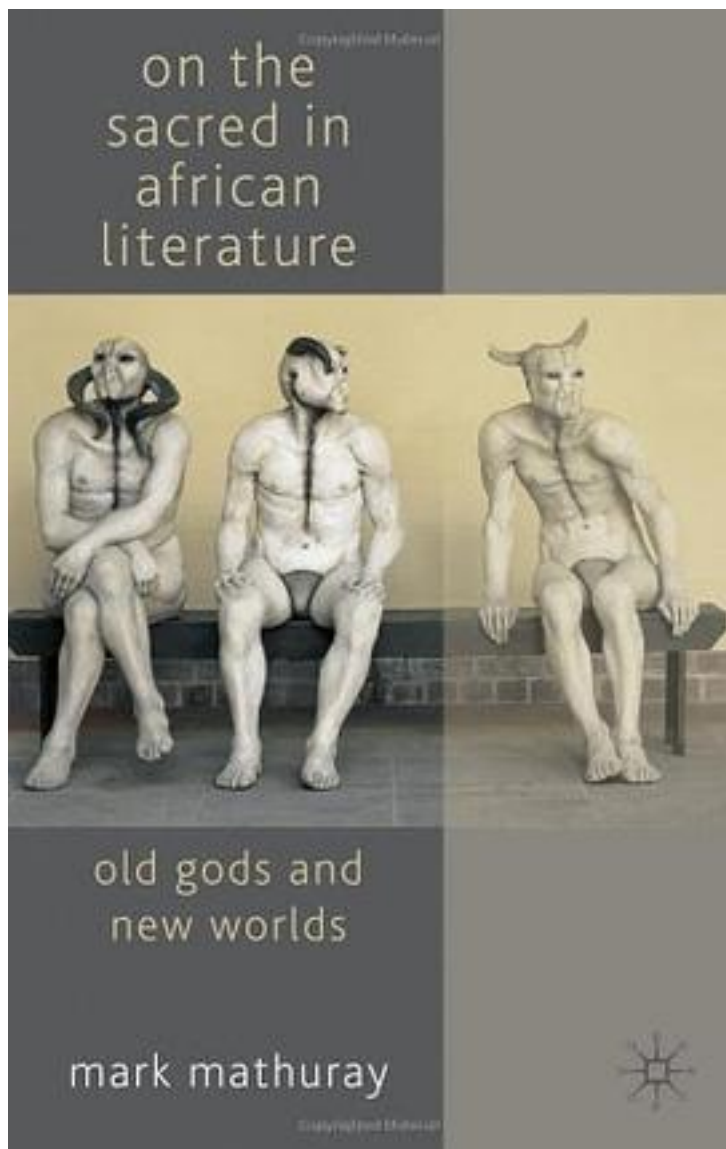


On the Sacred in African Literature



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The representation of myth, ritual and magic are important elements of African cultural production. Within African literary criticism, the distinctiveness of the African text, its distance from or subversion of European literary forms, is elaborated and celebrated through analyzing its appropriation of myth and ritual. This innovative and challenging book seeks not so much to dislodge myth, ritual, animism and other such terms from their place in critical discourse so much as to subsume them within the broader, more critically productive category of the sacred. Although an important idea in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, political theory, and history (specifically, the history of religion), the sacred, surprisingly, has not been explored in relation to African literature. The sacred emerges in this ambitious book as a cognitive-cultural schema, in the Kantian sense, which is central to understanding social and political structures, religious and philosophical ideas and practices, and cultural production of much traditional African society. It argues that the persistence of the sacred in contemporary African society structures and determines African literary production in ways which both enable and delimit epistemological concerns and political possibilities. One of the book's important critical strategies is to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap between African and Western systems of thought and literary practices, instated by colonial discourse and often re-instated by much of African literary criticism.

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