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## Animal transformation as a deserved punishment in archnarratives

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### Abstract:

*The present study is devoted to the transformation of protagonists into animals in ancient narratives (myths, magical stories, legends, etc.) from various cultures and continents (Europe, Asia, America, Africa and Australia). The aim of this research is to determine in what situations and subject-motive combinations the main protagonist transforms into an animal as a part or consequence of his/her fair/well-deserved punishment. We will also attempt to conceptually grasp the archetypal meaning of the existential transformation into an animal, which is directly related to human thinking and (sacral and profane) way of life.*

### 1. Research method and material

Not only is human transformation/transfiguration found in narratives, it is also an important anthropological phenomenon observable from the earliest periods of human development in every society and culture (ranging from ancient rites and literature to modern culturally determinant and iconic expressions). It is a metaphysical/transcendental, but often merely symbolic, transformation in which the protagonist temporarily or permanently loses his/her original appearance, bodily shape, way of thinking, intellectual property or social status to assume a new form or shape with a varying degree of value.

When the “transformation” theme is taken as a collective narrative-anthropological phenomenon, our research can be methodologically classed under the newly emerging literary/artistic sub-discipline called *archtextual thematology*. Archtextual thematology understands the *topic* as an<sup>1</sup> “expression/manifestation (mystery) of the underlying experience

and super-individual, historically and praxeologically validated wisdom, which underlies and overarches the purely individualistic creations” (Čechová, 2017, p. 280). The *topic* of the present study is the protagonist’s transformation into an animal as a result of punishment – a storyline algorithm typical for each culture.

The material analysed in this work consists of topically, culturally and religiously diverse classic narratives, which ensures a transcultural research sample. This varied array of selected narratives opens up space for analysing the protagonist’s zoomorphic metamorphosis as a punishment in the internal composition of the genre group and monitoring the impact of the cultural or denominational context on its iconization within the grammar/axiology of the “fictional world” (Doležel). Using the conceptual apparatus from the above methodology (archtextual grammar), this multi-genre and culturally diverse research sample of folk stories and tales can be aptly termed an *archnarrative/archstory/archtext*.<sup>2</sup> An archnarrative “usually does not have an identified author. In this sense, it is a collectively generated and modified creation [...]; it represents a story or text of a schematic, constitutive and deterministic importance in the development of the respective culture (or its subsystem, area, etc.), it is compositional and it lays down a certain ideological archetype” (ibid, p. 278). An ancient story that has the status of archnarrative/archstory/archtext may “constitutively express a certain life feel (within the meaning of Heidegger’s attunement), a conception of the world and abiding in it” (ibid., p. 278), which is often associated with its ability to absorb and subsequently to some degree preserve the way of life and thought in the respective society.

## **2. Just punishment and its meaning from a religious and anthropological standpoint**

Religion reflects the way of life and thought of any civilization or ethnic group. The different religious concepts embody legal laws and generally applicable moral principles, and are here to steer our everyday (not only spiritual, but also worldly) life. The sacred prohibitions and orders are primarily set forth in the respective religious scriptures and hieratic texts, such as the Judaic *Talmud*, Christian *Bible*, Islamic *Koran*, Hindu *Vedas* or Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, and show the importance and contribution of these rules to the well-being of society: “Keep therefore and do them [*the Ten Commandments*], for this is your wisdom and your understanding (...) And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (*Deut 4 – 6:8*).

Religious texts emphasize respect for the gods (adoration, rites and prohibitions) and behaviour in accordance with the moral code in the given society (virtue, prudence, truthfulness, modesty, etc.): “I have not harmed the offering-cattle; I have not caused pain for anyone; I have not reduced the offerings in the temples; I have not encroached on the fields; I have not added to the pan of the scales (Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, 125: 1); “Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.” (Deut. 5:16-20); “Speak the truth” (*Koran*, 5:77); “but He will impose blame upon you for [breaking] what you intended of oaths.”(*Koran*, 5:89); “O you who have believed,<sup>3</sup> indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful.” (*Koran*, 5:90); “do not kill game while you are in the state of ihram!” (*Koran*, 5:95).

However, a collection of religious and ethical prohibitions/commands can also be found in narratives other than the carefully written and complex *Bible*, *Koran* and Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. Less developed ethnic groups (mainly the natural and pre-scriptural communities at a lower stage of cultural development, such as African, South American and Inuit tribes) have preserved their religious and ethical tenets in their myths, legends and fairy tales, which were passed orally from generation to generation in the cultural memory of the group, and were only recorded in writing by the explorers and/or field researchers. Similarly to the constitutive and denominational writings of the civilized nations, the archnarratives in such societies preserve a snapshot of the orders, prohibitions and moral code of a legal or religious nature: “The Mother of the Sea wants you to know that it is not fit to think about food only, and put all your effort to its acquisition. It is equally important to uphold the customs, follow the commands of the Shaman and not forget to repent from your impurity, be it during the delivery or burial, because the transgressions of men come to the Mother of the Sea as dirt” (*Immap Ukuua – Mother of the Sea*, in: *Greenland’s Myths and Legends*, 2007, p. 56); “nobody but the hunters and warriors could eat the hunted game. Only in the times of trouble could the hungry women catch rats or pythons with their bare hands, and they were allowed to taste meat only when the life-giving sow died” (*The Fall of the House of Spirits*, in: *The Envious Cannibal and the Nonce Bird: Fairy Tales from New Guinea*, 2008, p. 140) etc.

Primitive and ancient people believed that the heavenly beings, which surpass man with their supernatural abilities, have the fate of society in their hands. Therefore, if man shows them (and the cosmic order they represent) no reverence and honour, they will bring the gods' wrath upon themselves and their offspring. This can lead e.g. to flooding, severe drought, wars, diseases, or lack of animals. This magical thinking was an "inseparable component of the reality formed by the collective wisdom in the given ancient society" (Lévi-Bruhl, 1999, p. 203).

However, for someone who has dealt with the mysteries of death and examining the nature of the relationship between knowledge/soul and the physical body, the greatest penalty for breaking the norm is the loss of a peaceful post-mortem life. There is a very strong and prevalent belief in the primitive and ancient societies that every human being is an immortal soul temporarily materialized in a certain physical shape and form, in which it learns, grows and develops. After death, this soul and/or consciousness must answer for all its thoughts, actions and deeds while on Earth. If the soul did evil and breached the religious and ethical rules, it is declared unfit and properly punished in the afterlife through "god's judgment". For example, the deceased in ancient Egypt had to appear at the final judgment in a mysterious hall in the Duat underworld. The heart of the deceased was weighed on the divine scales with *Maat* – the feather of order and justice. If the heart of the soul was spotless and lighter than the feather, the deceased could proceed to the underworld. But the soul that lived a wretched life failed this "cosmic audition" and was eaten by the dreadful monster Ammut<sup>4</sup> (Remler, 2006, p. 11). This means that the deceased got no second chance to remedy his/her own mistakes and was forever damned. Plato believed that the souls that sinned more return to animal bodies and the souls that sinned less return to human bodies (Vojtko, p. 61). The proponents of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism claim that a person leaves an imprint on his/her soul with each action and idea and thus creates his/her own karma, which causes the constant reincarnation of the soul into the next human or animal body. "Karma is nothing else but causality applied to the moral sphere (...); it is a mirror to our own past merits and transgressions" (Cross, 2000, p. 92). Every person living in unconsciousness is trapped in this cycle of death and rebirth – *samsāra*. Therefore, the human soul should try to escape the ten fetters (*samyojana*) while on Earth: belief in a separate personality or individuality (*drishti*), doubt (*vichikitsa*), uncritical attachment to rules and rituals (*silabbata-paramasa*), sensuous craving (*kama-raga*), ill will, wishing harm on others (*vyapada*), craving for a higher material existence (*rupa-raga*), craving for non-material

existence (arupa-raga), conceit or egotism (mana), restlessness (udhacca), ignorance (avidya) (Vasil, 2003, p. 66). The fetters are essentially the offences that delay man from achieving *nirvana* (in Buddhism) and *mokṣa* (in Hinduism), i.e. eternal peace and essential connection with Brahma – the highest energy in the universe. The idea of resurrection (or anastasis) is also known in Christianity: the soul of a bad and spineless person goes to hell after death – and on the contrary, a good, worthy and holy person living according to God’s will is resurrected and returns to God in the afterlife: “As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.” (*1Jn* 2:24-25); “We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us (...) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” (*1Jn* 4:6, 4:8-9).

The desire for immortality and a peaceful pleasant afterlife leads man to behave in accordance with established religious and ethical rules while on Earth, which control the entire (micro)cosmos of any given culture.

### **3. Iconization of the protagonist’s transformation into an animal as a well-deserved punishment in the axiology/grammar of the relevant fictional world**

The need for a fair punishment of the violations of moral and religious codes is also reflected in the narratives. A protagonist who consciously commits such transgressions is termed a *culprit*. In the ancient narratives, the culprit is male or female, and may come from all age categories and social backgrounds – a king, peasant, maid, princess etc. The transformation process fundamentally changes the protagonist’s external shape and look (i.e. a complete external transfiguration: e.g. a prince is cursed and turns into a dog in the Tibetan story *Prince Aschu and the Beautiful Ngoman*), or only some parts of his/her body are transformed (i.e. partial/local external transformation: e.g. King Midas’s donkey ears).

An *arbitrator* is someone whose role is to fairly assess/evaluate the culprit’s behaviour and subsequently issue a ruling about his/her guilt and fate. The arbitrator is a protector of a society because he/she oversees the preservation of its moral principles and ideals. The arbitrator in archnarratives is typically an unearthly mythological or religious being, such as a god or goddess (e.g. in Greek mythology the virgin goddess Artemis punishes the hunter

Aktaion by transforming him into a deer because he watched her take a bath; and the goddess Ishtar curses her lovers – a gardener and shepherd – into a frog and wolf because they fail to match her erotic escapades in the Sumerian-Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*). In the stories from communities with strong elements of animism and witchcraft in their religion, such as the Japanese, Inuit and African tribes, the punishment is often carried out by deified animals and spirits personifying the nature and natural phenomena, or by the tribal ancestors (e.g. in the Greenlandic story *The Origin of the Narwhal* the Bird Spirit transforms an elderly woman into a narwhal for her cruelty<sup>5</sup>). However, the “offender” may also be punished for his/her offences by a human character. Human characters penalize offenders by transfiguring them with the help of enchanting objects and magical formulas. For example, in the Czech fairy tale *The Bird’s Head and Heart* the main hero Fortunant transforms a greedy and brutal lady into a donkey with the help of magic apples. Human characters appear as punishers particularly in the classic European fairy tales.

Similarly to real life, the narrative worlds of magic stories include the tension between the character–offender and his/her surroundings because the “offender behaves unduly, immorally or dishonourably to others and thus undermines their happiness and harmony. The conflict in the narrative finally climaxes with the offender’s well-deserved punishment and transformation into a plant (e.g. the Slovak fairy tale *About the Beautiful Ibronka*, in which the devil kills a girl and turns her into a lily as a punishment for not telling him what she saw at the cemetery), mineral (e.g. the Mayan myth *The Chosen Virgin of the Sun and the Shepherd* where the princess of the Sun God is transformed into a rock because she broke her sacred vow of celibacy and found herself a lover), various natural phenomena (e.g. the Greenlandic legend *The Origin of Fog* where a man transforms a witch into fog with magic protective formulas because she ate his children and wanted to kill him) and an animal or animal monster (e.g. the Greek mythology where King Lycaon serves Zeus human meat, for which the insulted god curses him into a wolf).

The present study will only focus on a protagonist’s transformation into an animal and animal monster, which is depicted in the narrative worlds of the magic stories as part, or consequence of his/her well-deserved punishment for the offences committed. Transformation into an animal is a historically archetypal theme; it belongs to the topical development of any

archnarrative (legend, myth, epic poem, magic fairy tales etc.), and it is the most frequently recurring type of punishment in our research sample.

### **3.1. Transformation into an animal for violations of religious laws**

The motivation to punish the offender is closely connected with the cultural and social nature of the particular ethnic group the story originated in. “Nobody views the world completely impartially. People see the world through the modified optics of their customs, institutions and mindsets. They cannot rid themselves of these stereotypes even in philosophical contemplations and they relate the very concept of good and evil to their respective traditions and customs [...] From the moment [a person] is born, the customs in his/her community shape his/her experience and behavior” (Benedictová, 1999, pp. 17 - 18).

The narratives analysed most often present religious sins (insulting of the gods and violation of ritual prohibitions/orders) and moral transgressions (this mostly involves the sanctioning of negative human traits, such as greed and vainglory).

The punishment for the breach of religious laws is primarily observable in myths as they carry both sacral content and folk narratives<sup>6</sup>, and are very difficult to define as a genre. On the one hand, such stories show typical features of myths (they deal with the creation of humans or animals and teem with gods, household gods and spirits from the religions in the given society), and on the other hand, they are characterized by the topic-subject attributes typical for folk magic fairy tales: the flatness of the characters that fulfil the so-called Propp’s fairy tale functions in the story (hero, villain, donor, etc.), typical narrative structure of a fairy tale (the hero’s initial violation of a prohibition, from which the story spins off, his/her overcoming of the obstacles, victory of good over evil etc.) and the like<sup>7</sup>.

We found that the analysed archtexts mostly portray the protagonist as someone who disregards their gods e.g. rejects their adoration within the applicable rite, desecrates their shrines and idols, or behaves ignobly and aggressively etc. For example, the goddess Leto in Greek mythology transforms two peasants into frogs because they chased her away from the stream with fresh water. In the Mayan myth *How Tatutunpa and Aguaratunpa Got Married* and Aztec myth *The North Star*, the main heroes – young and beautiful gods – descend to Earth to live among people and find themselves a beautiful bride. However, the mothers-in-law constantly mistreat, disregard and insult their sons-in-law. When the women finally realize that

their sons-in-law are in fact gods, they begin to fawn on them. However, the young heavenly beings see through their falsehood. As a punishment for their disrespectful behaviour, they turn the malevolent women into a vulture and raven. A similar theme can be found in the Bolivian fairy tale *Who Is Asin*. A young and strong god wants to know how people behave towards each other. He camouflages himself as a beggar and descends to Earth. However, the local village chief degrades and derides the poor raggedy beggar and eventually bans him from the village. When the beggar reveals his true identity, he punishes the cruel chief for his inhumane behaviour by turning him into a crocodile. In the Fiji legend titled *A Spirit that Changes People* an expectant mother insults a respectable spirit. As punishment, she gives birth to a snake instead of a boy. In the Tibetan story *Prince Aschu and the Beautiful Ngoman* the Prince sneaks into the palace of the Snake God who is hiding sacred grain in his shed. The Prince steals several grains from the Snake God, but is caught when leaving the shed. The boy is turned into a dog for this desecration.

Disregard for religious purity (spiritual and bodily/sexual) is yet another cause of punishment. The Greek virgin goddess Artemis punishes Princess Calisto for impurity because she breaks her vow of celibacy and becomes pregnant with the highest god Zeus. In a fit of anger, Artemis turns her into a bear. In another Greek myth, the fabled beauty Medusa fornicates with Poseidon in Athena's temple. The outraged goddess turns her into an animal monster with snakes instead of hair. In addition to her unsightly looks, Athena curses her with a deadly stare – every man who dares look at her turns into stone.

### **3.2. Transformation into an animal for moral offences**

The archnarratives in our research sample very often thematize punishment for ignoble personal traits such as pride, envy, parsimony, greed, laziness, foolishness etc. Punishment for moral offences is portrayed both in classic magic fairy tales and in myths.

In these stories, the offender is usually punished and turned into an animal, which symbolically reflects his/her shortcomings. In the Bulgarian fairy tale *The Three Sisters*, the oldest daughter prefers to clean precious bowls to taking care of her sick mother. The magic crow turns her into a turtle: "I wish you grew into one with the bowls forever, you harsh daughter! The crow did not even finish her sentence and the clumsy daughter dropped both bowls on the ground, which then glued to her from top to bottom. The bride fell on the ground,

shrunk and started to crawl around the room: she turned into a turtle” (*The Three Sisters*, in: *Wooden Throne: Bulgarian Fairy Tales*, 1983, p. 46). In Greek mythology, the wife of the Thessaly King Arne is greedy and lets herself be bribed with gold. Zeus turns her into a magpie. Even Princess Arachne, known for her weaving skills, is punished by the gods. She ostentatiously challenges goddess Athena to a weaving contest. The enraged goddess eventually turns her into a spider. In the North American Indian tribal story *Zaloc* a malicious man wants to thwart the marriage ceremony of the mountain god. He cuts down a tree and lets it fall on the boat carrying the bridegroom. The angry god punishes the man for his malevolence and turns him into a beaver.

Some animals are often perceived as religiously impure, or associated with demonic forces in the respective culture. For example, in the Bulgarian magic fairy tale *Forty Brothers and Their Sister*, the brothers are punished for lack of respect for their dying father. The brothers, preoccupied with arguing about the property, do not pay tribute and attention to their father. Their angry father turns them into moles for their heartlessness. A similar analogy can be seen in the Slovak story *About the Twelve Ravens*, in which a mother curses her sons and turns them into ravens for their disobedience and gluttony. The above fairy tales belong to the Christian cultural horizon, in which the ravens (a symbol of death and gluttony) and moles are viewed as unclean: “These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean. (...) any kind of raven,” (*Lev* 11:13, 15); “Of the animals that move along the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard,” (*Lev* 11:29). The mythical King Midas fell into similar disgrace. He disputed the victory of the god Apollo, who had defeated Marsyas in a musical contest. Therefore, Apollo punished Midas for his impertinent and ignorant views by giving him donkey ears. The Greeks considered a donkey to be an embodiment of stupidity and stubbornness (Becker, p. 205). Midas tried to hide his disgrace, but when the compromising information about the king went public, he committed suicide because he couldn’t stand the shame.

The arbitrator may also transform the offender into an animal with a dreadful fate – a hunted, towing or sacrificial animal. For example, in the Greenlandic story *The Origin of the Narwhal*, a bad old woman bullies and troubles a chosen boy who is favoured by the Bird Spirit. One day the old woman takes the child for a boat ride to the sea, tosses him into the water and tries to drown him. However, in her clumsiness, she herself falls into the water. That’s when

the Bird Spirit steps in and turns the cruel old woman into a narwhal. Narwhals have long served the Inuit as one of the most important sources of food. Thus, the old woman is sentenced to live in the body of a constantly pursued/hunted species. The servant of the Heavenly Emperor in the Vietnamese story *The Legend About a Buffalo* is punished in a similar way. The Heavenly Emperor sends his servant to Earth with a bag of magical seeds. He orders him to first plant those seeds that bring benefit to the people, followed by chaff. But the stupid and irresponsible servant plants the seeds in the wrong order, covering the Earth in weeds, which makes it difficult to grow useful crops. Therefore, the Heavenly Emperor punishes the irresponsible servant and turns him into a buffalo to help people with the work in the field and pay for his mistakes.

In the archnarratives, the offender may be punished for moral transgressions by a human character who can do magic or owns magic objects. In the Slovak fairy tale *Secular Beauty* the protagonist tries to win the favour of an uncanny beauty who can do magic and lives in the Otherworld. On his journey, the boy meets a wise old lady who tells him how to win her heart and marry her. However, the boy is stubborn and wanton. He does not heed the well-intended advice and the girl first transforms him into a deer and later into a bear. In the Czech fairy tale *Bird's Head and Heart* the main hero Fortunant turns the unfair and greedy woman into a donkey with the help of magic apples. In the Romanian fairy tale *Bee and Spider* the mother acts as a punisher and transforms her son into a spider because of his lack of respect for her and because of the fact that he does not want to visit her on her deathbed.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The punishment of serious social and moral offences has an important psychological effect on the recipient of the story. The recipient/reader views this moment of satisfaction as a turning point in the narrative because it imposes a just punishment on the offender at the end of the story. In his work *The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, the American psychologist Bruno Bettelheim sheds more light on the significance of punishment in children as readers. In his view, when reading a story, children arrive at the conclusion that the offender should be punished. An appropriate punishment or penalty “pacifies the child, knowing that the offense cannot remain unpunished [...] and the more severely evil is punished, the safer [the child] feels” (ibid., p. 59 – 60). A fair punishment of the offender restores balance in the fairy tale/mythical world (as well as in real life), sends a moral message and warns us against improper and caddish

behaviour. Through the individual stories and situations, people are convinced that “they must act properly when faced by the pressing temptations to give in to the egocentric and inconsiderate motives of their own cravings” (Bettelheim, 2000, p. 60).

Each transfiguration in the fictional worlds of the folk stories essentially changes the protagonist’s identity. The new look after the transformation is directly related to his/her previous actions and behaviour: a noble and good man is rewarded by being turned into a deified animal (e.g. in the North American Indian story *The Crane’s Feather* the main hero is rewarded by the spirits for his valour and acquires the rare ability to turn himself into the sacred crane), or is given a more beautiful appearance (e.g. in the Tibetan story *The Two Brothers* the gods reward a mutilated prince for his goodness and wholeheartedness by turning him into a handsome man); and on the contrary, a spineless and inherently bad protagonist is most often punished by being turned into a religiously unclean or culturally dishonoured animal (e.g. donkey, frog, or snake). Such a transformation causes him suffering and denigrates him – the loss of original physical (or human) and social status, as well as psychological trauma, which has an effect on the mental life of the protagonist, are some of the serious consequences of the metamorphosis.

Deserved punishment through transformation into an animal somehow reminds us of reincarnation. The actual transfiguration is a moment in time, a short period of time, or a threshold (liminar) phase<sup>8</sup> between the individual existential experiences of a single notional protagonist. The act of transformation symbolically wraps up the protagonist’s hitherto way of life and, depending on the merits from this period, transitions him/her into a new state of being. The very act of transformation can therefore be seen as a metaphor of death and an analogy of God’s just judgment: a protagonist who fornicates, steals, murders, envies and behaves irreverently or otherwise mars the happiness and harmony of others in a story is not worthy of living in a stainless and cultivated human form. The arbitrator who represents a secular or religious authority (king, God, deified animal, parent, etc.) in the fairy tale/mythical world condemns him/her to living a life of misery, isolation and shame. For example, after her transformation into a snake monster, the Medusa hides in a remote cave and King Midas wears a hat to cover his donkey ears. In the Slovak fairy tale *About the Twelve Ravens* the brothers are transformed into birds for their gluttony by their mother and they move to live far from home in the forest. The newly assumed identity clearly reflects the “measure” of the offender

or sinner and constantly emphasizes the offence. The animal form prevents the offender from establishing contact with other human beings and leading a normal life.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> In archtextual thematology, the topic is generally viewed as a concept equivalent to *logos* (Plato and Aristotle), *inventio* (classic ancient rhetoric), *fabula* (Russian formalists), *histoire* (French structuralists), *narrative world* (Doležel), *visualized system* (Miko) etc. (Čechová et.al., 2016, pp. 153 – 187; Čechová – Plesník, 2016, pp. 7 – 13; Čechová, 2017, p. 280).

<sup>2</sup> From a purely “technological” (intertextual) standpoint, the concept of an archnarrative/archtext semantically overlaps with Genette’s terms *architext/architextuality* (Müller – Šidlák, 2012, pp. 52 – 53), or with Popovič’s term *prototext* (Popovič, 1983) (Čechová, 2017, pp. 279 – 280).

<sup>3</sup> A game of chance.

<sup>4</sup> Ancient Egyptian mythological being; a materialization of the divine retribution for the evil a person committed on Earth (Remler, 2006, p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> A marine mammal living in the Arctic Circle. It is popularly referred to as the “sea unicorn”.

<sup>6</sup> The origin of these hybrid narratives can be traced to natural and primitive communities at the lower stage of social development, such as the indigenous tribes in Oceania, Caribbean, Africa, the shaman nomadic tribes from the territory of Central Asia, Indian ethnic groups from the American continent or the Inuit living in the territory of Greenland, Canada and Alaska. But the stories “on the borderline” of myths, fairy tales and legends can also be found in the cultural heritage of advanced civilizations with long traditions. This typically includes the Middle East (initially inhabited by the Sumerians, Babylonians, Akkadians, and later by the Persian and Arabic tribes), Central Asia (India, Tibet, Nepal) and the Far East (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan).

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see Propp, 1999, pp. 31 – 60.

<sup>8</sup> A term used by the British anthropologist Victor Turner. “The concept of liminality, or liminar persons (“persons on the brink”), is inherently unclear because this status and these persons [...] happen to live among the law-abiding citizens adhering to the customs, conventions and rites” (Turner, 2004, p. 96). The state of liminality is often compared to death, the mother’s womb, invisibility or darkness (ibid., p. 96).

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