

Daniel Clément, *L'Hôte Maladroit: La matière du mythe*. Québec City: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2014. 508 pages. ISBN 978-2-7637-1980-1. \$45.00 paperback.

Daniel Clément, a Quebecois anthropologist, proposes a way to study and analyze myths in anthropology. His approach is demonstrated by his study of one group of myths shared by hundreds of Native peoples all around the American continent: the Bungling Host (*L'Hôte maladroit*, in French), which belongs to the cycle of the Trickster. While this myth is widespread, Clément focuses only on the North American versions and particularly on those of one people: the Innu, an Algonquian First Nation in the North-East of Quebec. Each of the twenty variations of the Bungling Host myth presents two main protagonists: the Bungling Host and the Trickster.

In his study, Clément provides a convincing and unique critique of structuralism. First of all, for him, myths should be respected and treated by anthropologists as real and serious narratives. Secondly, Clément sees no need to compare different cultures in order to fully understand the myth and its variations. Instead, myths are understandable on their own. Both of these points of view are opposed to the classic structuralist approach. Clément begins by critiquing some of the major propositions of Lévi-Strauss, the father of the structuralist school of thought. While Clément agrees with the concept of "*interrogation de l'inintelligible*" (p.3, p.5), he never considers this oddness in the same way as Lévi-Strauss or as other authors who have studied the Bungling Host myth, such as Pope, Savard, Hymes, Boas, Faber and Radin. His position relies on an essential demonstration.

Clément argues for four modes of operation in the various versions of the myth: isological, analogical, metamorphological and metonymical. Through these modes, he demonstrates that relationships between scientific thought and mythical thought are not elaborated in a hierarchy: the former is not, as it is in structuralism, an ultimate stage of the latter, but both are simultaneous. The principle of simultaneity between "*ontology and epistemology or semiotic and phenomenological*" (p.53) has been demonstrated also by Scott (2006) in his work with the James Bay Cree, another Algonquian First Nation in northern Quebec. Scott and Clément's ethnographic involvement with Natives is an integral part of their demonstration and understanding of Native thought. For these two anthropologists, as for others whose work on the Algonquian is based on ethnographic data and long fieldwork periods over several years, such as Preston (2002) or Feit (2000), the personal experience is central in the elaboration of knowledge and practices. For Clément, it is a question of a "*validation*" of the facts in myths (p.451).

L'Hôte Maladroit: La matière du mythe is a refreshing study in opposition to the structuralist approach. Clément proposes with force an examination of myths that places the ethnographic data at the center of the theoretical and methodological approach. Indeed, this study demonstrates, through a long-term and rigorous involvement with the Innu, that myths are meaningful in many respects. Specialists of myths will find here a new way of studying mythology based on two conceptual propositions. The first proposition is the articulation of the

concept of *mythème* as being the composition of *mythe et thème* instead of *mythe et sème* (p.4). The second proposition is Clément's addition of the concept of *étymon* to this definition of *mythème*. For Clément, who first introduced this concept in his work in 1992, "un étymon d'un mythème correspond au fondement de l'unité constituante, à l'élément qui le motive, que celui-ci soit d'ordre naturel ou social" (p.4). [The etymon of a mythème corresponds to the basis of the building block, to the element which motivates the mythème in question, whether this element is natural or social in nature.]

For these reasons, this book is destined to appeal to academics of many different interests. Specialists of ritual will find a new model to follow or to critique. Ethnographers will find a great quantity of ethnographic data on each culture or group of cultures to whom correspond each of the twenty versions of the myth examined. Students will find a new reference in the domain of myth studies. Finally, anthropologists in general will find a new critique of structuralism to think about, especially regarding how ethnographic knowledge and theory can be bound together or how the former should be the basis to elaborate the latter. In other words, this book will inspire great discussion and debate.

Works Cited

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