

KINGSHIP AS A SYSTEM OF MYTH:
AN ESSAY IN SYNTHESIS

I. ROYALTY AND TRANSGRESSION

Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* attracts the attention of ethnologists who are interested by the symbolical analysis of kingship. Although this book does not deal with the theme of kingship as such, it overlaps it on a mythical level. It is a novel about the rise and fall of a man, Henchard, whose initial act is to sell his wife and daughter; in order to commit this act he deviates from the context of the human norm by way of drunkenness. He then enjoys great success as a corn merchant and becomes mayor of the town. Twenty years after this the graph of his destiny starts to fall with the arrival of a young man named Farfrae, who eventually ousts Henchard from his business as well as from his political position, and who goes to the length of taking over not only Henchard's mistress, Lucetta, but also his daughter, Elizabeth-Jane.

This novel is likewise interesting for several of its symbolical and structural aspects, as is proven by the numerous contrasts

Translated by Simon Pleasance.

Kimball and Weatherford have emphasised that the frame of reference of the tragedy of this novel is to be found not only in the mediaeval concept of the "Wheel of Fortune" and in classical tragedy, but that it also represents the general theme of the conflict between generations. As will be seen, this theme around Henchard develops in line with the model of kingship in Western thought, in such a model as this, the destiny of the hero is expressed as a cycle, and this cycle is itself also bound up with the ritual model of kingship. The structure of *King Lear* was constructed on the same model, although it also contains the theme of death and rebirth, another essential theme of the ritual of kingship. In this case the death of King Lear is spiritual death, not physical death. And Lear's death in the wasteland corresponds to the structure of death and rebirth in the *rite de passage*.

Spiritual death in the *rite de passage* has been the most essential form of experience and knowledge in archaic society. As the individual dies and is spiritually reborn, so society dies and revives spiritually to give time its movement of progression. In the case of the individual, death and rebirth are represented by a man on the ritual level, but the death and rebirth of society are represented most frequently by two people in the ritual of kingship—the elder and the younger. This, then, is the symbolical plan of the ritual model which leads to the substitution of the king.

This logical model recurs in the contrast between Saul and David. Saul was a powerful monarch, endowed with a good measure of generosity, but his temperament was irregular and impulsive. One can see that Henchard was similar to Saul in his essence. On the opposite side to Saul, the young man David had a quick mind; he was of pleasant personality, popular, spiritually strong, and patient. In the same manner Farfrae presented himself as a good singer: he charmed Henchard and attracted Elizabeth's attentions. David appeared on the scene in his role as Saul's armour-bearer and as a popular minstrel. There are further parallels between Saul and Henchard. In the same way as Saul lost his royal status and was replaced because of his treachery against God, so Henchard was forced to give up his business interests, his role as mayor, and his various women, straight into the hands of Farfrae. In fact there was

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no way of paving a way through obstacles and difficulties which had their origins in his past, because he had sold his wife and his daughter, and had thus acted in opposition to the basic morals of society. By the fact of his rise to power and in his fall, the tragedy of Henchard demonstrates for us the tragedy of kingship transposed to the microcosmic location of the town of Casterbridge.

Let us therefore consider what are the themes in the work of Thomas Hardy which correspond to the mythological data peculiar to kingship. First and foremost we are shocked by the scandalous act committed by Henchard. Without thinking directly of it, the fact of selling his wife and daughter reminds us of the murder of Laios perpetrated by Oedipus unbeknown to him. In reality it matters little whether they were acting consciously or not; it also matters little whether they are good or evil. What is of interest to us is the *abnormality* of their conduct. At this point one recognises that the norm of human existence is shattered and one sees the emergence of a situation of sinfulness which is perhaps the repetition of original sin. A situation of this kind does not often occur in the day-to-day life of the average man. Therefore what comes to pass where Oedipus and Henchard are concerned is not part of ordinary life, but it is pertinent to a space in which two men are guided on by a force which remains beyond control. One can say that, within the eligibility of these two persons for royal status, this force is destiny. The psychological abnormality of both Oedipus and Henchard is borne out by the facts. This situation also means that both these men have crossed the boundaries of *culture*, and reached a stage where they find themselves in the realm of *nature*. Thanks to their behaviour which differs from the order of normal life, they open the way towards the *symbolic universe* which exists on the edge of life.

Peter Berger, to whom we owe the conception of the symbolic universe, explains the scope of an experience such as this in terms of the sensation of reality. In his words: "What is particularly important, the marginal situations of the life of the individual (marginal, that is, in not being included in the reality of everyday existence in society) are also encompassed by the symbolic universe... Its meaning-bestowing capacity far exceeds

the domain of social life.”² Herein lies the reason for the primordial sin of kings and queens. Its meaningfulness in relation to the reality of everyday is a dual one: the powerfulness of the energy introduced and the capacity of a man who commits sin. For a long time we have known that the history of cunning and violent kings such as Shakespeare’s Richard III occupies a considerable part of dynastic history. Hitherto people have contented themselves by explaining that these tales are moralising exaggerations whose aim is to magnify the virtue of beneficent kings—which is often the case with royal histories. We know today, however, that historical description reflects our ideas about the political system as we understand it either consciously or unconsciously; it thus has a role for us of being a carrier of mythical thought. Description centering on the violent aspect of certain kings may be considered as a specific symbolisation of the conception which the people forms for itself about certain aspects of society. African data on this subject are in a good position to give one some understanding of such a viewpoint.

Among the Jukun in Nigeria, I managed to piece together, during my stay with them, the story of a extremely cruel king who was called Jikēgyu. His name means “a man who hates war,” but he was brutal and distrustful. It is said that he was not a legitimate king. When his sister was named king of the Jukun, she declined the honour, and asked the council of elders to name her youngest brother in her stead. When he had succeeded to the throne, this brother became highly suspicious and started assassinating his subjects. When he reached the decision to assassinate the prime minister, his sister intervened and asked him to kill her before he took the step of killing the prime minister. Her request was made with the aim of putting a stop to the continual stream of assassinations. But in spite of her request, the king still gave the order to kill his sister in the first place and the prime minister subsequently. After this event, when the king left his capital, he noticed on the road a head, looking at him with fury in its eyes. It was his sister’s head. He was terrified by this occurrence and took flight. This matter caused him to lose the support of his people. Abandoned by them, he left the town and went to live in the suburbs on the

² Peter Berger and Thomas Ruckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, New York, 1967, p. 96.

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western side of the capital and here he died. This place is called *apa nga ku* ("The people have refused the king,") and it constitutes the negative expression of kingship, in contrast with the place which is called *puje*, on the eastern side of the capital, where the ritual of the coronation of the king is held.

It is not difficult here to see the structuration of the negative element of kingship in terms of space. For the Jukun people royalty is as threatening and frightful as it is beneficent. In the actual process the king of the Jukun is no more than an impotent entity in the sense that he cannot make any decision without the consent of the members of the council which is presided over by the prime minister. But still today he is spoken about with an attitude and feeling of supreme terror and dread. On the imaginary plane the king is identified with the hare in the folk-tales, who plays the role of the deceiver and instigator who introduces disorder and chaos to the bosom of society by means of his cunning behaviour, which is at once free and licentious. In fact the skin of the hare constitutes an important element in the garment handed to the king at the time of his coronation. It is perhaps not without significance that one can observe a similar custom for the king of the Shilluk tribe, which lives in the Republic of the Sudan. In fact the Shilluk royalty has long been known, as has the Jukun royalty, for its ritual or legendary institution of *regicide*.

A certain historical narrative of the Shilluk relates the following episode: "There was once a king who was called Ngwo-Babo. He was very cruel. He killed not only men, but women too. One day he ordered a hut to be built. When the work was completed, the king entered the hut with a girl. At this point the people plastered over the entrance to the hut. The king asked them to open the door, but the Shilluk people refused to obey their king. And so the king died. The king who succeeded the reign of Ngwo-Babo was called Nyato, and he was equally as cruel. He ordered all the chiefs to come to his court and asked them the following question: 'Why did you kill my cousin?' They replied: 'Ah, that we do not know.' And so Nyato killed all the chiefs."³ In his discussion of the image of the king in Shilluk country, Lienhardt underlines that people

³ D. Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, London 1912, p. 175.

do not believe that the king is a model of moral conduct in everyday life. He writes: "In the biographies of the kings of the Shilluk, the reputation of the monarchs was not based on the fact that they were just or virtuous men, but on the knowledge of whether the country was in a state of prosperity or not, whether the kings were courageous, whether they were effective in their actions, and whether they were shrewd and prudent. The whimsical side of their nature was always emphasised and, as we know, associated with Dak. Nyikang and Dak are the models for the Shilluk kings." The Shilluk think that the intrigues, surprise techniques, cunning and intelligence of the kings are evidence enough that they exceed ordinary dimensions and are upheld by a divinity. Thus we have the story of the struggle between Nyikang, the founder and hero of the dynasty of the Shilluk, and Dimo. The story goes that Dimo said that Nyikang was mad, whereas Dak was "full of words," which means that Dak was a knowing man—but this did not however mean that Nyikang was an incapable man. It is said that Nyikang was an inventor, because he introduced many objects which are used in everyday life. It would appear that Nyikang was the culture hero who brought some order to the world in the form of the various things which he provided. On the contrary Dak is a malevolent and aggressive figure; he is a deceiver. He tries to deceive his father, in his own interests. Nyikang refers to being a liar and even a professional buffoon. Elsewhere it is related that Dak captured, by his various trickery, a being who was similar to the spirit *Juok*, with which Nyikang founded the royal tree. Hofmayr gives us details about their double-dealing, their cunning, their military prowess, their cruel deeds and their humours. Thus by their severity it is demonstrated that the kings transcend the everyday. We have already shown the association of royalty with metaphysical violence and disorder in terms of the non-everyday.⁴

With regard to the more or less violent character of kingship Lienhardt underlines the correspondence between the figure of the hare, as it appears in the folk-tales, and the figure of Dak

⁴ The discussion which follows is based on the study by Godfrey Lienhardt; cf. G. Lienhardt, "The Shilluk," in *African World* (edited by D. Forde), London, 1965, pp. 138-163.

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in the myth. As is the case with the Anuak, their neighbors, the hare is the *hero-trickster* in the folk-tales of the Shilluk. Hofmayr recounts a story in which the hare eats the young of a crocodile by beguiling the parent crocodiles. Westermann has unearthed a similar tale with Dak as the hero. Thus the folktales about the deceiver supply the model which allows us to understand one of the essential aspects of kingship in respect of the Shilluk. We can say, then, that there is a close affinity between the products of the imagination as found in the tales and the logic which enables us to understand the central symbol of the political phenomenon. The Shilluk people is aware of and acquainted with the ambiguous and ambivalent character of their royalty, and they express it in their own particular way. In the ceremony of installation the Shilluk try to flee when they hear Nyikang approaching, and they also take flight when the effigy of Dak draws near, with a mixture of fear and laughter. The philosopher might qualify this sort of laughter as "grotesque." This is without doubt an expression which greatly helps us to understand the essential nature of kingship.

There is no doubt that each individual description is not in itself of any importance, but we should take note that in every culture one finds violent elements, not in an isolated sense, but associated with other elements; and one can see that they are integrated in the structure of historical descriptions and traditions. One can also understand that they emerge in order to indicate the transcendental aspect of royalty. Violence is always the indicative sign of chaos in society.

The relationship of kingship with primordial chaos is sometimes expressed in the most widely different forms—for example, the form of incest. The other sin committed by Oedipus was that of incest with his mother. This aspect can be felt from the feelings of Henchard towards his daughter, who, in fact, is not his own daughter. The element of incest is closely linked with the concept of kingship.

One of the most remarkable symbolical elements of African kingship is that of ritual incest. There are certain societies in which, during the ceremony of enthronement, the new king marries the wife of his father. Accordingly the new king of the Jukun in Nigeria is taken to the place called *puje*, the ritual

location of kingship, where he is introduced to the first wife of his predecessor, who, in principle, would be his father. He shows her his naked body and spends two nights with her. It is only after this sacred marriage that he makes his official entry into the capital. Now this is not an isolated case in African societies, as is illustrated by Luc de Heusch in relation with the conception of primordial and mythical chaos.⁵ It does, however, go without saying that incest is absolutely forbidden in African societies, just as it is in other societies. The ensuing result is that this royal custom presents a serious danger as far as the everyday routine of the prohibition of incest is concerned. Royal incest therefore violates the everyday conscience and forces the people to reorganise their vision of the world outside the confines of normal morality. One thus finds oneself still further ensconced in a mythical situation rather than in the domain of normal life. We can thus lay down that royal incest is the special mark of the non-everyday aspect of kingship on the mythico-symbolical plane, and that, just as parricide in myth, it can open the way to a cosmological consciousness, thanks to its quality as transgressor in relation to the morality of everyday life. In a society such as the Jukun, where regicide was conceived of as having existed before and where incest was an observable phenomenon, the new king doubly violates the principle of that culture. He neglects the order of that society which is founded on the differentiation between generations. By the act of parricide and the act of incest with his mother, he violates twice over the temporal principle of society. He thus shows himself to be the agent of the non-temporal principle, namely: chaos and disorder.

As we have already shown, the system of rendering legitimate the authority of the king is a result of the fact that he has the potential capacity of committing the most serious sins known to society and it is this which leads him to a status beyond the confines of culture. We have called it *potential capacity*, because this is expressed in different places in very different ways. Even if a particular king does not show any evidence of any tendency of this sort, there are always certain structured elements of chaos which form part of the system of kingship; sometimes

⁵ Luc de Heusch, *Essais sur l'inceste royal en Afrique*, Brussels, 1956.

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in the form of history, or else in myth, or even in ritual. Although these aspects may be difficult to demonstrate, because they do not always manifest themselves in tangible forms, they are still the essential conditions behind the very existence of kingship, because it is only by recourse to the negative aspect that kingship introduces the cosmic force into a society.⁶ In the words of Peter Berger once again: "The political order is legitimated by reference to a cosmic order of power and justice; and political roles are legitimated as representations of these cosmic principles."⁷

And so there is an inherent contradiction in the fact that the principle behind legitimating royalty is atemporal in the sense that it resides outside the regular culture in accordance with the distinct and articulate rhythm of physical nature; whereas it is incarnated in a particular person who is inscribed in a physical notion of time. It is because of this that kingship is personalised in two ritual figures, the old king and the young king, which thus resolves the temporal dilemma. We shall see later how institutionalised royalty settles other dilemmas such as the dilemma of space, the dilemma of the center and the limit, the zenith and the nadir. Now we shall discuss the means whereby kingship has resolved the temporal dilemma.

II. - KINGSHIP AS META-HISTORY

It can be seen that it is when the king withholds sufficient power in a physical sense to maintain the spiritual tension which surrounds him, that he finds himself at his apogee. But the day will come when one finds that the conduct of the king is no more than the repetition of an exhausted model: he no longer offers any new solution to the conflict which exists between the unknown aspects of society, which emerge day after day from one day to the next, and the stereotype

⁶ Cf. Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox—The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare*, London, 1927 and 1966, p. 123. The most recent summary of studies of royalty in the ancient world (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome) is to be found in H. S. Versnell, *Triumphus*, Leiden, 1970, chap. VI, "Gods, Kings and the New Year Festival."

⁷ P. Berger and Thomas Ruckmann, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

model of the responses of power. We find that the decline of physical power involves the decline of the spiritual power with which one hoped that the king would open up to his people the space of mythical patterns of behaviour in the form of models for the innumerable types of day-to-day conduct. But his body is not immortal. His conduct and his thought become fixed as if in a mould after a certain length of time. This is the beginning of his decline, and it is time for the old king to die. It is time for him to walk back down the same slope up which he had formerly run. Perhaps his fall from power will be a gradual process, but in other cases it can be a rapid succession of events, as with Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. The more rapid this fall from power, the more intense becomes the tragic image of kingship. The king himself is more valuable and effective as an object of sacrifice; and in the form of a scapegoat.

In his recent article, J. P. Vernant has demonstrated the aspect of Oedipus as scapegoat in the Athenian ritual of the *pharmacos*. In Vernant's opinion, Oedipus is driven out of Thebes in the same ways as the *homo piacularis* is expelled from a place in order to "remove the contamination."⁸ The decline of Oedipus began with the ravages of the plague and the poor harvest. One finds oneself waiting for this moment which is the sign that his decline has started. With Henchard the discontent among the townspeople originates from the sale of spoiled grain, and this discontent could not be appeased or swayed.

When a king finds that his power is failing and that his decline has begun, one sees the appearance on the scene of the pretender to the throne, awaiting his turn. The fact of having committed a serious sin had allowed one king to go beyond the limits of everyday life. But he is faced with a heavy burden. During his fall from power, he unconsciously directs the danger towards society, unable to control it. In *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas has illustrated a similar situation when she writes: "In the book of Samuel, Saul is presented as a ruler who abuses the power given him by God. When he cannot fulfill his role he causes the people to disobey him; his charisma

⁸ Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Ambiguïté et renversement sur la structure énigmatique d'Oedipe-Roi in *Échange et Communication II*, The Hague, 1970, pp. 1267-1275.

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abandons him and he is afflicted by a terrible rage, depression and madness. Thus when Saul abuses his functions, he loses all conscious control of the situation, and becomes a threat, even to his friend. When he is in possession of uncontrolled power, the ruler constitutes an unconscious danger.”⁹ Whereas Mary Douglas understands the role of the king in terms of morality, we understand it to be something which goes beyond ordinary customs. Because the king cannot bear the responsibility of the situation of sin, the situation overwhelms the king and makes a direct attack on society. In a situation such as this, he cannot be allowed to remain on the throne. And because he has passed on to the other side of life, he cannot revert to the ordinary side of life. At the time of his fall from power certain facets of his character, such as impatience (which is a pressure of vitality at the moment of the king’s apogee) turn against him; as is the case for Henschard. In archaic society, such a situation is conceived of as the contamination of time due to the physical debilitation of the king.

This sort of situation is also expressed in the myth of Veda. Based on the study made by Bergaigne, Clémence Ramnoux explains this drama of transformation. Varuna is the father of the great dragon—or rather he is the dragon itself—and at the same time another power emerges, a young god, the hero who conquers the dragon, in the event at Indra, thus replacing the reign of Varuna.¹⁰ This royal antithesis in terms of generations is repeated in the classical Indian epic with the struggle between King Kansa and Krishna and the murder of the former by the latter in the Mahabharata.

In several archaic societies one comes across institutions such as *regicide* to meet this problem. It is in this light that the Council of Elders in the Yoruba country in Nigeria makes the king the gift of a parrot’s egg when it finds the king too stubborn and unwilling to heed its advice, and thus acting consistently against the wish of the Council. For the Council this is the sign that the king’s reign should be terminated.¹¹

⁹ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Penguin Books, p. 128.

¹⁰ Clémence Ramnoux, “Aspect nocturne de la divinité” in *Études présocratiques*, Paris, 1970, p. 196. See also Ph. Wolff-Windegg, *Die Gekrönten*, Stuttgart, 1958.

¹¹ The most recent information about this well-known custom appears in W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southern Nigeria*, New York, p. 31.

By accepting this gift, the king is obliged to commit suicide by asking his wife to strangle him. The person who reads the book by Frazer called *The Golden Bough* learns that archaic societies existed, in which custom, or rather legend, demanded that the king commit suicide or be killed if he became too senile or fell seriously ill. Properly speaking, after a certain time, when power had left him, the king had to die. We know that in many archaic peoples, the "Old King" was effectively put to death. From Frazer up to Evans-Pritchard various theories have tried to explain the signification of this custom or legend which is almost universal. However, studies have rarely been made of the character of European kingship, from the anthropological viewpoint.

Jan Kott, a Polish critic, in his book, *Shakespeare notre contemporain*, expresses his point of view about royalty as a mechanism of history in terms which are not far removed from the anthropological perspective. In his discussion of the historical logic of royalty which is subjacent in the dramas of Shakespeare such as *King John*, *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *Henry IV*, Jan Kott shows that each of these chapters starts and ends at the same place. In each of these chronicles, one might say that history describes a circle and returns to the point of departure. These repeated, immutable circles which history describes are the successive reigns. He writes: "Each of these great tragedies starts with the struggle to win or reinforce the throne. And each one ends up with the death of the old monarch and the coronation of a new king. In each one of these chronicles the legitimate sovereign drags along behind him a long succession of crimes. When the new prince has already drawn near to the throne, he too drags along behind him a similarly lengthy succession of crimes as those committed by the legitimate sovereign. At the moment when he places the crown upon his head, he will be as hated as the former king. He killed his enemies, and now he will slaughter his old allies. And a new pretender to the throne will make his appearance, in the name of violated justice. The cycle is closed. And a new chapter commences. A new historical tragedy."¹²

This sort of historical model of kingship enables us to see

¹² J. Kott, *Shakespeare notre contemporain*, Paris, 1965, pp. 29-30. On the historical situation, cf. A. Besançon, *Le Tsarévitch immolé*, Paris, 1967.

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the logic of the existence of kings and to understand the historical world as the chain of the cycles of the destiny of kings. "The imaginary Henchard" is just as strongly linked to this cycle, even if he lives anonymously at the level of the logic of history. Jan Kott's text clearly presents the meta-historical mechanism immanent in kingship such as Shakespeare draws from history. Certainly the historical dramas of Shakespeare are not history, in the sense that they are not the direct recount of the historical facts. But they are more than history, because they show human experience on the metahistorical plane. I do not know if the word "meta-historical" exists today in the same way as the terms "meta-language" and "meta-psychology" do. However, it is at this level, thus reduced, that the anthropologist makes his encounter with history.

The logic of kingship such as is illustrated by Jan Kott takes on a dual character. On the one hand, it is maintained for the benefits it affords to the human community; on the other, this logic manifests the human mechanism which is the ultimate expression of political power. The final form of human domination is to draw near to God during life. To realise this, one has to deny one's own human state. This means that power has to be confronted in society with that side of life which is on the edge.

III. - KINGSHIP AND ANARCHY

By acting in this way, however, certain men must be distinct from other men in order to give birth to a political space which is not accessible to other men. In the majority of cases, this space is created as a result of a ritual anarchy or an anarchic pattern of behaviour by the actor at the centre of the political stage. Anarchy is already institutionalised in the systems of kingship in some archaic societies.

In the domain of the succession of royalty, as has already been observed with royal incest practised counter to the strict prohibition of incest in the same light, it can be noted that there is in practice an uncertainty about the rule of succession to kingship even in those societies where the rule of succession is, in principle, clearly defined. It is this practice which is

commonly observed in the traditional African states, notably in Buganda, Ankole and Bunyoro, which are all interlacustrine kingdoms. In these societies, the death of kings is followed by ritual combat or ritual civil war controlled by the prime minister of the deceased king. Princes fought among themselves with the support of their respective maternal family. Civil war generally ended up by the submission of the other princes, or by the flight of the conquered princes.

Thus among the Anole, no king was authorised to die of illness or senility. He had to be poisoned by his wife or personal servant. After the death of the king, the qualified ruler was elected among various princes, but the final proof of eligibility was the elimination of the rival brothers and the act of taking possession of the drum which was the symbol of royalty. During the war of succession, the princes fought one another with weapons, poison and also with magic; a scapegoat was elected from the Plebeians and in the interim period carried on the functions of the king. When the new king came to the throne he was killed.¹³

It is easy to be shocked by this custom which might seem a trifle savage, but on further reflection we are led to the conclusion that this practice is more reasonable than it might appear. In the first place it is the outright manifestation of the political philosophy which expresses the idea that order can only be established by a victory over anarchy and that anarchy is the primordial foundation of the political phenomenon; authority remains where it is, and can still make room for complete anarchy followed by a resettlement of the previous order. Thus Berger and Ruckmann write: "The legitimation of the institutional order is also faced with the ongoing necessity of keeping chaos at bay. *All* social reality is precarious."¹⁴ Various African societies have in this way institutionalised what Shakespeare has illustrated on the meta-historical plane about the English royalty during the Renaissance.

Gluckman has underlined the fact that the element of anarchy is a necessary element for the traditional States of Africa. Instead of being a factor weakening the basis of royalty, institutionalised

¹³ A. I. Richards (ed.), *East African Chiefs*, London, 1960, p. 148 cf. Roger Caillois, *L'Homme et le Sacré*, N. R. F., Paris, p. 147-148.

¹⁴ Berger and Ruckmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

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civil war at the moment of succession fulfils the function of securing and fortifying the idea of royalty among the Bemba, because the opposition of the pretender involves the re-affirmation of the concept of kingship.¹⁵ Although one might have the impression that Gluckman rationalises the function of institutionalised civil war, one can see the parallelism which exists between the traditional State in Africa and what one knows about ancient Japan. The possible explanation of the function of this institution is that ritual rebellion gives shape to the impetus towards disorder by way of a symbolical pattern of behaviour, which thus undergoes the experience of cosmic renewal. In a society such as this, there is a dialectical relationship between history and the structure of the political world. One can express this situation in another form and say that the institutional possibility of kingship which frequently tends to anarchy gives rise to several historical rebellions which are to all appearances accidental. These facts are lodged in historical memory, and thus transform themselves into a structure, which in return is expressed in the political system itself. When one can understand the dynamic relation between the structure of kingship and its historical development, one finds that it is abundantly clear that there is no irreparable disjointedness between the ritual structure of kingship and its historical development.

In several African societies there was another institutionalisation of this drive towards anarchy which was bound up with kingship. Among the Lovedu of south-eastern Africa, all the fires in the State were simultaneously extinguished when the death of the king was announced, and this gave everyone to understand that the country was entering into a period of anarchy. No crime committed in this period of inter-regnum was punished.¹⁶ At the same time one could observe the beginnings of civil war between the eligible princes. Anarchy during the inter-regnum is a custom observed in practically all the traditional States of Africa. This practice clearly indicates the punctuation of time, as it proceeded under the reign of the last king. One has the impression of living in a totally different space and time. With all the possibilities of anarchy, the inter-regnum constitutes the negative

¹⁵ M. Gluckman, "Succession and Civil War among the Bemba" in *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, 1963, p. 87.

¹⁶ E. J. Krige, *The Realm of a Rain Queen*, London, 1945, p. 65.

side of royalty with regard to order. In this negative period, the conspiracy, rebellion and violence which had lain latent as a negative part of royalty during the king's reign, manifest themselves as a central phenomenon of the community.

Civil war introduces "nature" to the inner side of man in history, demonstrating the brutal emotions of men. It is the confrontation of man against archaic dynamism in terms of an experience of chaos that one labels with the frequently encountered words "primordial situation."¹⁷ This is what the private life of an individual cannot produce at the level of day-to-day existence. Kingship is a politico-ritual space which gives access to a place in which the violence of emotions can be expressed.

The ancient chronicle of Japan presents the violent and anarchic aspect of royalty in different forms. As far as the characters are concerned first of all, these aspects include the form of two persons who are royal: the prince Yamato-Takeru and king Yuryaku.¹⁸ The figure of Yamato-Takeru is more mythical. He is conceived of as the primordial model of the tragic hero who is represented on the stage of popular literature in Japan: the hero in exile. The story goes that as the heir apparent the prince spent his life in exile and never had the chance to be crowned. According to an almost mythical story, this prince is reputed to have lived at the beginning of the 4th century. He was obliged to live in exile as the general in charge of a military expedition against the barbarian people of some distant region. His story opens with the murder of his eldest brother, committed in a violent and grotesque manner. His father, the king, asked him one day to waken his brother; the prince disappeared to do so and returned saying that his brother was dead: he had split him in twain because he had not woken up. The king started to go in fear of the violent deeds of prince Yamato-Takeru and sent him to do battle with the barbarians so as to remove him from the royal capital. Even if prince Yamato-Takeru was not the king as such, he was tantamount to his double. He represents an extension of the king's character in mythical thought, because

¹⁷ T. O. Beidelmann ("Swazi Royal Ritual" in *Africa*, Vol. XXVI, no. 7, 1966) discusses the violent, chaotic and demoniacal aspect of the annual ritual of Swazi royalty called *Incwala*.

¹⁸ *Ko-ji-ki* (Chronicle of ancient things) translated by Mr. and Mrs. Shibata, Paris, 1969, pp. 191-233.

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he expresses the violent and capricious aspect of royalty in ancient Japan. Compared to the reigning king who resides in the capital and who thus symbolises order and the central point, the prince is the symbol of disorder and the limit, that is to say, the situation on the edge of royalty. There is an equilibrium between the two kings. Nevertheless, on the death of one or other of them, this state of equilibrium is broken and the marginal element approaches the central point and creates a reversed situation both within and at the center of society, causing a state of disorder. *Ko-ji-ki*, the ancient chronicle of Japan, relates that during the 5th and 6th centuries, the death of kings was followed by the rebellion of the princes and by civil war; after the death of Ojin, Prince Ohyama rose up against Nintoku, the nominated prince. Hanzei succeeded peacefully to the throne relinquished by Nintoku, but the death of Hanzei was followed by the assassination of the nominated candidate, Prince Kinashi-Karu, by Ankô, who came to throne as a result. The story is told that king Yûryaku, who succeeded Ankô, came to the throne having murdered five other princes. King Yûryaku is truly comparable to Shakespeare's Richard III because of his political cruelty. With each war the princes received the support of their maternal uncle. It is after the 6th century that one observes the establishment of the rule of primogeniture as a result of the influence exercised by the despotic system of the Chinese Mandarins. Hitherto, however, Japanese historians have offered no satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon. Some of them have simply affirmed that these tales were more like legends and even inventions. Others have said that they were the reflection of true events. But in our view neither group is right. For reasons which we do not have time to explain here, it is clear that these tales belong to legend, but that, in all probability, they also reflect the state of things before the 6th century, when the death of the king was always followed by a stage of anarchy, which was itself replaced by order after the arrival on the throne of the new king.

As we have observed for African cases, one finds this legendary narration taken up several times in the form of institutionalised symbols, although each story of this type seems to be opportune. One can find certain structured practices in the form of collective representations about kingship. This is true, and particularly

because the history of royalty does not unfold in the shadowy wings of society, but on the contrary occupies the central scene of the area in which a given political community is evolving. This space is loaded with extremely dense tension and allows for a huge broadening of the individual who happens to find himself there. For this reason, kingship never ceases to seduce those are eligible for it. We are told how, during the reign of King Suinin, prince Saohiko, the queen's eldest brother, tried to assassinate the sovereign. Saohiko, who was the half-cousin of Suinin, asked his sister, the queen, one day, whom she preferred: the king, her husband, or the prince, her brother. The queen replied that she loved her brother more than she loved the king. So Saohiko said: "I wish us to rule over the land together" and he gave her a dagger endowed with magic powers, asking her to kill the king while he lay asleep. The plot ended in failure. This story demonstrates implicitly that the dangers which compromise order under the reign of a certain king are close neighbours of the elements which threaten his own person. The very knowledge of the fact that the king is surrounded by threats intensifies the power of kingship to create non-everyday emotion on a higher level (the symbolic universe) and in a more condensed form. Because of this fact kingship is the central symbol of the political-ritual space of a society.

This sort of explanation might appear too conjectural and arbitrary, but it does seem to be confirmed by contemporary psychology. An American psychologist, Philip Slater, has stated that the fact of increasing the authority of certain political leaders leads, of necessity, to an increase in the antipathy which they arouse. The community, in his opinion, undergoes material and spiritual losses in order to increase the authority, in the sole hope that the psychological field will be enlarged. He underlines that, in like manner, pigs are fed to be used in ritual sacrifices. Thus, in the case of the individual, the feeling of aggression presupposes the identification of the object to which it is opposed, namely, that all patterns of defiant behaviour are directed towards the object as a means of sharing the features possessed by the object under attack and as a means of taking possession of them.¹⁹ This psychological explanation exposes to

¹⁹ Philip Slater, *Microcosm — Structural Psychological and Religious Evolution in Groups*, New York, 1969, p. 75.

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some degree the source of the ambivalent feeling that one feels for royalty, and authority in general, in a society. One can see the abrupt contrast of the rise and fall lived at one and the same time. The popular knowledge of the possibilities of rebellion, the knowledge also of the fragility of authority thus solemnised in a spiritual sense, give an intense expression to emotions which remain inside the individual. As a phenomenon which emerges on the central scene of the political space in which the symbolical action is charged with a very high voltage, the more solemn the royalty, the more intense the non-everyday emotion provoked within the individual by the avatars of kingship in certain situations. It is for this reason that royalty can never free itself from the "Wheel of Fortune."

IV. KINGSHIP AND MYTHICAL THOUGHT

The incorporation of natural and anarchic elements is also the essential aspect of kingship in Indonesia.

In his recent and unpublished article, P. E. Josselin de Jong, a Dutch ethnologist, has shown the structure of the dynastic myth in Indonesia and Malaysia.²⁰ He writes as follows: "The people of Negri Sembilan, discontent with being without a chief and with being the prey of their neighbours, sent a mission to Sumatra in the country of Minangkabau, their country of origin; the mission was to ask that they be sent a prince of the dynasty of Pagarruyung, in order to be their king. Raja Khalib, an impostor, arrives posing as the pretender to the throne. But he is discovered and quickly killed, and replaced by Raja Malewar, the real envoy from the country of Minangkabau, who thus became the first chief of Negri Sembilan."

This is an episode which can be found in history and which corresponds to an historical event. Josselin de Jong maintains that the essential theme of this myth, whose presence one finds in several regions of Indonesia, is the struggle of a legitimate prince, removed from the throne, against an impostor or a less legitimate pretender. The legitimate pretender has to undo his adversary before assuming the throne; he has to put up with

²⁰ P. E. Josselin de Jong, *The Dynastic Myth of Negri Sembilan* (Malaya), reference text for a lecture given at the Dept. of Ethnology of the University of Paris, Nov. 1970, unpublished.

confinement, exile and suffering. Josselin de Jong writes: "In the Indonesian world a succession of events such as these is a basic part of royalty."

In a version of an episode in the history of the Sultanate of Malacca, the tale is told of the struggle between two princes: Raja Kashim, the more legitimate prince, and Raja Ibrahim, the less legitimate one. The former passes his time in exile after the death of Sultan Muhammed, because of the usurpation of the throne by Raja Ibrahim. A year later, people have begun to accept him as the legitimate sovereign and he organises a military garrison around himself and does battle with Raja Malewar of Negri Sembilan. This is also the case with the story of Airlangga in Java. When he was named the adopted son of the King of Java in the year 1006/7, the kingdom was overthrown by a neighbouring sultan and he took flight into the forest where he lay in hiding for several years. In the year 1010, he was invited by the elders and re-established the kingdom of Java.

This reminds us directly of one of the archaic Irish images of the "cycle of kings." According to Clémence Ramnoux, a usurper appeared at the end of the dynasty in the cycle called "the cycle of kings"; this usurper was destined to be sacrificed in the course of a magic battle, and replaced by the return of a "child of promise." Disorder, misery and anarchy set in around these fallen princes or usurpers. She says that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* preserves the memory of the cycle.²¹ It is evident that one is here concerned with the job of mythical division (in two) of what the same author explains in another article. According to her one finds in the mythical thought of ancient Greece a means for separating the ambiguous figure. She writes: "One solution consists in making the one the negative of the other. The first figure, the more ancient, being ambivalent, the division authorises one to put the good on one side and the bad on the other."²² In as far as royalty has its cosmic reference, it should always summon up the marginal situation which is expressed in the form of the negative of *black double*. The monster, the sinful king; the infamous king; the old king; the violent prince, the usurper; the deceiver-king; all can be the negative expression of royalty or the negative

²¹ C. Ramnoux, *op. cit.*, p. 276, and *La Nuit et les Enfants de la nuit*, Paris, 1959, p. 159-160.

²² C. Ramnoux, *op. cit.*, 1970. p. 225.

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dividing-up of kingship. This clearly explains the *raison d'être* of those royal figures with a menacing quality.

In analysing the model repeated in the history of the dynasties in Indonesia, Josselin de Jong associates it with the general image of the founder-kings or of those men who have inaugurated a new political era. He has also underlined the parallelism which exists between the structure of the episodes of the founder kings and the process of the ritual of initiation in those societies which do not know what royalty is. He proposes the example of the Toradja of the central Celebes in which the hero passes from his childhood to adulthood by way of a struggle which takes place on a cosmic level. During this process, it is thought at first that he has been killed; he descends to the subterranean realm which is the resting-place of the dead and then returns to earth with the head of his enemy and a wife. Although Josselin de Jong draws our attention to the aspect of transitional rite in both these cases, this brings to mind the theory of A. M. Hocart in *Kingship*²³ which links enthronement with initiation. But the data presented to us by Josselin de Jong enable us to arrive at a more meaningful explanation, because they take the positive role of the negative elements in the ritual and mythical antithesis. It is a matter of the confrontation of the hero with the natural elements which are in opposition to him at the outset of the normal order of life. By showing his capacity to face nature, he is a qualified mediator between the opposed elements in the world: life/death; earth and the subterranean; hero/demon, etc... reign/exile.

In the perspective of the complex of the positive elements of life, the negative element, as the adversary of the king or, in other words, the monster, has as much importance as the deep down source of life. Let us consider the ritual significance of the hill where Raja Malewar of Negri Sembilan battled with the impostor and decapitated him. The place itself where the impostor's head fell is called *Bukit Tempurung*, the "hill of the skull." It has become a ritual place where the local chief of Rembea, the descendant of the chief who helped Raja Malewar to re-establish order, has to pass through each time he visits the royal capital of Sri Menati. This brings to mind the fact

²³ London, 1929 and 1969.

that the king of the Jukun in Nigeria cannot go directly back to the capital Wukari when he visits the ritual place on the East of the capital; he must first of all carry out the ritual at the place where the most evil king was abandoned by the people and died. These two examples seem to us to illustrate the ritual process of the incorporation of the negative element (= nature) in a cosmological sense.

Josselin de Jong presents another myth which is not without significance. The Minangkabau myth tells of two forbears, Katumangunan and Parapatin. Between them there exists a consistent relationship of hostile brotherhood. During their lives they work together to give the Minangkabau their distinctive culture, but they are always in open conflict and have frequently to resort to weapons. This myth brings to mind the parallelism of the different orientations at the outset; the hostile brotherhood is the model which exists between the two halves which are inter-linked by matrimonial exchange and it can also be projected in mythology, as in the history of the mythical twins. All over the world one comes across the myth of the rival twins.²⁴ Moral characters are divided between the two entities: good and bad; ingenious and awkward; beneficent and cheating; hero and monster. Because one comes across mythical sets of twins all over the world, it is still not demonstrated that this sort of mythology is linked exclusively to certain forms of matrimonial exchange which are clearly defined. But, as G. J. Held has shown in *Mahabharata—An Ethnological Study* (Leiden, 1931), it is quite evident that this is the case in Indonesia.

In those archaic societies where one finds the asymmetric alliance (échange généralisé), the clans are always in a condition of rivalry and competition. On all the ritual occasions such as weddings and seasonal rites, two groups meet together to exchange wives and chattels, and confront one another in ritual combat. The conflict between the Pandawa and the Kauwara in the *Mahabharata* is the mythical reflection of the fraternal rivalry which exists between two groups which are connected to one another in this way. In societies such as these, the mythology of the primordial twins is the direct reflection of the social structure,

²⁴ Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, The Hague, 1967, Chap. VI "L'Organisation dualiste." M. Eliade, *La Nostalgie des origines*, Paris 1971, chap. III.

although one party may speak of the other as the descendant of the inferior, malicious twin. One can see, likewise, that it is the maternal uncle who fills the role of demon-initiator in the rite of initiation. Generally speaking the initiator is the representative of the dead, or rather of the ancestors, or even of the spirit of the bush, who kill the novice and make him go through the experience of death and rebirth. Thus it is that the initiator puts the novices in the presence of the non-everyday world, that is, of "nature," and also gives them time to be lived from the beginning. This, it would seem, is the true cause of the struggle of the hero-king with the demonic being who represents the non-everyday force. In repulsing the demon, the hero incorporates the demonic force. In one sense the demon is the division of the hero-king.

The dynastic myth of ancient Japan also relates the story of a hero-trickster called Susa-no-o. He is the younger brother of Amaterasu (the Great Goddess). Because of his misdeeds, he is expelled as a scapegoat of the heavenly land. He descends to earth to a place where he battles with the great serpent and conquers him by guile. Withdrawing from the body of the slain serpent, his sacred sword becomes one of the emblems of kingship.²⁵ He then became the first monarch of a dynasty which was opposed to the central dynasty. N. Matsumoto, the Japanese mythologist, has emphasised in this work that "the serpent was not altogether a stranger to the god Susa-no-o, that the god Susa-no-o and the great serpent are merely a sort of mythological dilution."²⁶ It is evident that the myth of Susa-no-o reflects the ritual of the enthronement of the ancient kings of Japan, or rather the annual rite which is the repetition of the ritual of enthronement. As such, the structure of the myth is once again made manifest in the epic of prince Yamato-Takeru; the cunning prince, his expulsion from the capital, exile, and the battle with the monster. One of the resemblances between them resides in the androgynisation of gods before the fight; in one case with the magic comb for Susa-no-o and, in the case of prince Yamato-

²⁵ J. Herbert, *Les Dieux nationaux du Japon*, Paris, 1965, pp. 122-131.

G. Ouweland studies the character of Susa-no-o, as the ambivalent trickster, in terms of dualist cosmology, in "Some Notes on the God Susa-no-o" in *Monumenta Nipponica* Vol. XIV, No. 3/4 1958-59; with regard to the presentation of this god as the whimpering infant, cf. Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Du Miel aux cendres—Mythologique II*, Paris, 1956, pp. 327-329.

²⁶ M. Matsumoto, *Essai sur la mythologie japonnaise*, Paris, 1928, p. 46.

Takeru, by disguise. Just as Susa-no-o withdraws the sword from the dead body of the Great Serpent, prince Yamato-Takeru receives the name of his adversary (*Takeru* is a part of the name of his adversary and this name is dedicated to Yamato, by his dying enemy).

In these examples, the heroes derive part of their identity from their chaotic adversary who, each time, is their double. By absorbing chaos, the hero-king creates a new time, starting from which order is established. Royalty realises a totality in this sense. Because, on the symbolical plane, it can associate two basic principles which are mutually opposed in a society, it can offer the picture of a deep totality:

- | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Order | Chaos (anarchy) |
| 2. Life | Death (initiatory death) |
| 3. Good | Bad (demon) |
| 4. Centre | Limit (exile) |
| 5. Reason | Unreason (violence - madness) |
| 6. Male | Female (androgynous rite) |
| 7. Culture | Nature (incest) |

Because of the limitations of this article, it is not possible to explain each facet in detail.²⁷ However it is evident that kingship in several societies was the concrete and visible expression of the metaphysics of the *coincidentia oppositorum* which is demonstrated most clearly of all in the ritual of enthronement.

It was A. M. Hocart who showed in his book *Kings and Councilors*²⁸ that royalty is founded on the cosmology of the symbolic antithesis.²⁹ Michael Bakhtine, the Russian formalist, has said that the carnival-like festival of the rite of enthronement/dethronement in the Middle Ages, presents the synthetic aspect of the symbolism of kingship, although it is done in the form of parody. According to Bakhtine, "the carnival-like images are always dual in type, joining together the two poles of change and crisis: birth and death (the image of death as bearer of

²⁷ Cf. W. Willeforde, *The Fool and his Scepter*, New York, 1969, ch. IX; "The King, the Hero and the Fool," and D. A. Miller, "Royauté et ambiguïté sexuelle," *Annales*, vol. 26, nos. 3 and 4, May-August 1971.

²⁸ A. M. Hocart, *Kings and Councilors*, Cairo, 1936.

²⁹ Cf. G. Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna—Essai sur deux représentations indo-européennes de la souveraineté*, Paris, 1948, p. 205-212.

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promises), blessing and curse (the curses of the carnival are blessings, wishing death and rebirth at one and the same time), praise and abuse, youth and decrepitude, zenith and nadir, front and back, folly and wisdom. Carnival-like thought is rich in images gathered in accordance with the law of contrasts (small and large, fat and thin), or the law of resemblances (doubles, twins) ... This is a particular manifestation of the category of eccentricity, an infringement of everything that is habitual and common, a life outside its normal current.”³⁰

By explaining the nature of royalty as a dramatic way of being and a concentrated expression of the human experience in the presence of spectators who are members of the community, Kenneth Burke writes: “Despite the absence of realistic, everyday detail in the rituals, they symbolized the experience of even the most lowly, though expressed ‘transcendentally,’ in ‘stylistic dignification.’ It was not the *king’s* life but their *own* lives that the onlookers were reliving—and these lives were being made acceptable, or ‘negotiable’ by transmogrification into royal attributes.”³¹ Kingship, therefore, is nothing more than the dramatic space which is capable of being stabilised in the imagination of peoples as a symbolic universe symbolising the inner life of the individual. In one sense kingship was a spectacle, a stage-show, used by the community, and it represents a deep part of the experience of life as gained by members of this society. This explains why kingship furnishes the most widely used model of ritual political and mythical transcendence, even in those societies where this was already overtaken by other phenomenon as a political institution.

Conclusion

There is no need to show that kingship is a political institution which happens to be the most widespread and common and which enjoys the longest history of all. At this stage we should not linger on the problem of the definition of terms: empire, kingdom and tribal state (for example); but we can say that with the exception of societies of hunters and gatherers, nearly all

³⁰ M. Bakhtine, *La Poétique de Dostoïevski*, Paris, 1970, p. 174.

³¹ K. Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Forms*, 1957, p. 318.

cultures have known the system of the centralised power of kingship. If kingship is as universal as this, it is because it must be linked to the deep down layer of culture and human imagination before as well as after the creation of the institution. Before, because its formal equivalence was probably in existence before its appearance in society. After, because royalty can survive as a nucleus of the intensive sensation of life and as myth. Furthermore, it is not difficult to deny kingship as a political ideology, as a form of domination or as an institution in general. In every corner of the world the system of royalty as a political institution has been abandoned, but this does not mean that morphological equivalences of kingship have, for all this, been dispersed. The gravest fault of democratic society lies in the fact that it has not managed to eliminate the desire of the masses to have a central symbol which is the source of all value and in which the destiny of the nation is realised and presented. In former times this need was met by kingship. We have already shown in full the violation of the principle of equality by the royal institution. We therefore consider that we are sufficiently detached from the concrete system of kingship to discuss its positive aspects.

We propose the following conclusions:

1. Kingship can be taken over by democracy in the political and historical process, but the system of authority and power in societies without kingship may still be founded on the royal model.

2. Despite all the general conceptions about kingship as a form of political system, we have allowed ourselves to analyse it as a system of myth, because it represents one of the most essential means to understand the world.

3. The anthropological analysis of the structure of the ritual of enthronement, in which the cosmic position of the king is made more clearly manifest than elsewhere, shows us that kingship is conceived of as a metaphysical and mythical system in which the integration of the world is carried out beyond the dichotomy which sustains the image of the everyday world.

4. In this way kingship—as a mythical system—better explains itself in the context of a society in which one finds a

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dualist symbolism: culture versus nature, the beginning and the end (on the plane of space and that of time), order versus anarchy, the centre versus the periphery, the good against the bad, the hero versus villain, etc...

5. The synthetic nature of kingship is above all expressed in the form of ritual drama, which thus supplies one of the archaic models of the popular imagination and of the transcendence of life by way of cultures.

6. In as far as historical society conserves a political and dualist conception, the political framework is founded on the political myth of kingship with its whole complex of symbolism.

7. Finally, the scale of the grandeur of human experiences which is expressed by kingship explains why royalty has throughout the world supplied the primordial model of drama.

8. This point of view requires, on our part, not only a revision of the ideology of our century in terms of this hidden form of kingship, but also opens the possibility of an analysis of the symbolical dimension of our political system.