TRICKSTER'S SOCIAL FUNCTIONS AND THE LANGUAGE PARADOXES: THE ROMANIAN *PĂCALĂ* AMONG THE TRICKSTERS IN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

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Abstract

Language, the essential instrument of communicating social traditions, is an intrinsic part of any discussion on cultural heritage, such as myths and folktales. Myth manifests itself through language, and through its many figurative forms of expression, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony, the most important ones being symbols and metaphors. Often symbol is regarded as the primary vehicle of mythical images, yet metaphor goes beyond being simply a figure of speech, it manifests itself in speech as part of the process of conceptualizing a mental realm by another. To understand the complexities of archaic socio-cultural expressions with a contemporary set of concepts and imagery should be evaluated in the proper framework. The archaic metaphors in time lose their initial mythic connotations and, borrowing a concept from physics, collapse into a new 'reality', as for example the story of Păcală selling his cow to the tree. The Trickster, with special functions in the Indo-European social-cultural context is present from classic mythology to the current European folklore: as mythic characters, Hermes or Mercury in the Greek and Roman mythologies, Loki in the Norse sagas, Bricriu in the Irish songs, Pekulis/Patullos in the Baltic heritage, or Varuna in Hinduism, and as the popular trickster in each European cultural complex: Tyl Ulenspiegel in German culture, Peik in Scandinavia, Pooca/Puca in Ireland, Velnius in the Baltic region, the old Russian Veles, or Volos, and Păcală in the Romanian tradition. The names of these European folk tricksters, Pekulis, Patulos, Pooka, Pooc, Peik, Puc, Păcală, could have their origin in the Indo-European root *pek- (Pokorny, 1959, IEW 797) 'livestock, domestic animal, cattle', testifying the incredible vitality of this character. In this paper I will attempt to unveil the main characteristics and social functions that contributed to the everlasting presence of the Trickster in folklore.

1. The role of language tools in myth formation

Language, through its tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony, is the essential instrument of communicating social traditions, an intrinsic part of any discussion on cultural heritage, such as myths and folktales. In conjunction with comparing the mythical material, scholars toil with the understanding of how the societal and religious beliefs of archaic societies developed. Studies on myth's formation and functions, how it was created and what its functions in society were, led to the

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general consensus that myth is a cultural phenomenon that manifests itself through language's tools, the most important ones being symbols and metaphors. To this we should add the discussion on the relation between metaphor and reality from Wheelwright's study: "…for many persons the word 'symbol' suggests meanings of a more permanent kind than those transient wisps of suggestiveness that are never entirely lacking in a poem and that sometimes mark its chief intent." Whereas metaphor is "described as semantic *motion*, the idea of which is implicit in the very word 'metaphor,' since the motion *(phora)* that the word connotes is a semantic motion the double imaginative act of outreaching and combining that essentially marks the metaphoric process." (1962, 68) Further, most researchers agree that 'the religious discourse is metaphoric' which positions metaphor as a *sine qua non* component of myth, and next to symbol, an essential language instrument in myth creation. As a creative-cognitive form of expression, the metaphor generates new concepts, while symbol, as a societal established system of codes, a representation of the general in particular [Goethe 'That is true Symbolism, where the more particular represents the more general' *The Maxims and Reflections of Goethe II*] seems to be more static, contributory in the process of creating new metaphors. Symbol, as a verbal or material form of expression, and part of the myth-ritual discourse, can be controlled, whereas metaphor, in an intense effort to penetrate the transcendent, escapes any control and becomes unconfined, leading the human mind towards new abstract concepts.

2. Metaphor and its cognitive role

Starting from Aristotle's classical definition of metaphor as "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (Poetics, 1457 b, 6-9), the traditional grammar dealt primarily with the poetical metaphor. Recent studies addressed the concept of metaphor from a different angle, by stressing the importance of metaphor in creating new meanings. The American philosopher Max Black considers that the way metaphor works is by "bringing two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other." (Black, 1962, 37)

The philosopher Cassirer (1953, 83) made a distinction between the *general metaphor* as a conscious denotation of a thought which includes another, using a known vocabulary, and the *radical metaphor* as a condition of mythical and verbal expression, which operates not as a mutation into a different category, but the creation of the category itself. A similar distinction between the two types of metaphors is offered by the Romanian philosopher and poet, Lucian Blaga, when he refers to 'image metaphor' and 'revelation metaphor': "The genesis of image metaphor is a non-historic moment which is linked to the genesis of human consciousness as such, [...] of the structural organization of human spirit" in the process of correcting the fatal conflict between the figurative and the abstract, essential to the human spirit; and he continues, whereas: "the revelation metaphor is a result of the specific human way of existence, of being in the horizon of mystery and revelation" (1935, 358). In Blaga's opinion, only when a man positions himself in the dimension of mystery does he really become 'a man'. Umberto Eco (1984, 88), after admitting the difficulties of defining metaphor, offers two ways to approach the subject: first, he suggests that language itself is metaphorical, with the metaphorical mechanisms establishing the language activity, and any effort in defining it becomes a failure unless we speak metaphorically; second, considering that language is governed by rules according to which metaphor is a malfunction, an uncontrollable deviation that leads to a linguistic renewal. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2008) finds that the description of reality through metaphor is the result of the interplay between differences and similarities that generate the tension at the level of utterance, a reality that in our discussion is the world of myth. Joseph Campbell (2001) goes beyond this 'tension' when he argues that metaphor's role is to transcend separation and duality.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that many of the most basic ideas in our conceptual system of thought, such as time, quantity, stage, change, action, cause, purpose, means, modality, or even the concept of category, are comprehended through 'metaphoric-concepts' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 6). Metaphor is the foremost mechanism through which we understand an abstract concept, and realize the abstract thought. Taking Lakoff's ideas and applying them to the study of mythology or religion

we can argue that, since myths deal in the world of the divine, and the divine realms are abstract concepts, they are, therefore, embedded in the mind through conceptual metaphors. The conclusion could be that the pre-historic religious thought, expressed in myth, employed a metaphorical language, which recalls Berggren's idea that myth is the result of the 'abuse' of metaphors, when "the mask, lens filter, or construing subject, is mistaken for or equated with the subject construed," (1963, 246) in other words when the distance between the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor is lost.

The quality of metaphor to create new meanings discussed by Wheelwright, was further examined by Bernard Debatin (1995), who argues that metaphor opens up a perspective on an object and at the same time describes it:

> [...] metaphor represents an 'as if' prediction with an anticipatory reference to the world [...] Based on its particular power of synthesis, metaphor can bridge the gaps between experience and thought, between imagination and concept, and between new and the known [...] Through this selective process, metaphor makes possible not only the conceptualization of experience but also the linkage of new to prior experience.

Thus, the metaphor's function of orientation and openness towards the world comes from the cultural heritage of images forming the metaphoric systems of orientation, deeply rooted within the culture, visible and accessible to reasonable thinking. Discussing the conceptual metaphor theory as methodology in comparative religion, Edward Slingerland (2004) states that if we need to know what people truly think about a concept, we need to look at the metaphors used in relation to that concept. More so, conceptual metaphors as a primary tool for reasoning about self and the world need to be observed in the shared conceptual structure in which they are formed.

Approaching the subject from yet another angle, Robert N. St. Clair (2000) marks the distinction between the verbal metaphor and the visual one. He argues that we cannot understand an oral culture with the instruments of the so-called 'literate culture', a very important observation considering that myths were essentially transmitted orally. Further, the author reveals that our formal school systems are focusing on analysis, whereas oral culture focused attention on understanding how things relate to one another. In the print or literate culture, the information is analyzed by using the verbal metaphor based on language, while the oral culture uses the visual metaphor based on reorganizing visual space.

In the attempt to understand the archaic heritage, we have to take into consideration our contemporary cultural set of concepts and images in relation to the web of symbols and metaphors through which the archaic mythic meanings are transmitted. Following St. Clair's idea that visual metaphors controlled the mental processes in the pre-historic oral tradition societies, the physical elements such as the earth, the sky, or the trees, have transcended into symbols representing mythic divinities. Simultaneously, these symbols were part of metaphors, part of logical sets of facts that were applied to another set of facts within the context of a myth in the complex process of myth creation. For example, the Great Goddess Demeter, as a symbolical embodiment of the Earth in a logical metaphorical act articulated in the expression, 'Demeter feeds us all', becomes the metaphorical manifestation of the divine in action, valid as long as the social group recognizes the divinity in its metaphorical context. Time passing and changes in human understanding of the divine could lead to altering the religious perception, and new denotations could develop. Stories once perceived as sacred, recounting divine actions in establishing certain social values for the community, could be transformed by new events or social conditions, new revelations, or leadership. The metaphors that were once connoting a particular divinity may become obsolete, and lose their spiritual sacred value. To use the same example, the expression 'Demeter feeds us all' becomes irrelevant for today's understanding of the divine. Yet, there are cases in which a rather significant phenomenon takes place: a divine concept may resurface as a new one under a different name, but, in essence, retaining the essential characteristics and powers of the old one. Such is the case of the pre-Christian Slavic gods Perun and Veles/Volos, that appear to have resurfaced in early Christian iconography in the Slavic lands as St. Ilya and St.Vlas/Vlasiy/Blasius. Veiled in metaphoric language, the new revelation arises from previous religious imagery. By borrowing a concept from physics, these metaphors can be

called 'collapsed' metaphors. To clarify, we shall refer to the famous Schrödinger's *Gedankenexperiment*, in which a hypothetical cat hidden in a box can be simultaneously considered dead *and* alive until we open the box and 'observe' it; then our quantum supposition 'collapses' and the cat is either dead *or* alive. Applying this idea to mythical metaphors that were operating within their original mythical environment, we could assume that they become *collapsed metaphors* the moment they were 'observed' through the light of a new cultural milieu. Thus, the metaphors belonging to a previous mythical background can collapse into a new *reality*. A good example of a collapsed metaphor could be the story of the Romanian Trickster *Păcală*, who, among other inexplicable actions, proceeds to sell his cow to a tree in the forest. At first glance, his action seems laughable and foolish, but only if a metaphor is interpreted *ad literam*, and the denotation remains visible. However, if we look, for example, at the Hindu (and not only) meaning of a cow as a symbol of the Mother Earth, the food provider, and then we consider the well-known symbol of a tree, the *axis mundi* connecting the earth and the sky realms, sacred to pre-historic people, Păcală's action may not seem so foolish. And so, the story opens itself to a range of interpretations, such as, perhaps, his action was related to an ancient ritual performed in forests, associated with an animal sacrifice to a tree-god. The imagery of a 'collapsed' metaphorical action, emptied of a distinctive mythical significance to us, could help unveil the former mythological meanings of collapsed metaphors, albeit hazardous, and broaden the understanding of the role of myth in oral societies.

3. The Romanian Trickster Păcală – the Story

Păcală, the Trickster, as he is referred to in studies of mythology and folklore, is a fascinating character, with ambiguous function in the archaic social-cultural context. His stories involve playing around with inversion and reversal of symbols in word or action, meant to reveal hidden truths and the paradoxes of social life The Trickster's actions reflect the logic of his world, the Otherworld, by images of the chaos before the creation, in contrast to the standard order, inviting the listener to a different logic, and by using satire the stories cleanse the society of its hypocrisy. In an interesting analysis of the Trickster's manifestations, Koepping discusses the ambiguity and ambivalence from the Trickster's stories, expressed in the symbolism of worlds upside down, "which tests the boundaries of logical discourse or indeed shows the limits of discourse in general." (1985, 193) As coming from chaos, his protest against existing structures, against boundaries, is related to the manifestations of chaos, the paradox of inverted social action, with its constant attempt to create an anti-structure, the chaos needed as a counterpart and justification for reestablishing the structure. Following van Gennep (1960, 65), "liminal" periods in the initiation processes brings to mind another trickster from folk tales, the *Statu-Palmă Barba-Cot* character, encompassing unity of contraries as his name stand for (the Height of a palm – the Beard of an elbow), who creates havoc in the house from the forest where the young 'prince' and his helpers are staying. By turning everything up-side-dawn the elf creates chaos reproducing the space of his origin, the liminal environment needed in the youth initiatory process revealed in the fairy tale.

In most anthologies of Romanian folktales, the story of Păcală begins with the trickster building a big fire on top of a mountain, adding plenty of resin to it, causing a thick smoke to rise up to God, who happens to have a cold. The smoke cures God's cold, who graciously offers Păcală anything he wants. The Trickster asks for a flute, a musical instrument very common among shepherds. He receives a flute that has the magic powers to make anyone dance incessantly until the music stops, similar to Pan's flute making the satyrs and the fairies dance. The magic flute episode is found in the Neo-Greek, Irish and German folklores as well. (Șăineanu, 1895/1978, 604) Other mythical characters creating magic with their musical instruments are Amphion, Orpheus, Oberon and Hameln.

As the story goes, Păcală inherits a cow, and goes to the market to sell it. On his way to the market he stops in the forest, and sells his cow to a tree, but he gets upset because the tree would not answer him, or give him his money. In anger, he strikes the tree only to find a treasure in its hollow. In the Western folklore the tree is replaced by a statue of a god or saint. In Aesop's fables we find a story of a man who asked Mercury's statue for money, and because the god does not seem to hear him, he gets

upset, breaks it, and finds a treasure in the statue's head. In Cosquin's French collection the character Cadet Cruchon sells a piece of linen to a saint's statue, and because the saint does not want to pay him, he breaks the statue and finds a treasure. In the Neapolitan version Vardiello does the same thing, and Giufa from Sicily wants to dye his linen green, sells it to a lizard, and the treasure is then, found in the lizard's house. (Şăineanu, 1895/1978, 607) As it is evident from these examples, in the East European folklore this motif includes the cow/bull and the tree elements, whereas in the West European we find a saint statue and a piece of linen, signaling an older version in the Romanian folklore.

The story continues with Păcală getting hired as a shepherd by a greedy priest, with whom he enters into a work contract; they vouch to keep their agreement until one of them gets angry, and the one who breaks the contract ought to be punished in various ways, usually to have a piece of skin cut off his back, or to have his nose cut off. In his new job, the trickster starts his malicious but satirical pranks, trying to force the priest to lose his temper. Some of his pranks are: making the priest and his wife dance until they are completely exhausted; going up in the meadows with the herd, and because the priest's wife doesn't give him any lunch, he kills a cow and eats it on the spot; the next day he kills a pig, then a lamb; another nasty work he does is peeling off the child's skin when told to clean him. Another time, the priest's wife tells him to cook soup, and to add parsley to it, but he cooks the dog with the name Parsley. In the end, the priest loses his patience and gets punished. In stories from Corsica, Picardia, or Serbo-Croatia, instead of a priest, the Trickster enters into a contract with a rich man or a king, who endures almost the same types of pranks, and gets punished just the same. (Şăineanu, 1895/1978, 607)

4. The Trickster in European Folklore

In the Irish folklore the trickster Pooka is considered essentially an animal spirit, whose name 'poc' means 'he-goat,' but he takes many shapes, horse, ass, bull, goat, etc. As a horse he has to be kept away from any sites of water, because he will plunge in with his rider and kill him. In an Irish story, a piper, on his way to sing at a party, meets with Pooka, who plays a few spiteful pranks on him, then gives him a pipe that makes him a famous piper (*Treasury of Irish Folklore,* 1985, 509).
The Scandinavian Peik gets horses and cattle from the bottom of the sea. Both, the Irish Pooka and the Scandinavian Peik own the magic flute that makes people dance until exhaustion. Peik is a feared trickster, always challenging the king, who attempts to outsmart him, but with no success (*Scandinavian Folk and Fairy Tales,* 1984, 96).

The names of these European folk tricksters, Pekulis, Patulos, Pooka, Pooc, Peik, Puc, Păcală, point to a common Indo-European root *pek̂ (Pokorny, 1959, IEW 797) 'livestock, domestic animal, cattle,' with cognates in Latin *pecū, -ūs* n. 'a head of cattle, beast, brute, animal, one of a herd', next to which *pecus, -oris* n. (formal = Grk τὸ πέκος), *pecus, -ŭdis* f.; derivatives *pecūnia* 'property, riches, wealth', *pecūlium* 'property.'

The tricksters from folklore share many common features, showing little differences from the mythical character, essentially, antagonizing the authority and watching over the moral order. To illustrate this point, we will compare the Romanian folk story of Păcală and the correspondences as well as the differences with the classical mythical characters.

5. The Trickster in Myths

According to Herodotus*,* (*Histories* 2.51) Hermes was adopted by the Athenians from Pelasgi, and was believed to have been born in Arcadia, where he was particularly honored by the Arcadian shepherds as the protector of their flocks and huts. As a symbol of veneration, a rudimentary image of him was often found by the shepherds' huts doors. This image was a pillar featuring a bearded head, or realistically modeled erect phallus. These phallus shaped stones or painted images, these 'hermai', were considered aggressive symbols of boundaries and fecundity, placed in front of houses, in market

places, but also at crossroads, as reminders of the god's role as the ethereal guide of the soul into the world of the dead. Hermes the Trickster, is the son of Zeus and Maia as Apollodorus gives a short version of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: a few hours after he was born he steals Apollo's herds, and to trick the sun god and hide his act he wears huge sandals to hide his footprints, and makes all the cows walk backwards so that no one could tell where they are hidden. After that, on the banks of Alpheios (the place of the Olympic Games), Hermes performs a noteworthy ritual: he sacrifices two cows, dividing the meat into twelve portions in honor of the twelve gods. Then, by rubbing two laurel twigs, he makes a fire and cooks the meat; although the aroma is appealing to him, he, as a god, must restrain from eating the flesh (Apollodorus, *The Library,* 3.10.2). This episode may explain why Hermes is often regarded as the god who taught people how to make fire with twigs. On his way home, contrary to time of the beginning of his adventures, he is not seen by humans, and dogs don't bark at him; perhaps his sacrificial act may signal his transformation into the flying god, invisible at wish, the messenger of gods, conveying the divine wisdom to mankind. Apollo's gratification for all his troubles is a musical instrument, a lyre that makes beautiful sounds by vibrating the air, perhaps in relation to the flying attributes of the young god. In turn, Apollo entrusts him with protecting his herds, thus confirming Hermes' position as the protector of shepherds, their flocks, and even their thieves. (*Homeric Hymn 4 to Hermes*)

In one of his adventures Hermes is tending the sheep of a mortal man, and falls in love with the man's daughter; from their love adventure, she has a son with horns on his head and hooves instead of feet. (*Homeric Hymn 19 to Pan*) Although he scares his nurse, the gods are happy to see the half human half goat child, and called him Pan. Being a very lascivious creature, Pan follows the nymph Syrinx one day, but she runs away from him, and her sisters, to hide her, turn her into reeds; this prompts him to cut 7 or 9 reeds, and tie them together in what became the musical instrument, the reed pipe.

The Lithuanian Pekulis, or the Prussian Patollus, are regarded as chthonic deities, agrarian helpers, who live near bodies of water. In ancient times Pekulis was feared as the god of death. He became known in the Christian era as Velnias, the flying evil spirit, in which we recognize the element of air as a medium and an attribute of this mythical character. According to Gimbutas, Velnias is a chthonic divinity, a pastoral god, who helps the poor, displaying a perpetual resistance to Perkunas, the sovereign god (Gimbutas, 1963, 202). As Hermes' symbol was a phallus, so Pekulis/Velnias often shows his enormous phallus to women. Velnias goes to weddings and frightens women who will not dance with him. He is known as the one who punishes the unfaithful. This character´s connection with animals is found in a Prussian triptych, where Patullos, whose sacred objects are "the skulls of a man, a horse, and a cow" (Puhvel, 1987, 225) is represented in the form of a horse's skull. Likewise, the Old Russian Veles, also named Volos, a parallel of Velnias, is a chthonic god of horned cattle in permanent conflict with Perun, the thunder god; his function is that of a shepherd of the dead. (Eliade, 1994, 3. 37)

In Northern mythology the Trickster, Loki, is a companion of gods, a giant able to change his sex and shape at will. In his female form, he gives birth to monsters, thus causing considerable troubles for the other gods. He is the 'mother' of Hell, the giantess ruling the realm of death, he scares the gods with old age and dying. Loki is a thief stealing or helping others to steal gods' treasures, then helping them to recover the goods in exchange for favors. In the poem "Lokasenna" (*The Poetic Edda,* 2015) the gods try to keep him out of the Hall of Aegir where they are having a feast, but he manages to enter anyway. Once inside he starts insulting and betraying shameful secrets about the gods' cowardice and the goddesses' infidelities.

The Irish god Bricriu, whose nickname was Nemthenga, Poison-Tongue, builds a splendid hall, preparing a feast to which he invites all gods of Ulster. When they refuse his invitation, he threatens to make them kill each other, and to turn daughter against mother. After arriving at the party, they try to keep him out of the hall, but he, as in the German story, manages to get in, and incite the gods against one another. In the end, the hall is damaged and he is covered with grime (*Early Irish Myths and Sagas,* 1981, 219).

In the Indian mythology, the pair Varuna and Mitra's essential function is to maintain the universal order. While Mitra watches over friendships and ratifies contracts, Varuna is the lord of moral order watching for sinful behavior. As the guardian of the oaths, he upholds *ṛtá*, the cosmic moral norm, quality which links him to one aspect of the Trickster's role. Present at every gathering, witnessing every action he could be ferocious, chaotic in his impulses if the rules are broken, punishing those who break them. Varuna sees, or 'shines' at night, thus he is linked to the Moon, the place of the dead, sharing with Yama the title of 'King of the Dead.' (Dumezil, 1988, 76)

6. The Trickster in Folklore and Myth: a Comparison

Comparing Hermes' actions to those of the Romanian Păcală, such as the use of fire, the musical instrument, the cows/animals sacrifice, and being entrusted as shepherds to take care of herds, (Hermes was entrusted by Apollo with protecting his herds – Păcală is hired as a shepherd), all show many similarities between the mythic and the folk characters. The tricksters from the Indo-European myths, Hermes, Pekulis, Loki, Brikriu, etc., fulfill an essential function as guardians of the archaic heritage, moral principles, passing down the ethical teachings through absurd actions and tricks, a function that has endured over the millennia. The trickster fulfills his function by performing illogical actions that always puts a devious character on trial through his numerous pranks. It may be possible that under his tricks there are hidden encoded messages waiting to be deciphered, revealing his function of messenger of the divine rules from the Otherworld, next to the role of a catalyst he plays in myths and folk tales, affecting the behavior of gods and men.

As we have seen, the trickster of ancient mythology plays pranks on the other gods, while the folk character plays malicious tricks on the authority, the god's representative on Earth, a priest or a king. In myths, his pranks address the divine authority, Apollo, or other gods, whereas, in the West European folklore this divine authority is represented by the king of the land, the statue of a god, or the landlord, that in the Eastern Europe is replaced by the priest. When the Romanian trickster Păcală enters into a contract with the priest, forcing him to break it, his absurd actions make the auditor laugh at the authority, thus restoring a social equilibrium and the moral order. Păcală always punishes the greedy 'devil's priest', the unfaithful wife, the thrifty fellow, and the perverts. His inversion of logical actions forces the audience to reflect, from a different perspective, on community events. He is in permanent conflict with the bad spirits and the devil. He is the moral compass, and watches over the ethical order within the community. He seems to be closer in his vigilance, to Varuna, the god who keeps a very sharp eye on every contract, and punishes bad behavior.

Besides similarities, there are some rather important differences between the mythic Trickster and the folk character: Păcală, with all the other Tricksters from the European folklore, never steal a herd from authority, but Hermes does. In myth, Apollo entrusts him with his herds after the boy plays tricks on him, whereas in the folk story the trickster enters into a contract with the authority, and then starts his malicious pranks. Another difference is that Hermes, as a god, doesn't eat the meat he has sacrificed, while Păcală eats it. The significance of these differences may rest with the fact that, over time, ritual practices and their significance, suffered modifications from myth to oral tradition.

Following the Dumezilian social "class" structure in the Indo-European society, we may speculate that Păcală, together with Pooka, Peik, and the god Pekulis, as shepherds dwelling among the shepherds and field workers, belongs to the third class that governs wealth and fertility. Yet, his role as the guardian of the moral balance, positions him within the first class, together with the keepers of the cosmic and judicial orders, a divine ambiguity which defines the trickster as a character able to move freely between classes.

7. Conclusions

The Trickster's presence is visible from classic mythology to the current oral traditions, as Hermes or Mercury in the Greek and Roman mythologies, Loki in German sagas, Bricriu in the Irish songs,

Pekulis, Patullos in the Baltic heritage, or Varuna in Hinduism, to the European folklore Trickster, well known as Tyl Ulenspiegel in German culture, or Peik in Scandinavia, Pooca, Puca in Ireland, Velnius in the Baltic region, Russian Veles/ Volos, and Păcală in the Romanian tradition.

Why is this mythical character playing malicious tricks on the other gods? Is it because, as suggested by Gimbutas and others, he may be part of an older agrarian pantheon, a pre-Indo-European god? This question may be difficult to answer, and Varuna, or even Pekulis, may stand to prove otherwise. The parallels between the mythic character and the folk one display a paradoxical character, that performs absurd illogical actions meant to readjust a moral balance, regardless who is the guilty, god or man. Expressed in metaphoric language his actions suggest a conflict, sometimes serious, sometimes laughable, in an attempt to create a counter-universe, a very utopian counter-world that shows the real world off as what it is or seems to be. (Koepping, 1985) When the Trickster exposes the faults of gods or goddesses, the greediness and the stupidity of the king or the priest, the story shows the contradictions versus the ideal world, and enhances moral values within the social group, and the ethical and moral principles are transmitted from generation to generation.

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