

Myth and Meaning

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By Esme Luckham

Claude levi-Strauss

- Born 1908 in Brussels, Belgium
- Lived in France
- His father was an artist and his mother was the daughter of a rabbi
- Parisian socialist who went to teach sociology in Brazil, even though he had studied philosophy, because he was intrigued by Jean-Jaques Rousseau's theory that there was an original natural human being, who was in Brazil.



Influences:

- Marxism
- Psychoanalysis
- Geology
- Socialism

What do these have in common?

Levi-Strauss started out thinking he would become a musician and would dabble in creative writing. However, after his teen years, he decided to study philosophy at university. It wasn't until his late twenties, when he started down the anthropological path that made him so famous.

Structuralism

- Many say that Claude Levi-Strauss was a pioneer of structuralism.
- His way of looking at ancient mythology has influenced, historians, classasists, anthropologists and psychologists.
- His goal was to understand these myths on many levels, he sought to find deeper, underlying allegorical meaning.
- He would take a myth apart to pick out the features that he was interested in examining.
- He would then compare these features to other features from other myths or modern stories and find patterns in them.

Incest and Oedipus

In his first book Levi-Strauss examined the structure/behavior around kinship. He came to the conclusion that society was first formed (everywhere in the world) because of the incest taboo. He suggests that the reason society came about was because men would have to make connections with other men to trade/find women outside of his family.

Oedipus, a Greek play by Sophocles, is a good example to look at when considering the societal structures formed around incest. And how this creates a natural structure to the story.

Oedipus and his mistakes

By leaving his home in Corinth, Oedipus believes that he is escaping a terrible prophecy that says he will kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus defeats the Sphinx, saved the seven-gated city of Thebes, and married the queen Jocasta. They go on to have children and live in peace until there is a terrible plague; Oedipus Goes to an oracle who says that the plague is because the murderer of Laius (former king) remains in the city unpunished. However through his investigations, Oedipus realises he is the one who killed Laius and that he was also Oedipus's father, meaning that he had married his own mother, fulfilling the prophecy.



Bibliography

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Images taken from google and Britannica encyclopedia.