for all a in G .
- (c) for each a in G , there is an additive inverse $-a$ such that $a + (-a) = 0$.

The most straightforward example is the set of all integers, $\mathbf{Z} = \{ \dots -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3 \dots \}$ which satisfies these properties simply. An even simpler example is the two element set $\mathbf{Z}_2 = \{0, 1\}$ where $0 + 0 = 0$, $0 + 1 = 1$ and $1 + 1 = 0$. The identity is 0 , as is the inverse. It is straightforward to demonstrate that property (a) also holds. There are very many different kinds of groups; those which most concern Weil for marriage structures are called **permutation groups**.

A permutation of a set, for example the set $A = \{1, 2, 3\}$, is a sequence. There are six permutations for the elements of set A ; namely 123, 132, 213, 231, 312, 321. These are the six elements of the permutation group of A . Weil uses permutations of marriage types to model a marriage system of laws. It is unnecessary to inquire into the details of this model; the mathematics is basic undergraduate abstract algebra and is well worked out. There are four significant points to highlight from Lévi-Strauss work *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

- (i) The hypothesis that the primal horde parricide myth, like all myths, reflects the internal psychic structure of humanity.
- (ii) Recognition of the symbolic-mythic value of the primal parricide hypothesis, reinforcing that Freud has created a myth, something different than his usual psychoanalytic method.
- (iii) The connection between the incest prohibition and issues of economic exchange and general consumption; more specifically the comparison between the exogamic exchange and the trading of foodstuffs.
- (iv) The connection between mathematics and the problem of incest.

⁵ The following from Benjamin Fine and Gerhard Rosenberger, *The Fundamental Theorem of Algebra* (New York: Springer, 1997), 5 and 105.

2. Structural Anthropology

In 1962 Lévi-Strauss published his most notable work *Structural Anthropology*, which was translated into English in 1963.⁶ Overall the work is a general elucidation of the theoretical and methodological basis of his structuralist approach to anthropology; for the purposes of this work the most relevant chapter is the eleventh, “The Structural Study of Myth.” (SA, 206-231) It is in this chapter that Lévi-Strauss outlines his method for analyzing myth, based upon an analogy between the structures of myth and language. This analysis methodology, along with his example using the Oedipus myth, and the brief use of mathematics he undertakes will be discussed below.

(a) Myth – Politics, Poetics and Math

Lévi-Strauss points out that there seems to be an inherent difficulty in the manifestation of myth which appears contradictory for the student of mythology. “On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen ... But on the other hand this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions.” (SA, 208) This contradiction has led to the erroneous assumption, as with Jung’s archetypes, “that a given mythic pattern possesses a specific meaning.” (SA, 208)

In fact this is the same problem faced in linguistics, where the same sounds equally present in similar sequences convey entirely different meanings. “Ancient philosophers reasoned about language the way we do today about mythology ... Their attempt, however, was thwarted by the fact that the same sounds were equally present in other languages although the meaning they conveyed was entirely different.” (SA, 208) This error, that “a certain sound possesses some kind of affinity with a meaning” is the error that Jung and other mythologists have made (SA, 208). Along with “the Saussurean principle of *the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs*” (SA, 209) is the similar analogy of the arbitrary nature of mythological patterns. Thus one sequence of mythological patterns appearing in many different cultures may have a multitude of meanings. Not every culture views a dragon as malevolent, although dragons may be found in many myths across the world.

Myth cannot be treated as language entirely, since the telling of a myth is itself part of speech (SA, 209). Strangely, Lévi-Strauss’s solution to this is to incorporate another linguistic tool, since “language itself can be analyzed into things which are at the same time similar and yet different.” (SA, 209) Thus Lévi-Strauss invokes Saussure’s distinction between the structural side of language, *langue*, which is diachronic or belonging to reversible time, and the statistical side of language, *parole*, which is synchronic or non-reversible (SA, 209). Myth,

⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, Basic Books, 1963). References noted as SA.

however, being different than language, “has a third referent, which combines the properties of the first two.” (SA, 209) The distinct property of myth is that although it refers to historical or pre-historical events, it is timeless in that it also explains the present and the future. The myth merges both components of language in third kind of relation.

For example, Lévi-Strauss clarifies this difference between myth and language itself by comparing myth “*and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics.*”⁷ (SA, 209) The historian might refer to an event such as the French Revolution as a non-reversible (*parole*) sequence of past events that may well have consequences which are still in effect. But for the politician – or the myth maker – it is not only that but also a reversible sequence (*langue*), “a timeless pattern which can be detected in the contemporary French social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation, a lead from which to infer future developments.” (SA, 209)⁸ Thus the myth, political or otherwise, describes an event as pertaining to both the realm of *parole* and *langue* but is an entity on a third level distinct from the other two by combining them (SA, 210).

Lévi-Strauss notes that myth opposes poetry as a linguistic expression because while for poetry the style or syntax is of highest value, for myth, it is the story or meaning which is essential: “Poetry is a kind of speech which cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distortion; whereas the mythical value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translations.” (SA, 210) Thus, the three important claims are: (1) that the meaning in myth resides not in the isolated elements of myth but in the sequences of combinations of those elements; (2) that myth, although a part of language, as a language exhibits specific properties above and more complex than the ordinary linguistic level (SA, 210).

With this in mind, Lévi-Strauss posits that myth, like language is made up of gross constituent units, or *mythemes*, in analogy to phonemes, morphemes and so on (SA, 210).⁹ The structural study of myth, in a kind of mathematical procedure, involves essentially determining the relations between these mythemes, and the bundles of these relations, by reading them on the two dimensional axes of the diachronic and synchronic sequences (SA, 211-212). The analysis of variations on a myth from a single tribe or village allow for a third dimension, while other variations from different places might result in a rather large number of dimensions. Thus “progress in comparative mythology depends largely on the cooperation of mathematicians who would undertake to express in symbols multi-dimensional relations which cannot be handled otherwise.” (SA, 219).

⁷ Italics mine, for the reader to keep this in mind until completing the summary of Lévi-Strauss.

⁸ Here Lévi-Strauss notes the politically minded historian Michelet describing the French Revolution thus: “That day ... everything was possible ... Future became present ... that is, no more time, a glimpse of eternity.” (SA, 209-210) from Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Revolution Française*, IV, I. “I took this quotation from M. Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la Dialectique* (Paris: 1955), 273.” (SA, 230n5).

⁹ Lévi-Strauss provides two illuminating analogies (SA, 212).

(b) Oedipus

Lévi-Strauss, although admitting that a specialist in Greek mythology might improve the analysis (SA, 213), attempts a breakdown of the Oedipus myth by means of demonstrating his structural method. His assessment reveals four vertical columns of relations belonging to the same unit or bundle, which entail the synchronic patterns enabling the understanding of the myth. The diachronic rows are used in combination with the columns to understand the myth (SA, 214). This matrix structure is presented by Lévi-Strauss as follows (SA, 214):

Cadmos seeks sister Europa, ravished by Zeus			
		Cadmos kills the dragon	
	The Spartoi kill one another		
			Labdacos (Laïos' father) = <i>lame</i> (?)
	Oedipus kills his father Laïos		Laïos (Oedipus' father) = <i>left handed</i> (?)
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx	
			Oedipus = <i>swollen foot</i> (?)
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta			
	Eteocles kills his brother Polynices		
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition			
Overvaluation of blood relations	Undervaluing of blood relations	Slaying of the monster	Difficulties walking

The first and second columns oppose the overrating and the underrating of blood relations, respectively (SA, 215). The third column refers to slain monsters, and the fourth to “*difficulties in walking straight and standing upright.*” (SA, 215) By a certain kind of logical gymnastics Lévi-Strauss manages to conclude that the third column referring to monsters features the “*denial of the autochthonous origin of man*” while the fourth is the “*persistence*” of that origin (SA, 215-216). The fourth column is related to the third just as the first is to the second (SA, 216).

Overall the Oedipus myth is like all myths, “a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.” (SA, 229) Specifically, Oedipus is intended to merge “the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman” with the autochthonous origin – “born from one or born from two?” (SA, 216) Thus his conclusion relates to problems of origins and kinship, birth from female but procreation by male and female. “Although the Freudian problem has ceased to be that of autochthony *versus* bisexual reproduction, it is still the problem of understanding how *one* can be born from *two*: How is it that we do not have only one procreator, but a mother plus a father?” (SA, 217) Thus the Freudian version of the myth ought to be included with the Sophoclean along with other mythic and literary manifestations.

(c) The Canonical Formula

Lévi-Strauss concludes his chapter with a brief mathematical model which he hopes underscores the structural analysis of myth in general. By “organizing a whole series of variants into a kind of permutation group, we are in a position to formulate the law of that group ... every myth (considered as an aggregate of all its variants) corresponds to a formula of the following type:” (SA, 228)

$$F_x(a) : F_y(b) \cong F_x(b) : F_{a-1}(y)$$

According to Lévi-Strauss, here x and y are functions of a and b respectively, this and the rest of the descriptive paragraph (SA, 228) making so little sense mathematically speaking that it would be impossible to explain it.

Lévi-Strauss ensures that “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)” (SA, 229). He appends a brief note assuring that the myth, created by “the so-called primitive mind” and modern scientific thought are essentially using the same kind of equally rigorous logic, although applied to different subjects (SA, 230), thus countering Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* reasoning that scientific thought is an evolution of mythic-religious logic akin to the individual development from child to adult. Four of Lévi-Strauss’s conclusions from *Structural Anthropology* are significant here:

- (i) That myth has been largely replaced in modern society by politics.
- (ii) That the Oedipus myth is an attempt at overcoming the contradiction of sexual reproduction with autochthonous birth.
- (iii) That mathematical analysis and modelling is useful for the study of myth.
- (iv) That mythic logic and scientific logic are essentially the same processes.

3. Critique

An analysis of the problems raised with the structural analysis of myth is a rather daunting task. The basic tenets of the structuralist perspective have several difficulties, many of which have been discussed at length and need not be presented in this dissertation. Any later work by Roland Barthes and some essays by Jacques Derrida can provide most of the critiques of the structuralist assumptions. A good textbook on the anthropology of religion would also provide most of the main difficulties. Suffice it to say that some of the usual critiques, such as ahistoricism, are not entirely founded if it is recognized that Lévi-Strauss believed that all myth not only reflects inherent psychic structures, but has the power to mould those structures as well (*ESK*, 491). The structuralist perspective accounts for the dynamic nature of culture more than usually credited.

(a) Wallace and Lévi-Strauss on *Totem and Taboo*

Wallace has made several minor errors in relation to his discussion on Lévi-Strauss's reaction to *Totem and Taboo*. The first problem is this assertion that Lévi-Strauss "commented directly on *Totem and Taboo* in 1963 (pp. 67-76)," (*W*, 154) insinuating *Structural Anthropology*. In this latter work there is no direct reference to *Totem and Taboo* on those pages or any other; *Totem and Taboo* is not even listed in the bibliography of *Structural Anthropology*, where there are only four minor and offhanded references – that is, no formal reference – to Freud at all.¹⁰ Wallace attributes to *Structural Anthropology* a disagreement with "Kroeber's 1939 idea that Freud's "scientific myth" might reflect a recurrent psychological disposition" and suggests that here Lévi-Strauss "gave precedence to the role of society in determining group behaviour, rather than personal feelings." (*W*, 154) Yet again, there is no such statement in *Structural Anthropology*, no reference to this particular Kroeber essay – which is referenced in Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, where Lévi-Strauss in fact agrees with Kroeber on this issue (*ESK*, 491) – and certainly no precedence given to social factors in determining group behaviour.¹¹

Wallace also suggests that these references in *Structural Anthropology* are prior to those in *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, noting the latter as being printed in 1967. However *Kinship* was published in French long before *Structural Anthropology*, in 1949, and then only translated into English in 1969. In 1967 Lévi-Strauss does not by any means "reverse his view" (*W*, 154) because the initial view in *ESK* is the only view ever printed, where Lévi-Strauss agrees with Kroeber on the significance of Freud's "scientific myth" of the primal horde parricide. Contrary to Wallace, there is no reversal, the dates are incorrect, and

¹⁰ (*SA*, 197, 213, 225, 328)

¹¹ For example, Lévi-Strauss compares the shamanistic ritual curing to the psychoanalytic method in a different essay (*SA*, 197).

there is the attribution of a statement to *Structural Anthropology* which does not exist. Wallace for some reason never admits that Lévi-Strauss in fact agreed with Kroeber on the value of the scientific myth, and even suggests again that Lévi-Strauss opposes others such as Whiting in his disagreement with Kroeber (W, 155) – a disagreement which does not exist. Finally, Wallace provides a statement from “another work” of Lévi-Strauss, implying neither *Structural Anthropology* nor *Kinship*, noted as “(1962, p. 492).” This is an eight line statement printed in Wallace (W, 155) directly out of *Kinship*, page 492, where Lévi-Strauss contrasts the psychoanalytic method with the *Totem and Taboo* explanation.

It is difficult to determine whether or not these errors are deliberate. Certainly Wallace has misrepresented Lévi-Strauss on *Totem and Taboo*. Lévi-Strauss is not ambivalent concerning *Totem and Taboo*, makes only one major but brief reference to the work in *Kinship*, and discusses it only indirectly in *Structural Anthropology* under the general umbrella of interpreting the Oedipus myth. Wallace concludes the Lévi-Strauss discussion by suggesting that “we might see Lévi-Strauss as rectifying this error [that Freud abandoned his own analytic method and thus failed in his anthropology], “by delving into the structure” (ESK, 492; although attributed to 1962, 492) of myths themselves” (W, 155). This is a misdirection away from the main point of the *Kinship* discussion, that Lévi-Strauss was in agreement with Kroeber that “Freud’s “scientific myth” might reflect a recurrent psychological disposition,” (W, 154) as Lévi-Strauss suggests that the primal horde parricide is like all myths a reflection of “an ancient and lasting dream.” (ESK, 491) Lévi-Strauss never disagrees with this, never gives precedence to social over psychological factors in group behaviour, and although he suggests that Freud is behaving neurotically in using a myth to explain facts, thus abandoning the psychoanalytic method, this is not a denial of the significance of the myth. Wallace seems to want to divert attention from Lévi-Strauss’s status in the line of thinkers who attribute symbolic value to the primal horde parricide and represent him as not belonging to that lineage.

(b) Oedipus and the Primal Parricide

Lévi-Strauss’s reading of the Oedipus myth has been challenged by Michael Carroll, who does not quarrel with Lévi-Strauss’s methodology, but suggests that his interpretation is incorrect. Carroll performs his own structural analysis of the “entire Theban Saga”:

“A consideration of Greek beliefs suggests that Lévi-Strauss is incorrect in tying certain events to the “overvaluation of blood relations” and in asserting that the myth is concerned with the “affirmation and denial of man’s autochthonous origins ... Lévi-Strauss is correct in identifying a series of events in the myth which indicate a *devaluation* of blood relations but that these events specifically refer to the devaluation of *patrilineal* blood ties ... The final hypothesis of opposition between the devaluation and affirmation of patrilineal blood ties underlies the [entire] Theban Saga “makes sense” in terms of Greek history, as the

period in which the Olympian myths took their present form is also the period in which the Greeks moved from a society organized along patrilineal kin ties to one organized around allegiance to the polis.”¹²

This interpretation would certainly merge more smoothly with Freud’s interpretation of Oedipus, not to mention his primal horde parricide version of the myth. It also dispels some of difficulties of Lévi-Strauss’s rather questionable conclusions based upon unsure interpretations of names in the Oedipus saga – his fourth column in the chart above – and the unfounded connection of those to ideas of standing upright and autochthony. However the association of the myth to patrilineal kinship ties is not in actuality far removed from the interpretation Lévi-Strauss posited, for the matter of autochthonous origins is still dealing with the problem of the paternal involvement in conception where birth is entirely a maternal process. Carroll’s re-evaluation is a variation on the same theme.

Yet this is not the only time where Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of myths have been questioned. He has several myth interpretations in his second volume of *Structural Anthropology* which have been scrutinized and found erroneous, with new interpretations using the same structural methodology as shall be noted below. Importantly it should also be highlighted that Lévi-Strauss believed the *Totem and Taboo* primal horde parricide myth to be different in nature than the usual psychoanalytic ideas, although Carroll’s reading would perhaps merge the primal parricide more closely with the general Oedipus complex.

Jacques Lacan, however, is in agreement with Lévi-Strauss: “No one ever seems to have been struck by the extent to which *Totem and Taboo* has nothing to do with the current use of the Sophoclean reference.”¹³ Certainly, Lacan also agrees with Lévi-Strauss that the Oedipus myth “concerns something quite different” (*L*, 111) from a story simply of incest, and takes note of the Lévi-Strauss interpretation of Oedipus as “not walking straight.” (*L*, 120) However, other than Lacan, Lévi-Strauss is the only thinker to have suggested that the primal horde parricide myth is different from the usual psychoanalytic material.

“There is the myth of Oedipus, then, borrowed from Sophocles. And then there is this cock-and-bull story, the murder of the father of the primal horde. It is quite curious that the result is exactly the contrary [to what would be expected, that the death of the father implies liberation].” (*L*, 114) What Lacan refers to here is the erection of the taboo prohibitions after the death of the father, which disallows the very behaviours allowed in the Oedipus story, access to the women. The sons prohibit themselves from the women which they killed the father for in the *Totem and Taboo* story. Instead, Oedipus kills his father and in fact does have incestuous relations with his mother – these stories have the opposite or contrary results from the same action, the murder of the father. The prime consequence for killing the leader of the primal horde, “the old man, the old orang ... is completely

¹² Michael P. Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss on the Oedipus Myth: A Reconsideration” *American Anthropologist*, 80 (4), 1978, 806.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, Seminar XVII* (New York: Norton, 2007 (1991)), 115. References after this noted under *L*.

different from the myth of Oedipus” – the sons discover they are brothers. Thus begins “the pursuit of brotherhood, liberty and equality.” (L, 114) And for Lacan, “brotherhood first and foremost is founded on segregation.” (L, 114) Perhaps this kind of brotherhood founded upon segregation is not really distinct from Carroll’s interpretation of Oedipus as referring to the degeneration of paternal kinship ties into the city polis political structure of ancient Greece.

(c) The Use of Mathematics

The use of mathematics with anthropological ideas such as kinship has blossomed, since Lévi-Strauss into a field of its own. There is now even an academic journal called *Mathematical Anthropology and Cultural Theory: An International Journal*, where articles are published regularly on mathematics and anthropology. One good example of the continued use of algebraic group theory for kinship systems may be found in the November 2000 initial issue, entitled “Prescriptive Kinship Systems, Permutations, Groups and Graphs.”¹⁴ Most certainly the enthusiasm for this work came from Weil in Lévi-Strauss’s *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. It might be questioned whether this rather distal branch of anthropology really has much to offer most anthropologists who likely have little or no experience with abstract algebra. It seems rather to be a subfield of applied mathematics, of interest perhaps for its own sake but with rather little to offer in terms of anthropological theory. The article mentioned helps determine why some types of marriage rules, including those against incestuous relations, and kinship systems are more frequent than others, but this is only within the closed system with which group theory always works. This kind of mathematical theory, algebraic group theory, is a field of pure mathematics rather than applied math, and predicts nothing nor describes nothing other than within the confines of its own system. In terms of prediction or estimation, normally more applied fields of mathematics must be used – differential equations, game theory or statistical analyses. Nonetheless the work might be of interest to those rare anthropologists well versed in algebra and less inclined toward ethnography, rare anthropologists indeed considering the current usual requisite ethnographic training for cultural anthropologists.

Lévi-Strauss’s own formula in *Structural Anthropology*, sometimes called his *canonical formula*, has been followed by a rather controversial history among the few mathematicians who have considered it.¹⁵ As the formula stands as printed, it makes no real mathematical sense.

¹⁴ Gisèle de Muer and Alain Gottcheiner, “Prescriptive Kinship Systems, Permutations, Groups and Graphs,” *Mathematical Anthropology and Cultural Theory: An International Journal for the Scientific Study of Culture*, 1(1), Nov 2000, 1-12.

¹⁵ To read about this, a good source is P.Hage & F. Harary’s, *Structural Models in Anthropology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

$$F_x(a) : F_y(b) \cong F_x(b) : F_{a^{-1}}(y)$$

With various distortions some mathematicians have suggested ought to have been used, it might be meaningful. For example altering it to:

$$F_x(a) : F_y(b) \mapsto F_x(b) : F_{a^{-1}}(y)$$

has led Morava¹⁶ to consider, by making several other rather sophisticated mathematical presumptions, that Lévi-Strauss did in fact understand what he was writing. This is based upon some work in higher modern mathematical logic, using adverbs only acquired by mathematicians long since Lévi-Strauss wrote *Structural Anthropology*.¹⁷ I have rather strong doubts that this is the case, that Lévi-Strauss did understand his mathematics to this extent and am not alone in this opinion.¹⁸ The paragraph immediately following his canonical formula is nearly nonsensical mathematically or otherwise in both English and French:

“Here, with two terms, a and b , being given as well as two functions, x and y , of these terms, it is assumed that a relation of equivalence exists between two situations defined respectively by an inversion of *terms* and *relations*, under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the formula above, a and a^{-1}); (2) that an inversion be made between the *function value* and the *term value* of two elements (above, y and a)” (SA, 228)

Even were this formula mathematically valid, the same problem as mentioned above exists, its relevance for anthropologists who by and large do not have the mathematical background to comprehend abstract algebra (as evidenced by Lévi-Strauss himself). Long before Lévi-Strauss and his work with Weil, Malinowski criticized the use of algebra for kinship studies that anthropologists such as Bachofen, Morgan and McLennan were promoting based upon the early initial work on kinship of Rivers:

“A very pertinent question might be asked as to whether we should really get nearer to the family life, the affections and tender cares, or again the dark and mysterious forces which the psychoanalyst banishes into the unconscious but which often break out with dramatic violence – whether we could come nearer to this, the real core of kinship, with the use of mock-algebra ... There is a vast gulf

¹⁶ Jack Morava, “On the Canonical Formula of Lévi-Strauss,” arXiv:math.CT/0306174 v2 11 Jun 2003, 1-6.

¹⁷ Morava, “Canonical Formula,” 5.

¹⁸ See again Hage and Harary.

between the pseudo-mathematical treatment of the too-learned anthropologist and the real life of savages.”¹⁹

It is significant to recall that Malinowski earned a doctorate in physics and mathematics as well as another in science before he became an anthropologist. Malinowski understood the topic, while Lévi-Strauss had no specific mathematics training and misused even the mathematical notation with which he was dealing. Nonetheless, believed that Lévi-Strauss that the use of mathematics was important for the understanding of both myth and the problems of incest and kinship. Freud never included any mathematical reasoning in *Totem and Taboo*.

My own appraisal of Lévi-Strauss’s structural analyses of myths is that the use of linear algebra, and specifically of matrices, an area of mathematics much more commonly used in applied mathematics (whereas abstract algebra such as group theory is rarely used by applied mathematicians) would suit his methodology much better. The matrix-like structure of his analyses, complete with columns of synchronic mythemes and rows of diachronic occurrences suggests a pattern of distinct column vectors aligned together in the form of a matrix. The use of mathematical bases with matrix vectors suggests the conception of the multitude, perhaps infinite, number of variations upon a basic mythic pattern. The mathematics of matrices, complete with transformations and matrix operations likely is the most lucrative direction to proceed from Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis methodology.

One branch of mathematics already utilizing matrix methods which is further used heavily in numerous applications, most especially in economics, is game theory. Furthermore, game theoretical concepts form the foundation for the mathematics of social contract theory. Rousseau, the initial social contract theorist, has recently been interpreted using game theory by Bryan Skyrms.²⁰ Rousseau himself used some basic mathematical reasoning based upon ratios in the third part of his *Social Contract*. It is perhaps not entirely accidental, then, that during his analyses of myths, Lévi-Strauss also treats reasoning in terms of ratios. For example, “Coyote (a carrion eater) is intermediary between herbivorous and carnivorous just as mist between Sky and Earth; as scalp between war and agriculture (scalp is a war crop) as corn smut between wild and cultivated plants” (SA, 225). With Oedipus, he notes how the fourth column of the persistence of the autochthonous origins of humanity relates to the third column of the denial of those origins just as the first column of the overrating of blood relations relates to the second column of the underrating of blood relations (SA, 216). Lévi-Strauss even notes how the logical framework of his canonical formula, which seems to be based upon ratios, is related to what he himself “has called *generalized exchange* in the field of kinship.” (SA, 228 – this term used

¹⁹ Bronislaw Malinowski, “Kinship: Must Kinship be Dehumanized by Mock-Algebra?” *Man*, 30(1), Jan 1930, 20.

²⁰ Bryan Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt and The Evolution of Social Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

several times in *ESK*). Thus between the use of ratios in the structural analysis of myth and my own suggestion of the use of matrix-oriented linear algebra and evolutionary game theory, it is a short inductive leap to recognize that the basis for a kind of social contract theory exists here. Lévi-Strauss's own suggestion that politics has more or less replaced myth in modern society (SA, 209), which I have made a special point of highlighting earlier in this discussion, only serves to reinforce this hypothesis.

Lacan's discussions of *Totem and Taboo* make regular reference to Pascal's wager (*L*, 100, 106, 182) which is a kind of simple game theory model. He also very often refers to the psychological role of the father as a "structural operator" (for example "in the statement of the myth of *Totem and Taboo*, the equivalence between the dead father and *jouissance* [loosely translated as enjoyment] is what we can describe with the term "structural operator": *L*, 123). This is a mathematical term for a matrix transformation, sometimes also referred to as a linear transformation or linear operator. Further, Lacan jokes that "analytic technique can in a certain manner be considered a "game" of interpretation" (*L*, 134), just as a myth is interpretation, perhaps eluding to a kind of game theoretical perspective of probabilities and matrices. All this only further fortifies the idea that the mathematics most suited to Lévi-Strauss's study of myth, and perhaps of kinship, would be linear algebra and game theory more usually used in applied mathematics, especially in economics and social contract theory, rather than the abstract algebra of group theory.

(d) Primitive Thought

Lévi-Strauss is in direct conflict with Freud's *Totem and Taboo* argument upon the issue of the psychological cognition of "primitives." Freud followed the social evolution hypothesis and correlated the development of humanity with the development of individuals, so that less technologically developed societies were exemplary of an earlier stage of human psychic evolution. The primitive possessed magical thinking akin to that of a child or a neurotic. Lévi-Strauss is clear that the thought of cultures is always the same, but simply depends upon the material to which it is applied. Scientific thought and mythic thought are more or less identical means of attempting to overcome a cognitive contradiction. His recognition of Freud's primal parricide hypothesis as myth underscores the fact that such scientific thinking as Freud attempts very often creates myths in order to explain the unfathomable. Freud, according to Lévi-Strauss, has done no more than the savages he studies with the same kind of mythic thought processes in order to explain their behaviour, and that of all humanity.

Of course this kind of reasoning places Lévi-Strauss in the exact place of Freud also – a maker of myths which attempt to explain. Lévi-Strauss's methodology and use of mathematics all have the same ring of mythic thinking that Freud's hypothesis did, especially when it is taken into account that perhaps some of the details of his structural analyses were either arbitrary or mistaken, and

that his use of mathematics was either irrelevant (Weil's work in *ESK*) or entirely erroneous (the canonical formula in *SA*). He was certainly at times aware of this difficulty. Lacan too notes that in general the study of myth "is precisely the field of bullshitting," and links logic and myth in a kind of kinship (*L*, 111). Geertz sheds light on this; he begins his essay on Lévi-Strauss with a quote from his *Tristes Tropiques*: "sometimes I wonder if I was not attracted to anthropology, however unwittingly, by a structural affinity between the civilizations which are its subject matter and my own thought processes. My intelligence is neolithic."²¹ In some sense Lévi-Strauss is telling myths with his methods, interpretations and use of mathematics; Lacan might be included in this structuralist camp as well, however much he is usually considered as post-structuralist. Leader writes how "despite their many differences, there is a current in the work of both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss that constitutes a part of the same, relentless mythic activity."²² The scientific myth is, according to Lévi-Strauss's analysis, a part of all scientific thought, which is really mythic thought applied to different substance. Clifford Geertz asserts that "the civilized thought patterns of modern science and scholarship are specialized productions of our own society. They are secondary, derived, and, though not unuseful, artificial."²³

In line with this, Geertz notes that Lévi-Strauss's primary academic influence was Rousseau. "The philosophical conclusions which for Lévi-Strauss follow from this postulate – that savages can only be understood by re-enacting their thought processes with the debris of their cultures – add up to a technically reconditioned version of Rousseauian moralism."²⁴ The savage mind is essentially logical and rational, not mystical or instinctive, to the same extends to which the civilized mind is rational; the range of application is the only difference. It is important to recognize this heavy influence of Rousseau upon Lévi-Strauss, who credits Rousseau as being the first important anthropologist, "conceiving, willing, and announcing this very ethnology which did not yet exist, placing it first among the already established natural and human sciences."²⁵ Lacan too connects *Totem and Taboo* to Rousseau in a kind of joking manner: "The father of the horde – as if there has ever been the slightest trace of it, this father of the horde. We have seen orangutans."²⁶ (*L*, 112-113) In light of this, Rousseau's own contribution to the study of society and politics in his *Second Discourse* and *Social Contract* will be discussed in the fourth chapter, for ironically, it in many ways resembles Freud's *Totem and Taboo* argument.

²¹ Clifford Geertz, "The Cerebral Savage: On the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 (1973)), 345. Quoted from Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*.

²² Darian Leader, "Lacan's Myths" in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. J.-M. Rabaté, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48.

²³ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 357.

²⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 357.

²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, v2. (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 34.

²⁶ This referring to Rousseau's *Second Discourse* comparison of early humans to orangutans.

4. Consumption and Competition

Lévi-Strauss in fact devotes an entire chapter to Rousseau in his second volume of *Structural Anthropology*, published over ten years later and less influential than the first volume. In this same volume is the analysis of several other myths from various indigenous cultures. In light of the allusion to concerns of consumption that I have highlighted in both the first chapter of this dissertation as well as to both Bataille's articulation of Lévi-Strauss's assessment of the problem of incest, I believe it is important to re-examine some of these analyses. While Lévi-Strauss interprets all of these myths in terms of kinship bonds, just as he did with Oedipus, I will demonstrate how they may be in fact better interpreted in terms of rivalry and competition.

It is not hard to see that the primal horde parricide hypothesis is not entirely about incest. Each of the sons who overthrow the father in order to gain access to the women would only be committing incest with one of those women, their mother (or possibly their sisters); the other women are not necessarily related. In a horde with one man and eight women, for example, each son would have seven women for whom none would be directly related, not including his sisters or half sisters. Incest, for both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, founds neither Oedipus nor the primal horde parricide myth. Bataille also views the problem of incest as one of exchange and might also submerge concerns of incest into those of consumption; it is certainly possible that the Oedipus myth itself has more to do with political rivalry than it does with the desire for incest. The examination of the following myths will demonstrate that very often concerns of kinship have been elicited using Lévi-Strauss's structural interpretation methodology in cases when rivalry and competition might better define those myths. If this is in fact the case, then perhaps Freud's *Totem and Taboo* primal parricide myth also requires reinterpretation.

(a) The Story of Asdiwal

In his second volume of *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss discusses in some detail the indigenous myth of Asdiwal from the Tsimshian Indians of the Northwest Pacific coast of Canada.²⁷ The Tsimshian are divided into four nonlocalized matrilineal clans (SA2, 149), and thus already making Freud's *Totem and Taboo* analysis reducing all prohibitions to Oedipal incest concerns problematic. One group of anthropologists have made investigations and found that Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the Asdiwal myth to be founded upon incorrect ethnographic generalizations (SA2, 149).²⁸

The story begins with a period of famine. A mother and daughter have lost their husbands and lament happier times when love and hunger were both

²⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, v2, 146-197. References here noted as SA2.

²⁸ Thomas, Kronenfeld and Kronenfeld, 1976.

satisfied. They happen to find a single rotten berry which they share. A bird of good omen arrives and the women find food; the daughter has a son named Asdiwal who becomes a mighty hunter with prowess and supernatural weapons. He has several magical adventures, which included encounters with a she-bear, the Sun, visiting the heavens, and hunting and killing wild goats, bears and sea-lions. He has a quarrel with his brothers-in-law over their envy of his hunting success, and they leave him on an island during a storm. Then he is transformed into a bird by his father to save his life. Asdiwal is awoken by a mouse, led into a sea lion home, and helps cure the wounded beasts. After this he is transported back to land in a boat made of the stomach of a sea lion; now he has become a helper of animals, even creating some killer whales. Asdiwal gives up his weapons, is joined by his son and a dog, and is turned to stone. (SA2, 148-152)

Levi-Strauss analyses the myth in a complicated and convoluted fashion, with his usual emphasis upon kinship factors, binary oppositions and levels of development. It has been asserted that his structural analysis is careless and that the “theme of the story of Asdiwal is rivalry, while the basic binary opposition is between competition and cooperation and not between the matriline and the patriline as Levi-Strauss supposes.”²⁹ Levi-Strauss was overly focused on kinship relationships, while ignoring the theme of rivalry. However, the unmistakable theme of the story is hunger which is based upon rivalry and the hunting of animals, as well as the more obvious kinship with animals. Levi-Strauss does take brief note of this: “the man who had killed animals by the hundreds goes this time to heal them and win their love. The bringer of food becomes food, since he is transported in the sea lion’s stomach.” (SA2, 161)

Asdiwal is transformed, punished, and immortalized. He is punished for all his greedy hunting and devouring by being devoured himself. Asdiwal experiences the animal world himself and is transformed, leaving behind is hunting. Seeing the animal perspective no longer allows him to view them as property of the self.³⁰ Note too that the women were only saved when they resorted to sharing and eating vegetable matter – the single rotten berry.

Levi-Strauss highlights the significance of the Tsimshian prime reliance upon salmon, just as was the case with the Kwakiutl, also of the Northwest Pacific coast. In the story “first Asdiwal is in a way fished up by the she-bear who draws him up to heaven; myths often describe grizzly bears as fishing for salmon. Like a salmon, Asdiwal is fished up in a net by the compassionate Sun after he has crashed to the earth. When Asdiwal returns from the kingdom of the sea lions, he travels in one of their stomachs like fish.” (SA2, 171) In fact the entire episode presents the problematic scenario of identifying with what one eats. “The mythical identification hits upon the only real relationship between fish and men: one of food. It persists, even in the myth, as an alternative: either to eat like a

²⁹ Darcee McLaren, *Structuralism and “The Story of Asdiwal.”* (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1990), iii.

³⁰ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*. (London: Everyman, 1996 (1689)), 129: “Meat becomes owned by he who killed it.”

salmon, or to eat salmon.” (SA2, 174-5) A third alternative should be inserted here – to be eaten like a salmon. The bears, birds, whales and sea-lions in the story are prime competitors for salmon with the Tsimshian. This is the importance of competition and rivalry. These species increase the risk that the Tsimshian may have to resort to cannibalism during times of food shortage, and they also have attached to them the fear of being devoured through identification with the salmon. This brings a new meaning to ‘you are what you eat.’ The identification with the primary food source mirrors that of the earliest identification with the breast. Oddly, the Tsimshian use their naked breasts to press the fish to remove excess fish oil, and the men were prohibited from this activity. (SA2, 148)

In perceiving the story in this way, obstacles are surmounted which gave Levi-Strauss difficulty. “The conception of the relation of the myth to reality no doubt limits the use of the former as a documentary source. But it opens the way for other possibilities, for, in abandoning the search for a constantly accurate picture of ethnographic reality in the myth, we gain on occasions, a means of reaching unconscious categories.” (SA2, 173) Of course a myth is more than likely a reflection of both conscious and unconscious motivations; emphasizing one over the other is likely to result in adverse omission. The Tsimshian deal both with the actual real potential for food shortage, the dependence upon the salmon for survival and unconscious repressed images of fragmentation, fears of being devoured which arose during early childhood breast-feeding experience.

(b) The Mandan and Hidatsa

Levi-Strauss also analyzes in this same volume the rituals and myths of two neighbouring Central Plains Amerindian tribes, the Sioux-speaking Mandan and Hidatsa found near North and South Dakota (SA2, 238-255). These tribes lived in a “double seasonal economy” which alternated between periods of agriculture focusing primarily upon corn and a short late summer hunting season centered upon the buffalo (SA2, 241). While the agriculture took place in sedentary villages, the hunting was nomadic and ran in exposed intersecting territories. Thus hunting was associated with warfare “in spatial contiguity and moral affinity, since they are violent types of activity, pregnant with dangers and spilled blood; from this point of view they vary mostly in degree.” (SA2, 241)

During the winter the people of both tribes “seldom went out of their villages, although accumulated food supplies were not sufficient to secure the population against famine.” (241) At this time, most hope rested upon the winter storms driving the buffalo herds close to the villages in the valley so that the men could hunt them without too much danger of exposure. “When the approach of a herd was signalled, a reign of absolute silence was necessary and the police corps watched over the village. People locked themselves in their huts with their dogs; they refrained from cutting wood and extinguished their fires. An overzealous hunter, a careless housekeeper, a child laughing or crying would have been

severely punished.” (SA2, 241) Thus hunting was associated for these peoples with warfare on the one hand, and with starvation and punishment on the other.

The Mandan has a complex “imitation” ceremony spread over a few days during the summer season called *okipa*, which “commemorated mythical events and stimulated the fertility of the buffaloes.” (SA2, 242) They also had the warfare and hunting ritual of the Small Hawk based upon a founding myth of a wild virgin named Corn Silk. Corn Silk left her parents, angry because they reproached her for remaining unmarried, and she travelled to the end of the world to marry an ogre named Small Hawk. He abandoned her with a son Look-Down-to-Hunt who was a hunting master having inherited his father’s bird-of-prey nature. He also rejected his mother’s incestuous advances (SA2, 242).

Look-Down-to-Hunt met two women, Buffalo Cow, a dark-haired woman from the north who brought dried meat and Corn Silk, fair haired like his mother from the south who brought corn patties. Look-Down-to-Hunt married both. Buffalo Cow grew jealous and left with her son. Corn Silk convinced Look-Down-to-Hunt to go after her, and he did, arriving among the buffaloes, his in-laws who tried to destroy him. He overcame them, and obtained the promise that from then on they would serve as food for humans. Though famine was reigning in the village, he brought back buffaloes and fertile rains for the crops (SA2, 243). “There is hardly need to interpret this myth, so explicit is it on all points.” (SA2, 243) The Hidatsa knew of this myth but did not celebrate this ritual (246); in the summer instead they celebrated the well known Sun Dance (SA2, 242).

However, both tribes also celebrated a winter ceremony of the Red Stick which served to draw the buffaloes near, but this ritual was founded upon inverse founding myths.³¹ In the Mandan version, Corn Silk is temperamental and eccentric. She falls into the power of an ogre, escapes, adopts a little girl First Pretty Woman whom she brings back to the village. “The baby proves to be an ogress, personification of famine, who devours all the inhabitants. Helpful buffaloes denounce her, and she is burned at the stake.” (SA2, 244-5) Thereafter the buffaloes come to the village offering themselves as food whenever famine threatens in exchange for women who have been delivered to them (SA2, 245). Thus Corn Silk brings famine into the village.

The Hidatsa version is the reverse. A foolhardy heroine brings famine to the village, and Buffalo Cow, the wise heroine brings the buffaloes in the winter so that the people escape famine (SA2, 245). A third ritual, White Buffalo Cow, celebrated in winter by women in both tribes is based on a myth where two buffalo children are captured, and the female child detained so that the cows come and visit it every winter, bringing the buffalo herd close to the village (SA2, 245). “This girl (the passive cause of the abundance of buffaloes) is thus opposed to the little ogress (who actively manifests their absence as the incarnation of famine) whose buffalo son (frustrating the cannibalistic plans of her family) is the opposite.” (SA2, 245)

³¹ The myths for both rituals have many similarities.

There are many complicated relations here which Levi-Strauss discusses extensively in the chapter. Heavily intertwined are the problems of famine, cannibalism, hunting and agriculture. Also, “summer hunting and warfare afford a double analogy, both by their resemblance and their contiguity.” (SA2, 247) Deaths from war and from buffalo-inflicted injuries possess a similarity explaining “that the Mandan and the Hidatsa conceive war itself as a cannibalistic hunt, in which men become game for the Sun and his sisters, celestial ogres who feed on abandoned corpses.” (SA2, 247)

This is a complex series of myths, and Levi-Strauss is not always exactly clear which myth he is discussing. However, some conclusions he makes are very insightful. The Mandan Small Hawk myth for the summer hunt and warfare and the Hidatsa myth of the Red Stick possess an interesting parallel. “Both refer to a quarrel between the brothers Sun and Moon [not discussed above] either about a Cheyenne cannibal woman who *eats* human beings, or a buffalo woman, representing a species *eaten* by human beings.” (SA2, 248) In all the myths mentioned here, the focus is upon a child, ogre or buffalo, associated with devouring and famine. Also, “Corn Silk each time, having gone to marry an ogre ... either kidnaps her legitimate son to prevent him from becoming a cannibal or adopts a little girl although she is a cannibal.” (SA2, 251) In the Small Hawk myth, Corn Silk is the heroine who is vegetarian, “paired with a cannibal woman who has brothers with the same appetite. The buffaloes of the first myth reverse hunting into warfare, the cannibals of the second reverse warfare into hunting since the enemies are eaten.” (SA2, 251)

A deep and complex relationship between these issues primarily related to hunting, warfare, cannibalism and famine exists among these two neighbouring yet similar cultures. Competition for food where both rely upon hunting the same species creates a worse situation because the prey source is limited and territories overlap. There is no discussion of ritual sacrifice here; however most of the rituals circumnavigate either hunting or warfare or both. The religious myths certainly express the underlying fears of the potential for cannibalism, both of having to resort to it and of falling victim to it. Identification with the buffalo is sharp, and while these people hunt and consume the buffalo, the projected fear of having the same done to them, being consumed by ogres, famine or other people combines with the legitimate fear of being injured or killed during a hunt or warfare, or of dying due to starvation.

Levi-Strauss provides insight into a phylogenetic development might accumulate through the repetition of actual historical acts, somewhat along the lines of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* hypothesis, but in a more pragmatic fashion. “If the customs of neighbouring peoples exhibit symmetrical relations, the cause for it should be sought not only in some mysterious laws of nature or mind. This geometrical perfection also sums up in the present mode the innumerable efforts, more or less conscious, accumulated by history, all aiming in the same direction of a just equilibrium.” (SA2, 255)

Besides these examples, it is also worth mentioning that in the eleventh chapter of the first volume of *Structural Anthropology*, the chapter on “The Structural Study of Myth” discussed above, the two examples of myths analysed by Lévi-Strauss other than Oedipus are the Zuni origins myth and Amerindian trickster imagery (SA, 219-226). In fact both are interpreted by Lévi-Strauss as being concerned with issues surrounding food. The origins myth deals with emergence from the earth, as plants do, and the contradictions between the ingestion of plants and animals, manifesting as agriculture and hunting, or life and death, with themes of war being related to hunting, death and animal ingestion (SA, 221-222). The trickster mythology is dealing the same kinds of issues, the tricksters like coyotes or ravens being carrion eaters and thus ambiguously placed between carnivores and herbivores, hunters and foragers, and death and life (SA, 224-225). Both of these examples given are dealing intensely with issues of consumption and hunting.

It must be noted here that Carroll has also reinterpreted this trickster myth, noting a problem with viewing all tricksters as “carrion-eaters” (SA, 224) when coyotes are only sometimes scavengers, and one of the major North American trickster images is the hare, which eats no meat at all. Instead, he argues that the trickster image is an attempt to overcome the conflict between uncontrolled sexuality and the stability of culture, both of which are desired, but the first presumably leading to the destruction of the second. Thus the trickster “is simultaneously portrayed as a selfish buffoon and as the culture hero who makes human society possible.”³² Thus Carroll, explicitly linking his argument to Freud’s idea of culture presented in *Civilization and its Discontents*,³³ is implicitly leading back to the problems of *Totem and Taboo*. Unrestricted sexuality in its worst and most extreme form, incest, and its link to the potential destruction of society is at the base of the problems which both Freud and Lévi-Strauss investigate. If the trickster myth may be interpreted in terms of eating and hunting or alternatively unrestricted sexuality and the fate of culture, and also the Oedipus myth may be viewed as either dealing with lineage and origins or exchange and consumption, then perhaps these two difficulties, incest and consumption, are more proximally related than has been recognized.

With the addition of rivalry and competition which likely founds the need for those myths – for if there were enough food for all, problems of warfare and hunting would be minimal – it may start to become clear that perhaps these issues are founding the Oedipus myth as well. Rivalry for the mother’s attention and sustenance with the father may well be a significant factor in the experiencing of Oedipus. It is not hard to imagine that Oedipus Rex himself, banished from his home as an infant experienced rivalry first-hand with his own father who feared Oedipus. The return home, the murder of his father and the marriage to his

³² Michael Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss, Freud and the Trickster: a new perspective upon an old problem” *American Ethnologist* 8(2), 1981, 301.

³³ Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss, Freud and the Trickster,” 305.

mother may not have really been a desire for incest but a product of the competition that Oedipus experienced from his father in the first place, a jealous rivalry which impelled Laios to attempt to murder his own son by abandoning him. Certainly Freud's *Totem and Taboo* primal horde parricide variation of the Oedipus myth must also be founded as much on themes of rivalry as it is upon incest, the rivalry of the father for dominance over the lives of his own sons. Perhaps that strong male baboon-father is as afraid of his sons sharing his food and other resources as he is afraid of them sharing his women. In Lacan's discussions of *Totem and Taboo* he makes the link from the primal parricide to the Moses story, via Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, and then to the Golden Calf symbolism (L, 115-116). Clearly this, along with his concurrent discussions of Marxism and equality (L, 92) is indicating the usual symbolic value of the Golden Calf story as a critique of the pursuit of wealth, and of consumption. This will be investigated in more depth in the following chapter.

Somehow, with the method of Lévi-Strauss, there seems to be a problem; in the cases of at least four myths noted in this chapter – Oedipus, the trickster, Asdiwal, and the Central Plains Amerindian hunting myths – it is possible to reach at least two fairly different conclusions. Oedipus could reflect the contradiction concerning autochthonous origins and sexual reproduction, or that between paternal kinship ties and societal structures ultimately founded upon exchange systems. The trickster could imply the problems of eating vegetable matter versus hunting, or the conflict between stable culture and sexual restriction. The other two myths can be interpreted as either about kinship ties or rivalry over food. In all four of these cases, there seems to be two underlying themes, that of sexual reproduction and that of the acquisition of sustenance – and all the variations of trading, exchange and cultural mechanisms which pertain to these two basic fundamental human drives. More importantly, the possibility of multiple interpretations makes dubious the exactitude of Lévi-Strauss's scientific structural analysis of myth.

5. An Old Story

In one of his last works, *The Jealous Potter*,³⁴ Lévi-Strauss has discovered something which Freud never had access to – an actual ethnographic mythic account of a primal parricide. Lévi-Strauss has managed to unearth the mythological folklore of the Jivaro Indians, famous head-hunters who no longer practice their art, on the borders of Ecuador and Peru, at the foot of the Andes on the eastern slopes (*JP*, 14). He asserts that The Jivaro Indians anticipated the primal parricide myth, and their version “offers an even richer and more subtle plot than *Totem and Taboo*.” (*JP*, 185) This offers Lévi-Strauss a chance to critique psychoanalysis, since “all psychoanalysts have done is rediscover categories such as oral and anal character, and the primal horde parricide myth” (*JP*, 185) A version of this Jivaro myth is related in *The Jealous Potter*:

“While his father, Unushi [the Sloth], was away on a long trip, Ahimbi, the Snake, slept with his mother, Mika, the Clay Pot. These two offenders symbolized the male and the female genitals, naturally destined to unite, notwithstanding the social rules that would restrain their freedom. And the patriarch – their father and grandfather – actually banished them. They remained vagrants and had many children. When the deceived husband returned and discovered his misfortune, his wrath was directed not against the offenders but against his own mother, whom he accused of having encouraged their crime. It would be tempting to say that he held her responsible for his own incestuous desire for *her* and that his son’s crime was the enactment of his own secret wish [jealous rivalry]. The offspring of the incestuous couple wanted to avenge their grandmother, so they beheaded their mother’s husband in *Totem and Taboo* style. This triggered a series of conflicts. Mika killed her children, who had murdered her husband; her incestuous son then sided against her, and from that point on, the three camps – the father’s, the mother’s, and the son’s – engaged in a merciless fight. This is how Society came about.” (*JP*, 185-6)

With the discovery of this myth in mind, Lévi-Strauss asserts that psychoanalysis “cannot be credited with uncovering the latent meaning of myths. Myths were its precursors in this. The Jivaro Indians’ theory on the origin of society may well be similar to Freud’s – indeed, they did not wait for him to announce it.” (*JP*, 186) However, this same observation does implicitly credit Freud with being able to understand mythological thought. Lévi-Strauss acknowledges this gift, being able to “think the way myths do” as being a mark of Freud’s greatness (*JP*, 190). And in calling the *Totem and Taboo* parricide hypothesis a *scientific myth*, it is clear that “Freud himself was aware of the affinity between mythic thought and his own.” (*JP*, 191)

³⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, trans. Bénédicte Chorier (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988). Noted as *JP*.

Thus Lévi-Strauss arrives at the essential point of demarcation between psychoanalysis and structural analysis. “Throughout his works, Freud oscillates – and in fact never succeeds in choosing – between two conceptions of the symbol: realist and relative.” (JP, 188) At first Freud seemed attached to the realist conception of symbol, in which each symbol has only one signification. This approach is not different than a “dream book” except in size, and is more or less the direction which Jung partook after Freud. The archetype is more reductive than the realist conception, as *many* symbols can have the same signification.

Much later, Freud experimented with the relative conception of the symbol, which structural analysis also posits. This conception “recognizes that the symbol draws its signification from the context, from the way it relates to other symbols, which themselves, in turn, find their meaning only in relation to it.” (JP, 189) Lévi-Strauss knows that this pursuit came close to his own: “one would thus seek to understand an individual in the way an ethnographer seeks to understand a society.” (JP, 189) However Freud did not spend enough time with this conception, and returned to the realist conception, “hoping to discover an absolute signification for symbols, he seems to have turned more and more to everyday language, etymology, and philology.” (JP, 189)

Thus Freud turned back in order to follow Jung, to demarcate a realist conception of symbols, although mostly Freud lagged behind “in the backwaters of scholarly research and the arduous pursuit of what he called “the original myth.”” (JP, 189) Yet all that Freud eventually did, with *Totem and Taboo*, “was to produce a modern version [of the original myth].” (JP, 189) Freud himself acknowledged his difficulties. “In a letter to Jung about the writing of *Totem and Taboo* ... Freud admitted, “my interest is diminished by the conviction that I am already in possession of the truths I am trying to prove.”” (JP, 190)³⁵ However, as he acknowledges Freud’s gift for mythic thought, Lévi-Strauss does relieve Freud as being unfair to himself. “For example, if a snake takes on both male or a female connotation, Freud recognizes that this does not mean the symbol has two significations; it is simply employed in the inverse sense.” (JP, 190) This is of course where Freud was tripped up – he failed to see that this did not lead back to the realist conception of symbols. “Freud, working in an indirect way, reaches a key notion: that of transformation [inversions, inverting relationships, reversal, turning into the opposite], which is at the root of all his analyses.” (JP, 190) In this strange way, the inversion or reversal became part of much of Freud’s thought, and the primal parricide myth is no different. The death of the horde father is an inversion, a complete reversal of conditions (of leadership) while the same rules are essentially maintained through guilt and self-punishment, and occasionally broken during transgression – the festival, the sacrifice or other liminal ritual practices.

³⁵ Quote from a letter from Freud to Jung in R.F.C. Hull & Ralph Manheim (trans.), *The Freud-Jung Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 472.

This has lead Lévi-Strauss to conclude that “can we consider psychoanalysis as anything more than a branch of comparative anthropology applied to the study of individual minds? Freud himself acknowledged more than once the dependence of psychoanalysis on the social sciences and humanities.” (JP, 192) And for Lévi-Strauss, this leads directly back to Rousseau, whom he believes Freud ought to have considered. “Freud could have propped up his theory better by quoting from chapter three of Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages*: “Figurative language came first; literal meaning was discovered last. Men first spoke only in poetry; it was a long time before they invented reasoning.”” (JP, 192) In poetry, a symbol does not have a single signification, but depends intensely upon the context in which that symbol occurs.

Both Freud and Rousseau were aware, for Lévi-Strauss, that “the metaphorical process is a regression effected by the savage mind, a momentary suppression of the synecdoches that are the operative mode of the domesticated mind.” (JP, 194) However, they also both “saw figurative or metaphorical language as issuing directly from passions and feelings. They failed to see that it is, rather, the primitive apprehension of a global structure of signification – and *that* is an act of the understanding.” (JP, 194) That “primitive” thought is no less understanding than “civilized” thought is the mistake that both Freud and Rousseau have made, and Lévi-Strauss urges that they are similar in this, and that Freud ought to have appealed to Rousseau. This recognition is an important one, there is more similarity between Freud’s reasoning and Rousseau’s than even Lévi-Strauss acknowledges. They are both supreme composers of myth.

Once again in conjunction with the discussion of *Totem and Taboo* Lévi-Strauss enters into conversation with mathematical reasoning. In chapter twelve of *The Jealous Potter* Lévi-Strauss discusses “Myths in the Form of a Klein Bottle,” attempting to categorize a subset of myths which are similarly structured. A *Klein* bottle is a standard mathematical object that is commonly discussed as being distinct, topologically speaking, from both a sphere and a torus. In topology, the mathematics of surfaces, two objects are *homologous* if one can be stretched, compressed, or otherwise distorted into the other without being cut. The definition is intuitive, rather than rigorously analytic. A sphere is homologous with a cube because each could be moulded to become the other, without cutting the surface, if they were made of rubber or some other malleable material. Thus a sphere, and all homologous objects, are designated by a Euler characteristic $\chi = 2$, χ being a topological invariant used to distinguish surfaces:

$$\chi = V - E + F$$

where V is the number of vertices (zero in this case), E is the number of edges (one) and F is the number of faces (one). A *torus* is a tire or donut shaped object, that is, a sphere with a hole cut into it. It has Euler characteristic 0. The Klein bottle, like the sphere, has Euler characteristic 2, although they are not topologically homologous. The Klein bottle is in no way homologous to a torus.

Lévi-Strauss is utilizing the Klein bottle in the tradition of Jacques Lacan. Each has influenced the other. Lévi-Strauss introduced the mathematics of group theory into anthropology, Lacan in turn and in response introduced topology into psychoanalytic philosophy, and Lévi-Strauss then imported that use of topology back into anthropology. In each case, both thinkers are very often discussing either Freud directly or Freudian concepts, attempting to use mathematical tools.

Lévi-Strauss notes of several North and South American myths he has discussed, including the important Jivaro Indian genesis myth, that all “can be described as being ... in the form of a Klein bottle.” (*JP*, 157) This assertion is based on the fact that “the image of the tube or pipe appears in these myths with unequalled frequency.” (*JP*, 157) Here Lévi-Strauss includes the pipes contained in the human alimentary system as well as tools. It must be noted that a simple tube or pipe, such as a blowpipe or smoking pipe which *is* often contained in the myths Lévi-Strauss discusses, is *not* topologically speaking similar to a Klein bottle. Tubes are essentially homologous to the torus, being more or less stretched donuts in shape. A Klein bottle is a tube which merges back into itself – it thus has *two* holes or cuts. A torus, like most tubes and pipes, has only one hole or cut. Lévi-Strauss again botches his mathematical reasoning.

“The notion of a tube or pipe, illustrated in South America by the blowpipe and in North America by the smoking pipe, is the starting point of a transformation in three stages: (1) the hero’s body enters a tube that contains him; (2) a tube formerly contained in the hero’s body emerges from it; (3) the hero’s body becomes a tube – something either goes in or comes out of it. The tube is first extrinsic, then intrinsic, the hero’s body is first contained, then becomes a container. We can represent this in the following formula:

$$F_{\substack{\text{contained} \\ (\text{body})}} : F_{\substack{\text{container} \\ (\text{tube})}} :: F_{\substack{\text{contained} \\ (\text{tube})}} : F_{\substack{\text{body-1} \\ (\text{container})}}$$

In other words, the contained body is to the containing tube as the contained tube is to a container that is no longer a body but is itself a tube.” (*JP*, 162-63) Lévi-Strauss is once again resorting to his “canonical formula,” although there is nothing mathematic being discussed here, the formulaic representation at best a mnemonic for a relationship between concepts. Also, Lévi-Strauss clearly intends the “*body-1*” to represent a kind of inverse, although the correct mathematical terminology would be $body^{-1}$ for inverse. The same mistaken terminology he made in *Structural Anthropology* reappears here, almost thirty years later. There is also no common usage in mathematics of the double colon. Lévi-Strauss does not appear to understand the mathematics he is using, merely making colloquial the symbolism for his own purposes. The illusion is made that the mathematics is modelling the structuralist concepts; however, they do nothing of the sort. At best, they are diagrammatic illustrations which add little to the discussion, already dubious given that the Klein bottle allusion only confounds the main issue that the important myths contain pipe imagery.

6. Lacan's Topology

Surely Lévi-Strauss is attempting with this discussion to align with Lacan, who also discussed topology and the Klein bottle in several lectures, although not always in relation to myth, but mostly with respect to psychoanalytic ideas. With Lévi-Strauss, it seems that merely mentioning the Klein bottle a couple of times, and including a diagram, is enough to allow him and his reviewers to be satisfied with his human topology. Lacan was somewhat more thorough. Lévi-Strauss understands little of his own mathematics other than simple analogous conceptual ideas; Lacan is aware somewhat of deeper representations. Lacan's writings make references to topology by the 1950's, but the first extended and publicly available discussion was from a conference at Johns Hopkins university in 1966, where Lacan was quoted as referring to differential topology:

"The Mobius strip can be considered the basis of an essential inscription at the origin, in the knot which refers to the subject. This goes much further than you think at first, because you can search for the sort of surface able to receive such inscriptions. You can perhaps see that the sphere, that old symbol for totality, is unsuitable. A torus, a Klein bottle, a cross-cut surface, are able to receive such a cut. And this diversity is very important as it explains many things about the structure of a mental disease. If one can symbolize the subject by this fundamental cut, in the same way one can show a cut on the torus corresponds to the neurotic subject, and on a cross-cut surface to another sort of mental disease."³⁶

In mathematical terms, Lacan is here pointing out that the first homology group of the sphere is trivial, while those of the other surfaces are profound, since the sphere has no "cuts" while the others do. This homology is linked with the connectedness or disconnectedness of the surface after one or more cuts. The Mobius surface, like most knots, cannot be cut without altering the surface – the other surfaces may receive such cuts. The mathematics here does have some consistency, although the real question is whether what Lacan discusses is valid for psychoanalysis. How a cut on a surface might represent a neurosis is difficult to see. Lacan hoped to ultimately categorize all neuroses using surface representations (likely an impossible task). However it can be noted that already in 1966 he is discussing the Klein bottle, which Lévi-Strauss goes on to use to represent myth types over twenty years later. Also, the important idea is that Lacan is trying to merge mathematical reasoning with Freudian discourse. In this case it is not the discourse of *Totem and Taboo* to which Lacan refers, although he

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, "Of structure as an in mixing of an otherness prerequisite to any subject whatever," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds. R. Macksey and E. Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 192-93. (article 186-200)

does later use this kind of mathematical discussion in relation to the primal parricide.

This is not to suggest that Lacan is entirely cognizant of his own mathematical statements. Sometimes they are entirely erroneous – for example: “As of our point in time today, there is no theory of knots. There is no mathematical formalization applicable to knots.”³⁷ There is no veracity contained in this statement. The theory of knots was a small field of mathematical topology at the time that Lacan was giving this seminar, and certain invariants such as the Alexander polynomial had already been in use for the formalization of knots for some time. Currently, knot theory has exploded, largely due to applications in physics, and there are a vast number of knot invariants in use now. Lacan has not really understand much about the mathematics he discusses, and any university mathematician would have corrected him upon hearing this statement. A second example should suffice:

“Regarding the locus of the Other ... what does the most recent development in topology allow us to posit? I will posit here the term “compactness.” Nothing is more compact than a fault, assuming that the intersection of everything that is enclosed therein is accepted as existing as over an infinite number of sets, the result being that this intersection implies an infinite number. That is the very definition of compactness.”³⁸

In fact, this is *not* the definition of compact. A compact set is one which is closed and bounded, for example, all the real numbers between 0 and 1, including both endpoints, usually written as [0, 1]. A “fault” would not normally be compact, being an infinite line. There is an infinite number of elements in the closed set [0, 1]; however, Lacan is hardly articulating the concept correctly, let alone explaining exactly what a compact set has to do with the locus of the Other. Lacan, like Lévi-Strauss, abuses his mathematical reasoning.

However, the important observation is that Lacan, as with Lévi-Strauss, is attempting to use mathematical reasoning together with Freudian discourse. This is the case with the primal parricide hypothesis of *Totem and Taboo*, which seems especially interesting for Lacan, as has been noted already. Consider the following statement from Lacan’s seminar: “In the statement of the myth of *Totem and Taboo*, the Freudian myth draws an equivalence between the dead father and *jouissance*. This is what we can describe with the term “structural operator.”” (L, 123) The term *equivalence* has a kind of mathematical sense to it, and the term *structural operator* is borrowed directly from the analysis of linear algebra, an operator being a kind of transformative matrix. Thus a structural operator could be called a structural transformation matrix, a operation which rotates, translates, shears or reflects a given function. Lacan seems to be suggesting that the death of the father is a transformative operation in the primal

³⁷ Jacques Lacan, Seminar XX: *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 1972-1973, Ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 1999(1975)), 129.

³⁸ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 7.

parricide myth, although the mathematical linguistics is not used in any but the simplest literal senses. It might in fact serve to confuse as much as it does illuminate, for most people understand what a transformation is, while few know anything about structural operations and linear algebra.

Lacan also discusses, in this seminar, his various discourses (of the master, analysis, hysteric and university), as well as other ideas, with ratio-like formulations. For example he writes little diagrams in his chapter on the father of the horde such as

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \in \frac{S}{S_1}$$

in order to represent the discourse of the analyst. Consistently throughout this text Lacan resorts to ratios such as this to elucidate his intention. While the diagrams probably do little to aid understanding, the regular use of ratios is not altogether different than what Lévi-Strauss was attempting to do with his canonical formula. It will become clear in the following chapter why this observation is significant, that both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan view the use of ratios as important in connection with *Totem and Taboo*.

Lacan's analysis of the structure of myth in conjunction with discussions of discourse, signifiers, Oedipus and *Totem and Taboo* not only is related to his mathematical reasoning, but importantly provides commentary on Lévi-Strauss's hypotheses. Russell Grigg³⁹ writes that "Lacan initially thought that psychoanalysis could draw upon some of Lévi-Strauss's anthropology of myths, and he engaged in some serious efforts to make use of Lévi-Strauss's work in his own work on individual analytic cases." (RG, 52) However, Lacan began to believe that myth was more related to fantasy than it was to scientific thought, as Lévi-Strauss asserted. The neurotic exhibits obsessions similar to mythic ideation, the obsession "an individual religion of the neurotic" similar to Freud's thesis on religion (RG, 52). Lacan agrees that "at the heart of myth there is a point of impossibility, a "contradiction,"" but believes that science is unlike myth, in that science seeks to uncover this point, while myth generally covers over those points of impossibility (RG, 55). That point is a bit of the real, for Lacan, the kernel of the myth, an impossibility which science attempts to expose, "whereas myth constantly revolves around the impossibility in recurrent attempts at resolving questions that have no answers." (RG, 55-56)

Lévi-Strauss believed that scientific thought and mythic thought are identical, simply working with different tools to reveal contradictions, whereas Lacan returns to Freud's logic on this topic, suggesting that myth is more "primitive," in the primitive sense of the word. Lacan's conclusion, with relation to *Totem and Taboo* and the primal parricide hypothesis, is that "the primal-horde

³⁹ Russell Grigg, "Beyond the Oedipus Complex," in *Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. R. Grigg and Justin Clemens (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Noted as RG.

takes precisely the place of a myth.” (RG, 59) It is Freud’s dream or myth, and for Lacan, attempts to paper over an impossibility, instead of exposing it.

Most important, for the current discussion, is that Lacan believes, according to Grigg, that *Totem and Taboo* and the primal horde parricide has far more to do with socio-political theory than it does the anthropology of religion.

“All four [of Lacan’s] discourses, but particularly the master’s discourse, share a common aim with the myth of the primal horde in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, in that Freud’s work is *as much an attempt to give an account of the social bond that binds people together, along with an account of what segregates them, as it is an account of the origin of religion* [italics mine].” (RG, 59)

Grigg is particular adamant that “one further consideration about Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* should be mentioned.” (RG, 65) He suggests that the reference “to the ideal of acquiring his father’s position, suggests that an answer to the question of how in this myth the incest taboo arises should be sought in terms of an identification with the father, and *not merely in terms of a vaguely sociological theory of a social contract between equals* [italics mine].” (RG, 65) Grigg’s forceful assertion is perhaps indicative of a sore point, a kernel of the real. At the least, he is implicitly recognizing that the incest taboo is related to social contract agreements. Both the incest taboo and social contracts are social bonds which both bind and segregate people. It is perhaps the case that all social contracts are enforced through identification, since it is difficult to define exactly what mutual agreement between equals entails. Perhaps what Grigg is pointing out is that this work of Freud’s, the *Totem and Taboo* story, is in fact a kind of social contract, but one that is not sociological but psychological in nature. Lacanian thinker and translator Jacques-Alain Miller writes that “*Totem and Taboo* is not an anthropological work: it was Freud’s approach to the question of the father in analysis that forced him, for structural reasons, to resort to a mythic elaboration.” Miller asserts that this is the same kind of reason for which Lacan needed to resort to the use of mathematical symbolism.⁴⁰ Thus with Lacan, not only in his use mathematics, so important in the political theory of social contracts, but in his reasoning in relation to the primal horde hypothesis, it seems that the direction that thought pertaining to *Totem and Taboo* is returning, just as with Lévi-Strauss, to Rousseau.

⁴⁰ Jacques-Alain Miller. “Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan,” in *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, eds. Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (New York: Other Press, 2004), 34.

7. Why Bataille?

Besides the clearly related problem of consumption, Georges Bataille deals directly with Lévi-Strauss's answer to the problem of incest in the second volume of *The Accursed Share*.⁴¹ Although Bataille does not directly incorporate the use of mathematics into his analysis, the work is relevant for two important reasons. The main one is that just as is being suggested here, Bataille recognizes that the fundament which underlies the problem of incest is one of consumption. Also, Bataille posits in the first volume of *The Accursed Share* a general economic theory of consumption which is mathematical by nature, although not actually engaging in the application of mathematics. The global analysis of a mathematical system is theoretical, as is Bataille's work, not calculative. In this way he applies correct mathematical reasoning to the problem of consumption, and thus to religion, rather than inviting the rhetorical use of mathematics that thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss and Lacan employ by simply importing mathematical symbols. The following is a synopsis of the work of Bataille on Lévi-Strauss's theory of incest, a direct response to *Totem and Taboo*.

Bataille is struck, as was Freud – and Lévi-Strauss – by “the universal character of the incest prohibition. In one form or another, all of humanity knows it, but the persons targeted by the prohibition change from place to place.” (B2, 30) In reviewing Lévi-Strauss, Bataille does pay brief homage to Freud in opposition to the other explanations for the incest taboo: “Freud's “myth” introduces the most gratuitous set of circumstances, but at least it has the advantage over the sociologist's explanation of [the incest taboo] being an expression of living obsessions.” (B2, 33) Here Bataille refers to Durkheim's hypothesis that the incest taboo being connected to the fear of menstrual blood of the clan women. Bataille quotes Lévi-Strauss about Freud's myth symbolically expressing an ancient, lasting dream, and notices that Freud's theory is thus both the “least vacuous” and yet “the most absurd” of all the hypotheses (B2, 33). Its strength is its quasi-mythological nature (B2, 33). However, Bataille suggests that the reservations of Lévi-Strauss, “while recognizing the breadth of the inquiry, make its failure more painful.” (B2, 34) The problem of incest is not one suited to “inspired conjecture” such as that of Freud so much as to a down-to-earth and rigorous, albeit boring, approach such as the one Lévi-Strauss takes in the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, about two-thirds of which is “a meticulous examination of the multiple combinations imagined.” (B2, 34) Here already Bataille lauds a mathematical approach to the treatment of the problem of incest.

Bataille does seriously question one premise both Freud and Lévi-Strauss posit – that the incest prohibition belies a common desire for incest rather than an instinctive repugnance because otherwise such a prohibition would be

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Vol II&III* (New York: Zone Books, 1999(1976)). Noted as B2.

unnecessary. Bataille writes: “As I see it, explanations of this type are fundamentally mistaken: what needs to be specified is the meaning of a reprobation that does not exist among animals, that must be given historically, that is not simply in the order of things.” (B2, 32) What Bataille does value most in Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of incest is that he “has shown the role of a distributive system of exchange in the archaic institution of marriage. The acquisition of a wife was that of a precious article of wealth, the value of which was even sacred: the distribution of this wealth raised vital problems, which had to be dealt with by rules.” (B2, 37) Thus Bataille is specifying the problem of exchange, distribution and consumption as focal to the problem of incest. Furthermore, he does admit that Freud and Lévi-Strauss were correct to look to aboriginal totemic clan social structure for the solution to the problem: “Apparently an anarchy like that reigning today could not have solved such problems. Only circuits of exchange in which the rights are predetermined can bring about, often poorly no doubt, but rather well on the whole, a balanced distribution of women among the various men to be provided.” (B2, 37) For Bataille, it is also with totemic culture in which the roots of the incest prohibition lie. Specifically he argues for the centrality of an analysis of exchange. The problem of incest for Bataille is fundamentally an economic one. This implicitly suggests the capacity for a mathematical application.

The conclusion that Bataille reaches of the problem of the incest taboo being related to distribution and exchange suggests that what is required is an application of his theory of *Consumption*,⁴² which can be neatly summarized as follows. The comprehension of any local system requires an understanding of the global laws of energy (B1, 20). Thus the life of an animal is interdependent with the energies available to it which emerge from the worldwide reception and production of energy. The same holds true for a political organization.

Bataille believes that all organisms and organizations have an excess of energy available. This surplus is due to the extreme quantity of light and heat being constantly supplied by the sun (B1, 27). This global solar energy becomes routed into all forms of life, whether biological survival or the economic efforts of humanity. And importantly, this “superabundance of biochemical energy” must be expended (B1, 27). Thus a pressure exists everywhere for all life systems, and the effects of this pressure are predictable. The first effect of the pressure to expend energy is the growth of the system (Bataille 31). An individual organism may become larger, a population will extend itself geographically, and a business organization may expand into franchises.

Since growth is always limited by available space, once the limit of growth is attained excess energy must be expended in some other fashion. The second effect of pressure is some form of lavish expenditure of surplus (B1, 32). This excess energy which requires consumption is what Bataille refers to as the

⁴² Georges Bataille, 1991(1967), *The Accursed Share Vol. 1: Consumption* (New York: Zone Books). Noted as B1.

accursed share. It is important to note that with any system some energy loss is necessary; it is only a question of quantity and manner (B1, 31). Since the growth of a system will quickly reach the limits of growth, luxurious expenditures become the norm: “The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.” (B1, 33) The three most natural forms of luxurious consumption are eating, death, and sexual reproduction, none of which is necessary for the existence of life. Many green single-celled organisms sustain themselves by the absorption of sunlight through chlorophyll, and reproduce by mitosis, thus neither truly eating, dying, nor engaging in sexual reproduction (B1, 33). Incest is of course a variation of sexual activity, and thus falls under the category of luxurious consumption for Bataille. “Physically, the sexual act is the gift of an exuberant energy. This is true of its more complex forms, of marriage, and of the laws of distribution of women among men.” (B2, 41) Paul Hegarty notes how Bataille’s *Consumption* hypothesis in fact seems “very close to a system such as Freud’s, wherein the organism seeks homeostasis rather than turbulence – once energy is let off, things can go on as they are supposed to.”⁴³

The real source of the prohibition on incest for Bataille is the adequate distribution of resources – women – to prevent political breakdown. The consumption needs of small groups must be met with consideration for those of other nearby small groups; the global situation is the perspective Bataille demands: “we cannot envisage the tension that is inherent in life in small groups often separated by hostility.” (B2, 39) The exchange of women, as Mauss’s gifts of reciprocal obligation, is a way of relieving this tension without resorting to war.

Bataille adds to Lévi-Strauss’s assertion that in addition to the economic motivation for the institution of marriage, there is the basic problem of eating. “Not only do the man and the woman not have the same technical specialization, and so depend on one another for the making of the objects needed for daily tasks, but they devote themselves to producing different types of food. A complete and above all regular diet thus depends on this veritable “production cooperative” that a household constitutes.” (B2, 45) The poor organization of the exchange of women, for instance without proper prohibitions on incest, results in complete disorder – especially in the domain of diet (B2, 45). Thus Bataille adds to Lévi-Strauss by recognizing not only the alluring value of women, but the material value (B2, 44). And for Bataille, the principles of general economy, or generalized exchange, arise whenever there are more than two groups at stake. His mathematical hypothesis of consumption applies in that the general laws of energy use must be considered when understanding the specific case of marriage and incest. Here Bataille also briefly alludes to Lévi-Strauss’s use of the mathematical group, although confounding the usual sense of the word with the mathematical structure in a way that demonstrates little understanding of abstract algebra (B2, 47).

⁴³ Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), 42.

Thus Bataille discusses mathematics specifically in only a very cursory fashion, but his entire approach is mathematical. “Economic association with a view to reproduction became the dominant aspect of marriage ... Women came to be understood in terms of their fecundity and their labour.” (B2, 49) In particular, issues of food and eating are central to the institution of marriage, which rests upon the prohibition of incest. Bataille’s term for exogamy, the “potlatch of women” or the gift of the coveted object becomes particularly meaningful (B2, 48). Thus as with Lévi-Strauss, “the rules ensuring the sharing out of women as coveted objects ensured the sharing out of women as labour power.” (B2, 49)

There are two important results which Bataille underscores – the relationship of economic-mathematic analysis of marriage relations and the incest prohibition, and the significant connection to the consumption of both energy and actual food. Bataille complains that the work of Lévi-Strauss is a perfected analysis of an isolated aspect of the marriage relation, but one that only very roughly takes the global aspect into account (B2, 51). “Apparently this is owing to the horror of philosophy that dominates the scholarly world.” (B2, 52) The prohibition of incest is at the axis of the transition of animal to human, which involves not only formal states, but the drama in which animal and human opposed one another (B2, 52). Bataille believes that Lévi-Strauss has juxtaposed abstractions by not considering the full ramifications of this transition. In this sense, Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* myth better articulates the nature of this transition – although without the rigour – and it is for this reason that Bataille has previously lauded Freud. It is also apparent that Freud’s myth is also a paradigm for the development of political structure, economics, energy exchange, and consumption which Bataille, clearly in agreement with Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, requires the use of mathematical thinking to comprehend. The mathematics of economics, then, appears to be a more apposite way to deal with the problem of incest and its connection to consumption than either Lacan’s topology or Lévi-Strauss’s abstract algebra. It is also interesting to note with Hegarty how Bataille’s writings in *The Accursed Share* is a kind of return to Rousseau and his “valourizing of a nature that is always lost.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Hegarty, 46.

Conclusions:

“Whatever you may think of Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is difficult to deny that his work has completely revitalized the study of myth.”⁴⁵ Certainly anthropology owes a debt to structuralism, if it is no longer relevant to current ethnographic practices. Lévi-Strauss is notable for the study of myth, his work on kinship, and in particular his reappraisal of the problem of incest.

There are four main points then to highlight from the elucidation of Lévi-Strauss’s response to *Totem and Taboo*. The first is that the primal horde parricide hypothesis is likely not the equivalent of the Oedipus myth. The former is an attempt to explain the current state of society; the latter tries to articulate a common human psychological pattern found in literature and in individuals. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud is procures a kind of political myth, possibly abandoning his psychoanalytic method, in order to comment on the structure of society. The primal horde parricide concerns rivalry and brotherhood, and the structure of institutions such as the totemic clan, more than the individual psyche.

Second, it has become clearer that Freud has neglected aspects of consumption and food dynamics. The centralizing of the Oedipus complex at the expense of that other fundamental human drive has perhaps blinded Freud to what Bataille and to some extent Lévi-Strauss himself have noted are concerns of consumption, exchange and the problems related to rivalry over goods and food.

Third is what Lévi-Strauss makes fairly clear is the connection between mythological and political thought, in contrast with historical thought. The mythic logic used by Freud is the same kind of logic used in the creation of myths by early cultures. Freud’s conception of culture as developing phylogenetically parallel to ontogenetic individual development leads to a vicious circle of reasoning, just as does the use of a myth describing past events to explain the current and future state of a society. This is true in myth, science and politics; thus the distinction between primitive and modern crumbles.

Finally, the recognition of what Lacan calls the kinship between myth and logic leads in the direction Lévi-Strauss already took, and the same one Lacan took later in his career toward mathematics. The use of mathematics for the study of kinship, incest and myth by Lévi-Strauss, and to study the structures of the unconscious mind by Lacan are themselves a kind of mythologizing. Based upon the analysis of Lévi-Strauss’s use of group theory, I have suggested that linear algebra of matrices and game theory would likely be a better form of modelling, one more often taken in matters of applied math, especially in relation to economics and politics. Thus recourse to the politics of social contract theory, notably that of Rousseau, is justified for *Totem and Taboo* in what Lévi-Strauss recognizes as the kinship of myth, math and politics.

⁴⁵ Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss, Freud and the Trickster,” 301.

CHAPTER III: The Eternal Return to Rousseau

Lévi-Strauss believed Rousseau to be the founder of modern ethnology, and of the social sciences in general. It is no coincidence that Freud also made such an impact upon the French anthropologist, for Freud in some ways is a very similar thinker to Rousseau. Neither were scholars, giving both liberty to write what and how they wished. Where Rousseau sees the faculty of self-improvement as the means to achieving higher human states, Freud posits the psychoanalytic method for the liberation from neuroses. Both view humanity as bound in chains more or less of their own making. And both were scientifically minded, wrote myths, revolutionized thought, and ultimately posited comparable social theories.

Rousseau's *Second Discourse* has a mythic structure which in many ways resembles that of *Totem and Taboo*. Both discuss the origins of humanity and society. And both are monkey stories, myths which bracket Darwin at about equal intervals – Rousseau prefiguring Darwin, Freud following. A full analysis of the overall structure of the *Second Discourse* alongside that of *Totem and Taboo* will reveal a structure common to perhaps many scientific myths.

Rousseau focuses far more upon concerns of diet than he does of sexuality in the evolution of humanity. This is the case for many later thinkers, including several anthropologists such as Robertson Smith and Malinowski. Freud seems uniquely alone in his assertion that incest and Oedipus is the prime basis for religion – it is perhaps this which has made him so interesting and yet so controversial. However even contained within *Totem and Taboo* there is evidence that Freud also recognized the importance of diet for early religion, though he generally asserts that the consumption of food is just a function of sexuality.

Paul Roazen perceived *Totem and Taboo* to be a kind of social contract theory, in particular because of its circular nature characteristic of all social contracts. He believed that political theorists ought to have paid more attention to Freud, and the correlation with the *Second Discourse* is the first indication that he was correct. The use of mathematical theory by Lévi-Strauss for kinship and the study of myth, as well as his belief that all myth ought to be viewed as being replaced in modern society by politics, suggests an association between the primal parricide myth, mathematical analysis, and political theory. The mathematics of matrices, linear algebra, and game theory forms the foundation of social contract theory. Since Lévi-Strauss uses matrix-like constructions for myth analysis, it is reasonable to induce that social contract theory is located in many myths such as the explanatory one found in *Totem and Taboo*.

Roazen believes *Totem and Taboo* to be a social contract theory. Lévi-Strauss and many others, mostly French structuralists, have used mathematical reasoning in analysing issues closely related to *Totem and Taboo*. Brian Skyrms asserts that the *Second Discourse* stag hunt game, analysed with the mathematics of game theory, ought to be the paradigm for any social contract. This all leads to the conclusion that Roazen was correct, and is strong evidence that *Totem and Taboo* is in fact a kind of political theoretical document.

1. The Structure of the *Second Discourse*

Lacan is perhaps the only thinker to have recognized the direct parallel between Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and Rousseau's *Second Discourse*. And even Lacan never states this explicitly, but makes comical implicit references that leave little doubt as to his stance upon the matter. In *Beyond the Oedipus Complex*, the second part of his seventeenth seminar *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*,¹ Lacan opens with an introduction to what he labels “the master’s discourse,” which has “its letters of credit in the philosophical tradition.” The important recognition is of the implications for political philosophy of the master’s discourse. “What I mean by this is that it embraces everything, even what thinks of itself as revolutionary, or more exactly as what is romantically called Revolution with a capital R. The master’s discourse accomplishes its own revolution in the other sense of doing a complete circle.” (L, 87)

With his characteristic humour, Lacan is here arguably asserting the primacy of the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, perhaps the father of modern political revolutionary thinking, as well as the founder of the romantic literary tradition. No doubt a product of Rousseau’s thought, Lacan, the first important French psychoanalyst, is attempting to situate Freud within the existing tradition of French philosophy. Lévi-Strauss was also cognizant of the importance of Rousseau for the type of psychoanalytic and anthropological inquiry which Freud undertook in *Totem and Taboo*. Lévi-Strauss credits Rousseau, with his *Discourse on Inequality* in mind, with “conceiving, willing, and announcing this very ethnology which did not yet exist, placing it first among the already established natural and human sciences.” (SA2, 34)

While Rousseau attempts to make a social scientific argument, as with Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, it is not difficult to discern a mythological structure. Lévi-Strauss recognized that “the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science and that the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied.” (SA, 230) Ironically Lévi-Strauss opens his chapter on social structure in *Structural Anthropology* with a quote from Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* in which Rousseau himself admits that: “The investigations we may enter into must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form respecting the formation of the world.” (SA, 110)²

Not surprisingly, this is the same brand of qualification which Freud formulates in *Totem and Taboo* in reference to the primal parricide hypothesis: “The lack of precision in what I have written in the text above, its abbreviation of

¹ Lacan, Seminar XVII as noted in the previous chapter referenced with L.

² Found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, ed., trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1984 (1754)), 78. Page references in this essay are from this work noted with R.

the time factor and the compression of the whole subject matter may be attributed to the reserve necessitated by the nature of the topic. It would be as foolish to aim at exactitude in such questions as it would be unfair to insist upon certainty.” (*TT*, 177n55) Freud even takes care to point the reader to this note in the previous footnote, “as a corrective to the description.” (*TT*, 176n54) It may also be noted that Rousseau too makes reference several times to his “abbreviation of time factors” in the *Second Discourse*. Thus it becomes reasonable to first inquire into the overall structure of that work, which, as described by translator Cranston, “has perhaps been the most influential” of all Rousseau’s writings, giving him acclaim as “the founder of modern social science.” (*R*, 29)

Jacques Derrida labels the modern era the “Age of Rousseau,” and asserts that this age founded upon Rousseau is, “in Western and notably in French thought, the dominant discourse, let us call it “structuralism.””³ (*D*, 99) Derrida emphasizes the fidelity of Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau: “It is already known that Lévi-Strauss feels himself to be in *agreement* with Jean-Jacques, to be his heir at heart and in what might be called theoretical affect. He also often presents himself as Rousseau’s modern disciple; he reads Rousseau as the *founder*, not only the prophet, of modern anthropology.” (105)

By means of example, Derrida ironically chooses to quote Lévi-Strauss’s work *Totemism*, attributing to Rousseau the penetration into “that which opens the possibility of totemism in general,” even before the discovery of totemism through discussions of pity, and metaphor and the essence of language (*D*, 105). Psychoanalysis and structuralism intersect precisely at the juncture of totemism – and where Rousseau penetrated into totemism, Freud has opened the field to a wide audience. In a sense, both Rousseau and Freud gave birth to Lévi-Strauss and structuralism, at least the Freud who followed Rousseau into the investigation of totemism. Freud came at the subject from a different angle than did Rousseau, not through pity and language, but through incest and taboo prohibition. It is these two openings that merge in Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss has also noted, however, at the beginning of *Tristes Tropiques*, his only true masters as Marx and Freud (*D*, 118). In many ways, Freud is the furthest thinker from Rousseau that might be imagined. Derrida’s project of the investigation of language and writing observes that “with this entire system of philosophical kinship and claims of genealogical filiations, not the least surprised might well be Rousseau ... To reconcile Rousseau, Marx and Freud is a difficult task. Is it possible to make them agree among themselves in the systematic rigour of conceptuality?” (*D*, 118) Here Derrida is discussing primarily linguistic philosophy, and includes Marx, going on to discuss mainly how Marx and Rousseau may be reconciled linguistically, but the statement nonetheless is telling. It is possible to reconcile Rousseau and Freud, at least at a certain juncture, that part which lands itself within the anthropological tradition

³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press). Noted as *D*.

that Rousseau has founded, and which specifically pertains to totemism, the possibility of which Rousseau has opened, according to Derrida (*D*, 118). Freud's only real work of anthropology is *Totem and Taboo*, which investigates totemic law and structure. With this investigation, Freud partially removes himself from the psychoanalytic realm and lands directly into the field of Rousseau, the same field in which Lévi-Strauss has based his system. The primal horde parricide hypothesis more resembles Rousseau than does anything else Freud wrote, barring the even more controversial death instinct. It is at this juncture of *Totem and Taboo* that Freud and Rousseau intersect, and may be reconciled.

Rousseau is legendary for his ambivalence. He seems utterly critical of modern society in both his *First* and *Second Discourses*, and yet intimately wed to them. In the *First Discourse* (or the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*) he argues that the arts and sciences have a deleterious effect upon societies, and yet paradoxically he wins a liberal arts essay contest and heavily influences politics, anthropology, philosophy and literature with that essay as well as with a number of his later writings. Rousseau also demonstrates ambivalence toward women. On one hand, he notes the consequences that follow from the dependence of male artistic creators upon the likes and dislikes of their female critics: "Men have sacrificed their taste to the tyrants of their liberty."⁴ Immediately he reverses himself and argues for the benefits of this situation: "I am very far from thinking that this ascendancy of women is in itself an evil. It is a gift given them by nature for the happiness of the human race." Most notably, Rousseau is ambivalent in his discussions which concern diet and the surrounding themes of devouring. The most important of these considerations may be found in *Emile*⁵ and particularly in the *Second Discourse*, which attempts to address the problem of human inequality. Importantly, Rousseau's *Second Discourse* describes the descent from a vegetarian paradise into an increasingly violent and even metaphorically cannibalistic existence, ignited by the addition of meat into the usual primarily frugivorous diet, and then combusted with the advent of agriculture, metallurgy and property ownership. Rousseau's style exhibits a rather mythic structure.

As if to emphasize this fact, the analysis begins with an examination of humanity in "in the first embryo of its species." (*R*, 81) Implicitly suggested is the fundamentally problematic premise akin to the psychoanalytic parallel between ontogenetic development of the individual and the phylogenetic development of humanity that Freud asserts in *Totem and Taboo*. Then almost immediately, Rousseau begins with matters of diet, making the argument that the earliest humans were not hunters. In part this argument is based biological ideas. "Man, having teeth and intestines like the frugivorous animals, should naturally be classified in that category." (*R*, 143nE) Also, he suggests that humans,

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, Ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 (1751, 1754, 1762)), 59. *Social Contract* noted as *SC*.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, tr. A. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979 (1762)), noted as *RE*.

naturally having only one or perhaps two children at a time, should be classed with the herbivores, which also have small litters, usually of one or two young, in comparison to the larger litters of carnivorous animal species (R, 146nH). Here Rousseau criticizes Locke (R, 161-166nL) for ignoring many facts while implying that humans are naturally carnivorous based upon their conjugal period, which is long as are those of other carnivores, rather than short as those of herbivores.⁶ Rousseau appeals to the classical Golden Age myth concerning the “reign of Saturn [Kronos] when the whole earth was still fertile by itself, no man ate flesh but all lived on the fruits and vegetables that grew naturally.” (R, 143nE) Regardless of the veracity of his evidence, Rousseau’s early humans are frugivorous, and also peaceable, since normally only carnivores fight intensely over food (R, 143nE).

In *Emile* Rousseau also argues that humans are by nature vegetarian. “One of the proofs that the taste for meat is not natural to man is the indifference that children have for that kind of food and the preference they all give to vegetable foods such as dairy products, pastry, fruits, etc.” (RE, 153) Rousseau implores that parents not denature their children’s natural taste for vegetable food, which corrupts their character as much as their health. The argument is essentially that all societies which eat meat in large quantities are barbaric, comparing the cruel English with the gentle Zoroastrians. The same argument is found in the *Social Contract* where Rousseau quotes Chardin: “We are carnivorous beasts, wolves, in comparison with the Asiatics ... The closer to the equator we get, the less people have to live on. Hardly any meat, only rice, corn, couscous, millet, cassava are the ordinary foods [grains]. Millions in India live on pennies a day.” (SC, 211) This is as much a political argument as a dietary one – but it is also evolutionary. Yet the point is clear that the vegetarian diet is the desirable one (RE, 153-4).

Rousseau is characteristically ambivalent on this point: “Neither Rousseau nor *Emile* seems in fact to be vegetarian.” (RE, 482n24) Later in both *Emile* and the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau criticizes agriculture. In *Emile* he praises hunting for developing the heart and the body (RE, 320-1, 353). In the *Second Discourse*, during the “golden mean” phase of culture (R, 115), hunting and fishing exist, although agriculture does not. Rousseau’s dietary argument is in part based upon the peacefulness of those cultures which eat little meat, such as the Zoroastrians and the Pythagoreans. Yet in the *First Discourse* Rousseau was highly critical of those cultures which developed peaceful pursuits such as the arts and sciences, and lauds warrior cultures such as the Tartars, the early Romans, the Spartans and the Goths. It is hard to believe that Rousseau is entirely unconscious of all these inconsistencies; one moment he praises the peaceable lotus-eaters, the next the hardened Tartars and men who hunt animals. Rousseau’s ambivalence seems very closely tied to matters of diet.

⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (London: Everyman, 1996 (1689)), 154.

From the anthropological perspective, Rousseau's insight into the early evolution of humans is startlingly accurate, given the time period. "It is one of the earliest and boldest hypotheses regarding the physical transformation of mankind in an age when most arguments about the chain of being remained fundamentally wedded to a belief in the fixity of species."⁷ While Rousseau's theory of evolution was not fully developed, he nonetheless believed that the relation between apes, specifically orang-utans, and humans, was one of genetic continuity. It in fact can be argued that Rousseau truly believed that orang-utans and other primates were early humans, his *savages* (*R*, 154nJ). This is shockingly close to modern ideas of evolution, minus the insight that both apes and humans evolved from an earlier progenitor. Even more interesting are Rousseau's intuitions concerning primate behaviour. Although likely Rousseau had never actually seen an orang-utan, he argues that these primates were solitary and peaceable frugivores. Many naturalists at the time believed just the opposite, that orang-utans were aggressive carnivores, and it wasn't until the 1960s that Rousseau's insights were confirmed. Rousseau truly ought to "occupy a prominent place, not only in the history of speculative anthropology, but in the history of empirical primatology as well."⁸

Rousseau's early human savage is noble – nearly perfect physically and morally. In their natural state, humans possess a natural pity. Rousseau appeals to this in part in defense of his argument against eating meat by procuring empathy for animals: "the mournful lowing of cattle entering a slaughterhouse reveals their feelings in witnessing the horrible spectacle that confronts them." (*R*, 97-8) The savage's senses are acute, prowess is highly developed and resistance to illness is strong. The initial stage is preliterate, nearly devoid of what we might call thought, and the 'savage' mind is filled only with images rather than concepts. This stage of naïve existence, a paradise or Golden Age, is described as remarkably similar to the infancy of the individual, "the original condition in which he would pass his peaceful and innocent days," (*R*, 88) Rousseau himself recognizes a parallel comparison between the early phylogenetic condition of humanity and the beginning ontogenetic stages development of the individual, and he mentions how the "inhabitants of the shores of the Orinoco [engage in] the practice of flattening the foreheads of their infants, and so preserving at least a part of both their imbecility and their original happiness." (*R*, 88-89) For a short while the human infant exists in the innocence of the vegetarian paradise.

At this early evolutionary stage, the only major source of conflict is over food – and the degree of conflict is minimal, according to Rousseau. "A savage may well seize the fruits which another has gathered, seize the game he has killed [once humanity as acquired hunting as a practice], or the cave he is using as his shelter, but how is he ever able to exact obedience." (*R*, 106) Such encounters are brief, since anyone can always find more food or shelter elsewhere in paradise.

⁷ C. Frayling & R. Wokler, "From the Orang-utan to the Vampire: Towards an Anthropology of Rousseau" *Rousseau After Two Hundred Years*, Ed. R.A. Leigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 113.

⁸ Frayling & Wokler, 114.

Physical inequality is unlikely, since all are trained from birth to be fit and capable, and even if some sort of giant human specimen arises, any other individual can more or less avoid him, or quickly make off when the oppressor is distracted. Oppression barely exists, then, and importantly, there is no mention of conflict concerning love and sexuality.

“What advantage would the most favoured draw ... in a state of affairs which permitted almost no relationship between persons? Where there is no love, what would be the use of beauty?” (R, 105) For Rousseau, the early stages of human development entail little passion, nearly no jealousy or conflict over access to sexual gratification, which is primarily ruled by instinct and pleasure, rather than love or beauty. He argues that humans cannot be compared to animals that have mating conflicts in light of the year-round rather than seasonal human female oestrus periods. “One cannot draw any inference about men in the state of nature from the fights that take place among certain animals for the possession of the female.” (R, 104) Any such fights would certainly have caused far less problem than they do with our modern morality, encompassing jealous duels and murders. News of the indigenous peoples found living on the Caribbean Islands⁹ convinces Rousseau that early humans were peaceable concerning love. “The Caribs, who of all peoples existing today have least departed from the state of nature, are precisely the most peaceful in their loves, and the least subject to jealousy, despite their living in the kind of hot climate which always seems to inflame those passions.” (R, 103)

Rousseau describes at this stage no trace of Oedipal conflict. Continuing with the parallel between early humanity and early infancy, Rousseau does not yet recognize any sexual jealousy aimed at the father figure. If humanity existed in any way as Rousseau suggests, no Oedipus complex could possibly exist. In the solitary and idle early state of nature, human fathers would not know their offspring. Mothers would not maintain a relationship much longer than past nursing: “As soon as [children] had the strength to find their own food, they did not hesitate to leave their mother herself; and as there was virtually no way of finding one another again once they had lost sight of each other, they were soon at the stage of not even recognizing one another.” (R, 92) Here Rousseau in a footnote engages in a long and detailed argument against Locke’s assertion that humans have always been social (R, 161-166nL). This part of Rousseau’s understanding of early humans is difficult to accept, and the most contrary to modern scientific evidence. It is now largely presumed that humans, as are most higher primates other than orang-utans, are predominantly social rather than individualistic. Nonetheless, interpreting Rousseau as literary myth rather than scientific fact, if the structure of Rousseau’s myth mirrors the structure of the unconscious mind as Levi-Strauss argues, then Rousseau subverts the importance of the Oedipus complex in the development of the individual by analogy with the development of the human species. Oedipal anxiety develops only for Rousseau

⁹ “Caribs,” from which it has been hypothesized the term *canib*, or ‘cannibal’, has originated.

at the same time as does language – within “the domestic relationships of fathers, mothers and children.” (R, 92) In this sense Rousseau is in line with Lacan, who also links Oedipus to the development of language. Prior to language, for Rousseau, in the solitary state of humanity, and the egoistic state of infancy for individuals, there is no Oedipal complex. The only conflicts experienced at that stage concern self-preservation, revolving primarily around eating.

As the *Second Discourse* progresses human conflict escalates in reaction to concerns about consumption. In the original natural state, Rousseau has “proved that inequality is hardly perceived,” (R, 106) and concludes that “man’s first feeling was that of his existence, his first concern was that of his preservation.” (R, 109) Sex at this stage is an impulse “devoid of sentiment of the heart ... a purely animal act” (R, 109). This can only imply a pre-Oedipal condition. It is competition for food and growing numbers of humans which force early humans to seek other types of food and other geographic locations in which the primary natural human diet of fruit is impossible.

The first response to new kinds of food other than simple fruits is the development of technology; weapons and fire, for hunting and cooking. These initial changes remained fairly innocuous for humanity. Rousseau maintains that the early stages of hunter-gathering might have been the best for humanity. “The *golden mean* between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our own pride must have been the happiest and the most lasting.” (R, 115) While humans were somewhat weaker and their natural pity diluted, the development of other faculties which allowed for more diversity of diet and more protection balanced those deficits (R, 115).

This state was Rousseau’s Golden Age; however “those first initial slow developments finally enabled men to make more rapid ones.” (R, 112) Implicitly here is that the move away from the natural frugivorous diet was responsible for the current “decrepitude of the [human] species.” (R, 115) It was these later developments which fully corrupted human nature, notably, the twin arts of metallurgy and agriculture (“iron and wheat”), accompanied by the private ownership of land (R, 114). Of course, this is a precursor to Marxist ideology, but the problem of possession and ownership arises mainly as a result of changes in dietary practice. The demon here is the introduction of commodity, ownership of possessions and land – “the first yoke ... and the first source of evils” (R, 113) – but that demon was conceived in the initial fall from a solitary frugivorous existence. The primary corruption of human nature coincides with radical developments in patterns of consumption of both food and goods.

The peace-loving and vegetarian early hominid is analogous to the placid infant who eats no flesh, and kills no beast, but consumes only the milk of its mother – a naturally vegetarian diet. The fruit of the tree for the species is the fruit of the breast for the infant who later departs to a more omnivorous menu. Comparing the mythological structure of Rousseau’s argument with the ontogenetic development of individuals, the pattern of the fall from the vegetarian Golden Age is a paradigm for the transition from breastfeeding to eating solid

foods. In one passage in *Emile* Rousseau remarks specifically on the relation of meat-eating and breast-feeding. “Milk, although developed in the body of an animal, is a vegetable substance.” (RE, 58) Rousseau argues this point from several angles here, and he also asserts that it is healthier for a nursing woman to eat a primarily meatless diet – children nursed by women who eat meat are more prone to colic and worms. “Vegetarian food, far from constipating the nurse, will provide her with milk in abundance and of better quality. Is it possible that the vegetable diet being recognized as best for the child, the animal diet is the best for the nurse? There is something contradictory in that.” (RE, 58-9) The stage at which meat contaminates an individual may well be prior to weaning. The fall from paradise is intimately tied to issues of breast-feeding.

Prior to weaning is the state of fragmented vegetarianism for the human species and for the individual human. Only with the transition to hunting, eating meat, and the rapid escalation toward agriculture and concomitant social living does Oedipal jealousy rear its head. “A tender and sweet sentiment [conjugal and paternal love – R, 112] insinuates itself into the soul, and the least obstacle becomes an inflamed fury; jealousy awakens with love, and the gentlest of passions receives the sacrifice of human blood.” (R, 114) Other human failings – punishment, contempt, vengefulness, shame, envy, vanity and scorn coincide with this development – as “men become bloodthirsty and cruel.” (R, 114) Along with these speech and thought develop in tandem with the move from individual solitary life to unified society, instigated by the nutritional revolution.

“Men who had previously been wandering around [individually] in the woods, having once adopted a fixed settlement, come gradually together, unite in different groups ... through having a common way of living and eating.” (R, 113) The move from fragmentation to unification is a response to consumption behaviour, but the unification is corrupt. Repressed beneath the image of a unified body exist images of a dismembered body, the presence of which Lacan spent the better part of his early career attempting to demonstrate. Lacan argued that the fragmentation fantasy is found beneath the more classical psychoanalytic complexes, primarily the castration-Oedipus fantasy.¹⁰

The mirror stage transition intertwines consumption and violence. The development of political societies, a fairly direct result of the move to agriculture, leads to “wars between nations, battles, murders, reprisals which make nature tremble and offend reason, and all those horrible prejudices which count the honour of shedding human blood a virtue.” (R, 123) At this point, Rousseau’s language becomes apocalyptic and possesses a paranoid cast, with regular use of sacrifice and dismemberment vocabulary. Cannibal metaphor is instilled: “The rich ... dreamed of subjugating and enslaving their neighbours; like those ravenous wolves, which having once tasted human flesh, refuse all other nourishment and desire thenceforth only to devour men.” (R, 120) In the *Social*

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage, Source of the I-Function as shown by Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977 (1949)), 11.

Contract there is similar language: “We have mankind divided like herds of cattle, each of which has a master, who looks after it in order to devour it.” (SC, 157)

The last line of Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* is emphatic. “It is contrary to the law of nature that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities.” (R, 137) The fragmentation scenario and the fear of being consumed oneself are directly associated. His final “unity” is disorganized and corrupt, concealing repressed fears and desires of devouring, and images of bodily dismemberment. This is the case until the redeeming and better known *Social Contract*, which begins where the *Second Discourse* left off, and where Rousseau provides a resolution for the fragmentation complex by presenting a new schema for a unified and reorganized body politic. However, what Rousseau has in mind “was by no means a law of history but a reward for those virtuous to escape corruption and strong enough to lead other men down the path of renewal.”¹¹ There is thus an implicit theme of transformation contained within the mythic structure of the *Second Discourse*, described explicitly as the uniquely human *faculty of self-improvement* (R, 88).

Intertwined within Rousseau’s language of ambivalence and paranoia are concerns about devouring, being devoured, eating meat, and images of fragmentation. It oscillates from paranoid apocalyptic imagery to ingenious insight and back again. When his arguments are combined with a more broad structural analysis of his writings a brilliant psychological analysis is obtained which reveals a great deal about human nature. The eloquence of his writing is deceptive, and as with Freud, makes for what appears to be easy comprehension. Yet hidden beneath the basic argument is a much broader psychological philosophy, one which includes a descriptive portrait of the complex relation of meat-eating, fragmentation, sacrifice and fears of being devoured.

Importantly for this discussion then is that Rousseau begins the *Second Discourse* with the same premise of *Totem and Taboo* – that the phylogenetic development of humanity parallels the ontogenetic development of individual humans. Yet Rousseau obtains through argument the opposite result of *Totem and Taboo*. For Rousseau, humanity is degenerating, becoming worse and more corrupt, as are individual humans. For Freud, society is improving, gradually pulling itself out of a lower level of consciousness and moving away from magic and religion toward scientific and rational thought.

¹¹ Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988(1971)), 302.

2. The Other Taboo

Freud's writings regularly circumnavigate the problem of consumption, although his obsession with Oedipus generally leads him to ignore or trivialize the issue. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud focuses primarily upon the incest taboo, viewing the taboo against eating the totemic animal as an extension. He relates the primal horde parricide to provide impetus for the notion that the memory of the deceased father eventually becomes deified, first in the form of the totem animal, and later in the form of the god. The ambivalence toward the totem animal, revering and yet wanting to kill and eat it – as evidenced by the charge attached to the taboo – is the ambivalence toward the father.

In his haste to centralize the Oedipus complex, Freud cites as evidence the case of children's animal phobias (*TT*, 164-71). Such phobias are the displacement of the fear of the father onto some animal species, and are usually found in boys. The ambivalence of the relation is demonstrated by the fact that while the child fears the animal, he often also reveres it, even imitating and admiring it. Thus by comparison with the young child and the "primitive cannibal" Freud reasons that the taboo attached to the totemic animal has essentially the same origin. By this reasoning, the totem animal being a substitute for the father, "the two commandments of totemism, the two taboo rules which constitute its nucleus ... agree in context with the two crimes of Oedipus, who slew his father and took his mother to wife." (*TT*, 171) These two crimes are the child's two primal wishes, which when insufficiently repressed or reawakened, lead to all neuroses.

While it is logical to assert that incest taboos are founded upon Oedipal anxiety, it is not directly obvious with eating taboos. While Freud criticizes thinkers such as Reinach for placing too much emphasis upon the eating taboo and ignoring the incest taboo (*TT*, 132), Freud does nearly the opposite in reducing both the primary totemic taboos to the singular Oedipus complex. Nonetheless his own ambivalence on the issue is made known by his praise for Robertson Smith: "But we shall follow Robertson Smith in the assumption that sacramental killing and the common consumption of the otherwise forbidden totem animal was an important trait of the totem religion." (*TT*, 180)¹²

In drawing the connection between the eating taboo and children's animal phobias, Freud admits that the latter "have not yet been made the object of careful analytic investigation, although they very much merit it. The difficulties of analysing children of so tender an age have probably been the motive of such neglect." (*TT*, 165) Freud is clear that his conclusions are based upon a very few cases because of this problem, and he illustrates three of the best known cases, where children have manifested phobias of dogs, horses or chickens. "In every

¹² Freud notes his awareness of the objections of thinkers such as Hubert and Mauss to the general extension of this idea to the theory of sacrifice as a whole, but he suggests that they have not impaired in an essential way the theory of Robertson Smith. (*TT*, 180n74)

case it was the same: the fear at bottom was [the displaced fear] of the father.” (*TT*, 165) However, this is not at all obvious from his presentations, and he makes rather startling inductive leaps in the analyses.

The first case is of a boy of four who runs up to a dog on the street and weeps, crying “‘Dear dog, don’t touch me, I will be good.’” (*TT*, 166) This is interpreted as implying that the boy is promising not to masturbate, which had apparently been forbidden by his father.¹³ The connection appears to be a rather loose one, but Freud continues to extend the reasoning to the widespread fears of mice and rats (*TT*, 166). In the second case, a five-year-old boy manifests a phobia of horses, and refused to go on the street. “He expressed apprehension that the horse would come into the room and bite him.” (*TT*, 167) This is interpreted as fear of being punished for wanting the horse – which contained the image of the father – to die. A little later the boy identifies himself with horses, acting like one by jumping around and biting the father. While there may be some Oedipal anxiety present here, the more straightforward association is the one between biting and the animal. The third case is similar, where a boy of two is afraid of chickens after having one snap at his penis while he tried to urinate into a coop. While the circumstance might lead to the implication of castration fears, it is possible the same problem would have arisen if the chicken tried to bite a finger – the general problem being the fear of being bitten. As the child matured, by five he became the hunter rather than the prey, just as in the previous case study: “He loved best to play killing chickens. The slaughtering of poultry was quite a festival for him. He could dance around the animals’ bodies for hours at a time in a state of intense excitement.” (*TT*, 169)¹⁴

Before these three cases Freud also notes one where a child who is afraid of wasps because their colouring resembles that of a tiger “of which, from all that it [the child] had heard, it might well be afraid.” (*TT*, 165) Of course the child could be displacing fear of the father onto the tiger; on the other hand, it might simply be afraid of being bitten or eaten. Although not mentioned explicitly, this reasoning could believably be extended to the first case of the dog phobia – and that of the rodents – where the boy simply wants to be good so that he will not be bitten. The conclusion that animal phobias are displacements of Oedipal fears of the father is not at all direct. The more obvious and parsimonious induction is that these young children are afraid of being bitten or eaten.

Ambivalence manifests itself very often as a period of lamentation and bewailing over the murdered animal – “with the purpose of exculpating oneself from responsibility for the slaying” – followed by a holiday feast celebration (*TT*, 181). Freud however continually insists that the ambivalence is necessarily that displaced from the ambivalence toward the father (*TT*, 182). Here he inserts his famous phylogenetic primal horde hypothesis, incorporating the Darwinian notion of the patriarchal horde where a single jealous male keeps, ‘baboon style’, all the

¹³ It is unclear here whether this is actually true or inferred (*TT*, 166).

¹⁴ Note, this is partly a quote from Ferenczi found in Freud (*TT*, 169n64).

females for himself while driving away any sons. Since this has never actually been observed, “the most primitive organization we know ... is founded on matriarchy,” (*TT*, 183) Freud presents the Oedipal scenario as what must have transpired: “One day the expelled brothers joined forces and slew *and ate* the father and put an end to the primal horde ... *Of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim* [italics mine].” (*TT*, 183) After this act the totem animal was adopted as a substitute or surrogate for the father, allowing for the assuaging of guilt while glossing over the real state of affairs. “The totem feast is the celebration, repetition, commemoration of this act out of which originated social organization, morality and religion.” (*TT*, 183) Later the totem is transformed into human deity, who very often has sacred animals or the ability to take on animal form (*TT*, 190), and thus the totem feast evolves into the religious sacrificial feast honouring the deity.

There are two major problems here. One is just why it is these brothers might have eaten their father, when it is clear that simply killing him would have sufficed for their main purpose – access to females. Freud only discusses cannibalism in a minor passage in *Totem and Taboo* where he bases its motivations upon the oral incorporation of desirable traits (*TT*, 107). The sons may have wished to incorporate the father’s strength by eating him. But oral incorporation is very often a *conscious* motivation for cannibalism, and Freud gives little to no *unconscious* motivation for the act. His hypothesis seeks to account for both the totemic taboos simultaneously; the eating taboo, if based upon the Oedipal guilt, can only be explained given the cannibal hypothesis which has no other motivation or reason for being introduced.

An even more difficult problem is that of the supposedly prior, in evolutionary terms, patriarchal totemic clan – Freud himself acknowledges that this (at the time Freud was writing) has never been observed. Clans are normally matrilineal. He suggests that the brothers, once having overthrown the father, must erect the incest taboo in order to assuage their guilt over the murder – denying themselves the very thing they sought, access to the females. This is also for practical considerations, since none of the brothers is strong enough alone to take the father’s place, and for them to leave in peace together they must instil the exogamy condition. At this juncture Freud again elevates the status and value of the incest taboo above that of the eating taboo in the formation of the totemic religion, because the former has practical (as well as emotional) foundations, while the latter has merely emotional motives (*TT*, 185). It is here that Freud asserts that “the germ of mother right matrilineal society must have arisen from this.” (*TT*, 186) This, however, did not and continues to not match with anthropological evidence. “In this evolution I am at a loss to explain the place of the great maternal deities who perhaps everywhere preceded the paternal deities.” (*TT*, 192) It makes little sense why a totem erected in memorial for the murder of the father, supposedly arising from paternally-ruled clans, would be moulded into a female deity. For some reason, although he acknowledges it, the problem does

concern Freud. He suggests that the change to paternal deities was mirrored in social organization by a move from matriarchal to patriarchal society (*TT*, 192).

Just as appears to be the case culturally in social structure and religious worship, for most individuals the maternal relationship is necessarily prior to the paternal. Lacan notes how strange it is that Freud continually elevates the latter:

“Concerning the father one thinks one is obliged to begin with childhood, with identifications, and then it’s something that can tend toward extraordinary nonsense, a strange contradiction. One will speak about primary identification as what binds the child to the mother, and indeed this seems self-evident. However, if we refer to Freud’s 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*,¹⁵ it is quite precisely the identification with the father that is given as primary. Freud indicates there that, completely primordially, the father happens to be the one who presides over the very first identification, precisely in that in a privileged way he is the one who deserves to be loved. This is very odd, and is to be placed in contradiction with everything that the development of analytic experience is found to have established concerning the primacy of the child’s relationship with the mother. There is an odd discordance between Freudian discourse [discourse of the master] and the discourse of psychoanalysts.” (*L*, 88)

It would further not be shocking to find a connection between the totemic eating taboo, sacrificial feasts, and breast-feeding. Freud’s neglect of the importance of the mother relationship has led to him overlook some important points concerning breast-feeding, although he does often refer to the issue.

“A child’s first erotic object is the mother’s breast that nourishes it; love has its origin in attachment to the satisfied need for nourishment. There is no doubt that, to begin with, the child does not distinguish between the breast and its own body; when the breast has to be separated from the body and shifted to the *outside* because the child finds it so often absent, it carries with it as an *object* a part of the original narcissistic libidinal cathexis. This first object is later completed into the person of the child’s mother, who not only nourishes it but also looks after it and thus arouses in it a number of other physical sensations, pleasurable and unpleasurable ... In all this the phylogenetic foundation has so much the upper hand over personal accidental experience that it makes no difference whether a child has really sucked at the breast or has been brought up on the bottle and never enjoyed the tenderness of a mother’s care.”¹⁶

The suggestion that love is connected to nourishment here is typically Freudian, placing sexuality at the oral stage of development. It is not necessary, however, to view these two as identical, and it even contradicts Freud’s own observation of Schiller’s poem that the two mechanisms holding the world together are ‘hunger and love.’ The Harlow monkey experiments demonstrated

¹⁵ [as well as most of Freud’s works, mainly *Totem and Taboo* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* before 1921, and *Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Moses and Monotheism* after 1921]

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, “An Example of Psychoanalytic Work,” *An Outline of Psychoanalysis, The Complete Psychological Works, Standard Edition*, vol. 23 (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), 188-9.

sharply that hunger is most definitely *not* love, as infant monkeys raised with only nourishment but no physical contact quickly withdrew and died. What Freud usually calls the oral phase of libidinal development might be rather an entirely different development of the ego-drives.

Note that originally the body of the child is not distinct in its own consciousness from its mother, in particular from her breast. This leads to the conclusion that at this early pre-Oedipal phase that the repressed imagos of dismemberment which Lacan has hypothesized would also contain images of the mother, or at the very least of her breasts.

“At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother’s breast and is the prototype of an object-choice; the boy deals with the father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side-by-side, until the boy’s sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates.”¹⁷

Allowing for the removal of the sexual elements from the early stage relationship, Freud himself acknowledges that at this pre-Oedipal stage there exists images of the mother and her breasts within the infant’s psyche. At the early stages these are not distinguished from images of the child’s own body. The Lacanian phantasies of dismemberment almost definitely would contain images of the mother, also fragmentary and often of just the breast, as well as early recollections of the infant breast-feeding.

Freud generally believed that in the normal Oedipus development “an ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy.”¹⁸ His development of Oedipus in girls was never entirely clarified, Freud changing his view on this regularly and fairly drastically. However, it is difficult to imagine for either gender how there could not possibly arise some ambivalence toward the mother during the pre-Oedipal breast-feeding stages. This was precisely the conclusion reached Freudian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein:

“Throughout my work I have attributed fundamental importance to the infant’s first object relation – the relation to the mother’s breast and to the mother ... Under the dominance of oral impulses, the breast is instinctively felt to be the source of nourishment and therefore, in a deeper sense, of life itself ... An element of frustration by the breast is bound to enter into the infant’s earliest relation to it, because even a happy feeding situation cannot altogether replace the pre-natal unity with the mother.”¹⁹

Klein, one of the few psychoanalysts in agreement with Freud on the death drive, asserts that this infantile dilemma serves to reinforce the ambivalence of the love and death drives, although here could easily be substituted the drives for love

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: Norton, 1962 (1923)), 21-22.

¹⁸ Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 22.

¹⁹ Melanie Klein, “Envy and Gratitude,” *Envy and Gratitude and other works*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1980 (1953)), 178-9.

and hunger. Hunger creates the need for the milk; love is the affection felt toward the mother. The desire to harm, usually by biting, the breast or the mother is experienced at a very early and quite arguably pre-Oedipal stage. At early stages the breast and the mother are experienced as the self. The self is then experienced as both the attacker and the attacked, and the paranoid perspective manifests: “I have described the importance of the earliest internalized persecutory object – the retaliating, devouring and poisonous breast.”²⁰

At the time of writing *Totem and Taboo*, Freud had not yet fully introduced the death instinct other than briefly alluding to a death wish in his analysis of animism. However, there is already an indication of an association between the totemic animal taboo and death: “According to Frazer the best example of the sacramental consumption of the otherwise forbidden totem is to be found among the Bini of West Africa, in connection with the burial ceremony of this tribe.” (TT, 180) Freud arrived at the concept of the death instinct by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, then detailed it more carefully in *Civilization and its Discontents*. He relates in the latter how his “first clue came from a proposition by the poet-philosopher Schiller, to the effect that the mechanism of the world was held together by *hunger and love*.”²¹ Love functions to preserve the species and hunger functions to preserve the individual. At this stage of his articulation of dual drive theory, the two drives map directly onto the two primary totemic prohibitions against marrying within the clan and eating the totemic animal.

Of course death and eating are intimately tied; the second taboo prohibits both eating and killing the totem. After first recognizing the drives as love and hunger, Freud’s theory evolved into love and death. The important point here is that Freud has underscored the incest taboo, and the Oedipus complex, as being at the foundation of the institution of totemism and ultimately at that of religion. This is in spite of the fact that there is much evidence even within *Totem and Taboo* itself suggesting that the eating taboos are just as, if not more, foundational.

Malinowski adopts Freudian concepts such as ambivalence and projection but argues that in fact dietary concerns are more significant factors in the religious behaviour of totemic cultures. In *Magic, Science and Religion* he responds to the psychoanalytic view of religion. Malinowski agrees with the “hunger and love” formulation: “Propagation and nutrition stand first and foremost among the vital concerns of man. Their relation to religious belief and practice has been often recognized and even over-emphasized.” (M, 23-24)²² However he disagrees with Freud. “Especially sex has been, from some older writers up to the psychoanalytic school, frequently regarded as the main source of religion. In fact, however, it plays an astonishingly insignificant part in religion.” (M, 24)

²⁰ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 231.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2004 (1930)), 68. The Schiller poem is entitled *Die Weltweisen* or *The Philosopher*: “Hunger and love are what move the world ...”

²² Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic Science and Religion and Other Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1954(1948)). References noted as M.

Malinowski argues this on the basis that although sex is often involved in certain magical practices, “contrary to what one would expect, in savagery sexual cults play an insignificant role.” (*M*, 24) However nutrition is a much bigger part of the life of indigenous cultures, with hunts, feasts, sacrifices, sacraments, ceremonies and communions. This is because “to the primitive man, never, even under the best conditions, quite free from the threat of starvation, abundance of food is a primary condition of life.” (*M*, 25)

On the subject of totemism Malinowski almost entirely focuses upon eating taboos. “Food is the primary link between the primitive and providence.” (*M*, 26) The primitive experiences ambivalence toward what is eaten, fear and admiration toward larger animals, and a simultaneous gratefulness and the necessity for destruction toward all life forms that are depended upon for consumption (*M*, 28-29). The survival value then of a strong interest in certain species and a belief in the capacity to control those species “should give him strength and endurance in his pursuits and stimulate his observation and knowledge of the habits and natures of animals and plants. Totemism appears thus as a blessing bestowed by religion on primitive man’s efforts in dealing with his useful surroundings, upon his “struggle for existence.”” (*M*, 29) The totemic system and food taboos for Malinowski are an adaptive survival response. He is in line with Rousseau in locating eating behaviour at the root of human culture.

At the same time Malinowski has avoided in this discussion the problem of incest. If Freud has overemphasized sex at the expense of eating, then Malinowski and even Rousseau, have perhaps done the reverse. Nonetheless, Malinowski is among the majority of thinkers who centralize concerns of eating as primary; based upon the argument above, even most psychoanalysts would centralize the mother relation, and the necessary focus upon feeding, over Oedipal concerns which arise with the introduction of the father relation. Even Lévi-Strauss ultimately reduces the problem of incest to one of the economic exchange of goods, foodstuffs most certainly having been the first item of such exchanges.

3. Structural Comparison of the *Second Discourse* and the Primal Parricide

FREUD father has all women and resources for himself – otherwise peace reigns (unhappy sons can always leave and find other women) (<i>gorillas</i>)	Brothers expelled join forces and kill and eat the father	Totemic animal with feast to commemorate, Sexual liberation	erect incest prohibitions the current state of Oedipal neurosis, compulsion, (superego) guilt and self-punishment	Oedipus Tyrannos Rex = swollen foot tyrant king (pun: <i>Oidipus</i> = I know, hubris, swollen pride) Prideful tyrant king; superego
ROUSSEAU Everyone solitary and peaceful, compassionate fruit-eaters (<i>orangutans</i>)	Individuals join forces, claim property, and ‘kill and devour’ each other	greed and aggression law of the strongest	the voluntary establishment of tyranny, Societal customs and political laws inequality corruption; obedience and loyalty to the tyrant	tyrant king Tyrannos Rex (tyrannosaurus rex = wolfish society, fierce meat-eaters) also prideful ²³
State of nature stable structure <i>stability but some barrier or conundrum</i>	death, cannibalism <i>violence and instability</i>	desire, indulgence <i>transgression, enjoyment</i>	law, injustice prohibition <i>guilt, self-punishment</i>	Lacan’s “structural operator” the prideful tyrant death-drive

Here I have tried to stay true to the basics of the story, without making the kind of startling inductive leaps which marked Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of Oedipus, such as arriving at autochthonous origins from the comparison of slaying monsters and being unable to walk properly.²⁴

²³ “It is no easy matter to reduce to obedience the man who does not wish to command.” (R, 132)

²⁴ “There is little basis for the claim that the Oedipus myth is concerned with the affirmation/denial of man’s autochthonous origins.” Carroll, “Lévi-Strauss on the Oedipus Myth,” 11.

In the first column, the beginning stages of each of the myths of Oedipus, the primal horde and Rousseau's myth, there is a relative condition of peace or at least some form of stability. However in each case there is a problem or barrier to happiness. With Oedipus, he hears of the prophesy that he is to kill his father and marry his mother, and believing that King Polybus and the Queen are his parents he leaves so as not to harm them. With Rousseau, the early humanoids are peaceful and solitary, but fairly vulnerable individually to the elements and to nature. Freud's *Totem and Taboo* myth begins also with a stable situation, a structured society, which is fine until the sons reach maturity and experience sexual desire. All three cases are stable until some problem arises. In Lévi-Strauss's terms this column might be referred to as the *overvaluation* of order.

In the second column is the act of violence. This act is not early; it happens after some time in all three situations. Murder is the main act, along with either real cannibalism in Freud or metaphorical devouring of others in Rousseau. Violence and a breakdown of stability marks this column. According to the structural method the first two columns mark the conflict between peace and violence, stability and instability, order and chaos or using Turner's articulation, structure and anti-structure. This dichotomy hinges upon murder, and perhaps cannibalism. This column could be considered the *undervaluation* of order.

The third column marks transgression either of the laws of the ruler for Freud, or the laws of nature for Rousseau (land ownership, social organization), and the free indulgence of desire. In Lévi-Strauss's terms it is the *overvaluation* of pleasure. The fourth column describes the tightening of stricture, erections of prohibitions and inhibitions, self-punishment and guilt; the *undervaluation* of pleasure. The third and fourth columns observe the dichotomies between indulgence and prohibition, liberty and restraint, hedonism and asceticism. The fourth column is to the third as the first was to the second.

In the fourth column there is a return to a worse situation than was present in the original scenario. In the primal horde, sons had the freedom to leave and find their own mates or hordes. In the new situation, no such potential exists – the guilt-free relationship only exists in the monogamous marriage, and maybe not even there. Besides, the sons of the horde *could* indulge in their desire for sexual relations with the women if he was not caught by the father. After the breakdown of the horde, people have to fear their own guilt which is presumably entirely unavoidable. For Rousseau, the solitary frugivorous human had a great deal of liberty, although some vulnerability. The social, property-owning individual may possess more security from nature, but less in relation to other humans, and he or she is weaker individually should some problem arise. They also must obey the desires of their leaders or even of stronger social groups of humans as well as the laws of nature. Since inequality has arisen, a human in the new society might even have to obey a single human, when this would have never happened in the natural state according to Rousseau (R, 105-106).

It may also be noted that ironically Rousseau's story finishes where Freud's begins – with a ruling tyrant and a restrictive form of government where

the strongest rules. With Freud, the early situation, stable if not entirely desirable, becomes replaced by the same situation inwardly – the tyrant horde leader becomes introjected as the superego, conscience or the deity which is more restrictive than the father of the horde. In the horde, threat of physical punishment or expulsion was the only problem. The self-punishing superego which rules through guilt marks clearly the obsessive-compulsive personality, which sublimates only through labour, some sort of calling or discipline, whether scientific, artistic, athletic or constructive.

Rousseau's *Second Discourse* myth ends with this scenario of powerful leaders but is far worse because of the magnitude of the political tyrannical structure. His early praise of solitude and independence, plus the ultimate solution to the political tyranny through control of legislation, education and the social contract is symptomatic of the paranoid condition to which Rousseau eventually degenerated. Here the self-punishment manifests as the voluntary submission to political control of the stronger humans.

The structure of these stories which, along with being manifestations of a faulty premise, exhibit the overall pattern of the Freudian death-drive. The ambivalent oscillation between peace and violence, and transgression and guilt mark these myths as characteristically oriented toward self-punishment. The place of the prideful tyrant king, either literally or introjected as the superego is Lacan's structural operator, the transformer of energy in a reversal, and the overthrowing of which allows for liberation.

Victor Turner marks the difference between structure and the liminal state of ritual as oppositional in the same way that these myths describe. Order, stability, structure in the first column and restraint, prohibition, asceticism, control in the fourth all are characteristic of the typical politically ordered status of existence. The alternatives, chaos, violence, instability of the second column and transgression, liberty, indulgence, hedonism in the third mark the *communitas* or the liminal status of transition.²⁵ The *Totem and Taboo* primal horde parricide and the *Second Discourse* human social origins myths, under structural analysis, both exhibit the same kind of pattern which attempts to break with the usual structure but in fact returns to an even more restrictive structured status, as liminality does "not so much eliminate as much as underline structural distinctions."²⁶ It may also be observed that ritual usually mediates between stability and instability, transgression and self-punishment; the connection between myth and ritual may lie at this juncture of mediation between opposing or contradictory qualities and situations. A myth is a logical attempt to overcome some contradiction; a ritual is an active mechanism with the same aim.

²⁵ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, Aldine de Gruyter, 1997(1969)), 107.

²⁶ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 189.

4. Derrida: From the *Second Discourse* to the *Social Contract*

The *Second Discourse* and the primal horde parricide hypothesis of *Totem and Taboo* are structurally very similar. Jacques Derrida has followed the reasoning that Lévi-Strauss began that Rousseau is the progenitor of modern anthropology, but goes further and directly associates Rousseau with Freud: “Rousseau explains with some embarrassment that the prohibition of incest had to ... be born of the act of birth of human society.” (D, 264) Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* argument, which concerns the origin of writing, is important here, so a brief outline is warranted.

Derrida argues that in the *Second Discourse*, “the stage of prehistory which primarily interests Rousseau is the passage from barbaric shepherd to civil and ploughing man [the first stage being savage hunter].” (D, 255) That transition is what especially interests Derrida. “This passage was in fact extremely slow, uncertain, and precarious, but since nothing in the previous state contained the structural ingredient to produce the subsequent one, the genealogy must describe a rupture or a reversal, a revolution or a catastrophe.” (D, 255) Derrida notices, as has been observed here above, the place of catastrophic language is the *Second Discourse*, which “often speaks of revolution.” (D, 255) For Rousseau, the origin of civil, agricultural society, and of language, and also of writing, is catastrophic: “it follows an upheaval in the form of a reversal, of return, of revolution, or a progressive movement in the form of a regression.” (D, 255)

Derrida makes this argument on the basis of the conjecture that without such a “terrestrial revolution ... man would never have left the “golden centuries of barbarism.” Nothing within the system of barbarism could produce a force of rupture or a reason for leaving it.” (D, 256) Thus, for Derrida, “the causality of the rupture had therefore to be at once natural and exterior to the system of the pre-civil state.” (D, 256)

Since Rousseau’s barbarians are by nature indolent, Derrida recognizes that humans “did not have the motion for going further. Rest is natural. The origin and the end are inertia. Since disturbance cannot be born out of rest, it could not encroach upon the state of man and the corresponding terrestrial state, upon the barbarian, except through a catastrophe.” (256) This relationship between indolence and inertia suggests that the catastrophe must have been a global one. “That is why the anthropological attitude of indolence must correspond to the geo-logical principle of inertia.” (D, 256)

Derrida treats this catastrophe as almost a kind of divine intervention, calling it “a little push entirely exterior to Nature” or “the finger that tips a world” (D, 257) Here he implies that what Rousseau, in the *Second Discourse*, speaks of as the “fatal accident,” (D, 259) is almost a personal force that has tilted the axis of the earth from its originally vertical position. “It suffices that the force of the person who touched the axis of the globe with his finger should be exterior to the globe.” (D, 257) It is at the time of this “catastrophe” that civil society began.

At the same time, Derrida believes that Rousseau is arguing that the practice of the festival emerged beginning with a very simple celebration around water holes. The origin of civil society for Derrida is thus “not a contract, it does not happen through treaties, conventions, laws, diplomats, and *representatives*. It is a *festival*.” (D, 262) Derrida goes on to define the festival, in similar terms to what Bakhtin has called the *carnival*, or Turner the *liminal* state. “Rousseau’s festival excludes play. The moment of the festival is the moment of pure continuity, of indifference between the time of desire and the time of pleasure.” (D, 263) The festival brings with it a break in the human experience of time: “before the festival, in the state of pure nature, there is no *experience* of the continuous; after the festival, the experience of the *discontinuous* begins. The festival is the model of the continuous experience.” (D, 264)

As soon as the festival becomes part of society, everything changes: “what follows the festival? The age of the supplement, of articulation, of signs, of representatives.” (D, 263) It is here that Derrida enters into the realm of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, through Lacan. “That is the age of the prohibition of incest. Before the festival there was no incest because there was no prohibition of incest and no society. After the festival there is no more incest because it is forbidden.” (D, 263) Through this, the link is made to Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. “Does this not justify us in placing the prohibition of incest, the law sacred among all, on the level of that fundamental institution, of that social order which supports and legitimizes all others? The function of the prohibition of incest is neither named nor expounded upon in *The Social Contract* but its place is marked as a blank there.” (D, 264) Thus Derrida believes the work of Freud compares to the *Social Contract*. “Everything permits us to respect the coherence of Rousseau’s theoretical discourse by reinscribing the prohibition of incest in this place.” (D, 265) The discussion of the *Social Contract* is similar to Freud’s own reasoning.

“Recognizing the family as the only “natural” society, Rousseau specifies that it cannot maintain itself beyond biological urgencies, except “by convention.” Between the family as natural society and the organization of civil society, there are relationships of analogy and corresponding image: “the ruler corresponds to the father, and the people to the children; and all, being born free and equal, alienate their liberty only for their own advantage”” (D, 264) from (SC, 156)

The breakdown of the patriarchal family structure of the barbarian – Freud’s primal horde – occurs at a specific point. “One element alone breaks this analogical rapport: the political father no longer loves his children, the element of the law sets him apart. The first convention, which has transformed the biological family into a society of institution, has thus displaced the figure of the father.” (D, 264) In a way, this is the death of the father. Derrida thus believes that Rousseau, like Freud, is saying the same thing. “Society, language, history, articulation, in a word, supplementarity, are born at the same time as the prohibition of incest. That last is the hinge between nature and culture.” (D, 265)

Derrida has also articulated what has been discussed here with relation to Freud’s argument and the place of the mother. He says of the recognition of the

concurrence of the prohibition of incest with the origin of civil society that “this statement does not name the mother in Rousseau’s text. But it shows her place all the better.” (R, 265) “The natural woman is a represented or a signified replaced and supplanted, in desire, that is to say in social passion, beyond need ... The displacing of the relationship with the mother, with nature with being as the fundamental signified, such indeed is the origin of society and languages.” (D, 265) The place of language, Derrida’s prime concern, maintains the structure of society. “Language is neither prohibition nor transgression, it couples the two endlessly. That point does not exist, it is always elusive or, what comes to the same thing, always already inscribed in what it ought to escape or ought to have escaped, according to our indestructible and mortal desire.” (D, 266)

The axis of society, then, lies at “a point in the system where the signifier can no longer be replaced by its signified.” (D, 266) The activity of society is continually returning to this locus. “That point is reflected in the festival, in the water hole ... The festival itself would be incest itself if some such thing – itself – could take place; if, by taking place, incest were not to conform the prohibition: before the prohibition, it is not incest; forbidden, it cannot become incest except by recognition of the prohibition.” (D, 267) For Derrida, the prohibition of incest, the result for Freud of the primal parricide, and for Rousseau the origin of civil society, is the problem and the contradiction which social humanity must constantly address. “We are always short of or beyond the limit of the festival, of the origin of society, of that present within which simultaneously the interdict is given with the transgression: that which passes always and never properly takes place. It is always as if I had committed incest.” (D, 267) This address is achieved in many ways, but especially through myth, according to Lévi-Strauss.

Derrida too brings the language at least, if not the practice, of mathematics to this discussion which continually circles around the Freudian *Totem and Taboo* problem of the incest taboo. “This birth of society is therefore not a passage, it is a point, a pure, fictive and unstable, ungraspable limit.” (D, 267) From the *point* in the system, to the *discontinuity* of social life, to Jakobson’s “mathematical theory of communication,” (D, 69) and Leibniz’s algebra or analysis which gives speech to languages,” (D, 78) Derrida does not resort to mathematical reasoning, as has Lévi-Strauss or Lacan, but *does* include the vocabulary of mathematical conception in order to illustrate his argument. The post-structural French tradition has continued to understand Freudian anthropological discourse through a mathematical lens as returning to Rousseau.

One last reference to Derrida aids in the clarification of the connection between incest and eating in *Totem and Taboo*. In a small interview, Derrida refers to the idea of what he labels “carnophallogocentrism.”²⁷ For Derrida, the “sacrificial structure” is phallogocentric – more or less as with Freud – but with a dominant schema implying carnivorous virility. For Derrida, there is a strong

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Eating Well: An Interview,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991), 113-114. Noted as D2.

relationship between authority, sacrifice and the eating of flesh. “I would ask you: who would stand any chance of becoming a *chef d’Etat* (a head of state) and of thereby acceding “to the head,” by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him- or herself to be a vegetarian? The *chef* [chief] must be an eater of flesh (with a view, moreover, to being symbolically eaten himself.” (D2, 114) Derrida cites Hitler here as a counter-example in a footnote as a “reactive or compulsive vegetarian.” (D2, 119n14)²⁸ It might be suggested that Gandhi be included in this category as well, an anti-carnivore rather than a true vegetarian, marked by his vehement public proclamations.

This rather brief discussion to which Derrida alludes nowhere else is interesting in light of the *Totem and Taboo* portrayal of sacrifice as a manifestation of both sexual and hunger drives. The relationship between the leader, head or chief, the phallus, and the ingestion of meat is something which Derrida finds significant enough to mention in his interview. The French word *chef* implying both *head of the kitchen* only underscores this. More importantly this conception adds one more piece of evidence that Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* is a political theory as much as it is a work of anthropology. As has already been noted, Derrida assures that Rousseau was the foundational thinker of this kind of reasoning which correlates politics, sexuality and the consumption of foodstuffs.

²⁸ The exact nature of Hitler’s vegetarianism is of course a rather controversial issue.

5. Myth, Matrices and Linear Algebra

The structural analysis of myth, as described by example above and also noted in the previous chapter from chapter eleven of Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology*, lends itself far more to being modelled by matrices and linear algebra than it does to the abstract algebra of group theory. The former is far more typically used in applied mathematics, whereas the latter is rarely used except in quantum physics. André Weil in *Elementary Structures of Kinship* uses group theory only for marriage relations; only Lévi-Strauss has tried to apply group theory to the study of myth in two brief paragraphs which display at best a rather confused understanding of group theory (SA, 228). No other has made any significant attempt to analyze myths mathematically.

The matrix-like grid onto which Lévi-Strauss organizes myths, especially the columnar bundles of myth relations he calls gross constituent units or *mythemes*, almost automatically suggest the use of matrices where each column is a vector within itself. What I have noticed as significant, and what Lévi-Strauss attempts to point out with his canonical formula (however badly articulated) is the relationship between the columnar mythemes. For example, in his analysis of Oedipus (as in mine above), he notes how the fourth column is in the same relation to the third as the first is to the second (SA, 216). In other words $1:2 = 4:3$. The same relation is true of the *Totem and Taboo* primal horde parricide myth and the *Second Discourse* origin of society myth as noted above. However, in the analysis of the Zuni origins myth, the opposite relation is sometimes derived (SA, 221). In the trickster myth, the conflict between life and death is in the same relation as the conflict between food-gathering or agriculture and hunting or warfare. These relations would be $1:2 = 3:4$.

All myths have been analysed using a matrix with four columns, the first two columns paired in relation, and the last two columns paired in either an analogous relation or the inverse relation. If we construct a new matrix with two rows and two columns, with the first row representing columns one and two of the myth analysis and with the second row representing columns three and four of the myth analysis, then we can formulate a set of possible relations. Let a "1" represent the overvaluation of a quality, or perhaps the positive quality (life, peace, agriculture) and a "0" the undervaluation of that quality or the negative quality (death, violence, hunting).²⁹ Then it is possible that there are six matrices which codify the relations of a myth, as well as two trivial matrices:

²⁹ "Positive" or "negative" here are value judgments of course, but made for the sake of mathematization rather than some sort of ethical stance.

A: $\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$ is the matrix for the first case: $\begin{bmatrix} \text{overvaluation} & \text{undervaluation} \\ \text{undervaluation} & \text{overvaluation} \end{bmatrix}$

B: $\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$ is the matrix for the second case: $\begin{bmatrix} \text{overvaluation} & \text{undervaluation} \\ \text{overvaluation} & \text{undervaluation} \end{bmatrix}$

C: $\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$ represents: $\begin{bmatrix} \text{undervaluation} & \text{overvaluation} \\ \text{overvaluation} & \text{undervaluation} \end{bmatrix}$

D: $\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$ represents: $\begin{bmatrix} \text{undervaluation} & \text{overvaluation} \\ \text{undervaluation} & \text{overvaluation} \end{bmatrix}$

The other four possible 2×2 matrices with entries of 1 or 0 are not likely to manifest, although are still technically possible. These are:

E: $\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$ and **F:** $\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$

as well as the identity matrix **I:** $\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$ and the zero matrix **0** = $\begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$

It is easy to check that these matrices form a group of order eight (with eight elements), under the operation of standard matrix addition where:

$$0 + 0 = 0$$

$$1 + 1 = 0$$

$$0 + 1 = 1 + 0 = 1$$

There are thus eight variations of mythic patterns, with primarily four of these seen regularly. In fact, these eight matrices also form a basis for the vector space of all possible 2×2 matrices over the integers, usually denoted by \mathbf{M}_{22} . This leads into the next section on social contract theory, a branch of political philosophy based upon game theory, a branch of mathematics which makes extensive use of \mathbf{M}_{22} for games such as the prisoner's dilemma and other games of cooperation versus competition.

6. Social Contract Theory and the Stag Hunt

Rousseau's solution to the problem of political and social inequality is ultimately the installation of the *Social Contract*. Freud too, more especially articulated in *Future of an Illusion*, hopes that through science and reason that a new society can develop. There are four main reasons to look at Rousseau's *Social Contract* from the current discussion. The first reason is, as Paul Roazen noted, the similarity between the primal horde parricide and all social contracts in that they are circular attempts to explain social organization through presupposing the existence of society. Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss and many others have all commented on the vicious circle reasoning of the primal horde parricide myth, although most seem to be interested in its mythic-symbolic significance.

The second reason for considering the primal horde parricide myth of *Totem and Taboo* together with social contracts derives from the observation made by Lévi-Strauss in his *Structural Anthropology* that in modern civilization myth, of which he and many others recognize the primal parricide as being an example, has been largely replaced by politics. The politician is akin in many ways to the myth-maker, using a past sequence of events to construct a framework for the present and the future of a society. The social contract functions similarly.

The third reason is that in many ways, Rousseau's *Social Contract* has elements in common with *Totem and Taboo*. The *Social Contract* begins with the famous maxim: "Everywhere man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains."³⁰ (SC, 156) Freud's *Totem and Taboo* recognizes these chains as neurosis, anchored to Oedipus. The second part of the first book of the *Social Contract* deals with "primitive societies" in order to derive the foundations of society as does Freud. "The earliest of all societies and the only natural one, is the family." (SC, 156) The father is the first leader, the political leader being "the analogue of the father." (SC, 156) The father is compared to the monarch and the deity (King Adam, Emperor Noah and Saturn – SC, 157). This kind of logic continues to the end of the document, where "men had at first no kings except the gods and no government but a theocracy ...[and] God was placed at the head of every political society." (SC, 245-246). The replacement of pagan religions by the civil religion marks a similar kind of evolution which Freud discusses where religion replaces animism (to be further replaced by science).

In the *Social Contract* there is also the brief discussion of mathematics. "The government is on a small scale what the body politic which includes it is on a large scale. It is a moral person endowed with certain faculties ... a single leader who may be represented in the middle of the progression, as unity between the series of fractions and that of the whole numbers." (SC, 196) Here Rousseau appears to be referring to the basic number line, where "1" lies between the proper fractions and the other whole numbers besides "1". It is possible however that he refers to the parallel between the whole numbers and the rational numbers, the

³⁰ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 2002, 156. References noted as SC.

two sets being of the same cardinal order. Clearly one of the basic problems of the *Social Contract* lies with this paragraph in the first part of the third book where sets are treated as members of themselves, with the body politic being treated as a government or even a person as members of themselves. This basic flaw of reason leads directly to the Russell paradox as shall be discussed shortly.

Finally, social contract theory is based upon the mathematics of game theory, a branch of linear algebra based partly upon simple matrices. These games very often involve an analysis of strategies of cooperation and competition. One of the simplest and best known games is the prisoner's dilemma. A very similar game which has its roots in Rousseau's *Second Discourse* argument is known as the stag hunt.

Rousseau's origin of society story hinges upon a very specific event: the decision to cooperate in order to gain mutual benefit, once people had "gradually acquired some crude idea of mutual commitments, and of the advantages of fulfilling them." (R, 111) Rousseau is in line with Freud on primitive thought being not as advanced as the thought of the modern human, as ideas of cooperation arose "only so far as present and perceptible interests might demand, for men had no foresight whatever, and far from troubling about a distant future, they did not even think of the next day." (R, 111) Prior to this important event humans acted only alone, being for Rousseau fundamentally solitary beings.

If the goal of the cooperation "was a matter of hunting a deer, everyone well realized that he must remain faithfully at his post; but if a hare happened to pass within reach of one of them, we cannot doubt that he would have gone off in pursuit of it without scruple and, having caught his own prey, he would have cared very little about having caused his companions to lose theirs." (R, 111) This situation has come to be known as the *stag hunt* game, and has been investigated recently and in depth by Brian Skyrms. He argues that it, rather than the prisoner's dilemma, ought to be chosen for the paradigmatic social contract.³¹

Before detailing that, it is interesting to observe again the parallel between the stag hunt and the primal horde parricide. Both are events upon which the development of society is based, although Rousseau's is a fair bit more arbitrary, as the cooperation could have involved many situations – the stag hunt is exemplary, whereas the primal parricide is determining. However both involve cooperation as the important factor, for the primal parricide does not occur until the brothers of the horde finally mutually decide to band together. In this sense the myth is as much or more about brotherhood, as Lacan emphasized, as it is about the desire for incest. In the stag hunt the decision to cooperate is also decisive; it is perhaps also an alternative explanation for the origin of the totemic clan system. The animal totem of the clan might be linked to this first decision to cooperate – whether the large game animal is a deer, boar, bear or something else impels the clan to name itself after that animal. There is a fairly strong similarity

³¹ Brian Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xii.

between the primal parricide and the stag hunt, and this is further support for Roazen's argument that the primal parricide resembles a social contract theory, since in reality it is more about brotherhood and cooperation or competition for goods, as Lacan and Lévi-Strauss have respectively asserted, just like the stag hunt which Skyrms argues is the paradigm for any social contract. The Roazen hypothesis also further supports Skyrms's conclusion, since if *Totem and Taboo* is a social contract theory, and it closely resembles the stag hunt, then the stag hunt is a good model for social contracts.

In the stag hunt game, there are two participants presumed to simplify the situation. The two hunters must rely on each other without knowing the choice of the other. If they cooperate, then both benefit by catching the deer and sharing it. If one defects from the arranged hunt to chase the hare, then the other loses out entirely, while the defector makes some gain by catching the hare, although not as much if he or she shares the deer; the other loses out entirely. If both defect to chase hares, then both gain, although again not as much as if they both worked together to catch the deer. This kind of game is called a *Nash equilibrium*, after the famous mathematician John Nash, because it is always best to hunt whatever the other hunts.³² The safest decision is to chase a hare on one's own; but the most beneficial situation is to cooperate to catch the stag, at the risk of gaining nothing if the other defects. This situation might be represented with the following matrix for one of the individuals **A**:

The Stag Hunt

		B	
		stag	hare
A	stag	$\begin{bmatrix} 5 & 0 \\ 3 & 3 \end{bmatrix}$	
	hare		

If both hunters cooperate and catch the stag, each is rewarded with a weight of 5 – half the deer. If **A** stays loyal but **B** defects to chase the hare, then **A** gets nothing. If **A** defects and catches the hare, then he is rewarded with a weight of 3, since a hare is much smaller than a deer, but his reward does not depend upon the action of hunter **B**. Cooperation is the most risky but potentially the most beneficial. The safe option is chase the hare no matter what, but has less benefit. The worst scenario for **A** is to try to chase the stag when **B** defects.

According to Skyrms, who references Hobbes's *Treatise of Human Nature*, there are only two basic types of strategist. The fool (Hobbes's Foole) always defects, and his mistake lies in ignoring the future. The trigger cooperates until

³² Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt*, 3.

the other defects, trusting until given reason not to trust, and then retaliating by never cooperating with the defector again.³³ There would presumably be no one who always cooperated, because this person would lose to every fool there was. The fool has no foresight and no loyalty. The trigger is rational and premeditated but perhaps prone to losing out by misplaced loyalty if there are too many fools.

A primal horde game might look like the following. Suppose there is one strong father with three wives, one daughter and two sons. The sons could either team up to overthrow the father, or each individually go off and try to find a mate on their own. None is strong enough individually to overthrow the father of any horde. So brothers **A** and **B** would by cooperating presumably kill the father and take over the horde together, with the total of four women, split between the two brothers, would be two women each. So the cooperation of the brothers would lead to a weight of 2. If both brothers go off alone, they might find themselves a lone woman or girl somehow, or steal one from another bigger horde. Likely they couldn't do this with more than one woman without losing the first one. So individually, each brother could earn a weight of 1. If, however, the brothers decide to cooperate and overthrow the father, and one defects during the attempt, the jealous father likely kills the brother that follows through. This is of course a weight of 0, and in fact a total loss, far worse than the loss in the stag hunt. The primal horde parricide game has a more dire outcome than the stag hunt – death. The defecting brother simply then wanders off and still has the option of finding a mate or living alone, although he cannot likely get himself a horde. One small difference lies here though – the defector has no competition from the deceased brother. So it is more beneficial to him to promise and defect than to never agree to the act in the first place. This action would earn him a weight of 1.5 then, since he might sometimes be lucky enough to find a second mate that his brother would have assumed. The game then looks like this:

Primal Horde Parricide

		B		overthrow	leave the horde
A	overthrow	$\begin{bmatrix} 2 & 0 \\ 1.5 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$			
	leave the horde				

This game is a little different than the stag hunt because of the extra risk of being tricked. Perhaps this in fact is a more realistic game for a model of social structure. This might also be more like a case when a hunted animal, instead of a deer, is dangerous, such as a bear, buffalo or a tiger. In the stag hunt there is little

³³ Skyrms, *The Stag Hunt*, 4.

immediate risk to trusting the other individual other than losing a meal. In the primal horde parricide, the risk is much greater. The threat of death turns the game into a more serious matter, perhaps one much more like a real life cooperation scenario which involves a dangerous task. This game is *not* a Nash equilibrium game, and it is hardly ever considered by game theorists. The best outcome does not necessarily involve doing what the other brother does, and a change in one's strategy midway through the act can benefit the defector. The fool might then become the opportunist. One could envision this kind of game in a business deal where one partner promises the other and then reneges, and snapping up the business of the first partner in the process. The same kind of activity occurs socially or in politics, and it becomes clear why in fact sometimes crime does pay. The mitigating factor is the danger, especially serious injury or death (whether actual or metaphorical as in a business). In this game described above, the defector ultimately does not get what he might have by cooperation, but he may benefit at little risk to himself by convincing a gullible brother to join in an undertaking in which he himself has no intention in following through: thus the evolution of the con-man which would likely never happen under the stag hunt model where no one trusts a defector after he shows his true colours.

However, there is a slightly different variable to take into account. If brother **A** can convince brother **B** to work together and overthrow the father, and if he is cunning, he may be able to manoeuvre into a position where he allows the father to kill **B** while simultaneously killing the father while he is distracted, wounded or tired. This kind of trick could be even more fulfilling than in the first case. Rather than simply backing out of the agreement out of fear and escaping, one brother may in fact learn to *sacrifice* another brother in order to overtake the horde for himself. In this scenario brother **A** then benefits by obtaining *all* four of the women for himself while sacrificing his brother and murdering his father. This game now looks like this for **A**:

Primal Horde Parricide (deceitful variation)

	B	overthrow	sacrifice brother
A			
overthrow			
		$\begin{bmatrix} 2 & 0 \\ 4 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$	
sacrifice brother			

Now the cooperation condition is *not* producing the best results for the brothers; with this kind of thinking it becomes more advantageous to deceive than to cooperate; again this is non-Nash equilibrium game. This observation is rarely considered, since most political thinkers have fallaciously assumed that, as with

Skyrms's stag hunt, mutual cooperation is always the most beneficial tactic. The risk to the deceiver may be more or less depending upon the situation – but the most deceitful person may be cunning and able to trick even the father if the overthrowing attempt is botched, or to evade the situation entirely, since he has no ties of loyalty. Once a scenario is introduced in which deceit is more valuable, then the game changes entirely. So does the view of how society is constructed. This is clear in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*: "The first man who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying "This is mine" and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society." (R, 109) Deceit obviously plays a strong role in this statement, as does manipulation and exploitation. Before this progenitor, no one was cunning enough to attempt such a ludicrous thing as claiming a piece of land as a possession. The reward for the primal parricide may not be women; money or other resources may be equally valuable rewards, including land ownership. Should this not be the paradigm for social construction, at least in a real rather than ideal situation, where the fool wins out over the cooperative trigger? Convincing brothers of the horde or fellow citizens becomes the key to taking advantage of them, and hence arises the niche for the con-man, the political revolutionary or activist, or the religious fanatic.

In this scenario also arises a basis for sacrifice, including the religious sacrifice. Freud has not made this explicit, although Lacan does note how the primal horde myth is about brotherhood (L, 114). In a horde with several brothers, more than two, convincing some of the brothers to manifest unfailing loyalty while certain other brothers plan to sacrifice one or more of those loyalists would be advantageous in the manner of the deceitful primal horde parricide game. Loyal brotherhood benefits the simple people, the triggers, by providing a sense of security, and the more convincing the ploy the more security is felt. It benefits the apparent fools by enabling them to take advantage of those deceived. The religious martyr and the courageous sacrifice victim all fall into this category of deceived triggers believing that their deaths are serving some greater good. The origins of the sacrifice may well lie within this kind of mechanism being evolutionarily adaptive in scenarios that resemble the primal horde. If it becomes advantageous to sacrifice people, whether religiously, through war or other means, then a kind of evolutionary mechanism may explain the behaviour. This accounts for both the violent and the votive aspects of the sacrifice, as well as more intangible kinds of sacrifices such as fasting or celibacy which allows other members of a society to have food or sexual partners while the martyr is rewarded with attention, respect, free accommodation, and perhaps other intangibles. Self-punishing behaviour takes on an evolutionary advantage if it happens to be rewarded by other society members through apparent validation while those other members acquire goods or positions made available by the martyr activity.³⁴ An abstract analysis of this primal horde parricide game scenario is illustrative.³⁵

³⁴ Note that this theory of sacrifice is similar to that of Girard's (which is of course partially based upon Freud's *Totem and Taboo*) in many respects, in that it entails some group of deceivers taking

General Parricide (deceitful) Payoff Matrix

		B	
		overthrow	sacrifice
A	overthrow	$\begin{bmatrix} r & s \\ t & p \end{bmatrix}$	
	sacrifice		

Here r is the reward for cooperating, s is the “sucker” payoff (normally zero), t is the temptation to defect, and p the mutual defection punishment value or weight.

$$\text{Then } 0 = s < p < r < t \text{ and } \frac{s+t}{2} \leq r$$

Thus, in opposition to the earlier games, where $r > t$, to cooperate is not evolutionarily stable. It makes more sense in the long term to deceive. In the deceitful primal parricide game, because $t > r$ and $s < p$, to defect *is* evolutionarily stable. This is a seemingly paradoxical situation which goes against all rationality of the usual stag hunt, and is only introduced with the possibility of deceit which does not occur in the stag hunt where the worst thing that happens to the fool is going hungry. In the deceitful version, a population of cooperating overthrowers (“brothers”) could easily be invaded by a deceiver, whereas a group of deceivers could not be invaded by a cooperator, who would quickly lose. Cooperation is thus not an evolutionarily stable response, and society could have only evolved upon a model of deception rather than cooperation. The Freudian primal horde hypothesis provides impetus for a game that is contrary to the cooperative model of the stag hunt in Rousseau. However, once again, Freud’s model of social development is similar in motivation to Rousseau’s.

advantage of one or more “scapegoats.” However with Girard, the element of deception is not necessary for the sacrifice, which is an outlet for channeled aggression. In the case of the primal horde parricide game, the deceitful sacrifice is deliberate, suggesting an already controlled aggression. The deceivers are not simply releasing aggression, but in fact taking advantage of those who have not learned to control theirs. The goal is not, as with Girard, a homeostatic return to the status quo, but the development of an entirely new scenario with perhaps far fewer competitors, a social transformation from nature to culture or “civil society” as Rousseau remarks. The more dangerous the desired object of rivalry, the greater role of deceit plays. Freud’s primal parricide myth introduces a new dimension to the stag hunt theory of cooperation as the root of society. Even Girard, although describing competitive rivalry as the basis of sacrifice, suggests that the sacrifice is ultimately a social cooperation in channeling the aggression raised by that mimetic rivalry. Here the direct competition becomes even more focal to the sacrifice.

³⁵ Representation model here coming from Rufus A. Johnstone and David J.D. Earn, *Game Theory for Biologists*, (New York: Springer, 2008), 49.

7. Vicious Circles

Any social contract, just like the *Totem and Taboo* myth or any myth of origins, is paradoxical in that it is based upon a supposedly historical sequence of events which presupposes a society when it is trying to account for society, and to represent a timeless pattern which both characterizes a current state and provides direction for the future. Rousseau's social contract theory is based upon a theory of political institutions which:

“Like Hobbes, Locke, and other contractualists, Rousseau thinks that a good political society must be founded upon an agreement among its citizens to organize their public life according to certain normative principles. But there is a difference between Rousseau and his predecessors. For them, the theory of political right is separate thing from constitutional theory; both Hobbes and Locke argue that the principles of a just society can be embodied in any of various concrete political forms. Rousseau conversely “insists that the social pact is compatible with only one set of legal institutions.”³⁶

Simpson argues that because of this quality, there is an inherent contradiction at the centre of Rousseau's theory of institutions. He is missing the larger picture, however. Not only Rousseau's but *any* social contract theory is inherently flawed when the containing set, a society, is defined as behaving as a member of itself, some concrete political institution or form within that society. The Russell paradox disallows the definition of such sets; by defining a set which behaves as one of its members, then contradictory statements may be derived. This is really the problem at which Simpson is pointing, but it is a much larger problem than he guesses. Miller writes on Lacan that there is a relation between topology and logic, and that “the subject of the unconscious may also [in addition to using topology] be transcribed according to Russell's paradox.”³⁷ This somewhat mathematically vacuous statement may have more of interest to the problem at hand than Miller suspects.

The Bertrand Russell paradox is simple. If sets are allowed be members of themselves, then a set *A* may be defined as containing all sets *X* which do not contain themselves. Then if *A* is not a member of itself it must belong to itself; if it is a member of itself than it must not belong to itself. Hence *A* both belongs to itself and does not – a contradiction. Thus if a set is allowed to contain itself, or behave as if it were a member of itself, contradictory statements may be deduced.

This is a variation of the vicious circle paradox, which Russell articulates.³⁸ Essentially the vicious circle is the same problem, where a set is constructed from its own definition. The real problem for this work results from

³⁶ Matthew Simpson, “A Paradox of Sovereignty in Rousseau's Social Contract,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 3(1), 2006, 46.

³⁷ Jacques-Alain Miller, 2004, “Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan,” in *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, eds. Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (New York: Other Press), 43.

³⁸ If *A* is contained in itself, then so must be $\{A\}$, $\{\{A\}\}$, $\{\{\{A\}\}\}$, and so on, ad infinitum, in a vicious circle, and thus *P* must be paradoxically infinite.

defining abstract concepts such as “society,” “culture,” or “humanity” as having characteristics of individual humans or institutions which comprise those conceptions. “Society” or any such group of individuals collectively can not and does not love, hate, act, think, or anything else which only individual people do. The first basic premise of *Totem and Taboo*, and that of the *Second Discourse* are seriously flawed; most have recognized this practically without being able to articulate the reason behind the flaw. “Humanity” as a whole cannot develop as a person does; it can only get bigger or smaller because it is a set which contains a finite number of humans. “Humanity” cannot become corrupt, decay, or even improve. The parallel of ontogenetic and phylogenetic development makes no sense logically speaking which is why there is no real practical anthropological evidence for social evolution. A “culture” is a term for a finite set of individuals, and cannot possess the properties of those individuals. The mathematics of finite sets is well defined.

Freud is proposes in *Totem and Taboo* a close connection between the theory of the individual psychology (state of the soul) and the concrete theory of institutions (the totemic clan or the religion). This surely marks Freud as a political thinker. By asserting the same faulty premise of Rousseau that the development of humanity as a whole can mirror the development of individual humans, Freud derives the opposite conclusion of Rousseau. Freud, contrary to Rousseau, concludes that humans are evolving, and that humanity is also evolving, entering into the vicious circle of the Russell paradox.

Conclusion

I felt as if I had been guilty of incest.

– *The Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau³⁹

Totem and Taboo returns to Rousseau. The real problem is that it has usually been treated as anthropology, and interpreted as some kind of realistic description. In fact it fits closer into the genre of political philosophy, although it possesses a rather mythic significance which marks it as at once both universal and uniquely Freudian. Freud was a physician and mainly dealt with case studies in his early life. He transitioned after having turned his attention to himself in 1899 for *The Interpretation of Dreams*, after that becoming something different and strange. Freud's later essays possess a lasting appeal being short, seemingly simple to read and have a certain kind of elegance that arose only from the evolution of a scientific mind. *Totem and Taboo* synthesizes a great deal of the literature at his disposal on a perhaps unsolvable problem.

The primal horde parricide is similar in construction to Rousseau's *Second Discourse*. They are both monkey stories. It has been demonstrated that the underlying structure of those myths, both of which are only written after the forceful qualification that neither is to be taken as entirely accurate, represents the ambivalence of the death-drive, and the contradiction between order and chaos, transgression and punishment. It is no small irony that Lacan's re-articulation of the death instinct involves a development, the splitting of the ego, which occurs at the mirror stage, the stage where an individual learns to ape his or her elders. This mirror stage is itself a mythical hypothesis, the articulation of something both universal and strange about how individuals develop.

The primal horde hypothesis and *Totem and Taboo* have qualities which makes it more like a political theory than anthropology. Paul Roazen recognized this, and so did Marcuse. Lévi-Strauss argued that the myth has essentially been replaced in modern society by politics. *Totem and Taboo* is a modern myth but is also a political writing, a social contract theory. The primal horde parricide game accounts for society more than even the stag hunt game. It deserves to occupy territory in the political philosophical tradition alongside Rousseau.

Totem and Taboo can be read as a kind of social contract, as Roazen argues, akin to that of Rousseau's. The mathematics of game theory can be applied to *Totem and Taboo* in a similar fashion to that used in the social contract theory upon which Skyrms expounds. The French structuralist response to *Totem and Taboo* suggests that mathematics would be a useful tool for studying *Totem and Taboo*. The application of game theory should prove to be the most useful type of mathematics, far more appropriate than the group theory of Lévi-Strauss or the knots of Lacan. Inherent in *Totem and Taboo* is a game theory of sacrifice which describes a novel perspective on the origins of civil society.

³⁹ Quoted in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 95.

Conclusions

Jacques Lacan calls *Totem and Taboo* “one of the most twisted things one can imagine.”¹ Nonetheless he also believed that an in-depth study of its composition was warranted, despite the dismissal of the work by most of the academic world. As an anthropological study, *Totem and Taboo* possesses many flaws. However a close inspection reveals multiple similarities to the political theory composed by Rousseau. Canadian Paul Roazen alone has recognized that *Totem and Taboo* has the same kind of circular reasoning present in all social contracts, and thus views Freud as a “social contract thinker.”² *Totem and Taboo*, like the *Social Contract*, presupposes what it sets out to explain – the existence of social organization and its common language. Since political scientists have tended “to rescue social contract thinkers from the test of historical truth by interpreting their ideas as moral theories, or as logical fictions having explanatory value,”³ Roazen marvels at why the same has not been done with *Totem and Taboo*. Such a rescue mission has been the purpose of this dissertation.

There are three significant results that have arisen during the investigation of *Totem and Taboo*. The first is that, although Freud does not emphasize it, the document contains almost as much about eating behaviour as it does about sexual taboos. This observation is reinforced by the work of Lévi-Strauss that links exogamy to rivalry and economic exchange – the exchange of foodstuffs being the prototype of economy – and especially by the work of Georges Bataille which connects the prohibition to consumption. This is the first condition of *Totem and Taboo* which suggests that it is a return to Rousseau, who found dietary matters so important to discuss in his *Second Discourse* and *Social Contract*. Derrida’s “carnophallogocentrism” adequately highlights the relationship between politics, authority, sexuality and the ingestion of animal flesh.

Secondly, the use of mathematical reasoning in connection with work on *Totem and Taboo* by French structuralism, including Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and especially Bataille (not to mention several other French post-structuralists) indicates a strong return to Rousseau. Most importantly, the economic emphases of these three thinkers impels an investigation into game theory as the most apposite branch of mathematics to use in tandem with discussions of *Totem and Taboo*. While Lévi-Strauss and Lacan have indeed used mathematical reasoning, they are mistaken in attempting to apply abstract algebra and topology respectively, since these are branches of pure mathematics with little value in modelling. Lévi-Strauss was more correct to suggest matrices in his discussions of myth, the linear algebra of matrices being the basis for game theory. As game

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 111.

² Paul Roazen, *Freud: Political and Social Thought*, 136.

³ Roazen, 154.

theory underlies much of the reasoning of social contract theory, then this is the second condition of *Totem and Taboo* which impels a return to Rousseau. There is a game inherent in the primal parricide account which may more adequately explain the development of social behaviour than the stag hunt usually attributed to Rousseau. This game is effectively also a theory of sacrifice.

Finally, *Totem and Taboo* is a theory of political institutions that is more similar to Rousseau, and ultimately Plato, than almost anything else Freud has written. Psychoanalysis is in the main an Aristotelian endeavour. The goal of inducing catharsis through emotional observation comes straight out of *Poetics*. However in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud seems to be composing a theory of justice that is closely associated with a theory of institutions. For Plato in the *Republic*, justice in the individual soul is related to justice in the polis. For Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, the just society is founded upon the social contract which presumes just composers of that contract. For Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, the institution of the incest taboo in the city, or totem clan, is the source of the instillation of Oedipus in the individual psyche. All three of these theories are circular, and arise from the fallacious assumption that a group of individuals can possess the same property as an individual member. This assumption leads to the Russell paradox, which prevents a set from containing itself. It is interesting to note that all three of Plato, Rousseau, and Freud have some kind of disclaimer asserting that their theories are not entirely practical political theories. It might be a mistake to treat them as anything more than moral allegories designed to be interesting reading and instruct on the human condition. They are all mythic in nature, although this does not detract on the potential insight contained within each work. The beauty of *Totem and Taboo* is that it is itself a myth, and that traces of the primal parricide motif recur regularly throughout myth, literature, and human history, as Freud was well aware (*TT*, 192). A very brief consideration of three instances of this recurrence is appended to this conclusion.

1. The *Chūshingura* or Forty-Seven Rōnin

In 1701 Japan⁴ was in the middle of the Genroku epoch, the cultural and artistic golden age of the peaceful Tokugawa era. When feudal Lord Asano was called to Edo (Tokyo), as part of the alternate attendance (*sankin kōtai*) policy which the *bakufu* shogunate government had instilled in from to keep control of the feudal lords living outside of Edo, he was asked to perform ceremonial duty. During this duty Asano attacked and wounded shogunate official Kira, for reasons which are still unknown. For this act, Asano was ordered by the shogunate to commit *seppuku*, suicide by disembowelment, under traditional samurai honour.

⁴ The following information is paraphrased from Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture*: 4th edition, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 208-13.

When Asano died, his forty-seven vassals became *rōnin* or masterless samurai. They joined in a secret pledge to avenge Asano, which they did late 1702, killing Kira at his home in Edo. Many in Japan thought the act of revenge was true to the samurai code: since only Asano ended up dying as a result of the conflict, then it was natural that Kira be killed too. Yet there were three main points of public contention. The first was that the samurai revenge vendetta (*katakiuchi*) was usually undertaken on the behalf of relatives. Asano was not related to *rōnin*; furthermore Kira had killed no one and so many believed that he was not the proper object of revenge. No one ever knew why Asano had attacked Kira; perhaps it was Asano's fault to begin with. Secondly, the revenge was premeditated for nearly two years. Some thought that the true form of samurai revenge was reckless, irrational, and occurred immediately: the *shinigurui* "death frenzy." Finally, during those two years, the *rōnin* were divided over the matter of revenge. The majority thought the matter should be considered settled if the shogunate allowed Asano's younger brother to succeed his title and estate. A smaller group thought that only revenge would suffice. It was only after the decision of the shogunate to not allow Asano's brother to rise when both groups finally agreed to avenge the death. Immediately after they killed Kira, the shogunate decided that the *rōnin* must die for breaking public law. They were, however, granted the privilege of dying by *seppuku* rather than decapitation, since they had supposedly been following their honour code.

This whole series of events and the controversy surrounding them created a fair stir in Edo and the rest of Japan. Whether the old samurai ways had been revived under the peaceful government or an unlawful act had been committed made this story become very popular. Versions were printed and performed dramatically within weeks of Kira's death. By 1748 the most popular version, *Chūshingura* (*A Treasury of Loyal Retainers*),⁵ had established itself. Yet in the *Chūshingura* most of the ambiguities of the historical events were entirely removed. Within the play the *rōnin* are motivated only by loyalty and revenge, Kira is thoroughly evil and devious,⁶ and there is no dissension among the forty-seven concerning their plan for revenge. Ending the vendetta with their self-administered suicides even becomes part of the plan. Thus the play became a pure celebration of the samurai way – a purely fictional celebration.

The Japanese *Chūshingura* story, as well as the historical event, is an excellent example of a primal horde parricide motif. The theme of the death of the master, while not the direct doing of the samurai as in the *Totem and Taboo* primal horde story, is nonetheless present through unconscious guilt. That guilt

⁵ See William T. de Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition* v1. *The Tokugawa Peace* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1964), 470-73. That version was written by Takeda Izumo. An early version was penned by the famous Japanese playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon in his *Major Plays*.

⁶ The character of Kira submits, "I understand. I have long been expecting this. Take my head." The narrator: "He puts [the leader of the 47] off guard with these words, only suddenly to draw his sword and strike at him." Thus Kira tries to trick the samurai in a way that is not honourable (deBary, *Sources*, 473).

inspires an act of arguably misdirected revenge, one which was not socially or legally expected or sanctioned – it was rather a shock at the time – and one which resulted in their own deaths in the ultimate sacrifice to the deceased master. The official represents a sacrificial victim substitute for the master, similar to the totemic animal, which enabled the justification for the following *seppuku* self-punishment for each of the forty-seven samurai. The removal of the master is the desired situation, the death of the father, which results in guilt motivation, sacrifice and martyrdom. Revenge was only the *modus operandi*; self-punishment being the unconscious motivation and the manifest consequence of this act of revenge. The *Chūshingura* reveals a political facet of the primal parricide motif.

2. *The Brothers Karamazov*

Dostoevsky's opus *The Brothers Karamazov*, written in the golden age of Russian literature, is without a doubt one of the strongest literary representation of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* primal parricide myth. Several years after publishing *Totem and Taboo*, Freud wrote an essay called "Dostoevsky and Parricide."⁷ There he gives high praise to Dostoevsky: "*The Brothers Karamazov* is the most magnificent novel ever written." (F, 234) Freud explicitly relates the plot of *The Brothers Karamazov* to his *Totem and Taboo* primal parricide hypothesis (F, 240).

The Brothers Karamazov is the story of the Karamazov family, with four brothers born of Fyodor Karamazov and three different mothers – a rather paradigmatic primal horde. The four brothers are the impassioned Dmitri, the intellectual Ivan, Alyosha the monk, and the epileptic Smerdyakov. Fyodor is murdered halfway through the novel. He and the oldest son, Dmitri, are in a position of rivalry because they both desire the same woman. Dmitri is suspected of the crime, and is tried and convicted, although the events of the later part of the novel suggest that the murderer was Smerdyakov. Nonetheless, all of the brothers are responsible for the murder, and as Freud suggests, all share in the guilt. Dmitri Karamazov even refers to his father Fyodor as an "old ape," (BK, 185)⁸ apt enough for the ever-lecherous chief of the Karamazov horde.

Lacan associates, indirectly, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* with *Karamazov*: "Above all [Freud] clings strongly to this blessed story of the murder of the father of the horde, this Darwinian buffoonery." (L, 112)⁹ Fyodor Karamazov is regularly referred to as a buffoon. Surely Lacan here refers to Fyodor Karamazov, the old buffoon, as soon after this quote, the book is mentioned explicitly: "A long time ago I observed that for the sentence of old father Karamazov, 'If God is dead, then everything is permitted,' the conclusion that forces itself upon us in the

⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide" in *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. James Strachey. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 234-255. A list of the noted publications may be found in the editor's notes 278-80). References to this essay noted as F.

⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Konstantin Molchusky (New York: Bantam Books, 2003 (1880)). Noted as BK.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Noted as L.

text of our experience is that the response to “God is dead” is “nothing is permitted anymore.”¹⁰ (L, 120) Lacan is articulating here the relationship between prohibition and transgression, for in *Totem and Taboo* it is only after the father is murdered that the taboo is erected. Before the murder, there was no taboo, since the strong father prevents the incestuous indulgence.

As with *Totem and Taboo*, Freud in his essay on Dostoevsky argues that the psychic act is as powerful as the actual one. “It is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime; psychology is only concerned with who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done.” (F, 247) He notes that: “All of the brothers, except the contrasted figure of Alyosha, are equally guilty – the impulsive sensualist [Dmitri], the sceptical cynic [Ivan] and the epileptic criminal [Smerdyakov].” (F, 247-248) When Lacan discusses the *Totem and Taboo* primal horde, it appears as he applies his analysis to *Karamazov* as well: “For having killed the old man, the old orang,¹¹ two things happen. I place one of them in brackets, for it is incredible – they discover that they are brothers.” (L, 114) This seems particularly true of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the death of the father unites the brothers, other than the culprit Smerdyakov, who commits suicide. It is not clear in the story whether the guilt continues, as Dostoevsky planned to write a second part to the novel but died soon after its publication. Each brother experiences guilt, but it might be suggested that this guilt allows for a kind of transformation. The brothers’ conflicts seem to be resolved. Ivan has a psychotic break with reality, but seems to be on his way to recovery and marrying his love Katerina. Dmitri is tried and convicted of murder, but has plans for escape and to leave for America with Grushenka. Likely Alyosha will marry his love Lise. However the outcome is speculative and suggestive in the epilogue. Perhaps the death of Fyodor Karamazov is what Lacan terms a “structural operator,” (L, 118-120) an agent of transformation which allows for a general psychological restructuring. The primal parricide myth prefigures Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* hypothesis, influencing him sufficiently to devote an essay to Dostoevsky.

3. *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe’s 1958 *Things Fall Apart*¹² is in many respects a kind of “ethnographic parody,”¹³ perhaps even of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. Certainly there are many Oedipal conflicts and portrayals of the theme of rivalry. *Things Fall Apart* is a story about Okonkwo, the head of a horde of three wives and eight children (A, 14), and “ruled his household with a heavy hand.” (A, 13) Okonkwo is famed for his prowess as both a warrior and a wrestler in Umuofia, the Igbo

¹⁰ Lacan is slightly mistaken, since the statement belongs to Ivan Karamazov, not his father.

¹¹ Orangutan – a joking reference to Fyodor being an ape and to Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*.

¹² Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1994(1959)). Noted as A.

¹³ Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41.

village in Nigeria. He has many skulls demonstrating his war successes. Okonkwo is the paradigmatic strong male leader figure, a primal horde father.

Okonkwo has many rivalries. He hates both his father, Unoka, and his eldest son, Nwoye, for their feminine traits, gentleness, laziness and lack of ambition (A, 13). Okonkwo has an intimate connection with his daughter Ezinma, whom he wishes were a boy, and is responsible for the death of his adopted son Ikemefuna of whom Okonkwo is quite fond (A, 62-64). Of his other four sons, Okonkwo promises that "if you turn against me when I am dead I will visit you [as a spirit] and break your necks," (A, 172) an oath which is very compatible with Freud's primal horde parricide hypothesis.

In the middle of *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo kills a boy in the village because his gun, with which he is rather incompetent (A, 38-39), accidentally explodes and a piece of iron pierces the boy's heart (A, 124). For this crime Okonkwo is exiled from the village for seven years, and thus loses the chance to lead his "war-like clan." (A, 172). The incapacity to control his gun on more than one occasion (he tries to shoot one of his wives but misses) has a blatantly Freudian phallic insinuation. The exile is particularly problematic because the village is soon to be colonized by British missionaries.

When Okonkwo returns from his exile, the colonization process is already underway. He tries to take matters into his own hands, despite his absence, and does little to help matters, other than decapitating a head messenger with standard castration imagery (A, 204). Despite this, Okonkwo realizes that his village is allowing the colonization process and that he is powerless to arrest it. He hangs himself in shame in a kind of mimicking self-castration (A, 208). Although it is not his own sons who overthrow their father, symbolically it amounts to the same idea because it is especially Okonkwo's eldest son Nwoye who is one of the staunchest supporters of the new Christian religion (A, 152-53). Okonkwo disowns Nwoye after the conversion to Christianity, and it was the missionary colonization which impelled Okonkwo's suicide.

The primal horde symbolism is also used elsewhere in *Things Fall Apart*. The colonizers are also subject to a post-primal parricide effect that is as much political as religious. One of the missionaries states that "the head of my church is God Himself," but when pushed, admits that the head is in fact England (A, 179-80). The primal horde parricide trope is avidly represented by Achebe. This is most interesting because Achebe has likely read *Totem and Taboo*, and is incorporating Freud's cultural analysis into literature, a kind of Bahktinian reincarnation of the carnival. Kortenaar writes that "in the figure of Okonkwo, the greatest warrior of Umuofia on the eve of the colonial encounter, Achebe invented an Oedipal patriarch whom he could kill and incorporate psychically ... *Things Fall Apart* presents a myth of how modern Igbo society was founded, an allegory of the **social contract** along the lines of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*."¹⁴

¹⁴ Neil ten Kortenaar, "Oedipus, Ogbanje, and the Sons of Independence," *Research in African Literatures*, 38(2), Summer 2007, 183-205. Quote here from pages 194 and 196.

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