

CULTURE HERO'S INTREPID PAST (PROMETHEUS, LOKI, SYRDON... COYOTE...)¹

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Abstract. *The paper compares Loki of the Scandinavian and Syrdon of the Caucasian material (the Nart-epic tradition) with the evolution of the character of Prometheus as described in the early texts (Theogony and Works and Days by Hesiod) and with his later transformation as described in Prometheus Bound by Aeschilus. This comparison makes it possible to demonstrate the general pattern of evolution which can be described as (chthonian) deity → trickster → culture hero.*

In this we do not agree with Eleazar Meletinskij's statement, according to which the culture hero – Demiurge – is the most ancient character in the world folklore, while the trickster is a subsequent transformation of the image of the culture hero. Employing the Greek model (Hesiod's Theogony) as our starting point, we will argue that an intriguer / a trickster is the most ancient mythological character, while the culture hero emerges as a result of later developments.

Keywords: *trickster, culture hero, chthonian deity, metaphor, myth, comparative mythology, semantic evolution, idea of progress.*

Before the High and Far-Off Times, O my Best Beloved, came the Time of the Very Beginnings; and that was in the days when the Eldest Magician was getting Things ready. [...] He took the Elephant–All-the-Elephant-there-was–and said, 'Play at being an Elephant,' and All-the-Elephant-there-was played. [...]

But there was one Elephant [...] who was full of 'satiabile curiosity [sic] and that means he asked ever so many questions. And he lived in Africa, and he filled all Africa with his 'satiabile curiosities. [...] He asked questions about everything that he saw, or heard, or felt, or smelt, or touched, and his uncles and his aunts spanked him.

Rudyard Kipling

No method requires more erudition than the comparative, and yet none is less fruitful. Nevertheless, the comparative method continues to dominate research on individual myths.

M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij

¹ The shorter version of this paper see in Eloeva, Sausverde, 2015.

Introduction

Opening our paper with the quotation from Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij's book *Myth* (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1982, 28; 2003, 230) we pay once again homage to the great scholar whose legacy continues to be held in high regard in the academic world. Besides, comparative mythology is a fascinating realm that has mesmerized humanity for centuries. We too cannot resist the temptation. Nevertheless we believe that Steblin-Kamenskij's statement is rather debatable. Comparative mythology offers approaches and models through which the human mind perceives and analyses the world. For this reason one can hardly call it useless.

This paper deals with the question that has been extensively discussed in Indo-European comparative mythology. It is the question of the parallels and affinities which can be observed between certain epic and mythological characters – Ancient Greek Prometheus, Syrdon of the Narts' epos and Scandinavian Loki. Previously the three characters have been examined in pairs – Prometheus versus Loki,²

Loki versus Syrdon (Dumezil 1959; Kerényi 2010; Mikhailov 2011). Researchers studied them mostly at the synchronic level, statically, attempting in this way to reconstruct the proto-stage. We, however, aim to examine their development diachronically, in evolution³. The idea is to compare Loki of the Scandinavian and Syrdon of the Caucasian material (the Nart-epic tradition) with the evolution of the character of Prometheus as described in the early texts (*Theogony* and *Works and Days* by Hesiod⁴) and with his later transformation as described in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. We believe that this comparison will help us to demonstrate the general pattern of evolution which can be described as (chthonian) deity → trickster → culture hero.

The comparison of these three characters allows us to suggest that, at least tentatively, they all belong to the model of the so-called trickster which can be found in the Coyote spirit in some Native American mythologies, who stole fire from the gods (or stars, or sun). A similar motive can be found in the stories about the Rabbit in the South Eastern United States or the Raven

² Apparently, the first scholar to compare Loki and Prometheus was George Dumezil, in his early work of 1924 (Dumezil 1924). Jan de Vries calls Loki in his fundamental research on the history of Old Germanic religion the "Germanic Prometheus" (de Vries 1967, 272). The resemblance of the two characters two different mytho-poetic traditions has been noted regularly by various researchers (see, for example, Rooth 1961; Simek 1995; Meletinskij 1988). This comparison was based mainly on the motive of punishment of both characters, their bounded state, their suffering caused by torture and, finally, their liberation. Their similar *Kulturträger* characteristics were considered to be less significant. Referring to Dumezil (1924), Jean-Paul Vernant briefly commented that the inherent ambivalence of the two heroes and their specific intellectuality challenged the ruling gods (Vernant 2003).

³ An exception in this trend for the synchronic approach to Loki's character is found in the analysis offered by Anatoly Liberman in his book *The Word Heath* (1994) and especially in the brilliant etymological retrospective given in the Postscript, which characteristically bears the title "How Loki Laufeyjar Son Lived Up to His Name." Liberman states that the Loki myths were determined by the "punning possibilities inherent in his name". He goes on to say that the development of the hero starts from a kind of chthonic divinity (initially the name Loki meant "somebody who locks, delimitates") later transforming into the Ruler of the Down World, God of Fire (versus Lucifer), trickster etc. Liberman demonstrates convincingly, how in accordance with pre-Saussourian logic, the initial name Loki shapes and determines the subsequent modifications and functions of the hero, see Liberman 1994.

which stole fire from his uncle beaver and eventually gave it to people.

There is nothing new in this assertion – it has long been accepted by comparative mythology. Here we are dealing with a kind of mythological **universalia**. In this paper we will attempt to prove that the trickster and intriguer – a character who transgresses the rules because of his “satisfiable curiosity,” as Kipling put it – constitutes the first stage in the transformation from a character into a culture hero (Long 2005).

In this we do not agree with Eleazar Meletinskij’s statement, according to which the culture hero – Demiurge – is the most ancient character in the world folklore, while the trickster is a subsequent transformation of the image of the culture hero (Meletinskij 1959). Employing the Greek model (Hesiod’s *Theogony*) (Athanasakis 1983) as our starting point, we will argue that an intriguer /a trickster is the most ancient mythological character, while the culture hero emerges as a result of later developments (Aeschylus, *Προμηθεὺς Δεσμώτης*, *Prometheus bound*). One can suggest that the moment the culture hero emerges, myth disappears and gives way to fiction.

In this paper we will focus on the question of whether the semantic development attributed to these characters – chthonian deity → trickster → culture hero – correlates with the transformation and changing value of the idea of progress within different cultures. Our inferences are based on the belief that while reconstructing possible transformations of a character, one should make use of Greek material, where Prometheus of Hesiod acts according to the behaviour model of a trickster thus pre-

sending an early stage of the development of myth, while Prometheus of Aeschylus belongs to the world of fiction.

The Concept of Myth

Creating myths and subsequently analysing them from the point of view of their origins and construction seems to have become one of the distinctive occupations of Homo Sapiens and, arguably, one of his most favoured and ancient pursuits.

The study of the origins of myths and mythology is a well-established area of scholarly enquiry (Steblin-Kamenskij 1982). It was in Ancient Greece (where many theories had been put forward and rejected before restarting their life in the general history of the “world of the mind”) that numerous attempts were made to interpret myths allegorically. Empedocles was among the first to offer a symbolic analysis of Greek mythology. In his interpretation, Poseidon represents water, Apollo – light, etc. (Russel 1967, 81). Critical interpretation of myths goes as far back as the Pre-Socratic tradition. Euhemerus viewed them as accounts of actual historical events, which later became distorted on account of numerous retellings.

Analysing the Neo-Platonic perception of myths, Sergei Averintsev remarked that symbol per se is probably as old as Homo Sapiens. Yet, he argues that the strict division between symbol and object, as well as the concept of allegory, is relatively new (Averintsev 2004). The distinction between symbol and allegory was established at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries within the tradition of German Romanticism, notably in Schelling’s works. Thus, Greek antiquity begins with myths that were alive and evolving and

for this reason, could not be isolated and analysed. Myth supposes integrity of its symbolic content and its material manifestations and excludes any possibility of analytical approach or speculation. In subsequent periods myth came under severe criticism. After the scorn poured over it by Xenophanes and after the critique of the Sophists, myth could no longer be understood and interpreted literally, without an element of reflection (*ibid.* 161).

Hence, according to Averintsev, a third stage in the transformation of myth has to be considered.

In the early stages of the philosophical development of the category of myth the figure of Plato emerges. Averintsev compares him to the two-faced Janus, looking in two opposite directions.

Averintsev stresses the double nature of Plato who scorns and sarcastically criticizes ancient mythology, mocks Homer and Hesiod, and at the same time proceeds to construct a new mythology, a mythology of the second order, not reflective but post-reflective (*ibid.*).

Following this logic we can assume that the figure of a trickster belongs to reflective period, while a culture hero is part of the post-reflective stage. The nineteenth century saw an increased interest in the phenomenon of myth. The changes in the methods of enquiry and the evolution of scholarly traditions in this area of study make a fascinating subject, since every new emerging theory seems to act not like the Hegelian negation of negation but rather like further development and enrichment of the main line of argument (Zajcev 2005).

One thing is obvious – there is a single feature that marks the development

of the interpretation of myth by anthropologists – theories of mythology share a common logical basis, there is no inherent contradiction between them. While interpreting a particular myth one can combine the approaches of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and also find a link between the ideas of Sir Edward Burnett and Max Müller. In his short review of the history of myth studies, conducted in his usual humorous, at times verging on paradoxical style, Steblin-Kamenskij criticises the structuralist approach adopted by Lévi-Strauss and at the same time admits that that the structuralist vision has had a deep influence on him.

We recognise the potential of the structural analysis to bring a certain order into the chaos of mythological data. But it is important to remember that applying the structuralist approach to the interpretation of myths, one is not decoding but rather encoding the chaotic material into (as D’jakonov (2004, 245) puts it) “a system of abstract notions which were intrinsically alien to the primitive mind.”

It seems obvious that at present the general theory of mythology should be discussed in conjunction with the theory of the cognitive metaphor. The potential of the cognitive studies is revealed in the hypothesis offered by Johnson and Lakoff (1980) and their entirely new approach to metaphor. Metaphor is perceived as a very important mechanism of structuring the system of notions possessed by a human being. According to the Johnson and Lakoff theory, metaphors reflect the basic cognitive process and play a crucial role in the process of cognition.

The decisive role in the process of cognition seems to belong not to formalized

procedures, but to analogy, in other words, to the process of transformation of meaning from one semantic field into another. Hence, metaphor is viewed as a linguistic reflection of the processes of human cognition based on analogy. Johnson and Lakoff's hypothesis became a turning point in modern linguistics. To this day it is considered to be the only valid innovation, the only new hypothesis offered by cognitive studies. Still, if one compares it with the history of mythology studies its close connection with the theory of myth, especially with the ideas of Lévy-Bruhl, becomes apparent. It is also worth remembering that in his *La scienza nuova* Giambattista Vico expressed the idea that a metaphor is just a small myth.

Following the traditional (similar to that of Giambattista Vico) and quite materialistic approach, favoured by Igor D'jakonov, we will regard myth as a method of expressing man's cognition of the world in the period of his development when he has not yet created an apparatus of abstract notions required to arrive at logical conclusions. D'jakonov proposes to view myth as an extended metaphor. "Yet, one should not exaggerate the power which urges a primitive human being to analyse and to interpret the world around him," warns Igor D'jakonov in his last book *Archaic myths of East and West*. He then continues: "The interpretative aspect of perception was absolutely indispensable only on the periphery of human practices. No interpretation was possible without generalization and Homo Sapiens lacked the mechanism of language-based abstract thinking (D'jakonov 2004, 11).

Even the most superficial approach to mythological studies can reveal the vital-

ity of myths and the enduring human interest in them. We believe that the transformation (and distinction) "metaphor → allegory"⁴ can be juxtaposed to that of "myth → fiction". We will attempt to show that the transformation from a trickster into a culture hero can be combined with elements of creative approach to material – in other words, with fiction. At the same time a new myth – the myth of Indefinite Progress associated with the idealized character of Prometheus – has been created (Alfonseca 1998).

One can suggest that here we deal with the transformations myth → allegory, metaphor → symbol. In traditional cultures the idea of any change is viewed negatively. Yet, there is no doubt that even conservative societies fall under the charm of the ambivalent figure of a trickster. Æsir cannot help enjoying the tricks and inventions of Loki while Narts admire "their misfortunate", treacherous Syrdon. It is evident that Prometheus belongs to the same category of characters. Aeschylus's fantasy transforms a trickster into a hero and in the process creates a new myth – the idea of Indefinite Progress.

Prometheus – Loki – Syrdon. Common features. Ambivalence and complexity of the initial character

Apparently tricksters do not change their mischievous behaviour even after they had become the object of investigation, and cause the scholars' problems similar to those they used to cause gods'. It is an accepted fact that any review of scholarly

⁴ An interesting approach to the division metaphor – comparison – gradation is presented in an article of Anna Wierzbicka (1990).

discourse involving the interpretation of Loki, Syrdon or Prometheus comes against the extremely complex, confusing and ambivalent nature of these characters. They are always regarded as outsiders and strangers. As aptly put by Stephanie von Schnurbein, “Loki, the outsider in the Northern Germanic pantheon, confounds not only his fellow deities and chronicler Snorri Sturluson [referring to the *Prose Edda*] but has occasioned as much quarrel among his interpreters.” (von Schnurbein 2000, 121).

The traditional method of interpreting these characters has been to reconstruct the process of their transformation by establishing their starting point or their main features: the God of Fire (Jakob Grimm), Lucifer of Christian Norse Mythology, Hypostasis of Óðinn (Folke Ström), figure of trickster (de Vries 1933),⁵ spider (Rooth 1961),⁶ chthonic deity (Lieberman 1994), etc.

Adopting the concept of myth as a way of explaining and describing the world, we refer to the aforementioned statement by D’jakonov in which he claims that “a system of abstract notions is intrinsically alien to the primitive mind” (D’jakonov 2004, 243). Using this assertion as a starting point, we aim to reconstruct the ambivalent, complex character of the Ur-trickster, which has been analysed, interpreted and

simplified by humanity while it developed its capacity for abstract speculation.

Similar approach is proposed by Nikolai Mikhailov. Concentrating on the character of Prometheus he proposes to reconstruct a kind of a Proto-trickster valid on the Indo-European level. His ambivalence and dualist nature should not be regarded as a result of later development but as a set of initial features of his character. Analyzing the character of Prometheus, depicted in Hesiod’s works, Mikhailov proposes to reconstruct an ambivalent proto-hero who would combine qualities of culture hero and trickster, forming the unique image of Prometheus-Epimetheus (Mikhailov 2011, 82). He is referring to Kerenyi who advanced the hypothesis claiming the existence of an Ur-hero Prometheus/Epimetheus in the pre-Hesiod mythology (Kerenyi 1979, 120).

The ability to view a hero as a carrier of one leading quality is linked to the phenomenon of abstract thinking, “alien to the primitive mind” (D’jakonov 2004, 243). Thus we can see the possible development of a character from being complex, ambivalent and concrete to becoming “simple” and hence more abstract. This is similar to the ancient strata of onomatopoeic words in the languages which do not have a written tradition or to children’s speech, the so called “ideophones,” which tend to describe the whole situation.⁷

Let us consider some of the examples illustrating the ambivalence of the charac-

⁵ By trickster de Vries means a “Konzentrationfigur” which attracted all sorts of intricately combined traditions (bisexuality, mantic wisdom etc). According to de Vries such complex nature lies in Loki’s character of mischief-maker. De Vries accepts the idea of Dumézil about the striking resemblance of Syrdon and Loki and their “impulsive mind” (de Vries 1933).

⁶ In 1961, by way of excluding all non-Scandinavian mythological parallels and interpreting the plausible etymology of Locke “spider” (Medieval Swedish), Anna Birgitta Rooth concluded that Loki was originally a spider (Rooth 1961, 266).

⁷ “Ideophones” or onomatopoeic words, (indexes, in the terminology of Charles Peirce), specific words – pictures, describing the whole situation. It is particularly characteristic of children’s speech or languages with no literary tradition. They are presumed to belong to the primary lexicon (Pierce 2001; Voejkova, Čistovič 1994; Tolskaya 2011).

ters discussed. One of the most important texts providing us with the most complete description of Loki is the *Lokasenna* of the *Poetic Edda*. *Lokasenna* ('Loki's Quarrel' in Old Norse) of the *Poetic Edda* (Bellows 1936) focuses on Loki arguing with other gods. In the beginning Ægir gives a feast in his hall. There the gods praise Ægir's servants. Loki cannot bear to hear this and kills one of the servants, Fimafeng. After chasing Loki into the woods, the gods return to the hall and continue their feast. Loki comes out of the woods, and meets Eldir outside of the hall. Loki greets Eldir and asks him to tell him what the gods are discussing over their ale inside the hall. Eldir responds that they discuss their "weapons and their prowess in war" and no one there has anything friendly to say about Loki. Loki says that he will go to the feast, and that, before the end of the feast, he will initiate a quarrel among the gods and "mix their mead with malice." Loki then enters the hall, and everyone there falls silent upon noticing him. Breaking the silence, Loki says that, thirsty, he had come to these halls from a long way away to ask the gods for a drink of "the famous mead." Calling the gods arrogant, Loki asks why they are not willing to speak to him, and demands that they assign him a seat at the feast, or tell him to leave. Loki appeals to Óðinn, and says:

Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days
we mixed our blood together?
You said you would never drink ale
unless it were brought to both of us.
(Bellows 1936, 135)

In this passage the contradictory character of Loki in all its ambivalence, paradoxality, strange compelling charm, mixture of spontaneity and malice can be

clearly seen. We know that he is prepared to commit crime but he comes across as a rather unusual sort of a criminal. He does not seem to be aware of the crime he commits and is perfectly confident he will find a way to persuade the gods to let him take part in the feast. It seems he is intent on provoking the gods, trying to push the boundaries of their tolerance. One can suggest that that Loki's main trait is that of "insatiable curiosity," the feature mentioned above.

The dialogue with Óðinn presents one of the numerous mysteries of Loki. The words about the blood mixed together in the bygone days lead scholars to interpret Loki as a hypostasis of Óðinn (Ström, 1956). In any case, Loki combines mysterious, chthonic qualities with a unique humour, and a strange ability to initiate a catastrophe and then to save the situation.

The same ambivalence and tendency to initiate some misfortune and then to restore the *status quo*, or even to ameliorate the situation at the last moment, is characteristic of Syrdon – the hero of the Narts epic tradition. (The only exception seems to be the parallel stories of the tragic fate of the solar heroes of Scandinavian and Caucasian traditions, Baldr and Soslan, whose deaths had been provoked by Loki and Syrdon respectively. Here our personages go too far and the catastrophe cannot be reversed.)

Practically in all narratives where Syrdon features, he acts in the same impulsive manner, driven by his curiosity and his malicious and inventive mind, changing rapidly his tactics and strategy, intermittently acting as a positive and as a negative hero. For example, in his travels with Narts he decides to take revenge after being humili-

ated by them and brings them to the brink of disaster – but later, in accordance with his usual model of behaviour, he saves the lives of the Nart heroes who are stuck to the benches of giants by some magic glue. In his usual way he doesn't miss the opportunity to humiliate his companions while saving their lives.

Prometheus and Loki. Theft during sacrifice

It is evident that in the case of Prometheus we deal with the transformation of a trickster (as seen in Hesiod) to a character who becomes the gods' adversary (as seen in Aeschylus). The heroic opposition of Prometheus to Zeus and his subsequent punishment are very similar to the permanent feud between Æsir and Loki which caused the corresponding revenge of gods (the Æsir). Syrdon in his turn very often provokes the Narts to oppose and fight the gods. In the case of Syrdon we can see the opposition Gods – Narts. On the one hand, Syrdon opposes Gods, on the other, he is in permanent conflict with Narts. The opposition of Loki to the Æsir is somewhat different because the Æsir are actually gods.

There are two plots in Hesiod *Theogony*, featuring Prometheus. They are brought together in fragment 507-616 – the trick played by Prometheus on Zeus during the “first sacrifice” and the theft of the fire with the subsequent myth of Pandora (561-616). Mikhailov proposes to compare on typological level two fragments of myths belonging to Greek and Scandinavian traditions – the narrative about the first sacrifice (*Thg.* 535-564) and the confrontation of Loki and Þjazi (*Skáldskaparmál*,1).

In *Theogony* of Hesiod Prometheus is introduced as a challenger to Zeus's

power. Hesiod describes the trick, played on Zeus by Prometheus at Mecone during a sacrificial meal marking the “settling of accounts” between mortals and immortals, (*Thg.* 545–557). Prometheus placed before the Olympian two offerings: a selection of beef hidden inside an ox's stomach (an appealing offering hidden inside an unattractive cover) and bull's bones wrapped in “glistening fat” (inedible stuff hidden inside an attractive cover). Zeus chose the latter, setting a precedent for future sacrifices. Henceforth, humans would keep that meat for themselves and burn the bones wrapped in fat as an offering to the gods. This angered Zeus, who in retribution hid fire from humans. In this version of the myth, humans already knew how to use fire, but this skill had been taken away by Zeus. In the second part of the *Younger Edda* of Snorri Sturluson the *Skáldskaparmál* or “Language of poetry”, in *Bragarödur* (‘Brage's Talk’), Æsir – Óðinn, Loki and Hænir went on a journey across the mountains and heaths, found a herd of cattle, took one ox and proceeded to boil it. After a long time, they discovered that the meat did not get cooked. Following this, they heard a voice in the oak above them. A giant eagle (transformed giant Þjazi) told them that if they gave him his portion of the ox, the broth would be cooked. They agreed to this. But after Þjazi snatched two thighs of the ox and then both shoulders and started eating the meat, infuriated Loki snatched a large pole and hurled it at the eagle. The eagle recovered from the blow and flew away. One end of the pole attached itself to the eagle's body, and the other end got stuck to Loki's hands. Þjazi declared that Loki would never get free unless he pledged to bring Idun and her ap-

ples from Ásgarðr. Loki promised this and was set free. This gave rise to the story of the theft of the apples of youth. As a result of the theft of the apples of eternal youth, the gods became old and grey and Loki was forced to save the situation which he, as always, managed quite well.

In both cases we are dealing with the sacrifice of an ox to deity – in the case of Prometheus – to Zeus, in the case of Loki – to Þjazi. The bull is meant for the Æsir (the classical sacrifice) but also for Þjazi (peace offering). Then there is a certain condition attached – one part for you, one part for me (Zeus and mortals; Þjazi and the Æsir). In both situations Prometheus and Loki act like transgressors and they are punished for their crime.

Pairs of heroes and twins

It is interesting to note that quite often this **Ur-Trickster** has a positive counterpart. This dualistic nature of the First Trickster is crucial. Dualistic myths featuring two culture heroes arranging the world in a complementary fashion can be found in different cultures: Romulus and Remus, Ashvins – Dioscures, Prometheus – Epimetheus etc. In Germanic mythology and the Nart epic tradition of the Northern Caucasus these pairs are strangely attracted to each other: Baldr – Loki, Syrdon – Soslan. The two characters are intimately connected and one of them eventually causes the other's death.

According to Meletinsky, “the two heroes may compete or collaborate; they may be conceived as neutral or opposed to each other, as good versus evil; they can be of the same statue or differ as powerful versus weak; they can be brothers (even twins) or not related at all” (Meletinskij 1982, 25).

The significance of the inner form of the two names – Prometheus – Epimetheus has been discussed many times (Kraus 1957). Epi-metheus causes disaster, accepting Pandora and her terrifying gifts to humanity. This happens because he is not very intelligent, he is reluctant to act, he thinks after the event, while Pro-metheus foresees everything and his malicious acts are deliberate.

Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff claimed that there are different variants of Prometheus – the first – Attic-Ionian (culture hero) and the second – Beotian (the titan who opposed the gods). This idea was later developed by Sechan (1951) and Vernant (1979, 274-275). This distinction holds true, but we agree once again with Mikhailov's view when he suggests that this division of the initially ambivalent and unique character of Prometheus arises much later, while the earlier Prometheus was a kind of combination Prometheus / Epimetheus (a hypothesis proposed by Kerenyi, 1979).

It seems that there is an obvious link between Loki and Baldr, Syrdon and Soslan. Loki's hate for Baldr matches that of Syrdon for Soslan. There is a kind of secret to be discovered in order to harm their adversaries and Soslan / Baldr and Loki / Syrdon find it. They do not kill themselves but provide counselling to someone else how to carry out the killing. Soslan's young ally is prevented by Syrdon from reviving him, just as Baldr is prevented from being revived by Loki.

What is striking here, is not so much the correspondence in the details of the stories, as the profound connection between Syrdon's and Loki's psychological make up. Both are mean characters which

for a long time keep their meanness in check by causing relatively little harm, even being useful sometimes, until their mischief making reaches the point where they cross the line of acceptability. After this they perform the appalling crime of killing the solar hero. This similarity of their common journey from nastiness to crime is absolutely striking.

Chthonic origin.

Belonging to the Other World

Tricksters are usually of mixed (chthonic-divine) origins – Prometheus is the son of Titan Iapetus and the goddess Themis (Aeschylus) or Oceanid Clymene (Hesiod); Syrdon is the son of the river deity Gatag and Dzerassa – the daughter of the god of the sea Donbetyr; Loki is the son of Jötunn Fárbaumi and Laufey whose origins are unclear.

Insatiable Curiosity

It seems to be a cultural universal that with the initial intention to amuse himself the trickster deity transgresses the rules set by gods.

There is a well-known theory that the origins of the so-called Ancient Greek miracle lie in the phenomenon that the Greeks called *σχολή* “leisure” and the Romans “otium”, which meant “free time”. So there is something deeply touching about the fact that the first shoots of Progress were due to leisure and entertainment and not to strict protestant values. The logic of the evolution of myth appears to support this idea.

Gender and form variability

More often than not the Trickster figure exhibits gender and form variability and swops gender roles. Traditionally this

feature has been interpreted as a shamanistic one. Such figures appear in Native American and First Nations mythologies, where they are said to possess a double-spirit nature. Loki, the Norse trickster, also displays gender variability; on one occasion even becoming pregnant. He shares the ability to change genders with Óðinn, the chief Norse deity, who also possesses many features of the Trickster. Loki’s pregnancy came about when he was forced by the Gods to prevent a giant from erecting a wall in seven days. He solved the problem by transforming himself into a mare and drawing the giant’s magic horse away from its work. Sometime later he returned with a child he had given birth to – the eight-legged horse Sleipnir, who served as Óðinn’s steed. Syrdon, too, often changes his gender. He transforms into an elderly lady and even into a whole array of objects.

Loki – Syrdon similarities

George Dumézil was the first to observe the strong resemblance between Syrdon and Loki (Dumézil 1948). However, in Dumézil’s opinion, of greatest importance was the similarity of the general atmosphere, temperaments, modality and not the coincidence of separate details. Both characters are cunning, curious, possess outstanding mental abilities, are strongly connected to the Other World, perform magic, possess shamanistic features. Syrdon even has some Pythagorean skills – “numbers are not mystery to him”. Discussing the issue, Dumézil remarks that the only “material coincidence” between the two characters is present in two narratives that appear to be parallel:

1. While crossing the river, bound to the tail of a horse of Soslan Syr-

don is nearly drowned – in this way Soslan shows his contempt to his eternal adversary. Exactly the same thing happens to Loki who is bound to Þór's belt while crossing the river.

2. Syrdon steals pieces of iron when Barsag's will is forged by the Heaven's smith Kurdalagon. As a result, the power of Barsag's will weakens. Loki spoils Þór's hammer while it is being forged by a dwarf (Dumezil 1976, 121). Remarkable as they are, Dumezil, considers these obvious coincidences to be insignificant.

Both Loki and Syrdon have some potential for developing into culture heroes – Loki invents the net, while Syrdon invents the first lyre of the Narts (fandyr). The story of these “inventions” (if they can be considered as such) is very typical for the evolution of culture heroes. Their cultural endeavours are rarely systematically and methodically planned. Quite often an important landscape or culture feature is a consequence of some kind of chance or of their light-minded behaviour rather than a result of their creative activity).

Loki's relation with gods varies. Loki sometimes assists them and sometimes causes problems for them. Loki and Syrdon are experienced shape and gender shifters. Loki assumes the form of a salmon, a mare, a fly, an old woman. Syrdon too changes his form easily and often turns into an old woman, a dog etc.

Loki and Syrdon both dwell in strange secret houses. Syrdon lives either in a labyrinth under the earth or next to the river (this detail underlines his chthonic nature). Loki has a strange house in the mountains where the Æsir try to get hold of him, but he escapes turning into a salmon and

later comes close to creating the net. Prometheus (depicted by Aeschylus), Loki and Syrdon share features of prophets. Often they help their companions by giving them useful advices. On the other hand when they foresee the misfortunes, which will befall their community, Loki and Syrdon display real joy. Both Loki and Syrdon cause the death of solar heroes.

The motive of the punishment for the committed crime is not so evident in Syrdon's case, in spite of the fact that he is called *Narty fydylyzh* ‘the misfortune of the Narts’. In his turn, Loki is known as the evil of the Æsir. The Narts repeatedly try to find the way of punishing and torturing Syrdon, but he invariably manages to find some kind of solution for his predicament. Frequently Narts and Æsir show their despise for Loki and Syrdon.

Loki and Syrdon. Some new parallels

It is evident that the coincidence in general atmosphere is observed more easily than the matching of the concrete features making up the characters of our heroes. And still there are some details, which seem strikingly similar and have apparently escaped the researchers' attention. There is a certain affinity between the plots of Baldr's death caused by Loki and Syrdon's son's death caused by Soslan. Syrdon, wanting to get an ox from every Nart family, proposes to use his own son as a target and to shoot at him using their bows. “If you kill him I need no compensation, but if you miss you give me an ox“. Syrdon, who like Prometheus and Loki possesses some prophetic qualities, is aware of the fact that for some unknown reason, no Nart except for Soslan can cause harm to his son. Syr-

don knows that Soslan is absent and hence cannot participate in the dangerous game. But Soslan returns, meets a witch who tells him that he is the only person who can hit the target and kill the boy (interestingly, in the Narts epos we usually meet Syrdon himself in the role of the old witch, who, like Loki, can perform this kind of transformations). Syrdon recognizes Soslan's arrow because it produces a peculiar sound while in flight. After this incident Syrdon becomes Soslan's worst enemy. This story is strangely reminiscent of the well-known narrative of the killing of Baldr by Loki (which in its turn presents a certain parallel to the story of the peril of Soslan caused by Syrdon)⁸.

One of the most striking aspects in the resemblance between Prometheus and Loki is the fact that the two heroes are punished in the same way – being bound to a rock. Their punishment gave rise to the motive of torture, suffering and subsequent liberation.

Loki is eventually bound by the gods with one of his sons' entrails, while Syrdon creates the first musical instrument of Narts – fandyr – using his son's veins (Narty 1990, 224-238) (the boy was killed by Hamyts and boiled in a cauldron in revenge for Syrdon's stealing of his cow)⁹.

⁸ In his monography "The problem of Loki" Jan de Fries (1933) argues that the character of Loki is Óðinn's negative counterpart. He believes that initially Loki presented the type of an innocent trickster, who under the influence of Christianity has developed much more dark traits, eventually becoming the enemy to gods. His involvement in Baldr's death, according to de Fries (and to Mogk 1923) is a later version of the myth. In any case, the parallel with the sufferings of Syrdon's son is striking.

⁹ This fact seems to have been missed by Dumezil. Three volumes of the Narts Epos have been published in Ossetia and an electronic corpus of Ossetian language is

So here we are dealing with a remarkable coincidence that so far appears to have passed unnoticed.

The stories go like this: After Baldr's death the Æsir capture Loki. They bring him into a cave, take three flat stones and drill a hole in each of them. Then they take Loki's sons, Váli and Nari (or Narfi). Váli is transformed by Æsir into a wolf and tears Narfi into pieces. After that Æsir take Narfi's entrails and bind Loki to the stones (*Gylfaginning*, Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, chapter 50).

As for Syrdon, he seems to be deeply attached to his sons. According to some versions, his wife died after having given birth to his three sons; in other versions he had a wife and twelve sons. Syrdon's sons became victims of Soslan and Hamyts.

At some point Syrdon stole the cow belonging to Hamyts. He took it to his secret house, boiled the cow in a cauldron and prepared a meal for his wife and twelve sons. Hamyts on discovering the crime, found Syrdon's secret house, came there in his absence, killed Syrdon's wife and children, cut them to pieces and threw parts of their bodies into the boiling cauldron taking with him the cooked meat of his cow. Having discovered what happened to his family, Syrdon plunged into despair. In the cauldron he finds his son's hand and pulls over it his twelve veins. This is how Syrdon creates the Nart lyre – fandyr (Narty 1990, 224-238). Narts admire this wonderful musical instrument and allow Syrdon back into their community.

being prepared. Hence we can hope for the introduction of a new valuable material.

Trickster and intriguer as the original model

While discussing a culture hero it seems fitting to refer to Greek material (Hesiod) as it was the Greek written tradition that recorded the earlier stages of myth. Already in Aeschylus one can trace the subsequent transformation of metaphor into symbol and allegory and observe how myth becomes literature. We can presume that applying the Greek model, we can reconstruct a plausible route of hero's transformation. Scandinavian and Ossetian material does not offer such opportunity, so to analyze it, we should resort to analogy.

By analysing *Works and Days*, *Theogony* by Hesiod (Hesiod 1982) and partly *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus – the earliest Greek texts about Prometheus – the ambivalence of Prometheus's character becomes obvious (Kerenyi 1979; Meletinskij 1958, 1982; Ivanov 1987). Aeschylus begins to transform him into a noble and generous hero prepared to sacrifice himself in order to help the mankind. In Hesiod's texts Prometheus is a trickster, a mischief maker, whose involvement, guilt and responsibility for the tragedies brought upon the mankind can be compared to that of the serpent in the *Paradise Lost*.

Already in ancient Greece (where quite a few theories have been invented and rejected before restarting their life in the general history of the "world of mind"), starting from *Prometheus bound* by Aeschylus, Prometheus is regarded as a symbol of Indefinite Progress. And since Aeschylus, mankind tries to decide whether the idea of Progress should be regarded as positive or as negative. On the one hand, any change is looked upon as dangerous for humanity as it undermines the estab-

lished values. Hence the Judaic concept of the 'Fall of Man', and the idea of the world in decline – the process which started in the Golden Age.¹⁰ In this context the negative role of the trickster (serpent) who is trying to destroy the existing stability through his novel behaviour becomes absolutely clear. The idea of the Golden Age and the return to nature was revived by Rousseau and has not lost any of its attraction in our times. Xenophanes put forward the idea that the gods did not reveal to man the whole truth, and from the beginning of time humanity was forced to invent and discover things unaided. Diogenes was convinced that the severe punishment meted out to Prometheus was fair – he hated progress (Russel 1967, 290). He hardly appreciated the idea of progress.

When following the development of the characters in question we observe a gradual change in the features attributed to the culture hero. In the subsequent literary interpretations of the role of cult and of the changes in the perception of the mythological phenomena, the culture hero appears in an increasingly positive light. Thus, we are dealing here with a radical change in the perception of the role of a *Kulturträger*.

Nikolai Mikhailov offering a thorough analysis of Hesiod's text stresses the point that people seem to have managed to escape chaos after having received a kind of 'sacral injection' (Mikhailov 2011). This injection enables them to escape chaos but they act inappropriately and transgress the established rules. They can be thrown back to the depths of chaos and nothing can protect them from suffering, disasters and

¹⁰ Compare the description of the Golden Age by Hesiod in the 8th century B.C.

catastrophes. For this reason we have to follow the strict order according to which this world functions. It is obvious that the traditional societies which hold such world view will regard any progress as negative. One is not supposed to take a remedy without an advice from an experienced doctor; in the same way, one is not supposed to be initiated into progress without strict advice and benevolence of gods.

Quite often a cultural hero is a thief, trickster, transgressor of taboos – all of this being the testimony to the negative aspects of their activities. Following this logic we can reconsider the image of Prometheus. The fact is that later fictional interpretations have embellished it hugely. After Aeschylus's portrayal of Prometheus as a generous hero, a benefactor of the humanity, his image became very positive (Frazer 1993; Kejper 1986; de Vries 1970).

There is no doubt that Prometheus is a cultural hero, but his actions are to a certain extent destructive because of the methods he resorts to and the results he achieves. Hesiod's *Theogony* contains two narratives involving Prometheus. The first one describes the cheating of Zeus by Prometheus during the first sacrifice (*Thg.* 555-560), while the second features the theft of the fire and the myth of Pandora (who is connected with Prometheus' brother with etymologically 'twin' name Epimetheus). In some chronological dissonance with this fragment is the story of Prometheus' punishment and his subsequent liberation by Heracles. It is said only οὐνεκ' ἐρίζετο βουλὰς ὑπερμενεί Κρονίῳνι (*Thg.* 534) "because he opposed the will of the powerful Kronides" (Hesiod 1982, 167). One can conclude that he was punished for his destructive actions and for his attempts to

prevent the implementation of Zeus's will. ἐρίζειν βουλὰς . The epithets describing Prometheus are connected to the notions of cunningness, of being crafty and mobile – ποικίλον αἰολόμητιν (*Thg.* 511), δολίη τέχνη, (*Thg.* 560: δολίης ἐπελήθεο τέχνης), Προμηθεὺς ἀγκυλομήτης (*Thg.* 546), of hiding (καλύψας), of stealing (κλέψας), of an ability to see into the future, δολίη τέχνη, τέχνη.

In *Works and Days*, in the myth about the theft of fire and the creation of Pandora (*Op.* 42-105) Prometheus' main traits remain unchanged (*Op.* 48: Προμηθεὺς ἀγκυλομήτης; *Op.* 55: κλέψας; φρένας ἠπεροπεύσας).

Hence one can conclude that in Hesiod's *Theogony* not a single positive statement can be found about Prometheus' actions as a *Kulturträger*, whereas the negative consequences of the damage caused by his transgressions of Zeus's laws are really tremendous. Not only Prometheus but the whole of mankind were severely punished for his crime. Moreover, there is a certain lack of justice here as Prometheus's punishment is temporary, while mankind is doomed to suffer eternally. According to Zeus's orders, Pandora became responsible for the future sufferings of mankind. Following Prometheus' theft, the degradation of human beings appears to be quite logical and easily predictable. It seems that these *Kulturträger*'s actions bring about a flood, a real catastrophe for mankind, where the only person saved is Prometheus' son Deukalion (Kirk 1987, 146-147). It transpired that fire had been known to mankind before Prometheus' interference, and its introduction was carried out with Zeus' approval, in other words, legally. Kirk believed that showing Pro-

metheus as the benefactor of mankind was just a pretext to reveal his nature of a trickster (Kirk 1987, 146-147).

According to Meletinsky, the cultural hero – demiurge – is one of the most ancient characters of the world folklore. Yet, as we have attempted to show above, Meletinsky's argument does not seem convincing enough. We believe that culture hero is a later, post-mythological development and want to reiterate the statement made above. The culture hero begins his life the moment mythology (or at least 'primitive mythology') comes to an end and fiction begins.

In most cultures (one can refer to Greek, Norse, Native American, South-western United States, Pacific Northwest, Alaska and Russian Far East examples) the trickster deity breaks the rules of gods or nature, sometimes maliciously, sometimes with positive effects, his initial intention being to amuse himself. It seems that culture hero per se emerges as a subsequent interpretation of certain authors – compare *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus.

Meletinsky demonstrates that as a rule the mythical culture hero cannot be regarded as an object of a religious cult. As a matter of fact the cultural hero almost never evolves to become god. In most cases no sacralisation of the cultural hero takes place and he becomes part of the oral epic tradition. In our opinion, it is one more argument that supports our hypothesis that the culture figure is a relatively recent phenomenon.

More archaic than tricksters seem to be the images of totemic ancestors – half people, half animals who are wandering in groups or alone, eating and killing each other, dying and coming alive again.

Stones, hills, lone trees are the products of their actions. Some of them rise into the sky and turn into planets and stars. Very often they are supposed to have aided the delivery of fire to people, participating in the initiation rites etc. The creation of the totemic ancestors is usually attributed to early antiquity, to the period of dreams. And now in perfect accordance with the laws of folklore we return to the beginning of the article. A wonderful stylization of such myths belongs to Rudyard Kipling (in perfect accordance with the laws of folklore (my end is my beginning) we bring our reader back to the epigraph of the article.

Conclusion

In this paper we have focused our attention on the question of whether the semantic development attributed to certain characters – chthonian deity, trickster, culture hero – correlates with the transformation and the changing value of the idea of progress within different cultures. Our inferences were based on the idea that while reconstructing the possible transformation of this character one should use the Greek material, where Hesiod's Prometheus acts according to the model of a behaviour of a trickster and undoubtedly presents an earlier stage of the development of the myth, while Aeschylus's Prometheus belongs to the world of fiction.

We tend to regard myth as a tool for expressing man's cognition of the world in the period of his development where he has not yet created an apparatus of abstract notions required for arriving at logical conclusions. We believe that myth can be regarded as an extended metaphor.

The idea of any change has been regarded negatively in traditional cultures (the present society, surely, preserves many features of this addiction to stability and repetition). Yet, there is no doubt that even conservative societies felt the irresistible charm of the ambivalent figure of trickster. Æsir cannot help enjoying Loki's tricks and inventions, and Narts admire 'their misfortune' – the treacherous Syrdon. It is evident that Prometheus belongs to the same category of characters. Aeschylus's fantasy transformed the trickster into a hero and in the process created a new myth – the idea of the Indefinite Progress.

When discussing a culture hero it seems fitting to refer to the Greek material (Hesiod) because it was the Greek written tradition that recorded the earlier stages of myth. Already in Aeschylus one can trace the future transformation of metaphor into symbol and allegory and observe how myth becomes literature. Presumably, using the Greek model, one can reconstruct a plausible itinerary of the hero's transformation. Scandinavian and Ossetian material does not offer this possibility, so to analyze it, we can resort to analogy.

It is evident that Prometheus, Loki

and Syrdon characters demonstrate certain similarities. One of the most striking aspects in the resemblance between Prometheus and Loki is the fact that the two heroes are punished in the same way – being bound to a rock.

The matching process identified new features of similarity: Loki is eventually bound by the gods with one of his sons' entrails, while Syrdon creates the first musical instrument of Narts – fandyr – using his son's veins. This seems to be a remarkable coincidence that so far appears to have passed unnoticed.

'My end is my beginning' – we somehow wistfully return to the quotation from Steblin-Kamenskij, which we used as an epigraph of this article. As a matter of fact, it is extremely difficult to verify any hypothesis in the field of comparative mythology – the subject matter is too delicate. And still one should persevere because it concerns us, our way of thinking and of modeling the world around us in the most direct way. We can only reiterate our initial idea – myth comes to an end when fiction starts, and Snorri Sturluson in the 13 century was much closer to the phenomenon of mythological thinking than Aeschylus was in the 5 century BC.

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BEBAIMĖ KULTŪRINIO HEROJAUS PRAEITIS (PROMETĖJAS, LOKIS, SYRDONAS...KOJOTAS...)

Fatima Eloeva, Erika Sausverde

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami panašumai ir paralelės tarp trijų mitologinių personažų – senovės graikų Prometėjo, Syrdono iš nartų epinės tradicijos ir senovės skandinavų Lokio. Anksčiau šie trys herojai buvo nagrinėti poromis: Prometėjas lygintas su Lokiu, Lokis – su Syrdonu. Šie ryšiai dažniausiai buvo tyrinėjami sinchroniniu lygiu, statiškai, bandant atkurti konkrečius personažų evoliucijos etapus. Šiame straipsnyje mes pažvelgėme į šią problemą iš diachroninės perspektyvos.

Skandinavų Lokis ir Kaukazo Syrdonas (nartų epinė tradicija) yra lyginami su Prometėjo charakterio evoliucija, aprašyta ankstyvuose tekstuose (Hesiodo *Teogonijoje* ir *Darbuose ir dienose*), taip pat su jo vėlesne transformacija, kuri yra vaizduojama Aischilo tragedijoje *Prikaltasis Prometėjas*. Šis palyginimas leidžia konstruoti bendrą personažo raidos modelį, kuris gali būti apibūdintas kaip evoliucija nuo chtoninės dievybės iki apgaviko (triksterio) ir (paskutiniame etape) – kultūrinio herojaus.

Šių trijų herojų palyginimas leidžia mums manyti, kad visi jie priklauso universaliam vadinamajam

triksterio archetipui. Šis archetipas Kojoto dvasios pavidalu aptinkamas Amerikos indėnų mitologijoje (Kojotas pavogė iš dievų ugnį, žvaigždes ir saulę), panašių motyvų galima rasti ir pietryčių Jungtinių Amerikos Valstijų pasakose apie Triušį (angl. *Rabbit*) arba Varną (angl. *Raven*), kuris pavogė ugnį iš savo dėdės bebro ir galiausiai atidavė ją žmonėms.

Mes keliame klausimą, ar semantinė transformacija chtoninė dievybė → apgavikas (triksteris) → kultūrinis herojus koreliuoja su kintančiu pažangos (progreso) idėjos turiniu skirtingose kultūrose. Mums atrodo, kad šiai rekonstrukcijai reikia naudoti graikiškąją medžiagą. Hesiodo Prometėjas veikia pagal triksterio (apgaviko) elgesio modelį ir, be abejonės, atitinka mito ankstesnius etapus, o Aischilo Prometėjas jau priklauso grožinės literatūros pasauliui.

Tyrimas leido atskleisti naujų mitų panašumų ir sutapimų. Pavyzdžiui, mito pabaigoje dievai Lokį suriša jo sūnaus žarnomis, o Syrdonas panaudoja savo sūnaus venas pirmajam muzikos instrumentui – nartų „fandyru“ sukurti. Šis sutapimas iki šiol nebuvo pastebėtas.

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