THE YORUBA IMAGE OF THE WITCH

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WITCHCRAFT, the extra-natural interference in the welfare of the community by women, has long since ceased to be a source of major concern in Western society. In many other areas of the world, however, the witch remains a very active and vital image in the consciousness of the people, This is certainly true for the Yoruba*—a negro group occupying large areas of Nigeria, Dahomey and Togoland along the north-west coast of Africa. With the Yoruba (irrespective of his social level, religion or education), belief in the witch and in her powers is all but universal.

The study of witchcraft, both as it exists in contemporary cultures and as it has existed in the Western community at different periods in the past, raises a number of interesting questions for the student of psychology and sociology. If witchcraft is not a genuine phenomenon, why is the witch fantasy so prevalent in so many different cultures throughout the world? What is it about the human female that provokes such similar pictures of her magical malevolence in such diverse cultures? What changes have occurred in Western culture that have allowed the witch fantasy to lose its erstwhile potency? A study of the witch as she exists today among the Yoruba may help elucidate these problems.

THE WITCH IN YORUBA THEOLOGY

Yoruba legend has it that certain women once went to the malevolent trickster god Eshu to ask for the power of witchcraft. Eshu was willing to give it to them but he had to refer them to Orunmila, the god of Fate. Orunmila would not allow them to go out into the world with the power of witchcraft until they promised to honour certain signs and materials to serve men as protections against their power. They agreed to this but it was necessary for them to go on to Olorun, the Lord of all, to make their agreement binding. This transaction is mentioned in certain ancient Ifa verses of unknown origin which are used in divination.

"Idi ogbungbun, aworo niye,
They went to Alara's house and kill him,
They went to Ajero's house and kill him,
They went to Orangun's house and kill him.

You pluck the Okro of Ejiwo
You eat the Camwood of Ailoran
You kill the stammering water of Owu.

* For further anthropological and psychiatric data on the Yoruba see Lambo (1955, 1956) and Prince (1960 a, b).

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When Eshu came, you left for a place in the sky and it received you not,
Then you went to Orunmila and when you got there, you greeted him and he asked you where you were going.
Then you said you were going into the world to be killing people and to be debarring their progress.

Then Orunmila said that he would not allow the gates to be opened unto you, unless with a very solid agreement.
Then you said he should get the ram's horn, tortoise's shell, the long spine of the porcupine, fowl's feather and soap.

Because nobody will ever eat the tortoise with the shell
Nor the ram with the horn
Or the porcupine with the spine
Or the fowl with the feathers,

It is a forbidden act to eat soap.

Then Orunmila said that he alone cannot open the gates for you, unless you go to the almighty God, when you got there, you explain yourselves to Him.

Then the almighty God said:

'Spittle once out of the mouth, will not come back to the mouth again,
The grass that the elephants tread will never rise again,
Therefore you must not change your agreement

And anybody with this sign on should be honoured'."

(Ifa Odu, Idi Meji)*

The Nature of the Witch

It is clear then that in Yorubaland, witchcraft is a feminine art and has its power from Eshu, the trickster god, and was sanctioned, if somewhat reluctantly, by Orunmila (Ifa) the god of Fate, and by Olorun, the Lord of all. This power is generally attributed to older women, but young women or even girls can sometimes be involved. According to some informants, witchcraft power is a kind of immaterial substance which may be kept in a calabash hidden in a hole in the wall of the witch's house, or in a hollow tree. The power itself may be lodged in the roots of a tree or even in a young child (age 1 to 8 years). In the latter case the witchcraft power will not harm the child but, on the contrary, will protect the child from other witches as the child is serving one of them as a refuge. The red tail-feather of the parrot is used as a sign of witchcraft power, and may be placed in the calabash or in the tree containing the witchcraft power. (I have been unable to find out the origin of this use of the red feather or why it should come to have this association with the witch.)

Other informants regard the power as a more concrete substance which is present in the woman's abdomen. As one man said: "I have seen two women vomit it out. It was like a stone or a hard ball of something. They were not witches after that." Witchcraft seems generally to be held as a desirable skill because of the great power it provides; however, there is also the idea that the spirit of the witch after death becomes a restless and disconsolate ghost who wanders about the world in a distraught state. The power is usually passed from mother to daughter, but it may also be bestowed as a gift, or may be purchased. When passed from one person to the other it is often given mixed with certain foods. It is sometimes held that a woman cannot die possessing witchcraft power but must pass it on to someone before her death; in fact, she will not be able to die unless she does so.

* I am grateful to Mr. O. Obafemi, Native doctor and Priest of Ifa, for translating the above verses for me.

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Perhaps some actual comments by Yoruba informants would help clarify these aspects.

"Witchcraft power is like a breeze, you can't see it but it has effect. A woman can't die possessing it—when she dies, she vomits out the invisible witchcraft and it passes to her daughter."

"A woman can buy witchcraft power or may, as well, inherit it from another person. This mostly depends on the interest or love the witchcraft woman has in the person that is going to possess it. Some people when they suffer too much, seek for this power. In this case she has to buy it. But it is very necessary, and matter of must, to give this witchcraft power to somebody before she should die. In this case, if she could not get anybody either to buy it or to give it out as a gift to her friend outside, or to have a daughter she loved that can inherit it, she has to take it to an Iroko tree that is very young. This will become a spirit in the tree. Other witches will be coming to this tree to have their meetings. It is such trees that herbalists carry their sacrifices to in case they have a patient that is seriously sick."

"Through many informants I believe that a woman may buy, inherit or be presented with this power. This is not given directly. It can be given through foods such as baked beans (Akara), Kola, Porridge, red Yam (Esuru) and many other native foods. When this is taken the power will start to grow, until when the person will start to fly in the night."

The Powers of the Witch

Witches are considered to have great power—"They are the rulers of the world, they get their power from God who gave them permission to kill. They have no mercy. They can do anything." They are said sometimes to have favourites whom they protect and make wealthy but these positive aspects are not emphasized—they are mostly spoken of in connection with their malevolence. The Yoruba word for witch is Aje and would appear to be a contraction of "Iya je" meaning "mother eat". The word Aje is in practice avoided as much as possible or at least spoken in a whisper (for fear of attracting the witch's attention or offending her). The expressions "Agbalagba" (old people), "awon iya" (our mothers) or "Awon eni toni aiye" (those who rule the world) being substituted. A witch's malignancy may be turned upon a man for almost any reason—for some slight impoliteness, or because he accuses her of being a witch, or because he is getting too high in the world or often for no reason "just because they are evil women".

One of the commonest fantasies about the powers of the witch is that she can transform her "heart-soul" (Okan) into a bird or animal. This occurs at night and her physical body remains in a deep sleep while her transformed heart-soul moves abroad. A woman who sleeps on her back with her mouth open and arms outstretched is probably a witch. She cannot be awakened while her heart-soul is abroad and if someone captures the bird or animal into which her soul has been transformed she will not be able to wake up; if the creature is killed the witch will die. Most witches transform themselves into night birds of some type . . . these have been variously described to me as "a white bird with a long red beak and red claws" or "a brown bird like a bush fowl with a long red beak". Alternatively they may transform themselves into owls, cats, rats or bats, the common feature being that these creatures are all active by night, for it is believed that witchcraft is a nocturnal thing, the witches being most active between 12 and 3 a.m. in the realms of dream and nightmare. If the witch's activities are brought into the light of day, they lose their potency, e.g., by confession. It is believed that the witch bird perches by night in a tree close to the victim's house. An owl perched in a tree near a man's house will cause considerable alarm to the householder. The actual manner in which the witch bird damages her victim is obscure but I have been told that it pecks its

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victim's head or neck and sucks out his blood. There is a saying, "Aje ke lano, omo ku loni" (the witch bird chirped yesterday, the child dies today).

Witches are considered to take part in some obscure nocturnal orgies (ajo) for which one member of the witch party must supply a human child. A patient told me, "My wife is a high-tempered woman. If anything happened she would curse everyone, sometimes if she fought with someone, if it was settled whether she was wrong or right she would argue for three days. If I corrected her she would always argue. She has a twisted foot. One day she pointed at a place in the farm and said there had been a great feast there last night but I had not heard of it. When I asked her more about it she grew annoyed. After that I was afraid and began to suspect she was a witch."

By drinking the life blood of numerous victims, the witch is thought to be able to prolong her own life, and it is for this reason that old people are suspected of being witches. A pregnant woman will avoid visiting an old woman during her pregnancy and the birth of a baby will be kept a secret from a suspected old woman. In some areas the death of a young person or child is considered unnatural and all such deaths are attributed to the work of witches.

In addition to old age, other factors may lead the people to regard a woman as a witch—a woman with a beard, a domineering or cantankerous woman or a woman who engages in odd behaviour. One girl told me, "An old woman in our town who used to go about collecting old broken bottles and other things and packing them in her room for no purpose was thought to be a witch, but no one said anything openly for fear of what she might do."

One of the most common deeds attributed to witches is interference with reproduction. Impotence is common among Yoruba males and it is the prevalent idea that this is the work of witches. A witch is said to be capable of taking the penis of a man and of having intercourse, using it with the man's wife or some other woman. The witch will then return the man's penis but it will be altered in some way and may not be able to function. The woman who is visited in this way may become barren. It is a not uncommon dream for a man to see someone come to him and tamper with his penis or testicles. A woman will dream of someone having intercourse with her—the visitor may be either in the form of a man or of a woman with a penis. All this is considered to be the work of witches. Witches are also thought to control the menstrual flow of women. They can make it stop or flow excessively. They may obstruct the expulsion of the child from the womb. There is some obscure fundamental relationship between witchcraft and menstrual blood. The menstruating woman and the witch both have power to render magic and the native doctor's medicines powerless. On one recent occasion in the town of A. the women of the town had risen in revolt against the payment of certain taxes which they considered to be unfair. Their power was so great that they forced the ruling chief of the town to retire to the provinces for a year. They camped in hordes in front of the chief's palace singing and causing a disturbance. When police were sent to disperse them the women brandished their menstruation cloths. This caused the police to take to their heels, for it is believed that if a man is struck by a woman's menstrual cloth he will have bad fortune for the rest of his days.

In addition to these two most emphasized propensities of the witch (i.e., to cause wasting diseases or death through sucking the blood and eating the spirit of the victim and to interfere with his sexuality), she may cause psychiatric disturbances, to be described subsequently, and all manner of other misfortunes and accidents. I will give just two further examples. A witch may cause a film

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to come down over a lorry-driver's eyes so that he cannot see where he is going and will drive into the ditch (Incidentally, many lorry-drivers' cabs are so filled with charms and "medicine" hanging from the windscreen that they can scarcely see out!) I have also been told that when a witch closes her eyes she can see everywhere and can observe all that is happening. It is said of a powerful political leader, who was recently killed in a motor accident, that at one time he kept an old woman in his house who used to tell him what to do and where to go and "when the time would be safe". Later he gave up taking her advice and he was destroyed by the "medicine" of his political opponents. (The fatal accident took place near Ijebu Odi which is a town renowned for its "powerful medicines", particularly cursing, and where many of his opponents lived.)

Defences Against Witchcraft

There are three general methods by which the Yoruba may defend himself against witches: (1) with the help of native medicine usually as instructed by the native doctor, (2) through membership in certain cults, and (3) through organizing witch hunts and using trial by ordeal, though this last has been frowned upon, at least during the British regime in Nigeria. I will say a few words about each in turn.

The Yoruba native doctor sees a good deal of his work as protecting his patients from witchcraft, against malevolently-used words (i.e. curse, incantation and invocation) and against various other types of homoeopathic and contagious magics. Witchcraft is usually the territory of malignant women, while magic words and practices are the territory of the warlock. It is true that many native doctors have some conception of the physical causation of disease, e.g. that disease may come from eating incorrect foods—"cocoa doesn't grow well on all types of earth"; that "small, small bugs or worms cause tuberculous lymphadenitis"; that "epilepsy is the result of a lizard in the belly". Still the elements of witchcraft and sorcery are much emphasized. As one doctor said to me, "If you have two patients each with the same disease to the same degree and you give both the same herbs, one gets better but the other may not. This is because the witches are involved in the latter." It would appear that recently (though I have no idea when this attitude began) the relationship between the witches and the native doctors has altered. In former times, they were always at loggerheads but the native doctors' medicines were usually the more powerful and could overcome the effects of witchcraft. Now, however, the witches have become so powerful that the native doctor has joined forces with the witches and works in co-operation with them. For example, if a patient comes to the native doctor with an illness that the doctor divines or diagnoses as having an element of witchcraft in it, he will ask the patient to provide a sacrifice to the witches. After the witches are thus appeased the native doctor's medicines will be potent. I was unable to find out too much about the native doctor's dealings with the witches because of their covert nature. My visits to native doctors almost always took place amid a throng of people, my interpreter and I seated on folding wooden chairs with the doctor in a small room in his mud hut, a great press of people—men, women and children—squeezing through the narrow windows and pushing in at the door. I soon learned that under such circumstances the one subject that could not be discussed was witchcraft. I do not know whether this was because there might have been some witches in the audience who would not like their secrets revealed or whether most of the people were unaware of the co-operation between the native doctor and the witch, a

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subject then that would be painful to the native doctor. At any rate it seems clear that in former days the role of the native doctor was to divine who the witch was who was causing the patient's illness, point her out and have her banished or killed. Often methods of ordeal were used to discover the witch.

I might mention some of the types of medicines used by the native doctor as defences against witchcraft. On one occasion I watched a doctor make a medicine which he said was to protect against eye diseases caused by witches. In a piece of white cloth he placed a disembowelled chicken still covered with feathers together with some other objects which looked like pieces of white soap. He bowed his head and quietly recited an incantation over the preparation. He then wrapped up these materials in the white cloth which then formed a round ball about 8 inches in diameter, and tied it around with many windings of black and white thread (the threads being placed side by side). This bundle was to be suspended from the ceiling of the patient's house. The native doctor had a similar bundle hanging from his own ceiling. The same native doctor was a "specialist" in treating mental illness* and was also using a very effective infusion of the roots of the plant *Rauwolfia vomitorum* (which contains many of the same alkaloids as *R. serpentina*, including reserpine). In addition to this tranquillizer each of his patients had every day to smear himself with black soap to protect him from the witches. Also he had growing in the middle of his compound a special tree which would not allow witch birds to perch in it. It is probable that the use of the soap and of the fowl with the feathers is related to the passage from the Ifa verses which I quoted earlier. The use of these substances prevents the witches from consuming the spirits of the patients through something akin to homoeopathic magic. The formula appears to be, "No one eats black soap or fowls with the feathers on, I have a fowl with feathers on and am covered with soap, therefore no one, not even a witch, will eat me."

To turn to the cults which may protect a man from the witches: one of the most important of these is the Gelede cult which has recently been very well described by Mr. U. Beier (1958). It is a very popular cult among the Egbado group of the Yoruba who occupy the south-western portions of Yorubaland.

The Gelede are dancers, all male except for the leader. They wear brilliantly painted wooden masks over their heads and dress up as women with large breasts and protruding buttocks. I would like to quote from Beier's article passages which describe the function of the cult and the motives for becoming a member.

> "The purpose of the Gelede dance is to 'placate the witches'. This is what every Gelede dancer says . . . The men say: Gelede is 'the secret of women'. We the men are merely their slaves. We dance to appease 'our mothers'. The witches, they say, can kill in the dark, and there is no protection from their power, 'because God has already given them permission to kill. God does not mind killing—because for every man who dies he can make a new one.'
>
> "One Gelede dancer said: 'As I have already got three children, there is no reason why I should not die. Nothing prevents me from dying tomorrow. But as I am a member of the Gelede society, the witches will spare me.'
>
> "Another dancer expressed it as follows: 'God gave the world to the witches. They have permission to kill. In the olden days they did a great deal of harm to our fathers. But our fathers thought for a long time until they found a way to placate them and win their favour, thus the Gelede society was started. Fear of death made us join this society. Because the witches cannot harm anyone inside the society'."

The dance may occur once a year or perhaps oftener depending upon the leader. The main portion of the dance takes place at night though some of the masqueraders may dance the next day for general amusement. The dance is

* See also Prince (1960 c.).

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highly organized with different members of the cult appearing in special order and singers who accompany the drumming with songs sacred to the society. Part of one of the songs addressed to the "great mothers" is of considerable interest and is as follows:

"All-powerful mother, mother of the nightbird
Mother who kills animals without striking
.....
My mother kills quickly without a cry
To prick our memory suddenly
Quickly as the woodpecker picks the tree on the farm
The woodpecker who hammers the tree while words rush forth from his mouth,
Great mother with whom we dare not cohabit
Great mother whose body we dare not see
Mother of secret beauties
Mother who empties the cup
Who speaks out with the voice of a man,
Large, very large mother on the top of the Iroko tree,
Mother who climbs high and looks down on the earth
Mother who kills her husband yet pities him."

The masks used in the dance are ingeniously carved and have a great variety of subjects. Above the carved heads are serpents, women in exhibitionistic poses, mothers and children, or witch birds pecking into the head. (I have also seen one of a woman sitting at a sewing machine and another of an aeroplane with propellers at both ends!)

It seems clear, that the feminine costume represents incorporation of and identification with the threatening mothers—a kind of ritualized transvestitism as a defence against the devouring and castrating mother.

The witch hunt is another method of defence against witches. As I have said, at the present time the witches are too powerful in Yorubaland to be openly opposed by the native doctors (some of whom actually dance under the Gelede masks). Occasionally, however, a group of diviners and ordeal men may band together and go from village to village to search out the witches. Such a band was the Atinga, a group which began its activities in the northern Gold Coast, spread down to the coastal areas of the Gold Coast and through Togoland and Dahomey to southern Nigeria. The Atinga sought the assistance of the heads of the villages who called their people together. The Atinga leaders began to beat the drums and dance in the circle of collected villagers. During the dance one of the Atinga became possessed, claimed to receive the ability to prophesy and pick out witches. The accused women were forced to bring out their witching apparatus—calabashes, familiars, red feathers, etc.—and confess their evil deeds. If a woman refused to confess she had to undergo an ordeal. She had to bring a fowl, some gin and some money. The gin was poured out as a libation, and the fowl had its throat half cut so that it would run about for a while, then collapse. If the chicken collapsed with its breast upright, the woman was acquitted. If the ordeal was unfavourable the woman could try a second time providing she paid more money. Most women confessed, but a few were beaten to death. The movement was quashed by the British Government in 1951.

Many Yoruba recall vividly the Atinga hunts. According to one informant, the king of the town of A. did not invite the Atinga to practise their arts in his town because he said that many of the pillars of the community were witches. Another Yoruba, a schizophrenic patient, said that his brother, who was a policeman, had been instrumental in bringing the Atinga into his home town.

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He said that shortly afterwards his brother was killed under unusual circumstances and he himself "ran mad". He attributed both of these misfortunes to his brother's meddling in the affairs of the town witches.

The Witch and Psychiatric Disturbance

Patients suffering psychiatric disturbances frequently consider their symptoms to be the result of witchcraft. Many schizophrenic patients, for example, accuse their mothers of being witches. Indeed the sight of the psychotic son, apathetic and with downcast eyes, walking down the road behind his mother renders the fantasy of the consumption of the son's spirit by the mother not too unrealistic.

The patient may implicate the witches in his illness for a number of reasons. Perhaps the commonest indications are to be found in dreams—dreams of drowning are almost always interpreted in this way; dreams of intercourse with unknown persons or of having ones genitals tampered with or the classical "nightmare" dream experience (feeling of pressure on the chest, terror and suffocation) are other examples. Secondly, the native doctor, as a result of his divination, may inform the patient that he is being troubled by a witch. It may also happen that the patient develops symptoms during the time the patient is having some difficulties with a woman. He may then of course attribute these symptoms to the witchcraft of his female opponent.

An illustrative example might be helpful here. P.F. was a 17-year-old Yoruba male admitted to Aro Hospital, Abeokuta, in March, 1959, with the complaints that he had been behaving irrationally (fighting with other students in his school for no reason and running away from school), he was rambling and abstract in his conversation and unable to do his school work. The patient's father, an executive in a Government Department, had two wives, the patient being the only child of the senior wife. The junior wife had two children. All the children were attending the same school and whereas the patient was a good student, the son of the junior wife was a poor student and the father proposed to take the poor student out of school but send the patient on into higher education. This was a source of intense annoyance to the junior wife. The patient describes the onset and course of his illness as follows:

"At the end of 1957, I finished school and went to Lagos to spend the holiday with my father. On reaching Lagos I met my brother O., who failed the examination, and my sister and we were very loving to ourselves. Seeing how co-operative we three were, their mother would always call them and advise them to sever their connection from me. I had one bed with O. where we both slept and studied. I woke up one night about 1 a.m. and found O. gone. I intended to put my pen under the pillow where I met a butchered red-headed lizard. The intestines were removed and inside the stomach were seven needles and some ashes. Since that time I haven't been able to study any book or even stay in the school hostel—there are certain commanding instincts in me that push me to do certain things that I know to be very bad. I also have nightmares all the time that my father's second wife is beating me."

Because of these symptoms he was expelled from school and taken to several native doctors, but to no avail. The native doctors and the patient attributed his illness to the witchcraft of the second wife. In this instance certain medicine (i.e. the lizard and needles) was used but this is the exception rather than the rule with witches.

With the psychotic patient, the content of his hallucinatory experience may convince him that witches are attacking him. For example a 20-year-old Yoruba student described the onset of his psychosis as follows:

"I was sitting at my table in my room late at night . . . I had a strange feeling and looked up and saw a woman standing looking in at my window. Then a white bird flew from the woman into my mouth and lodged in my throat so that I couldn't speak and felt choked."

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This student was subsequently admitted to hospital in a disturbed state; he heard the voice of the holy spirit and expressed the idea that a witch and the holy spirit were fighting inside of him.

A third example is that of M.N., a 35-year-old single Yoruba cocoa farmer convicted of decapitating a woman with a matchet. He said that his trouble had started in 1956 and that he was being troubled by witchcraft day and night. The witches were talking to him continually saying such things as "It's done, he's killed: we have killed him now, now we will kill his brother", etc. The witches had started to trouble him after he had refused to attend the Cherubim and Seraphim church. "After that I would hear bats' voices in my ears and I would be confused. They troubled me at night in dream, they would come both man and woman and pull at my testicles and penis. One night they cut my penis right off but I prayed and it was restored . . . in the morning I could see all the veins were coming out and it was not normal." It was clear that this patient had the idea that the woman he killed was the witch that was tormenting him.

The delusion of being a witch also occurs; however, the woman who makes such a confession is generally not regarded as being delusional or psychotic, the idea being, as it were, culturally syntonic. There is the belief in some parts of Yorubaland that a witch cannot die until she has confessed her evil deeds, and in conformity with this idea certain old women (probably suffering senile psychoses) may be seen wandering around the streets telling of the people they have killed and the children they have eaten. Such old women are generally driven from their homes and may be stoned in the streets. None of these patients were brought to the psychiatric clinic. On one occasion, however, a psychotic woman who had believed she was a witch and had killed her young daughter was referred from the court. Her confession written a few hours after the killing read as follows:

". . . between the night of Tuesday and Wednesday the 20th and 21st of August, my mates in witchcrafts came to my house and instructed me to kill my daughter O. and I killed her that very night with a stick which is still in my room, and before this done I held her two legs swinged her around my head and knocked her on the floor three times. All these being done in the night. After the death I used matchet to cut her two legs and I threw the matchet in a brook. I also killed a cat and packed both the cat and my daughter in a basket."

Discussion

The idea associated with the name of Melanie Klein (1935, 1940) that the infant passes through a stage in which he divides his mother into two entities, one good and the other bad, has merited considerable contemporary interest. Under normal circumstances this propensity seems to occur between the ages of three months and one year and resolves itself in the so-called "depressive position" when the child is capable of grasping that the good mother and the bad mother are in reality one. This splitting of an object into good and bad entities may also be observed in adult psychotics. For example a housewife suffering from paranoid schizophrenia was transferred to me from a rather aggressive female psychiatrist. The patient expressed the idea that there were really two of her former psychiatrists, one who was tender and friendly, the other who was brusque and short-tempered. She said they both looked the same but that she felt that one was real while the other was an impostor. It would seem that by the adult, a person is recognized to be an entity largely on the basis of external and objective cues, e.g. on the basis of external appearance, gestures, voice, etc., whereas by the infant (and the schizophrenic noted above) the test of

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identity is "similarity of feeling toward" so that a person that aroused fear or hostility had to be a different entity from the one that aroused pleasure.

To return to the idea of the witch, it is an attractive hypothesis that the Yoruba witch represents the collective image of the bad mother in a people who have not yet attained the depressive position in their emotional development. I do not think we would be distorting the Yoruba concept too much to think of witchcraft as representing all the bad aspects of the mother or the female. It is true that not all women are thought to be witches, but all women are *potentially* witches and they are linked to witchcraft in some way through the common bond of menstruation. The fact that the witches are called "our mothers" and the fact that many schizophrenics say their mothers are witches seems to lend support to the idea.

It may also be noted that depressions are rare among the Yoruba. Paranoid thinking is common but the profound self-castigating melancholia so commonly seen in the contemporary Western man is very uncommon. I can remember only one case of this type and the patient was highly Westernized—reared in a literate Christian home, well educated herself, and who had lived in England for several years. Could this mean that the Yoruba as a culture has not reached the "depressive position"?

It is also of interest that the Yoruba mother tends to be idealized to a considerable extent and the relationship between mother and son is much more significant than between husband and wife. The latter relationship is almost distant—there seems to be no romantic element, wives being of value as status symbols and as bearers of children rather than for warmth of relationship. There seems to be some evidence then that with the Yoruba, their emotional development is arrested to the extent that intense relationships exist primarily between mother and child and that even in this relationship the mother tends to be on the one hand revered unrealistically and over-valued and on the other hand feared as a destructive entity in the background with all her witchly attributes. The fusion of these two images has not yet occurred, the depressive position not yet reached, the Yoruba has not yet been able to release himself from his mother so that little progress has been made towards relationship between husband and wife.

To turn for a moment to the interesting question—what changes have occurred in Western culture that have allowed the witch fantasy to lose its erstwhile potency? I would like to draw attention to three books published in a cluster about the beginning of the 17th century: Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). The first two of these books mark the beginning of the end of two rather extraordinary attitudes towards the female sex in Europe.* Scot was one of the first to ridicule the idea of the witch and question the reality of her abilities to fly, transform herself into animals, etc. Cervantes' book was a satire on the knight and his ideal lady and marked the beginning of the fading of that complementary medieval female image—the knight's lady—which had existed for some 300 years alongside the image of the witch. The third of these books marks the high point as it were in the Renaissance pre-occupation with the problems of melancholia, depression and death. These problems were of great interest to Elizabethan dramatists and poets and there are numerous representations and paintings of the Danse Macabre and the Dance of Death. Can we take this interest in melancholia as an indication that there was in fact

* For interesting descriptions of the evolution of relationships in Europe see De Rougement (1940) and Lucka (1922).

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a wave of depression spreading over Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries? The literary and artistic interest in depression and death is generally attributed to the plague and poverty produced by the Hundred Years War. Is it possible that the depression resulting from the attainment of the cultural "depressive position" was the primary event and that the Black Death was in part a symptom of this wave of depression? We could look upon the Renaissance then as a leap forward in reality testing with a concomitant release of human vitality accompanying the European "working through" of its depressive position.

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