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Autolycus and Sisyphus – Some Words about the Category of Trickster in Ancient Mythology

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to juxtapose the trickster model suggested by William J. Hynes in the text *Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide* with the stories of Sisyphus and Autolycus. A philological method proposed in this article is based on a way of understanding a myth narrowly, as a narrative with a specific meaning, which can be expressed in any literary genre. According to this definition, every mythology which is available today is an attempt at presenting a story of particular mythical events and the fortunes of gods and heroes. Therefore, stories about Sisyphus and Autolycus are myths that have been transformed and which in their essence may have multiple meanings and cannot be attributed to one artist. The philological method is, in this way, based on isolating all fragments of the myth relating to the above protagonists and subsequently presenting them as a coherent narrative.

Keywords: category of trickster, ancient mythology, Autolycus, Sisyphus, ancient literature
Słowa kluczowe: kategoria *trickstera*, mitologia antyczna, Autolykos, Syzyf, literatura antyczna

Every academic article should begin with the definition of basic terms connected to the main idea of the subject and included in the discourse suggested by the author. However, how can one begin a work referring to the term "trickster," the comprehension of which is considered by William G. Doty and William J. Hynes, quoted after Mac Linscott Ricketts, to be "one of [our] most perplexing problems"?[1] How can

[1] W.G. Doty, W.J. Hynes, *Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, *iidem* (eds.), Tuscaloosa–London 1993, p. 13. Lawrence E. Sullivan writes: "However, the trickster's distinction lies not so much in his particular feats as in the peculiar quality of his exploits – a combination of guile and stupidity – and in the ludicrous dimensions of his bodily parts and biological drives." See L.E. Sullivan, *Tricksters: An Overview*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Religion*. *Second Edition*, L. Jones (ed.), Detroit 2005, vol. 14, p. 9350.

one write about a category whose meaning is placed between life and death, existence and non-existence, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and stupidity, and can be described with one word – liminal? This very liminality is limitless and constitutes the central point of reference. As Harold Scheub writes:

> Tricksters are the timeless energy, the eternally liminal, the ordering and the chaotic. They are the alpha and omega, the yin and the yang, the contradictory, the ambiguous, the unending. They are primordial, now sublime and now debased, neither the one nor the other, but a combination that emerges in strange, quirky, and unpredictable ways.[2]

Therefore, the never-ending contradictories depicting the trickster mark the beginning of the difficulties in defining this term. It is not, however, a separate case: the essence of the trickster, just like dozens of other terms (e.g., myth), lies in its ambiguity. That intricacy is well noticed by Polish literature theorist Erazm Kuźma, who opens his article *Kategoria mitu w badaniach literackich* (Myth category in literary studies) with the following assumption: "Even a glance at the history of the word 'myth' leads to the conclusion that there is no such thing as an idea of a myth, there is only the word, its derivatives and attempts to translate it into contemporary languages, the word having a different interpretation at different times and for different users."[3] What is, however, a research problem on the one hand, on the other reveals vast interpretive possibilities (this feature is also mentioned by Kuźma).[4] It is not only the liminality and ambiguity of a trickster that marks him, but also (perhaps mostly) his multidisciplinarity. As Winifred Morgan shows in *The Trickster Figure in American Literature*, ever since the term was coined, it has been a subject of ethnological, cultural, religious, mythological and literary research.[5]

Lawrence E. Sullivan defines the trickster category as follows: "Trickster is the name given to a type of mythic figure distinguished by his skill at trickery and deceit as well as by his prodigious biological drives and exaggerated bodily parts."[6] Doty and Hynes provide typical versions of the name of the trickster: Animal-Person (particularly Blue Jay, Coyote, Crow, Fox, Hare, Mink, Rabbit, Raven, Spider, and Tortoise), Anti-Hero, Boundary Figure, Bungling Host, Clever Hero, Clown, Culture Hero, Confidence Person, Demiurge, Lord of the Animals, Numbskull, Old Man, Picaro, Selfish Buffoon, Selfish Deceiver, Swindler, and Transformer.[7] It is easier to analyze the features of a trickster, to point out characters and animal creatures with swindler features, than it is to search for a coherent definition of this category. Applying specific characteristics of this figure in various mythologies, one could dare to build a model defining an "ideal" figure of a rogue, cheater and seducer. A model of this sort, perhaps one of the best known ever, was put forward by

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[2] H. Scheub, *Trickster and Hero: Two Characters in the Oral and Written Traditions of the World*, Madison, Wis. 2012, p. 12.

[3] E. Kuźma, *Kategoria mitu w badaniach literackich*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1986, vol. 77, no. 4, p. 55. If not indicated otherwise, all translations are the work of the author.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] W. Morgan, *Trickster Figure in American Literature*, New York 2013, pp. 4–14.

[6] H. Scheub, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[7] W.G. Doty, W.J. Hynes, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Hynes in the article *Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide*.[8] His model was based on six features of a trickster, entering a wide spectrum of understanding of this phenomenon: (1) a fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality, (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shapeshifter, (4) situation-invertor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur.[9] Since Hynes's model was created on the basis of an analysis of specific mythological material, transmitted in both oral and written form, one could attempt to analyse chosen mythical figures and determine whether they fit into the pattern. Can the Hynes model be called universal? How many features and in what arrangement decide whether a certain figure can be identified as a trickster? In other words, does every known mythology contain characters who either are clearly defined tricksters or resemble them in some qualities?

These questions are particularly vital if we consider the large number of resource materials available, such as those from Greek and Roman mythology. The number of versions of a specific myth is so large, that, what is in one story is obvious and commonly accepted (might be called canonical), in another is just contradictory. One example is the figure of Penelope. Her canonical sources, entrenched for ages in literature and culture as an ideal of love and faithfulness, are by all means Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Heroides*. Nevertheless, in *The Library Epitome* of Pseudo-Apollodorus (7.38) we can read the following: "But some say that Penelope was seduced by Antinous and sent away by Ulysses to her father Icarius, and that when she came to Mantinea in Arcadia she bore Pan to Hermes."[10] The history of Penelope's unfaithfulness is also described by Pausanias in *Description of Greece* (VIII.2.5), while the concept of Pan with Hermes is mentioned by John Tzetzes in *Scholia to Lycophron's Alexandra* (722), having quoted the rather unknown poet Duris.[11] The spiciest details however, are presented by Servius in *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil* (2.44), in which Pan was conceived by Penelope with all the suitors who were attempting to win her hand during Odysseus' absence from home. Therefore, as the grammarian writes, he was given the name Pan (Greek word πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν denotes "all," "the whole").

The goal of this article is to juxtapose the model suggested by Hynes with the stories of Sisyphus and Autolycus. These characters have not been chosen at random however, as the best-known story about them tells of a duel of wits they fought over a herd of cattle. This article can be understood as a kind of introduction to a wider analysis, which should be carried out on a larger number of mythological figures. In my reflections I am going to use a philological method, supporting myself with the analysis of available works of Greek and Roman literature referring to the above-mentioned heroes.

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[8] W.J. Hynes, *Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–45.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 34.

[10] Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. J.G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 121, 122, Cambridge, MA– London 1921.

[11] See Cicero, *De natura deorum*, III.22.56.

The method proposed in this text is based on a way of understanding a myth narrowly, as a narrative with a specific meaning which can be expressed in any literary genre.[12] According to this definition, every mythology available today is an attempt at presenting a story of particular mythical events (the Trojan War, the Argonauts and the Quest for the Fleece, the Calydonian Boar) and the fortunes of gods and heroes. These stories, regardless of the topic and problem they deal with (e.g., the move from chaos to cosmos, the origins of holidays and institutions), must be coherent, which means that every one of them has a beginning and an end. A story presented in such a manner is in a sense an image of an existent, unchanging reality. The mythic events create a structure which relates to the present, the future and the past. Therefore, fragments of the stories of Sisyphus and Autolycus, which are recounted in this article, are myths that have already been transformed by the ancient authors (Virgil, Ovid, Homer) and which in their essence may have multiple meanings and cannot be attributed to one artist.

The philological method is, in this way, based on isolating all fragments of the myths relating to these protagonists and presenting them as a coherent narration. This method resembles the diachronic model of myth analysis in terms of Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology: we confer on myth a fictive dimension and focus on its variations. Two rules become essential: there is no original, authentic version of the myth, and the myth is a collection of all its variants.[13] In a way, however, the philological method complements Lévi-Strauss with a new element. In every coherent plot we deal with main (primary) and minor (secondary) stories. The structure of the plot is determined not only by the state of preservation of particular works of literature but also by the reception of various motifs in later art and culture. Thus, one or a few versions of the myth dominate and are completed by versions by other authors.[14] For example, the central points of most of Aeneas' stories are the events recounted by Virgil in the *Aeneid* or by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. We more frequently read about the Trojan War as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* narrate it than as it is told by Herodotus or Euripides.

It is not my goal to find an unambiguous answer to the questions posed at the beginning of my paper, but to reflect on the universality of a trickster figure and those features of mythical heroes which fit into the Hynes model. The philological method allows us to indicate specific trickster qualities without assigning them to particular ways of understanding this phenomenon.[15] The application of either a psychological approach (Carl Gustav Jung) or an anthropological one (Claude Lévi-Strauss) would,

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[12] See K.W. Bolle, *Myth: An Overview*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Religion…*, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 6359–6360.

[13] "On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such." C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson, New York 1963, pp. 216–217.

[14] See J. Bremmer, *What is a Greek Myth?*, [in:] *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, J. Bremmer (ed.), London 1990, pp. 1–9.

[15] See K. Dominas, *Słów kilka o wariacyjności mitu. Analiza literackich źródeł podania o Niobe*, [in:] *O literaturze i kulturze (nie tylko) popularnej. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Jakubowi Z. Lichańskiemu*, A. Gemra, A. Mazurkiewicz (eds.), Łódź 2017, pp. 73–86.

on the one hand, somehow impose on the methodology, and on the other hand, it would influence the choice of specific motifs. These motifs would become reduced to either "the collective shadow figure" that has broken down into a folktale figure during the course of cultural development,[16] or in the same way become reduced to the embodiment of all complementary opposites, but in particular that between immediate sexual gratification and the demands of civilization (Lévi-Strauss).[17]

Scheub, in the above-quoted work *Trickster and Hero. Two Characters in the Oral and Written Traditions of the World* provides a four-page list titled *Some of the World's Tricksters*, arranging the characters of his book in geographical order.[18] In the chapter that appeals to me, *Europe*, he mentions only two characters from Greek mythology: Prometheus and Hermes.[19] These gods by far deserve to be called tricksters, which is also acknowledged by William G. Doty in the article *A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster*.[20] Each of them matches well with the Hynes model, although at a completely different levels. At this point it is worth considering the fact, which seems to be left out of the discussion, that Hermes and Prometheus (particularly Hermes) are represented in ancient mythology by an enormous number of resources including texts ranging from Homer and Hesiod to the authors of the late Western Roman Empire. Moreover, each of these characters has found a permanent place in European culture and their reception is very well extended. It is thus worth considering on which level this fact influences how, if at all, a given character, so strongly inherited in culture and art, is perceived.

Experts on ancient mythology analyzing the Hynes model will surely notice that the indicators implied by him (especially the first and second points) quite match many other mythological figures. Let us look at, for example, the path that Theseus takes from Troizen to Athens. The hero consciously chooses a route more dangerous than the way by sea, which bypasses all dangers. On the way, he has to prove himself as smart in order to defeat his enemies: Periphetes (Club Bearer), Sinis (often called "Pityokamptes"), the Crommyonian Sow (an enormous pig), Sciron, Cercyon, and Procrustes the Stretcher. The rogues and monsters are fought off with their own weapons, for example, he kills Periphetes with his own truncheon, and Sciron is thrown off a cliff. In Theseus' history, it is exactly these six labors that confirm his shrewdness (the second point in the Hynes model), courage, and bravery.

Poseidon's son is not the only example which fits into the pattern of a trickster. What about the cleverness of Zeus, who in his desire to win more fancy women turns into golden rain (Danae), a swan (Leda), a bull (Europa), and a cuckoo (Hera)? And what about the trickery of Hephaestus, who, by means of an intricately woven web, imprisons Ares and Aphrodite (Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII.266–367) in order to uncover the infidelity of his beautiful spouse. His deception, just as with the 'classical'

[16] W.G. Doty, W.J. Hynes, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[17] *Ibidem*, pp. 19–20.

[18] H. Scheub, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–28.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 28.

[20] W.G. Doty, *A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–65.

tricksters, is turned against him: the gods, instead of supporting the unlucky blacksmith, laugh him off and Poseidon and Hermes become Aphrodite's lovers. Hephaestus himself becomes the butt of Poseidon's jokes, who convinces him that Athena, with Zeus' approval, is going to his forge and desires that the godly blacksmith conquer her by force (Apollodorus, 3.14.6; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 166). This motif is an introduction to the story of Erichthonius and Cecrops, protoplasts of Athens, although the joke of Poseidon marks the turning point of the story and is the beginning of the truly crucial events. The story of conflict between Thyestes and Atreus about the throne of Mykonos and the golden lamb, which either thanks to Hermes and Pan (Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 2.10), or thanks to Artemis, bore a golden fleece, also has a meaningful dimension in the context of reflections on the trickster. This entire story, assembled of a multitude of literary sources (see Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 2.10–2.12), is full of frauds, committed both by gods (Zeus, Artemis, Hermes, Pan) and immortals (Atreus and Thyestes). And so it goes, Atreus cheats on Artemis and only partially bestows on her the most beautiful lamb of his flock (the golden fleece is locked away in a chest). Thyestes obtains the chest by deceit, using his lover Airope, the wife of Atreus. When the secret comes out, and it is clear that it is Thyestes who will win the throne of Mykonos, the action turns: "But Zeus sent Hermes to Atreus, and told him to stipulate with Thyestes that Atreus should be king if the sun should go backward,"[21] writes Pseudo-Apollodor (Apollodorus, *Epitome*, 2.12). Thyestes agrees to a seemingly impossible-to-realize deal and loses. Zeus changes the laws of nature and as a result, Thyestes is driven out of the country.

All these stories can, in a way, replicate the pattern of a hero proposed by Harold Scheub, which is set on three recurring subjects: the first regarding myth and god; the second about the trickster, divine and profane; and the third about the tale's characters and with rites of passage, with liminality.[22] They may also refer to the idea of Károly Kerényi, who in the article *The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology* writes about a picaresque mythology, and the stories of tricksters he considers "as the timeless root of all the picaresque creations of world literature."[23] In each of the mentioned stories, cleverness becomes a part of a larger entity, and in many stories of this kind also appear gods, and among them, of course, Hermes. Despite that, how should one refer to a story of a duel between the two super-rogues: Autolycus and Sisyphus? How should one interpret the characters, whose actions are fully concentrated on cheating and deceiving? As Pierre Grimal writes in his lexicon, the gods punished Sisyphus for his dirty deeds so cruelly that even in the afterlife he would not be making plans about further tricks or mischief.[24]

It is worth beginning the story of Autolycus and Sisyphus starting with their relationship with Hermes and Odysseus, recognized literally as perfect examples of

[21] Apollodorus, *op. cit.*

[22] H. Scheub, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[23] K. Kerényi, *The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology*, [in:] *A Study in American Indian Mythology by Paul Radin with Commentaries by Karl Kerényi and C.G. Jung*, New York 1956, p. 176.

[24] P. Grimal, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej*, trans. M. Bronarska et al., Wrocław 1997, p. 331.

tricksters.[25] So, Hermes is believed to be the father of Autolycus, who was conceived with Chione, Apollo's lover, whom the king of thieves seduced by deceit (Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 200). After his father, Autolycus was supposed to master the skill of wording the vow so slyly that he would not to be found guilty of perjury, but still remain quiet about the things that he did not want to say. Such skill is mentioned by Kerényi, citing book XIX of *The Odyssey* (XIX, 396). Most probably the point of it is the conversation between Hermes and Apollo from *Hymn 4 to Hermes*. The god of poetry says (514–517): "Son of Maia, guide and cunning one, I fear you may steal from me the lyre and my curved bow together; for you have an office from Zeus, to establish deeds of barter amongst men throughout the fruitful earth."[26] Other skills bestowed on Autolycus by Hermes are mentioned by Hyginus in *Fabulae* (201).[27] According to this version of the myth, Autolycus had the power to turn every horned head of stolen cattle into a non-horned, or a black one into a white one and vice versa. All these skills were used by Autolycus in stealing the herd from Sisyphus, his neighbor. When it seemed that his mischief would succeed, Sisyphus outsmarted the thief by pouring lead into the hoofprints in the sand in such a way that they formed the message: "I was stolen by Autolycus." Autolycus admitted the superiority of his opponent and began to hold him in high regard.

In this way the enemies became friends, just like Theseus and Pirithous. Nevertheless, Autolycus decided to take advantage of this friendship by sending his daughter Anticlea to Sisyphus, looking forward to a descendant who would be as clever as him. Sisyphus, however, also had his own intentions about Anticlea, as written by Hyginus (201.4): "qui cum ibi moraretur, Sisyphus Anticliam Autolyci filiam compressit, quae postea Laertae data est in coniugium, ex qua natus est Vlixes."[28] Sisyphus was obviously cheating to conquer Anticlea, and Autolycus was doing the same to sire a worthy descendant. The descendant, as many sources confirm, turned out to be Odysseus himself.[29] In the XIX book of *The Odyssey*, Homer quotes Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather (405–410): "My daughter's husband and my daughter, give him whatsoever name I say. Lo, inasmuch as I am come hither as one that has been angered with many, both men and women, over the fruitful earth, therefore let the name by which the child is named be Odysseus."[30]

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[25] About Autolycus and Sisyphus see: W.H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1884–1890, pp. 735–736; vol. 4 (Quadriformis-Syzygia), Hildesheim 1965, pp. 958–972.

[26] Anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. H.G. Evelyn-White, [in:] *Homeric Hymns*, Cambridge, MA–London, 1914.

[27] Hyginus writes: "Mercury gave to Autolycus, who he begat by Chione, the gift of being such a skillful thief that he could not be caught, making him able to change whatever he stole into some other form – from white to black, or from black to white, from a hornless animal to a horned one, or from horned one to a hornless." *The Myths of Hyginus*, M. Grant (trans., ed.), "University of Kansas Publications in Humanistic Studies," no. 34, Lawrence 1960.

[28] "While he was delaying there, he seduced Anticlia, the daughter of Autolycus. She was later given in marriage to Laertes and bore Ulysses. Some writers accordingly call him Sisyphean; because of this parentage he was shrewd." *The Myths of Hyginus*, *op. cit.*

[29] See footnote 20 in: K. Kerényi, *Mitologia Greków*, trans. R. Reszke, Warszawa 2002, p. 309.

[30] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray, Cambridge, MA–London 1919.

In *Commentary on the Aeneid of Vergil* (VI, 529), Servius writes: "aeolides Vlixes, qui ubique talis inducitur: nam Anticliae filius est, quae ante Laertae nuptias clam cum Sisypho, Aeoli filio, concubuit, unde Vlixes natus est." Then the author of the *Commentary* quotes an excerpt from the XIII book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (29–33): "nec tamen haec series in causam prosit, Achivi, / si mihi cum magno non est communis Achille: / frater erat, fraterna peto! quid sanguine cretus / Sisyphio furtisque et fraude simillimus illi / inseris Aeacidis alienae nomina gentis?" These excerpts are worth summing up with a Greek source from Byzantine times. John Tzetzes in the *Commentary on Lycophron's Alexandra* (344) states: "Τῆς Σισυφείας ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς υἱὸς λέγεται εἶναι Σισύφου."

Autolycus achieved the same thing that Pittheus did towards Aegeus in the myth of Theseus (e.g., Pausanias, II.31.12; Plutarch, *Theseus*, 3; Apollodorus, 3.15.7), and Thespius did towards Hercules (Apollodorus, 2.4.10; Pausanias, IX.27.5). What is interesting, in the myths about the greatest ancient hero, Autolycus shows up as one of his teachers (to teach him wrestling), side by side with such prominent figures as Amphitryon, Castor, Eurytus, and Linus (Apollodorus, 2.4.9).

Sisyphus' tricks exceed the story of Autolycus to a great degree, since he is the most superior fox ever born on Earth. One of the best-known stories is that of the capture of the god Asopus' daughter Aegina by Zeus. Sisyphus revealed the truth of this event to the father, for which the gods punished him with eternal and useless work – he is to roll an immense boulder up a high mountain only for it to always roll down when it nears the top. This comes from Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Library* (I 9, 3). The dominant element of the story is the cruel punishment delivered to the protagonist – one of the most frequently recycled motifs of classical mythology. This punishment had already been mentioned by Homer in XI book of *The Odyssey* (593–600), and its extremely visual description was repeated, among others, by Cicero in *The Tusculanae Disputationes* (I, 5), Virgil in *The Georgics* (III, 39), and Ovid in *The Metamorphoses* (IV, 459, see also *Ibis*, 175). Although all these authors agree about the punishment delivered to Sisyphus, they dispute the reasons why he was sent to Tartarus. The story from Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Library* about Sisyphus, Asopus and Aegina recounted above is confirmed by, among others Pausanias (II, 5, 1) and also *The Scholia to the* Iliad (I, 180). Hyginus states, however, (*Fab*. 60) that the cause of Sisyphus' doom was his false accusation of Salmoneus, Sisyphus' brother of incest and infanticide, and the prior seduction of Tyro, Salmoneus' daughter.

The stories of Aegina and Tyro are in conflict with the typical presentation of a trickster, especially since in the first of these stories the protagonist opposes Zeus (like Prometheus), while in the latter he is motivated by Apollos' prophesy (like a hero). The story that has survived to our times is the one that makes Sisyphus the king of all deceivers. We know the whole of it from Eustathius' *Commentary on Homer's* Iliad, which in great detail recounts Homer's verses devoted to Sisyphus (VI, 153–154). For revealing the secret of Aegina's capture, Zeus sent to Sisyphus the god of death Thanatos to kill him. However, Sisyphus outwitted Thanatos, binding him in chains. Unfortunately, due to a lack of sources we do not know about the trick played by Sisyphus. We do know, however, that Zeus' intervention freed the god of

death and that his first victim became, obviously, Sisyphus himself. In this place the fragment of the myth connected with Sisyphus' wife, Merope, known from the mythology, begins. Merope, following her husband's orders, did not perform funeral rites, thanks to which Sisyphus could return to Earth. This time he outwits Hades himself and his wife, Persephone. It was finally Hermes who put an end to his plotting and sent him to his well-deserved punishment underground. It is worth mentioning at this point that the motif connected with Sisyphus, Thanatos and Ares is known from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. It seems then that this story was commonly known in Greek literature. The presentation of Sisyphus as Trickster is supported by one more fact. Namely, he was attributed the foundation of Corinth (earlier Ephyra) and the development of seafaring and commerce. According to one of the myths, the rule of Corinth was gifted to him by Medea. It is mentioned both by Pseudo-Apollodorus in the *Library* (I, 9, 3) and Pausanias in the *Description of Greece* (II, 3).

Finding a figure that does *not* contain aspects of Hynes's model in itself seems to be extremely difficult in ancient mythology. Flair, cheating and deception are inherent features of almost every mythical tale, starting from the golden age described by Hesiod and Ovid to the iron age, from Chaos to the Trojan War. It would be risky to say that the Greek-Roman mythology is full of various tricksters, especially since most characters would be reduced to only two or three points in Hynes' model. The philological method used in this article allows one not only to describe dozens of heroes referring to the trickster category, but also to create a huge database of texts containing interesting themes and threads. The "trickster" emerging as a result of such an approach would be, however, an apparent category (hence the quotation marks) situated in the issues of the relationship between myth and literature. These dependences can be presented both in the theory that literature is a form of the desacralization of myth,[31] as well as in that of John J. White, who in the *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Pre-emptive Techniques* writes about categories of mythological fiction (e.g., the complete re-narration of a classical myth; a juxtaposition of sections narrating a myth and others concerned with the contemporary world).[32]

This apparentness of the trickster results from the facts that 1) its features are separated on the basis of analysis of the many literary sources; 2) this analysis does not always take into account the genre characteristics of individual works: it deals with epos as well as with comedy, tragedy, philosophical dialogue, etc.; 3) as a result of the interpretation of individual characters, a myth is understood primarily as a story, which is why its specificity resulting, for example, from an archaic worldview or a universal form of consciousness, is marginalized or not taken into account at all. The examples (especially Sisyphus and Autolycus) presented in this text become starting material, which somehow forces questions about those fragments and features of the mythical story, which are primary and standard in the trickster category.

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[31] See M. Klik, *Teorie mitu. Współczesne literaturoznawstwo francuskie (1969–2010)*, Warszawa 2016, p. 79.

[32] J.J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel: A Study of Prefigurative Techniques*, New Jersey 1971, pp. 51–54.

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