

# GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS

## Essays in African Oral Literature

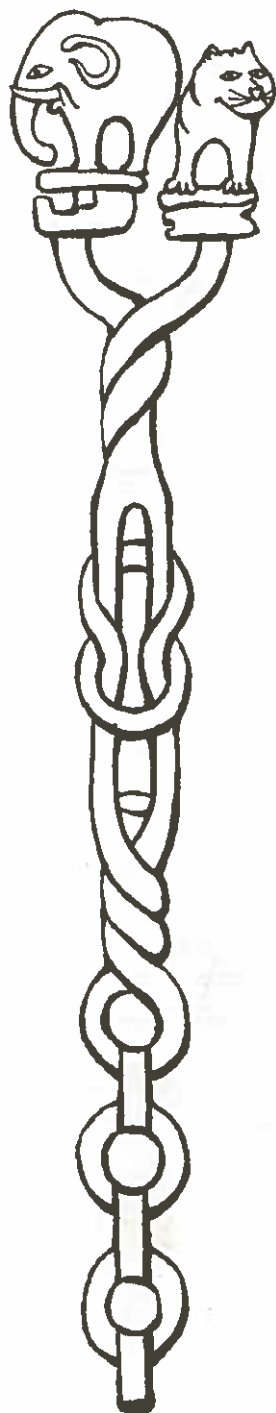
### GENRES, FORMES, SIGNIFICATIONS

#### Essais sur la littérature orale africaine

Edited by

Textes réunis par

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JASO OCCASIONAL PAPERS No.1

General Editors: Steven Seidenberg, Jonathan Webber, Pat Holden

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**GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS :**  
**Essays in African Oral Literature**

Papers in French and English

Edited by

**VERONIKA GÖRÖG-KARADY**

With a Foreword by RUTH FINNEGAN



**JASO**

**Oxford 1982**

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The essays that appear in this volume were first published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford (JASO)*, Volume XIII no.1 (1982), except for the last contribution, and the Preface and Foreword, which were written especially for this publication. The Editors of *JASO* gratefully acknowledge the generous subsidy made from Paris by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Equipe de Recherche Associée no. 246) and the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, without whose assistance the publication of this book would not have been possible.

*JASO* is a Journal devoted to social anthropology, now in its 13th year; it appears three times annually. Subscription information may be obtained by writing directly to the Editors, *JASO*, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6PF, England.

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VERONIKA GOROG-KARADY

## RETELLING GENESIS: THE CHILDREN OF EVE AND THE ORIGIN OF INEQUALITY

Inequality is one of the fundamental facts of social life people have to cope with in every society, both from a practical point of view - by living with it - and from a theoretical point of view - by explaining, justifying or contesting it. In historical or 'Promethean' societies inequality is conceived of in historical terms, that is in terms of dated economical or sociological circumstances. In traditional societies, devoid of recorded history and of categories to chart social change chronologically, inequality (and for that matter most other collective arrangements) tends to be accounted for in genetic terms where happenings in primeval times ('origins') are presented as instrumental in the birth and perpetuation of hierarchical differences among mankind.

However different representations of inequality in historical and traditional societies may be, they generally cover the same problem areas. Both refer to its 'distributive' and 'relational' aspect, that is to 'the ways in which different factors such as income, wealth, occupation, power, skill etc. are distributed' and to 'the ways in which individuals differentiated by these criteria' are related to each other within a system of groups and categories'. Still, traditional representations of inequality elaborate more often on non-social (natural, accidental, psychological) sources of social differentiation and, implicitly, also tackle the logical problem of how multiplicity came about in its socially objectivated forms.

This essay deals with two small corpuses of tales that develop the biblical theme of Eve's children in order to exemplify traditional explanations of inequality. The tales have been collected among Hungarian peasants and among a number of closely-related Sudanese societies (Dinka, Shilluk and Nuer). What they have in

common is that the authenticity of the texts is well-documented and that the social environment is well-known through reliable socio-historical accounts in both sets of cases. The purpose of this exercise in literary comparison is to apprehend *different ideological patterns in the elaboration of an identical narrative subject* which further research might eventually relate to broader issues such as traditional conceptions of social order in Europe and Africa. No general conclusions can be drawn directly from the study of such small and, by choice, thematically limited samples, but some qualified observations can be expected regarding two problems which often prove to be crucial for the understanding of oral literature, namely what are the constraints or degrees of liberty with which a very simple story can be reinterpreted to satisfy various ideological aims, and what are the narrative tools to achieve such reinterpretations?

The story under scrutiny is registered in the *Tale-type Index* of Aarne and Thompson but only a few occurrences are cited.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Eve's children in Hungary.*

The Hungarian corpus is the result of recent collecting, mostly by Ilona Nagy, from a cluster of villages in the north-central region of the country.<sup>3</sup> I also worked there and met some of the storytellers, all of them aged and religious-minded Catholics with a measure of basic literacy and a first-hand knowledge of the Bible.

All the Hungarian corpus is clearly inspired by the story of the Fall (Genesis iii), though only one version actually uses the whole story (no.7) while the others refer to one of its minor episodes directly related to Eve's children. The biblical story is based on Eve's double sin, namely her ignoring of God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit and her tempting Adam to follow suit in breaking God's law. Retribution for the offence is eviction from Paradise. God's plan failed to keep men in their original state, implying innocence, immortality, absence of suffering but also the lack of procreation. Henceforth reproduction and sexuality would be part and parcel of the human condition.

#### Hungarian corpus

1. *God went to visit Adam and Eve. They had 12 children. God wished to bless them. Adam and Eve were ashamed to have so many children so they presented only 6 to God. These 6 were blessed by God. They had a happy life therefore. The other 6 whose existence was hidden had a very hard life. That is why some people live well and others badly. The last ones were not blessed by God.*

(Collected in 1979 by P. Villányi, Galgamácsa. Told by Mrs. Julia Vankó.)

2. *God said to Adam: 'Adam, introduce your children to me!' Well, Adam was ashamed....He was ashamed to show all of them. He only introduced 6 of them and hid the other 6. So God blessed the 6. And the others? We are the others. Because of the naughtiness of Eve we are victims. She denied us. We are the denied ones.*

(Collected in 1979 by P. Villányi, Galgamácsa. Told by Mrs. Julia Vankó.)

3. The children of Eve were born. She had plenty of them. God went to pay a visit. He wanted to know the number of the children. She had many, many children. The children were in the forest, between the trees, behind the bushes; they watched out. Eve said to them that the more handsome of them should come along. So the handsomest came out but the ugliest stayed on naked in the forest. That was the custom at that time. Clothes did not yet exist. So Eve presented just the most handsome of her children to God. They were roughly twenty. God became angry, and pronounced a curse. But I do not know what it was!

(Collected in 1969 by Ilona Nagy, Nógrádsipek. Told by Mrs. Erz<sup>se</sup>bet Lacko.)

4. Adam and Eve lived in Paradise. They had 100 children. God wished to bless these children and ordered Eve to get them into a row. Eve heard the order. She went to Adam asking: 'What are we doing?' 'Why?', asked Adam. 'God said to get my children in a row because he wants to bless them.' But there were not enough clothes. She dressed 50 of the children and got them into a row next to their small house. God arrived and saw the children and Eve, the latter standing in front of them. 'Eve, all your children here?' 'Yes my Lord all of them are here.' 'Eve are you sure all of them are here?' 'Yes, Lord.' 'Well, Eve I will bless them, and they will rule over the other people.' These became the clever and intelligent ones of that country and of the world. The other 50 became serfs. They work, they plough, they sow because Eve denied their existence. We are the denied children of Eve, those blessed by God rule us.

(Collected in 1966 by Ilona Nagy, Somogyudvarhely. Told by Ferenc Balogh.)

5. Eve had many children. When she was asked she said she had 50. In fact she had 100. Because of her denial half of them became rich and the other half poor. Half of humanity became poor because she did not tell the truth.

(Collected by Ilona Nagy in 1969, Szécsényfalú. Told by Mrs. Mária Oravecz.)

6. When Jesus came to the earth Eve had 150 children. She washed in the river. 'What are you doing Eve?' It was not Jesus but God who asked her. 'I am washing, my Lord.' 'What are you washing?' 'Old rags, my Lord.' Since all clothes become rags after a while, nothing lasts forever. God asked again: 'How many children do you have?' 'Fifty,' said Eve. 'Where are the others?' asked God. So, Eve has children who are exiled, orphaned, neglected. These are the poor ones.

(Collected by Ilona Nagy, 1968, Bernecebaráti. Told by Mrs. Borbála Hajas.)

7. Once Eve went to water the flowers, to watch the trees. A big snake watched her intently. In fact it was a real man in the skin of a snake. The snake said: 'Come here and I will give you this beautiful apple.' At this time Eve had not yet any children. Eve



*became very friendly with the snake and so then she had plenty of children. Adam learned of that. The children begotten with Adam were all handsome, the children begotten with the devil, the snake, were all ugly. Once God told Eve to call her children together, her real children. Eve called her real children but she did not dare to call the others. She hid them. So, because of the mischief of Eve God did not bless these people. The stolen children were hidden. The real children who were blessed became more clever and could go to school. The hidden children became the Csango, bandits, and the poor. The latter ones steal from the others. That is the origin of the poor and the rich. (Collected by Ilona Nagy, 1969, Nógrádsipek. Told by Mrs. Erzébet Lackó.)*

The Hungarian stories can be analysed through a few significant thematic elements, all of which do not necessarily appear in each text:

- large number of children (result of excessive and/or adulterous sexuality);
- mother withholds some from God's blessing, hiding and denying the existence of some of them;
- the children blessed by God become privileged, the others under-privileged.

The Hungarian versions draw upon the last ingredient of the biblical tale. The first couple is already separated from its Creator and has procreated children. The central motif of all these stories has to do with the workings of sexuality which the biblical text scarcely hints at. Excessive sexuality, as witnessed by the great number of offspring, incurs shame and sets into motion the process of the division of mankind. In this respect text no.7 is particularly explicit since the hidden appeal of the snake, that is its unambivalently sexual nature, is emphasized. Clearly the snake here represents a man and the means of seduction, the apple represents sexual pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

This general principle of the shame of excessive sexuality and its multiple fruits is inspired by the tight social control of sexuality in rural Hungary backed up by the Catholic interpretation of original sin as it is included in the biblical story of the Fall. This elaboration of the Judaeo-Christian tradition has always commended sexual austerity and Hungarian Catholicism often laid stress on it. Popular morality and even the practicalities of cohabitation sometimes make sexual contact even between husband and wife somewhat shameful. Excessive fertility, attributed in many stereotypes to the lower, non-property peasantry and to despised national minorities, is regularly looked down upon. It carries a prejudice against all those unable to regulate their existence biologically as well as economically. One saying addressed to large families is 'They are prolific as the Gypsies' - and it is not meant as a compliment. It is the women who are generally made responsible in peasant morality for excessive fertility. 'She is prolific as a rabbit', as another typical saying goes. A negative interpretation of Eve's prolific offspring is thus supported by a range of ethnographic evidence.



The shame for excessive fertility (and sexuality) is important because it qualifies Eve's responsibility in the ensuing discrimination that will affect her children's destinies. More often than not she does not choose among her children as to which should be 'shown' and which hidden. Even when she actually makes a selection from among the offspring, her choice is over-determined by obvious considerations of coming up to social expectations (cf. nos. 3, 4 and 7) and of showing off the more 'presentable' youngsters according to the common criteria of popular 'decency' (the better-clothed, the more handsome, those of legitimate birth). In tale no. 7 it is explicitly stated that Eve *dares* not call the children she had with the snake (devil) but there is no mention of any hostility against the ill-begotten. Eve is *objectively* responsible for the primitive discrimination: she is its active agent. This is why she is verbally condemned by the narrators. Thus the stories simultaneously keep up the appearance of an original fault - even if it was not an intentional one - and explain it away by the circumstances. All extenuating circumstances are granted to Eve in advance.

Once again it is perhaps not far-fetched to relate this ambiguity to constraints of a religious and ethnographic nature. God's original responsibility in the ensuing institutional discrimination would have been incompatible with the popular image of the divinity. Eve's full responsibility was also difficult to accept within the same ideological framework, given the much popularised sanctity of the Catholic mother-image which, in Hungary, is particularly well-grounded in the cult of Mary, the 'Holy Mother', 'Mother full of felicity'. In European folklore the mother role can be both good and bad but the negative functions (by a well-known psycho-analytical process of splitting) are usually attributed to the stepmother. Motherly status in a way preserves one from evil and tends to be exalted, whatever different and indeed often derogatory representations are attached to women. Our stories succeed in reconciling the message they convey with the prevalent conception of a benevolent God (He came to bless men's offspring) and with an ambiguous mother image (whose fault is largely excusable).

In the biblical story God punishes the first couple and their descendants collectively but women are inflicted with special penalties both biological and social in nature: menstruation, labour in childbirth, and submission to male domination. The Hungarian versions of the story make no mention of the special retribution reserved for Eve herself. Nonetheless, they perpetuate a justification of the prevailing social relationships where man commands ('he wears the hat', as the proverb states) and 'woman's name is "keep quiet"'. Adam's role is indeed nowhere active, if he has any role at all. In the one case when the fault of lying to God and hiding the children falls on him (text no. 2), the responsibility for the division of mankind is all the same ascribed to Eve's alleged 'naughtiness'. Such negative definition of womanhood is common in local folklore<sup>5</sup> and text no. 7 elaborates it in the form of seductiveness and proclivity to seduction (infidelity). But even here Eve's frailty is the consequence of the bad man's desire, a temptation that comes from the male. In spite of this only the woman is loaded with the negative stereotype, an apparent conse-

quence of the transfer of the biblical condemnation from the original story (where it is justified) to these versions (where it is not). The special lot of women is also exemplified in text no.6 by the work done exclusively by Eve. Here the biblical state of women and their domestic function in traditional peasantry overlap.

All this considered, the weak role of Adam and the strong part played by Eve is a scheme to unburden men from any direct responsibility, indeed to disimplicate them from responsibility for mankind's destiny. As the story puts woman face-to-face with God, laying all decision in her hands, a simultaneous under- and over-estimation of womankind is accomplished. Such ambiguity of the feminine image is often to be found in European folklore, though it is rarely invested with such an ideological load as it is here.

Even the fact that Eve appears, as we have seen, always unaware of the possible effects of her behaviour (hiding some and presenting others of her children) confirms the stereotyped image of women. The weaker sex is not endowed with the intelligence necessary to recognise the consequences of her conduct. In one instance (text no.7) the sin of the flesh itself is presented as the woman's misconduct though here she is merely responding to temptation. There is at least one more instance where an anti-feminist popular stereotype looms up. Eve's lying to God would, in popular wisdom, be interpreted with reference to the unreliability or untruthfulness of women, a theme which is widely reflected in Hungarian oral literature. The strength of this negative image is in fact so strong that it transcends the story actually presented. In the one case already mentioned (text no.2), where Adam plays the role of the liar, responsibility is still loaded on to Eve.

The reasons for the division of mankind ultimately reflect a fatalistic as well as a Manichean view of history. The motif of an original misfortune is over-stressed and its consequences split humanity into two parts, those blessed by God and the rest of them who are victimized in various ways. Class society, rather than ethnic divisions, go back to these mythical happenings, but the narrative arrangement of the latter is such that an original quasi-biological division of the first humans is clearly suggested. Indeed the 'hidden' children remain away from 'civilisation', naked, sometimes in the forest, in what the popular imagination would qualify as a state of 'savagery'. God's blessing of the others in a way only ratifies the initial division of mankind into those close to nature (the lower classes) and the 'civilised' (the ruling group). Since the stories emphasize the mythical determination of social stratification (that is inequality), they explicitly justify it and display a conviction of the immutability of this state of collective affairs.

The vision of mankind conveyed in the stories is fundamentally dualistic or Manichean. All qualities of people can be sorted into two contrasting registers as found in *Figure 1*.

This dualistic perception of human fate is strengthened by the equal division of mankind. Whatever the number of Eve's children, they are divided into two groups of equal size without any intermediary categories. Such ritualized opposition (through the use of equal ritual numbers) of the blessed and the deprived conveys a

FIGURE 1

<i>initial qualities</i>	-proximity to God (presented to God's blessing)	-distance from God (hid- den, removed from God's blessings)
	-parents are proud of	-parents are ashamed of
	-handsome	-ugly
	-clothed	-naked
	-of legitimate birth (Adam's children)	-of illegitimate birth (the devil's or the snake's children)
<i>derivative qualities</i>	-rich	-poor
	-happy (good life)	-unhappy (bad life)
	-rulers, powerful	-serfs, powerless
	-clever, educated	-uneducated
	-leisurely	-working, toiling
	-honest	-members of out-group:
	-members of in-group	Gypsies (Csango), exiled, orphaned

sense of the inevitability of the established social order. The stories clearly indicate that this pessimistic conception of history belongs to the ill-fated among whom the narrators locate themselves. ('We are the denied ones.')

#### *The original differentiation in Sudanese tales* <sup>6</sup>

The small corpus of Sudanese versions appear to be heavily syncretic.<sup>7</sup> Though the biblical inspiration is apparent in some (nos.2 and 4), they are rather remote from the story in Genesis, so that it may be assumed that local creation myths are mingled here with the biblical tradition. Whatever their literary status, all these texts are attempts to integrate the white man into the Sudanese world-view. As Francis Deng put it about the Dinka, as they 'grapple with their relative position in the world complex of cultures and technological revolution, their mythology is beginning to react in an attempt to explain the contemporary realities of the Dinka world....'<sup>8</sup> The pieces of this sample, collected over a wide span of time (between 1910 and 1972) show remarkable constancy. Their authenticity has been confirmed, independently, by contemporary scholars. It appears that some Sudanese traditions of the origins of men have been sufficiently close to the biblical story to make it easily acceptable and liable to be used by local story-tellers all the more that the Bible itself was translated into Shilluk for example, as early as the 1920s.

1. (Dinka)<sup>10</sup> When man was created, it was as twins. One was a brown child and one was a black child. The woman would keep the black child to herself, away from the father. Whenever the father came to see the children, she would present the brown child and keep back the black child because she loved the black child very much. The man then said, 'This child whom you keep away from me, in the future, when they [the children] grow up, I will not show him my secrets.' That has remained a curse on us. It is because of this story which we have been told by our fathers that we have been deprived. Our father did not show us the ways of our ancestors fully....It was the woman who kept her black child away from his father. Otherwise, we would have known more things than we know.

2. (Dinka)<sup>11</sup> In the words of creation, it used to be said that when God created people, man was the first to be created. He was created from clay. And then God gave it breath and it became man. The woman was created subsequently. Then God said, 'You two will bear children this way.'

Then the woman gave birth to triplets. God made one child white and made one child brown and made one child black. This black child, his mother loved most. She would hide him from the man. The other children were the ones she showed her husband. Those were the only children that the man knew. One day, he found the woman suckling the black child. He said, 'Whose child is this?' She said, 'He is my child.' He said, 'And why do you hide the child? Is he of a separate birth or is he our joint birth?' She said, 'He is of our joint birth.' Then he said, 'This child you are hiding. This child of yours whom you hide will one day be the slave of these other children.' The white child was not really breast-fed. He merely sucked on the breast after they had been emptied. So he was the child his father took. [Whenever people went into public gatherings, she would prevent her black child from going. Only the white child would go with his father.]

Interjection of another informant:

Yes! This white child, his father thus maintained him; he looked after him very well. As he was prevented from sucking, his father took good care to feed him. He took a gourd, a new fresh gourd, bored a hole in the gourd and emptied it. The child was very hungry. The father of the child raised his hands to the sky and prayed, 'God, is there nothing for you to give to this son of mine?' That gourd was filled with milk. That white son of his drank the milk. This white son he took to God to be the servant of God. That is how the English went away and learned. Arab and Dinka remained; the brown Arab remained with the Dinka with their mother. It was said that their mother was the mother of all people.

3. (Shilluk)<sup>12</sup> The cow is our grandmother. It was born as a gourd. Our father is God. We were two of us born by God (a black and a white one). The black one was beloved by his mother; but the white one was hated. When God came, she showed him the white one, but the black one she hid. God asked, 'Why do you hide him?' She said, 'For nothing.' Then God said, 'Well, do but hide him, I like the white

one. The black people shall be ruled by the white people.' On that day she brought the black one out too. God asked, 'Why do you bring him out?' She said, 'Oh, I just brought him out (without any special reason).' To the white one was given the book, and the gun and the sword and all kinds of goods. He is loved by God. So now the black people are ruled by the white.

4. (Shilluk)<sup>13</sup> Long ago, when God made the people, the young Turk, Abyssinian, Darfurian and the Shilluk were all God's sons. God arrived. He called the mother of the boys Rao [Eve in Arabic] to bring out the children. But Rao, the mother of the sons, let come only three of them. She hid the fourth of them, the Shilluk. Jwok asked, 'Is that all?' She answered, 'Yes.' So God left. Later he came back and found there four boys. He called the mother, Rao, and asked her, 'You told me, did you not, that they were three. Where does this one come from?' 'What can I do? How could I hide a man from the one who begot him?' answered Rao. God left and did not come back for a time. Later he came back and asked, 'Why is this boy so skinny, this one, the Turk?' 'I do not eat,' said the Turk. He was hardly fed. The Shilluk could eat enough, the Darfurian could eat enough and so could the Abyssinian. God left again and with him the Turk. Soon after he came back and called the sons. But the Shilluk did not want to come, nor did the Darfurian and the Abyssinian. Then God kissed the Turk on the mouth and told him: 'You are not afraid of me, you are my son.' And the other sons spat.

5. (Nuer)<sup>14</sup> God had a wife and they had several different children. One day kot set out on a journey while his wife stayed at home with the children. When he came back, he said to her, 'Bring me the children so that I cut their hair.' The wife said, 'Of course.' And she brought the white one. But she did not bring the Nuer, the Denka and the Shilluk. So kot asked her where were the other children. She said, 'This is all.' Then the kot said, 'You lie, this is not all.' And she said, 'This is so, this is all.' Then he said, 'All right. As you have forged a lie, I will cut this kid's hair.' And he cut his hair and said, 'Those children you have with you must remain yours.' The woman said, 'All right, they must remain mine.' And he gave a gun to the white one....

The significant core of the tales is organised around the following structural elements:

- mankind derives from a primitive father (identified as God or invested with divine authority) and a mother;
- the first offspring of the ancestral couple are racially (ethnically) different: black and white (with or without an intermediary);
- original association of the black child with the mother and, consequently (implicitly), of the white child with the father;
- historical confirmation of the primitive associations: the white receive privileges from the father.



The opposition between the ancestral father and mother is the dominant aspect of all these stories. It is manifestly connected with the male-dominated representation of the social order prevalent in these Sudanese societies. The father's customary pre-eminence in the domestic group is particularly enhanced by its confusion with God. In the Shilluk and Nuer tales God acts as the original father. In the Dinka tales the father and the creator are only formally distinct. In one of the Dinka texts (no.2) he 'makes' the children white or brown or black without actually begetting them. However, the children's destiny is magisterially decided upon by the father who thus appears to be endowed with superior prerogatives. He holds the 'secrets' (knowledge), can condemn descendants to slavery or commend to God (etc.) when he does not directly wield divine power. The overlapping of the creative and procreative functions (giving life is man's most sacred attribute) is not infrequent in mythico-religious representations. It is attested in some forms among the Dinka.<sup>15</sup> However it may be here that the primal confrontation between the parents is, from the outset, a conflict between unequal partners, so that its outcome seems pre-determined by the established power relations. Inequality within mankind results directly from the unequal and conflicting partnership of the ancestral couple. Within the narrative structure the historical destiny of the ethnic groups is the outflow of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Indeed, since men were born racially different, it suffices to qualify sociologically the existing ancestors so as to project a colonial-type stratified view onto the historical picture. This qualification is implicit in the preferential association of the ancestral children with their mother or father respectively. The stories offer no motivation for the initial preference of the mother for the black child, the father's preference for the white one being only a derivative feature. However arbitrary it is, the mother's preference is a positive choice. The black child is hidden from the father, is fed (especially breast-fed) and exclusively looked after, while the white one is neglected. Thus the father's association with the white descendants comes up to offsetting the initial imbalance, to restoring order and obtaining justice, but it is not a genuine preference.

This motif of preferential associations<sup>16</sup> carries a doubly mitigating interpretation of the unequal destiny of the two racial groups. First, men are born equal though different by colour. Secondly, the black child is distinguished by the ancestral mother's special affection; while the initial status of the white in the family group is low, he is in fact discriminated against. Black ancestry bears the halo of the beloved ones, white ancestry that of the hated ones. On the mythical plane the black has a marked pre-eminence (or superior value) over the white, which the historical reversal of their relative position cannot annihilate since the association of the white with the father flows *not from affection* but from circumstances. The white child will receive better endowment or will be made superior by the father because the black one is hidden or remains aloof (cf. text no.4). There is an element of fault stated here (the mother should not withhold a child from the father, nor should a child be afraid of him), but this is not

to change the two children's basic qualities. With this narrative arrangement African story-tellers achieve a remarkable adaptation of a received narrative structure to their ideological need of explaining prevalent social inequality between racial and ethnic groups without giving up the idea of the Africans' ascendancy of a symbolic (or mythical) order.

Some significant details of the African stories are worth mentioning. The division of mankind is not viewed always in a Manichean manner with reference to the ethnic entanglements of Sudan. The functional equivalent of 'the white' is the Turk in one instance. A 'brown child', the Arab or otherwise non-qualified children sometimes act as go-betweens in the opposition of black and white. But these technicalities do not upset the narrative economy of the tales. Historically established inequality is expressed in terms of *power* (the white rules over the black), *knowledge* (the white receives the book, learns his father's 'secrets'), *military superiority* (the white gets the gun, the black gets the lance) and also of distance from the birthplace (the English leaves while the Dinka and the Arab stay; cf. text no.2). The motif of proximity is a possible reminder (and redundant evocation) of the black child's association with his mother, guardian of the home. In this respect the mother's protection of the black child - who is 'hidden' - is the structural opposite of the exposure of the white and his association with the father. The father is the one who does not remain at home, is engaged in public life etc. More generally, public appearance and presentation are the prerogative of those invested with authority, and this motif as such anticipates the social prerogatives the white is meant to be invested with. This interpretation is explicitly suggested in the interjection inserted in the Dinka version (no.2). In the Shilluk text (no.4) a similar theme appears in the form of an offence committed by the black children, who refuse to answer (come out) to their father's call.

The conflict opposition of the first human male and female can be sketched with the help of their differential attributes in the Sudanese stories:

	WOMAN	MAN
<i>presentation of self</i>	secluded, at home, in privacy	in public, away from home
<i>authority</i>	deprived	endowed with divine power, primogeniture (first created), dominant
<i>theme of 'hiding'</i>	the one who hides, acts behind a screen	open, does not hide



theme of 'mobility'	immobile	mobile, active
theme of 'excess'	excessive (in love for child)	moderate
theme of 'justice'	unjust (neglects white child)	just, dispenser of justice
theme of parental behaviour	selectively good or bad mother	good father

### *Conclusion and confrontation*

The Hungarian and African samples manifestly offer very different elaborations of the same story which lend them often contrasting narrative and ideological significance. These opposite patterns respond to different cultural codes which, applied to the same narrative structure and respecting its internal cohesion, provide diverging 'solutions' to the given 'literary problem'. The differences, though systematic and interconnected within each pattern, can be best apprehended in three thematic areas: the initial set-up (or exposition of the dramatic situation), the original fault (as regards the offspring) and the meaning of the concealment.

The initial situation in the Hungarian stories is strongly dramatised. Eve's excessive fertility (and, implicitly, her sexuality) is indeed the key of all the happenings inasmuch as the fear of social sanctions (shame) sets the events into motion. This motive obviously could not appeal to the African imagination where fertility remains a paramount value, indeed an essential means of assessing women. Consequently another initial conflict situation is put forward which is instrumental in the development of the story. This is the primitive hostility between the ancestors, based on 'crossed preferences' among parents and children. Preference is possible only if the children have different identity. Thus they must be born different and their number must be small (two or three, ideally), so that their opposition according to their proximity from the mother should be meaningful.

Once this narrative arrangement is made, the stumbling-block of the heroes is the mother's 'fault'. In the Hungarian stories the fault is over-motivated, that is - to all practical intents and purposes - it is minimized. In the African stories the fault is an in-built element of the initial situation. The conflict between the ancestral parents is produced by the mother's exclusive affection for her black child on the strength of which she withholds (hides) him from the father. This preference and, consequently, the fault the mother incurs is unmotivated. We have seen the ideological importance of the mother's arbitrary association with the black in the message the African stories convey: they supply the blacks' social disinheritance with a partial and symbolic compensation. In

the Hungarian stories the minimising of the fault is no less significant. It tends to confer an accidental character to the establishment of inequality. The historical damnation of the poor and powerless flows from a mythically contingent source. Both elaborations of the motif offer some narrative solace to those who are dominated.

The nature of concealment (hiding) is exactly opposite in the two samples of tales. In the Hungarian tales the mother hides those she is ashamed of, a normal attitude in the local peasant code of behaviour. Concealment clearly attests to a somewhat negative association also according to the logic of the narrative situation. As there is, initially, no enmity between God and the ancestral mother, there is no point in keeping from his blessing the 'presentable' children, while it is understandable that the others should be hidden. In the African tales the black child is kept out of sight, just as a treasure is sheltered, to be protected. Hiding means above all proximity to the mother and, in the line of the original conflict between father and mother, distance from the father (God) who represents from the start a hostile principle.

These differences do not affect the *dénouement* of the stories, though they provide a slightly different ideological colouring in the two patterns. In the Hungarian tales God's blessing goes to those already distinguished (even if sometimes under duress) by the mother. The two 'choices' coincide and the damnation of the neglected children appears to be all the more irrevocable. In the African tales those who are historically deprived are entitled to a special status as the primitively elect.

#### NOTES

\* The Genesis story was elaborated equally among the Sherente of Central Brazil. Cf. some brief comments on it made by A. Dundes, E.R. Leach, P. Maranda and D. Maybury-Lewis in Maranda, Pierre and Elli Kongas Maranda (eds.), *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press 1971.

1. Cf. A. Beteille, *Social Inequality*, Harmondsworth 1970, p.13.

2. Aarne and Thompson give the following summary of the tale: Eve has so many children that she is ashamed; when God pays her a visit she hides some of them and they fail to receive the blessing given to those in sight; thus arise differences in classes and peoples.

3. I am indebted to Ilona Nagy, Fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Science, for allowing me to use the tales she has collected. Mrs. Nagy is currently engaged in the preparation of the Catalogue of Hungarian Popular Legends and Religious Tales. I am also grateful to Peter Villányi for permission to use the tales he collected in Galgamácsa. The English translations were done by myself.

4. Among others see Theodor Reik, *Myth and Guilt, the Crime and Punishment of Mankind* (London 1958, pp.81-100) for an overview of the theological and psycho-analytical arguments used to interpret the tale of Genesis, which basically converge in considering the

Fall of Man as due to a sexual offence.

5. One of the most popular Hungarian creation stories develops the theme of the animal origins of the first women (made of a dog's tail).
6. In an earlier work I presented a general study of the problem of original differentiation in African oral literature. See V. Görög-Karady, *Noirs et Blancs, leur image dans la littérature orale africaine*, Paris 1976. Cf. also my article 'Noirs et Blancs. A propos de quelques mythes d'origine vili' in *Itinérances...en pays peul et ailleurs*, Vol. II, 1981, pp. 79-96.
7. A range of biblical stories (for example those of the sons of Noah, Jacob and Esau etc.) have often been reinterpreted in African folklore. See T.O. Beidelman, 'A Kaguru Version of the Sons of Noah', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol.III, 1963, pp.474-490.
8. Cf. F. Deng, *African of Two Worlds*, New Haven and London, 1978, p.76.
9. I am much indebted to Dr. Walter G.A. Kuniwuk for complementary information on present-day story-telling in Sudan.
10. Cf. F. Deng, *African of Two Worlds*, *op.cit.*, p.76. Both Dinka tales (see note 9) have been published in English but it is clear that the interviews to collect them were directed in Dinka. The narrator is Loth Adija, representative of the Ngok Dinka of Southern Kordofan Province, the only Dinka section administered as part of Northern Sudan. If the Ngok are 'Southerners' like the Dinka in the Southern provinces and share their cultural heritage, their more recent political experiences are somewhat different. The interview was arranged in Khartoum in 1974 with Chol Adija, Loth Adija, Marieu Ajak and Acueng Deng together. With the exception of Chol Adija who had been a court member, the informants were elderly noblemen who took turns to tell the stories and completed each other's versions.
11. Cf. F. Deng, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-78.
12. Cf. D. Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, Berlin 1912, p. 178.
13. Cf. W. Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, Mödling bei Wien 1925, Vol.II, pp.241-242. (The English translation is my own. Dr. Kuniwuk was kind enough to confirm that the story is still told in a similar manner by the Shilluk.) It is to be noted that the only informant Hofmayr identified by name was the person who told him five 'religious stories', among them the version presented here.
14. Cf. S.C. Crazzolara, *Zur Gesellschaft und Religion der Nuer*, Wien-Mödling 1953, pp. 69-70. Crazzolara collected his stories in 1932 in Yoinyan, 40 miles from Lake No. He offers no information about the narrators. The translation is my own.
15. Cf. G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience*, Oxford 1961, p. 39 ff.
16. See my 'Parental Preference and Racial Inequality', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Forms of Folklore in Africa*, Austin and London 1977, pp.104-134.