

Introduction

In the period from 1952 to 1956 Daniel BIEBUYCK collected in the village performance context more than one thousand tales during his field research among the Nyanga (eastern Zaire forest region). Thirty-six of these focus on the critical moment of mate selection and its attendant problems. Based on the internal comparison of plot outlines, these tales fall into two distinct but related groups:

The Suitor Contest Tales (Group I): Involve a parent or daughter who subjects suitors to an eligibility contest. The Unfit Bride or Bridegroom Tales (Group II): Center on a parent or child who arbitrarily rejects all suitors or selects one attribute (physical in nature) that the future spouse must have.

Despite the international distribution of similar tales (see Analysis of Plot Outline), there is to our knowledge no in-depth study of their style, content, function, meaning, and moral or social implications for any one given society. Our analysis in these pages aims to do just that for the Nyanga context.

Like all other Nyanga tales, those in our corpus are classified either as uano (pl. ngano) or mushinga (pl. mishinga); twenty-five fall in the uano category and eleven are mushinga. The distinguishing criterion for these two categories is the presence or absence of song; in each uano there are one or more songs, some very short, some slightly longer, some in dialogue form, some partially or entirely repeated. Song is completely lacking in the mishinga, but for the rest both categories share common features of style and content, and both

are told by men and women alike (in our sample the ngano were told by eleven men and fourteen women; the mishinga by seven men, three women, and one unidentified).

The selected tales were spontaneously presented by men and women during public performances attended by young and old, male and female in which different types of tales, proverbs, riddles, songs, remembrances, and teachings were sung or told. No effort was made to guide the choices of the narrators. Of the thirty-six narrators, eighteen were men, seventeen were women, and one was unidentified; in Group I, twelve tales were told by men and seven by women (one is unidentified); in Group II, six tales were told by men and ten by women. These narrators occupy different social positions. They are members of distinctive residential and kinship groupings scattered over several small Nyanga kingdoms. They are of different ages, but most of them are married with children, and none are adolescent. Among the male narrators some are elders or village headmen, others are simply full-fledged adult males (wabume); among the female narrators some have the status of "free woman" (kihanga) with children. Some are affiliated with commoner groups, others belong to politically or ritually high-ranking entities. Some of the men are initiates of voluntary closed associations such as mbuntsu, mpandi, mumbira, or ukanga. Both among the men and the women there are devotees of various cults addressed to a small pantheon of divinities. None of the narrators has any European type of elementary school training; as hunters, trappers, and cultivators, all are thoroughly integrated in their socio-economic milieu. The narrators resided in twenty-seven different villages out of a total of sixty-one in which fieldwork on narratives was conducted. These villages are situated in the north, center, west, and south of Nyangaland (see Annexes I and II).

We can conclude that the tales analyzed in this study are not the apanage of any particular social or sex group, but they belong to the repertoire of mature people. They do not represent a regional oikotype since they are distributed throughout Nyangaland; it is certain that if they had been explicitly asked, narrators in all villages would have been able to tell these types of stories. Among the available texts no regionally determined variations or preferences could be found.

Although they are not explicitly identified by the Nyanga as a subcategory of tales with their own generic term, the thirty-six texts are clearly recognizable as a distinctive analytical unit. In contrast to other types of Nyanga tales:

- They are relatively short. The length varies from narrator to narrator: some are parsimonious in words and present succinct, sometimes elliptical texts; others look for detail, specificity, repetition, and expansion.
- They are opened and closed by characteristic formulas rarely used for other Nyanga stories. The opening formula is

basically structured on the pattern "X gave birth to (begat) Y." Other tale groups and types have different formulas, such as the frequently occurring:

- X (and Y humans or animals) went (with Z humans or animals) to place A (hunting camp or forest)
 - X married Y (one or more wives, sometimes ranked as senior or junior, or as preferred and scorned)
 - X built a village
 - X and Y made a bloodpact
- The key dramatis personae are reduced to two social sets: members of the nuclear family (father/child; mother/child-always human; the spouse or sibling are occasionally mentioned) and strangers (mainly animals but also ogres, specters, Pygmies, and unidentified young men) acting as suitors (sometimes with their helpers). In Group II the actors are more diversified and include the spirit of the paternal aunt and of the mother, a spirit, the maternal uncles, a diviner, and also groups associated with the deceitful spouse.
- Apart from regular kinship and status terms (e.g., a young woman, a man, a young man, a chief) and common animal names (e.g., Elephant, Leopard, Duiker, Chimpanzee) with which the actors are identified, there are numerous unusual personal names for the father, the mother, the girl, and the suitors (e.g., Barungu, Mankobongo, Munungunungu, Kabira, Nyamunkubungu, Nkendi-butea, Shenganebo). These are not the usual names given individuals in Nyanga society; these names are also largely absent from the rest of the Nyanga corpus of tales.
- The tales have a characteristic plot development: they diverge, for example, from the numerous texts in which human actors undergo a series of experiences in the hunting camp, or from those in which humans or animals engage in soon-to-be-disrupted bloodpact or friendship alliances, or from those in which a heroic figure triumphs over various evils and emerges as a "savior of people." The main peripeties of the plot are also accentuated by typical formulas expressing fleeing, failing, dying, and succeeding.

The two groups not only form a definite unit from the point of view of their form, contents, and social and moral implications, but, more importantly, they are complementary from the narrator's point of view. Their complementariness is clearly demonstrated by tale A1093, which is a perfect fusion of the plots typical of Groups I and II. THOMPSON (1946), in The Folktale, had already hinted that the two stories are sometimes combined. Speaking of AaTh 621 in which suitors must guess the principal feature of a dress the girl had fashioned from the skin of a fattened louse, he says (p. 155): "As an

autonomous story, we find it here and there all over Europe... In other parts of Europe, the tale is more likely to serve merely as an introduction to Cupid and Psyche (Type 425B), King Thrushbeard (Type 900), and the Robber Bridegroom (Type 955). "

By way of introduction to our analysis, we present the text of A1093 in extenso, broken down according to the significant morphological units we have isolated for the plot sequence of the tales in Groups I and II. It might be noted here that those who heard the story considered it to be superbly narrated.

Group I. 1. Introduction of a man and his daughter

There was one man; he begat a female child.

2. Proclamation

When she was big now, her father told all the young men that he who would marry his daughter would marry her when his teeth had become like hers. And his daughter agreed.

3. Attempt and failure by one or more suitors

a/ First suitor's attempt and failure

Days passed. Baboon arrived; he said that he wanted to marry her.

When Baboon saw the teeth of this female child, he went away saying that his (teeth) were not the same as hers.

b/ All suitors' attempts and failures

All the animals, one after the other, were exhausted from looking, looking at her and failing to have teeth like those of the young woman.

4. Success on the part of one suitor

To their surprise, Master Chimpanzee also went to try.

a/ Preparation of deception with the help of donor

(in the other stories the narrator tells us this episode after the fact, as part of the hero's successful achievement of the task; in this case the narrator prepares the scene ahead of time)

In the course of his journey he arrived at a diviner's place. He said: there in that young woman's place there is failure.

His friend, this diviner, said to Chimpanzee: as you go, when you arrive in a place where musoby flowers (grow), you must then pluck them and put them on your teeth, and go to her place. He went; in the place where he traveled, he saw the musoby

flowers; he put them on his teeth.

b/ Arrival at the young woman's place
When he arrived in her place,

c/ Hospitality
this female child prepared food for him.

d/ Accomplishment of prescribed test
When he laughed at her, the young woman saw these teeth.
She went to tell her father, saying: this is the one who will marry me; his teeth are beautiful.

5. Reward

The father-in-law said to this Chimpanzee: you, my son, my daughter loves your beautiful teeth; you may get married to her; go now with her.

Group II. 6. Discovery of spouse's identity

a/ Preliminary dissillusioning effect
In the place where they traveled, upon arrival there, he said: there is no food here; it is befitting that I make a field for my wife.
His wife remained in the village.
And there he arrived with his kinsmen in the place where he traveled to make a field.

He sang:

Eererere eee, he who is full descends
Eeerere eee, now they are Raffia-People
Eeerere ere!

While he grew very tired of eating, eating the fruits of the trees up there (in the tree) together with his kinsmen, his wife remained there in the village.

b/ Complete revelation

One day, the wife questioned, questioned herself in her heart, saying that this husband fooled her when saying that he was going to cultivate.

Now let me follow him first!

She arrived there; she went after him snakewise; she arrived there: she saw all (of them) up there eating fruits of the trees.

She did not know who was who; all were now together; they had left their skins on the ground.

7. Dissolution of the union/return home

When she saw them in this state, she went to her father's place; she returned there; she did not remain

with this man because he fooled her.
And this man (her father) died of shame, Mr. To-Marry-Her-Off.

8. Explanation:

This is the reason why it is not befitting for people who do not know one another's habits to marry or to be married. And lo! the man who does not get advice will bring difficulties upon himself; he will carry excrements.

The tale was narrated in Mai-Makoi village by Bushu Sweri, a man who told three tales during a session in which twenty tales were narrated by both men and women. The group identified the text as uano.