The Evil Eye (2)

Dundes’s essay has the considerable merit of, taking up on Hocart’s suggestion, attempting to do more than simply add up instances to instances and propose an overall interpretation. Furthermore, he resolutely steps beyond the sociological level of analysis that focuses on envy and asks himself what could be the common element to all the symptoms, including loss of appetite, yawning, hiccoughs, drying up of milk, drying up of vegetation; the preventive measures, which include phallic amulets and signs, spitting, uttering formulas, and simply disguising one's good condition; and the fact that testicles and breasts, as well as eyes, are pertinent in producing the evil eye as well as in protecting against it (265-66).

According to this author, this belief complex depends on a number of Indo-European and Semitic folk ideas. First, life depends upon liquid and drying is dying; second, there is a finite, limited amount of good, so that if for example one individual gets to possess a certain amount of a certain precious body fluid, such as semen, another individual will be lacking in it; third, life entails an equilibrium model, so that imbalances are linked to envy or suspicion thereof; and fourth, in symbolic terms two eyes amount to two breasts and testes, a single eye to the penis glans, the vagina, or the anus, and thus eyes are apt to symbolize the fullness of life and threats to it concerning body openings (266-27). The author proceeds to demonstrate each of these points.

First off he argues that people, being born with only so much life force, are therefore anxious to replenish it. Milk and wine are obvious sources [not obvious, unless one notes their correspondence to blood on the one hand and sperm on the other!], and so one drinks "healths" as a way of denying that one wishes to take up the others' liquids. In the same way, the notion of limited good requires that one offer drinks to others while eating, this being the rationale of pourboires and gorjetas as well as of the custom of inviting someone to eat along and receiving a wish for bom proveito that opposes the otherwise poisonous effect of food (267-70).

In India, unless a mother will starve the child's double by using only one breast for forty days, he will have the evil eye (270-71) [Is there the suggestion that one who hasn't cut up the link with the dead has "moon power" so to speak, being able to draw the others' life force? This is seemingly confirmed by the fact that the reason why a man
meeting a wolf looses the power of speech is that the wolf enacts a desiccating evil eye towards him (274)] And in Greece a new mother that suckles from both breasts acquires the baleful glance, just as the child acquires it by resuming breastfeeding (271) That weaning reversal, supposed to show greediness and thus cause evil eye, suggests that tip ultimately comes from nipple. And yawning as an effect of the evil eye might still relate to weaning (271).

Would one interpret the child's behavior as greedy and the mother's as a result of drying up? Dundes argues for the former and the latter is seemingly, for in Saudi Arabia one having the evil eye is one who is dried out (275). Anyway, in this case an excessive transfer of milk creates evil eye in both partners, just as one of horns creates cabronazco in two men—milk and horns being arguably variations on the same stuff.

The search for the water of life in fairy tales is in accordance with the notion that to dry is to die, sick deriving possibly from siccus (273).

In all cases, it is the liquids of life—milk, blood, semen—that are coveted, while the effect of the evil eye is generally, like in Spain, a drying up process (274–75). Which suggests that it is only obvious that certain liquids, such as milk and wine, are used for replenishing if one takes into account on the one hand their respective equivalence to semen and blood and, on the other, the basic transformations of the three life-transforming liquids. Moreover, this explains why testicles and breasts should be wished to burst and why protuberant ones as used as protective amulets. And this, in turn, takes us to a more general point regarding the overall process and its connection with horns and the moon. Seemingly, the evil eye consists in “sucking” from others' testes and breasts to one's own the liquids of life, somehow, through the eyes. Now we have seen that the moon is supposed to regulate the rhythms of the bone marrow, essence of all the body liquids. We have also come across the idea of an ongoing sexual battle for the control of body liquids, to the effect that men generally deem that they need to protect themselves against the sucking power of women. In this wider context, the evil complex appears as one more mechanism for the overall redistribution of what the moon naturally controls; its connection with envy having to be interpreted in this perspective: it is those who lack something that are deemed to covet it and thus drain their possessors of it. In this overall conception of fluids distribution, again, the offering of liquids to those who offer us food
(as an alternative to sharing), as well as the custom of drinking to the other person’s health, make sense.

In other words, the limited amount of sperm that each man has in Andalusia is not a given, but rather a part of a greater whole comprising a great round of fluids ruled by the moon and comprising body and nature fluids (this tallies very well with Héritier's principles), which are attributed by natural cycles, such as the moon, and by social means, such as sexuality and the evil eye. The latter would then be a means of ensuring a balance that is reminiscent of the women's alleged sexual strategy—which could be one reason why the evil eye tends to be so associated with women who lack something crucial, such as children.

According to Dundes, Spit is equivalent to sperm (276–77), and pendulous testes and breasts suggest the equivalence of semen and milk (277). At any rate, eyes and nipples and equated (277–78), and so are eyes and testes (278).

Now the evil eye, singular, points to the sun and its vital ejaculations into the pharaoh, just like the evil eye ejaculates. The sun is both phallus and eye (279), and the force of the eye involves a kind of fluid released, in equivalence with the penis and its function (280).

To the Arabs the penis is the one-eyed, in Hebrew the same word means eye and well, and in Waloon folklore the penis is the one-eyed and to piss is to bleed it (280–81) [So the equivalence of eye and source comprises the penis. And the metaphorical bleeding in Waloonia is literal in other parts, suggesting the semen/blood equivalence]. If draining the one-eye is to piss, then an eye with liquid is a phallus (281). The third eye, like the third leg, is phallic (281).

The overall idea is that an evil eye absorbs liquid whereas a good eye emits liquid. Thus snakes, akin to the bad phallus/eye, ingest precious liquid. More precisely, the phallus in the shape of snakes or the evil eye ingests liquids (282). Now what would be the opposite of a good phallus that emits semen? An inverted phallus, that is a vagina, that sucks semen or else emits blood. This would explain why it is women that usually have the evil eye, and why they are most dangerous while menstruating.

This may be confirmed in another way: Snakes that steal milk while having the child waste away, as described by Brandes, should amount to menstrual blood spoiling
the milk (“la mauvaise odeur l'a saisit”), since snakes are related to such blood on the one hand and the symptom of wasting away for lack of milk is the same in either case on the other; recall, also, the widespread prohibition regarding cycling women going near nursing ones. Now such wasting away and rejection of milk amounts to the evil eye, which in cows translates as blood instead of milk (Asturias, Ireland), this being again equivalent to witches as hares stealing milk from the cows, the hare being here to the cow as the snake to the woman. This is interesting, for the witch, agent of evil eye par excellence, is thus linked to the milk-stealing snake who is attracted to bleeding women such as spoil milk--their own or others' milk.

Mau olho is the same as quebranto, which is also caused by the moon (Vasconcelos, 169, 173); which is coherent with the link between quebranto and menses. And the connection of menses to the moon bespeaks of the snake, which harks back to the dragon symbolism in the transmission of horns at the bullfight. Therefore, at this point and having spoken of semen, it is on feminine blood that we must dwell.

The Powers of Feminine Blood (I)

If, as Dundes maintains, protective amulets work on the principle of like against like, then one understands that amulets should comprise the eye and horns, the latter as symbols of masculinity. Horseshoes, in turn, may conceivably refer to the vagina, but more likely are symbols of horns and/or the moon. And then we have the figa, which refers to the sexual act. For example, modern Greeks floss the gesture by a verb that means, “to tear the woman’s pudenda” [Vasconcelos, 1996 #2574, 213]. Now it might be more exact to say that the like acts against its opposite like: thus, the good eye attacks the bad eye, the good sorcerer attacks the bad witch… And, in Galicia and Portugal a man, passing by a reputed witch, will touch his testicles. In the same way, horns and horseshoes oppose the bad penis or its feminine equivalent. But, here, the compound figa allows us to be more exact, since the opposite of a vagina being penetrated in the sexual act, a symbol of fecundation, must be the vagina in a non-receptive state that repels the sexual act. Again, this elicits the image of menstrual blood.