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ROMEO MOSES AND PSYCHE BRÜNHILD? OR CUPID THE SERPENT AND THE MORNING STAR?

Among all the folk-tales which tell of a woman married to some supernatural creature of ugly or non-human appearance, those that present a serpent creature are not specially distinguished by folklore research. In the classification system established by AARNE-THOMPSON 1928, type 425 deals with a woman who breaks the taboo condition by her intimacy with the creature, type 428 deals with a wolf as the male partner, type 432 deals with a bird partner wounded by the woman's relatives, type 433 deals with a creature who forces a woman to marry him and turns into a handsome youth at nights till the woman finally burns his removed skin, type 440 deals with a bridegroom found in a well (usually as a frog). J. SWAHN 1955 shows that 428, 432, 440 are species of (or a medley with) 425, which he separates from 433 because of the absence of taboo in the latter. It seems to me that the taboo is not unexpressed in 433, but only that the narration finishes just at the moment when the taboo motif usually emerges. Everybody agrees that Apuleius' *Cupid and Psyche* also reflects type 425. J. Swahn is inclined to derive the latter from the Neolithic culture-stage. He also points out the primary character of the serpent motif touched upon by Apuleius in the oracle's words to Psyche's father (Metam. IV 33, 1) and in the story of the taboo broken (V 17, 3)¹ (SWAHN 1955, 430 f., 374).

As type 425 is spread all over the world, it seems to be neither an Indo-European invention, nor a relic of pre-IE epochs, but a possible result of a typologically identical mentality even in isolated pre-historical cultures. Interaction of the divergent and convergent processes is not excluded here in its turn. In spite of maps and naming of many non-IE cultures, in which 425 is met, J. Swahn's standpoint remains europocentric, his non-IE material giving the impression of a supplementary, inexhaustive and accidental illustration. I have begun with type 425, having found variants in the Kartvelian Caucasus, where it was unknown to J. Swahn, and having compared it with corresponding Baltic folk-tales, which, according to the same J. Swahn, «may be of great age and directly connected with the primitive tales from which Aa 425 has once arisen»

¹ Nec speres generum mortali stirpe creatum,/ sed saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum (IV 33, 1); nec te /.../ celare possumus immanem colubrum multinodis voluminibus serpentem /.../ tecum noctibus latenter adquiescere (V 17, 3).

(SWAHN 1955, 342). Such a comparison seems to reveal the origins of type 425 and to explain their genesis in the latter. Let us now turn to this.

The Lithuanian tale «Eglė the Queen of the Grass-snakes» is typical of this kind in Baltic. An elderly couple had twelve sons and three daughters, the youngest daughter was Eglė. Once, having bathed in a lake, the sisters found a grass-snake in Eglė's thrown-off chemise. The eldest sister wanted to drive the grass-snake away but it insisted that it would crawl out by itself provided that Eglė promised to marry it. She promised, and three days later a teeming heap of grass-snakes appeared at Eglė's house as match-makers. They took her to the sea-coast where she was waited for by a handsome youth who confessed that he was the grass-snake she had met. The both lived happily under water for nine years, during which time their three sons, *Ažuolas*, *Uosis* and *Beržas*, and their daughter *Drebulė*, the youngest of all of them, were born. One day, the eldest son *Ažuolas* asked Eglė about her parents, hence Eglė wanted to visit them. Not wanting to let her go, her husband asks her first to spin an endless tow of silk. An old sorceress advised her to throw the tow into the fire, and so the silk is spun. Then the husband tasks Eglė to wear out iron clogs, but she follows the sorceress' advice and asks a smith to anneal the iron in his furnace so that the clogs become worn out in three days. After that the husband tells her to bake a pie for her kinsfolk and he orders the servants to take away all the utensils with which the pie may be baked. But the sorceress advises her to smear a sieve with the remains of leaven and thus to ladle the water and to mix the dough. The tasks fulfilled, the husband let Eglė go with her children, telling them how to call him by name on the sea-shore and warning them not to reveal that name to anyone. They spend nine days at Eglė's home, but as her kinsfolk do not want her to return to *Žilvinas*, the grass-snake, her brothers decide to extort his name from the children and to kill him. The brothers torture the children and the intimidated *Drebulė* betrays the secret. Then the brothers call *Žilvinas* and kill him. In grief Eglė and her children turn into trees corresponding to their names: *ėglė* — fir, *ąžuolas* — oak, *úosis* — ash, *bėržas* — birch and *drebulė* — asp. Transformation into birds occurs in Latvian variants of the tale.

Two typically Kartvelian variants of the type are folk-songs Nr. 67 and Nr. 95 about *Natela* in CHANIDZÉ 1939.

Nr. 67

Oh poor *Natela*,/ You are carrying maize from *Lenkher*,/ On the road you have found a small bead,/ You have kept it under the cartridge case bag./ You have heard rustling from behind,/ A big serpent was following close behind you;/ *Natela* hurled a small cap,/ The serpent snuffed a bit,/ With its tail hit it, threw it away./ *Natela* hurled a shoe,/ The serpent avoided the shoe, too,/ Close behind *Natela* it followed again.../ *Natela* reached her house./ «Come along, oh woman,/ Shut the door-windows well!/ We have an unwelcome guest coming,/

Close behind you it has followed to-day»./ In the morning the woman got up./ She opened a window, her mind went clouded:/ Round the iron baking-table it had wound itself three times./ The dragon had laid its head in the middle./ To Natela they gave a chang-lyre./ She began shair-reciting:/ «I kindly entreat you./ Go away from the house!/ I shall order prayer./ A person of each household of the village I shall invite»./ The serpent raised its head./ Once again hit the place where it had been laid:/ Natela asked for an arrow-bow./ The serpent's neck she hit:/ The serpent began to collapse./ Natela began to moan./ There the serpent is coiling./ Here Natela is agonizing./ Six men put it on a sledge./ Untrained bullocks they tied to it./ They let it down into Rion.

Nr. 95

There are Natela and young Segz./ Oh poor Segz's oxen./ They disappear every night:/ Oh poor Segz's rams./ They are stolen every night./ A serpent has wound itself around you./ It rejoices at Segz's ruination:/ Young Segz does not break his heart:/ He will have Natela./ Natela baptized by Christ./ Young Segz has gone out./ He has fallen in with dragons./ Natela is offering a sacrifice at home./ At home she is entreating her godfather:/ «Oh, glory to my godfather!/ My godfather, where are you?/ House and gate are not left to us./ Dragons attack us»./ Young Segz has secured expectations./ Twelve more he has killed./ Serpents, all impure./ They have got together, the serpents./ The thieves will be their relatives./ they are discussing how to do away with Segz./ To do away with Natela./ Natela the praised./ She will not be in fear of them./ Christ the Lord, her godfather./ Whom she will have as her rescuer./ So God has deigned./ He has let Christ down on earth./ Segz's enemy he has ruined —/ Serpents and [...]/ On the way back he has taken her upwards./ To the heavens upwards./ He has carried Natela./ At his table he has seated her./ This God bless us./ We shall have carouse and revel untroubled, shei!

Both texts originate from Upper Svania and are recorded in the dialect of Lower Bal (the neighbouring Lakmul and Par settlements). The editors have put Nr. 67 among everyday-life songs, but Nr. 95 — among mythological songs, obviously because of Natela's godfather Christ in the latter, who descends from heaven to help Segz overcome a great number of serpents and to save Natela. Nr. 67, on the other hand, is primitive as well as unclear in its non-everyday elements. It goes without saying that Nr. 67 is interesting for the mythologists, while Nr. 95 demonstrates a post-mythological interpretation of the plot as of a tale. It may be of interest because of the number twelve multiple of six in 67, as also in the Lithuanian tale, and as a rather odd example of folklorizing sermons about the Christian salvation story (Adam-Segz, serpent, Eve-Natela who is also Mary the Second Eve treading the serpent, Christ the Rescuer and Mary's ascension). The ethnization of Christianity is typical of the Kartvelian Caucasus. Christ clearly appears to be Natela's godfather because of the

Georgian linguistic substratum in this text, cf. Geor. *natlia* 'godfather', *natluli* 'baptized' which goes back to the root **te-* 'light' and the prefix **na*, as well as *sinatle* 'light' or the name *Natela* ← *nateli* 'bright'. In Nr. 95 the name *Natela* has been connected with *natlia*, *natluli* because of Georgian (not Svan!) folk etymology (cf. Svan *nāpriswd* 'baptized', *pāpi* 'godfather'). Although both 67 and 95 are in four-foot trochees, the more recent character of the 95 is seen in the correct metrical use of the Georgian loan-word *gwele(r)šāp* 'dragon' (Geor. *gvēlēšap* + i) twice instead of *herčem* «serpent», cf. *žiw xobina gwelešāpārd* 'He has fallen in with dragons', *gwēlēšāpār nējmaxwālex* 'Dragons attack us'. The same word (dat.) *gelāršāp(s)* is used once also in 67, though here the metre is broken and the recent substitution of the original dat. *herčems* is clear, cf. *gelāršāps txwim nensga xādēna* 'The dragon had laid its head in the middle' instead of the earlier **hērčems txwim nensgá xādēna*.

It must be mentioned that 67 was recorded in 1939 to the words of A. Davitiani, Lower-Bal speaker, not in Svania but in Tbilisi. When in an unnatural environment, a performer treats the performed text in a more detached way, and may replace words or archaic grammatical forms with those which he considers to be more intelligible to his auditors. This explains the lack of one syllable in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th lines of the 6th stanza (*ži loxbina lihširāl#*: */mādilšw eser xeqerāl#*, */ka oγw eswkax kor#xenka!* 'She began shair-reciting:/ I kindly entreat you,/ Go away from the house!'), and in the 1st, 2nd (*herčem#s txwim ži xoqida*, */ž#ad xoqira nādisgwži* 'The serpent raised its head,/ Once again hit the place where it had been lying') and the 5th (*herčem#s lixer xobina* 'The serpent began to collapse') lines of the 7th stanza. I reconstruct here the corresponding archaic forms: masdar **lihširale* because of its genitive in *-eš*, 3 pers. pres. **xeqərale* of the analogous masdar, elat. *koraxenka* because of the usual arch. dat. *koras*, arch. dat. *herčemas*, the attested *zī(j)ad*, arch. dat. *herčemas*.

One syllable lacks in the last line, too. It is not only because of the serpent figure forcing itself upon a woman that I have associated *Natela* of 67 with Lithuanian *Eglė*, but first and foremost because of the number 12 of the serpent's enemies in «*Eglė*», multiple of 6 enemies in «*Natela*». The numbers obviously reflect the year and half-year cycles. This, as well as the meaning of brightness in *Natela*'s name, makes me conjecture in both plots the coded calendar drama of the struggle between celestial (*Natela*-brightness—summer months) and chthonic (the serpent—darkness/night/sea—winter months) forces. Since darkness is the quality of the deep, where, as we know, the serpent *Žilvinas* lives, one must look for the sea in the Svan plot too. The killed serpent must have been thrown into the sea as in the Lithuanian plot, and not into the river *Rion*. This enables me to reconstruct the usual Svan *zuγwatejsga* 'into the sea' instead of *Riente* '(in)to *Rion*' at the end of 67.

It is well known that in ancient times the Svans lived in the Megrelian Lowland on the shore of the Black Sea, into which the river *Rion* flows. After its

name they have called every mighty stream Rion ever since the time they migrated to the mountains. The *Rion* of 67 is now perceived as a synonym of *Engur* (Geor. *Ingurī*), a strange name of Baltic (and Proto-Slavic) appearance (cf. O. Prussian *Anger-ap* 'winding river', Lithuanian *Ungurys* 'of an eel's (*ungurỹs*) shape etc.). The variability of this name makes the idea about the substitution of the earlier word 'sea' very plausible.

What are then the essential common characteristics in the Svan and the Lithuanian plots? They are: 1 — a woman, 2 — a serpent, 3 — six (of the twelve) brothers, the enemies of the serpent, 4 — the death of both heroes, 5 — the waters. The etymological connection of Natela with brightness/ the celestial sphere is reminiscent of the Indo-European (DUMÉZIL 1959) and universal (TOPOROV 1971) myth of the World Tree with the serpent at the bottom. The mythological background allows us to exclude from the original plot the most typical tale elements, such as the interrupted theme of cap and shoe thrown on the road in front of the pursuer in «Natela», or the three tasks, the way to fulfil them, the taboo, the transformations into a youth and into trees, so typical of Aa 425 etc., in «Eglè».

The remaining mythological plot seems to deal with a celestial woman somehow connected with the serpent arising from the deep. Baltic mythology does in fact feature such a celestial woman — the Morning Star deity, Lith. *Aušrinė* the Sea Maiden. It was A. GREIMAS (1979, 165) who cautiously mentioned that: «Eglė, as well as Aušrinė, possesses the power of all kinds of metamorphoses». I would go as far as to identify Eglė with Aušrinė. The folk-tale dendronyms Eglė, Ažuolas, Uosis, Beržas, Drebulė are no doubt of sufficiently recent origin. Bearing in mind Skr. *uṣā* 'morning star' and the East-Baltic difference in suffixes between Lith. *aušrà* 'dawn', Latv. *ausma* 'id.' (though also Latv. *āustra* = Lith. *aušrà*), one may reconstruct the original name of the deity Balt. **Ausā* instead of the derivatives Lith. *Aušrinė* (derived from *aušra*) or Latv. myth. *Austra* (from **Ausā*). This is the real name of Baltic Natela = Eglė the queen of snakes.

The main enemy of the serpent is the Thunder God, whose abode is the summit of the World Tree. The number nine in the Eglė plot (nine years with Žilvinas, nine days at home) is typical of mythological texts narrating the fight between the Thunder God and the serpent (TOPOROV 1969). This fact also points to the mythological origin of the folk-tale about Eglė. On the other hand, Aušrinė is known to be pursued and subjugated by the chthonic figure *Kalvelis* — Baltic Vulcanus (GREIMAS 1979, 144). This fact connects Eglė and Aušrinė once again.

The ancient mythologies of the Near East demonstrate a great variety of hierarchically organized manifestations of the same deity which correspond to various cognitive grades of modeling nature as labile 'Thou'-Subject (FRANKFORT e.a. 1967). We would not be surprised to see that, not only does Aušrinė

appear to be a star, a maiden and a cow at the same time, but her chthonic husband in his turn is a serpent, a blacksmith and... the moon. The story is well-known in Latvian folk-songs. The Moon (or his son) married the Sun's daughter, LT 10362, 10380). The Sun gave her (other) daughter in marriage to the Morning Star (it is masculine in Latvian), but the Moon fell in love with the fiancée of the Morning Star and wanted her to be a bridesmaid (LT 10363) on his side (*vedēji* — who takes the bride to the bridegroom). The Thunder God became angry and, while being a bridesman on the Sun's side (*panāksnieki* — relatives of the bride who pursue *vedēji* in order to return her home), came to the wedding and broke the Sun's golden oak (LT 10380, 10392). The Sun cut the Moon with a card as he had abducted the Morning Star's fiancée (LT 10488). The word *aūseklis* 'morning star' being a derivative from **ausā*, one may reconstruct a more simple plot: the Sun's husband Moon deserted her for the Morning Star but was punished by the Thunder God who cut him down while he was skulking under the World Tree (oak). Logization of this kind has been performed by L. Rēza in his *Dainos oder Litthausische Volkslieder*, although L. Rēza refers to G.F. Stender's *Latvian Grammar* (1785, 266) as if rendering such a plot from Latvian. But Stender presents the known plot with the Sun, not with Pērkons punishing the Moon².

On the other hand, M. GIMBUTAS (1985, 160, 170) assigns the serpent to the pre-Indo-European pantheon, and the moon to the Indo-European pantheon. Differentiation of such a kind disagrees with the evidence of the serpent of the deep in ancient Indo-European mythology (IVANOV, GAMKRELIDZE 1984, 489, 527-530 etc.). The binary opposition light:darkness = day:night = sun:moon correlates with the opposition height:depth and becomes personified in the opposition of the Thunder God to the serpent. The fact that the Balts worshipped grass-snakes is not so strange. As V. TOPOROV (1976, 11) has mentioned, the serpent becomes a positive force connected with fertility after it has been struck down by the Thunder God. All serpent rituals are those of the New Year. Since the Indo-Europeans distinguished only two seasons (MAŽIULIS 1985), the post-winter six-months' part of the bisected Moon (cf. the same word for month and for moon in Baltic Lith. *mėnuo* as well as in Svan *došdulmaxe*) is an enemy of the serpent. It is defeated because of its twofold nature. It is an enemy to itself, now a negative, now a positive force. Being part of the primitive cosmogonic myth, the fight between light and darkness, summer and winter was of great importance for pre-agricultural cattle-breeding, as well as for agricultural cultures.

In a huge number of folk-tales about a woman married to a supernatural

² A. GREIMAS (1979, 131) in his turn points to Rēza, as if he presented an authentic Lithuanian folk-song with Perkūnas punishing the Moon, and he writes about some former attempt to question the authenticity of this song. L. Rēza in fact compiled this song (as well as some other texts), as has been proved by A. JOVAIŠAS (1969, 261, 263) who shows facsimiles of Rēza's rough and fair manuscripts in which the creative process is quite evident.

creature those with serpents are not predominant. They can be grouped separately only if they are semantically opposed to all the other tales which must be distinctly separated according to some one-symbol integral feature. What then is common to all those tales with wolves, birds, frogs, cats etc.? B. KERBELYTĖ (1987), who does not separate tales with serpents, sees here a reminiscence of the primitive ban on marrying a person from a different tribe. As E. Meletinsky says, in the primitive world outlook the boundary of humaneness coincides with the boundary of one's own tribe. The very essence of Jesus Christ's revolution was the need (so urgent in our days) to overcome this kind of self-love, characteristic of biological selection, by the opposite divine principle of supernatural self-denial for the sake of all that which is considered by Philistines to be alien: neighbours, foreigners, different cultures. This principle has never been realized on the ethnical level. Even qualified professors devise biological theories which don't refer to common people. In this respect, the primitive world outlook appears to be alive and well in our era of total civilization, otherwise one should not still hear about such ideals as 'only my nation', 'only my class', 'only my race' etc. So, as a representative of some different ('snake's') tribe, Žilvinas is a man only to Eglė, not to her relatives. Having married a representative of an alien tribe, Eglė becomes alien to everybody. She is no longer a human being among her husband's relatives, her children are snakes to her relatives. She and her children have no way out after the death of Žilvinas and must perish. B. Kerbelytė's explanation holds in most instances of Aa 425. The very transformation of the beast into a youth is a transformation of Romeo Montague into Romeo Capulet.

The integral feature 'Obstacle to marriage' covers not only the ethno-social but also the natural sphere. Among the older literary variants of Aa 425 J. SWAHN (1955, 387-390) points to the Indian plot of Kusa-Jātaka about a wise but ugly prince to whom a princess of wonderful beauty is married. Not being allowed to see her husband until she is pregnant, she is convinced that she is married to his handsome brother, who is a fool. Having unforeseeably realized the truth, she flees back to her parents and rejects all gifts selflessly sent to her by her devoted former husband. After superhuman difficulties the latter becomes happy — he gains beauty with the help of a magic jewel. Here as well we see 1) the husband's appearance incongruous with marriage (cf. beast ↔ ugly man), 2) taboo, 3) transformation.

To be beautiful or ugly is independent of one's will, just as is to be born in one or another ethnic or social group. Nevertheless, physical aspects, such as appearance or sexual abilities, are much more valued in «love» than real love. Having a beautiful body, the imaginary husband of the princess does not frighten her with his foolishness. Thus «love» appears to be biological deception, essentially inimical to the values of individual world. The compulsion of natural selection is perceived as the same injustice as the compulsion of the artificial

biological selection according to parentage. Now the integral feature of the observed tales may be defined more precisely, i.e. Unjust obstacle to marriage.

Thus the main elements of such a generalized plot are: 1) falling in love with (or being beloved of) a beast, 2) which is able to be transformed into a beauteous human being, 3) taboo as the condition of love, 4) breaking of the taboo. Some of these elements may be present in the tales of the first group although its essential elements are: 1) a woman pursued by a serpent, 2) six brothers of the woman, the enemies of the serpent, 3) the waters, 4) the defeat of the serpent.

I have already attempted to demonstrate the mythological character of the latter plot. It has regularly merged with the former plot in the tales of Aa 425 etc. but it can be distinguished with no difficulty. As for the Lithuanian «Eglė», B. Kerbelytė is mistaken in defining this tale as being of the first plot: all the elements of the second one are present here, while the grass-snake cannot be treated as a representative of an alien tribe only because of the sacred status of the grass-snake among Baltic peoples (for her there is 1 plot here).

The six summer months, manifesting as part of the bisected Moon, are brothers of the Morning Star already belonging to the celestial Upper World of Light. The Morning Star is intermediate between day and night, it appears when liberated from the Moon which had abducted her. The main figures of this plot are known in various manifestations (e.g. the Moon/Serpent/Blacksmith) but not in transformations as in the plot of the Unjust obstacle.

Both plots merge because of 1) the presence of the feminine figure in them entering into relations with the non-human masculine figure, 2) the usual presence in them of the relatives of the feminine figure hostile to the masculine figure, 3) the great antiquity and global character of the both plots.

The plot of the Unjust obstacle serves as a base for a tremendous amount of poetic-dramatic texts of the every-day-life genre. The plot of the Morning Star is at the base of many mythological texts of the calendar type. The merger of both plots produces new texts of the tale type.

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