

Evil: Concept and Reality. Ethnolinguistics Perspective*

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Abstract:

The research of forms and etymologies of names of mythical can provide a safe and straightforward way to discover the ancient meanings of myths and mythical-religious representations essence named by them.

As the main mediator between *spirit* and *substance*, between *man* and *reality*, language has a very important role in the process of assimilation by man of the surrounding reality, which in the past was an important source of mythologizing process. There is an opinion shared by many linguists and philologists that the myth derives from the names of various deities who personified the forces and phenomenal nature.

Keywords: myth, symbol, folklore, taboo words, folk etymology, spirituality

One of the most interesting cosmological legends of Romanian folklore tells how this Universe, the Earth and all its arose: tired from overwork, filed in order to pull-in a ball of earth from deep water, God and the Devil (brothers as Cain and Abel were also later) were lying on the tiny firm stretch of land to rebuild their forces; God has fallen asleep immediately, but not the devil who, seeing his brother asleep, tried to throw him in the water. As God tumbling into water surface, ground stretched and, as the devil makes efforts more towards losing his brother, the Earth grew larger. Thus was born, according to the Romanian mythological vision, the Earth. Besides the charm, picturesque and multiplicity of the mythological meanings, this legend we are interested in an enormous extent in the following terms: the active element, one that creates the *World* and the *Universe* is not the passive principle, the static one, even if it is identified at a time with *Good*, on the contrary, it is the negative one that proves to be dynamic, creative, although fundamentally evil. We started with this etiologic

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example because it serves to delineate both main segments of the discussed concept: what presents interest is not the sterile evil, the absolute negation itself, pointless (and destructive, therefore, absolutely) but that negative one (to the extent that the term supports determinants) that proves creator, having on its side Lucifer's force, even if it is stigmatized by sin (in fact, sin is part of the human being, as a status, definition and concept).

Regarding *Evil* conceptually, we will not deal, therefore, the evil that particularly concerned today in the contemporary world and which is fundamentally social and generated by a certain structure of the nowadays society. We will not dwell at all on the huge evil that man creates through countless wars, increasingly sophisticated and destructive, ignoring the laws that rule nature, and therefore, consciously or not, making a real anti-ecological politics, destroying at large scale what we now call the environment, but it always and forever wore the name of *Nature*. We will not talk about the *Evil* that represents the almost total disappearance of solidarity, which transforms contemporary individual into an isolated, singular, being which always "lurking". What will interest us, especially, is mostly cultural, spiritual and ultimately aesthetic concept. Its "productivity", in other words, in terms of the cultural history of mankind, its function in terms of aesthetics history. An analysis of the concept on this background is in an intimate relationship with its semantic evolution, with lexical-semantic field that configures the *Evil*.

The subject aroused our interest about its enormous generosity. Besides the today satanic religious currents that have at least the merit to show, beyond any social hypocrisy, whose side they are, i.e. absolute *Evil*, in all of human history, no one declares on the *Evil* side. In each case, be as far removed from good intentions or the idea of kindness, generosity etc., those who defend it find a grain of truth, thus justifying the personal attitude and, finally, it turns, like snowball, in an avalanche. In a world where everyone is right, nobody, actually, is right. This is the world we live in. Disastrous as political and social context, it is extremely fertile on aesthetic perspective. Modernity is the era in which *Evil* has full rights and Satan is no longer chased in every hiding place game of the text, but instead, he is sought, worshipped and sat, most often, prominently, in the place of "good". We just want to mention socio-historical context in which we stand. We want to illustrate that those who declared themselves on the side of *Evil* produced, perhaps not as many spiritual goods, however, many of them valuable, culturally. We do not have any intention to justify *Evil*, to motivate, from any point of view. We would just like to point out that often, *negation*, in the

cultural, spiritual and literary level was more fertile than common sense and humble consent. About negation, evil, sin entire libraries have been written, the present paper will not be able to enrich them too much, of course. We still want to emphasize one of our thoughts: discovering the fecund role of genius of evil, on social scale, occurs when man loses the sense of sacred, ceases to fully continue its existence in a community and the awareness of this painful reality is identified, in fact, as a second (this time final) expulsion from Paradise, for the death of *homo religiosus* identifies, in fact (we think), with the moment when the human being no longer nurtures the nostalgia of Paradise lost.

The mythological “history” of domain confronts us with outstanding figures of world religions, illustrating *Evil: Satan, devil, demons, Cain and Abel*, with everything that brings their presence and action in the world: sin, evil, death.

In terms mythological, evil, sin, guilt are extremely “productive”. Almost there is no mythological system that does not have the basic primary fault, a slaughtered deity, a murdered brother, a crime. Moreover, not only the act of murder is “beneficial” from cosmological perspective (members of the body of the murdered turns parts of the Earth – waters, rivers, mountains etc.), but most often the culprit, murderer, killer is actually retained by the collective memory as the maker of the respective worlds. We will not dwell on the subject because it is too broad and does not constitute, in fact, interest of the paper. If we catch these issues it is to emphasize the motif in all major religious systems of the world, and in founding rituals or legends. In the following we refer to great names of creation, of course different structure and positions in the primordial act of creation, namely *Satan* and *God*.

Starting right from his name, extremely varied, at first glance, but belonging, apparently, the same Indo-European root, the name *Satan* denotes something that is opposed to, the contradiction, a permanent adversary, first of God then, after he will be defeated, of man who is created in the “image and likeness of God”:

Satan: Seth (Sueth) in Egypt, Satanael in the Bible, Semyaza in the Book of Enoch, Saturnus for Romans, Pashutan in Iran, Sootan in the Mayan myths, Sheitan in Islam. Among the devils and demons, Satan represents, by antonomasia, the opponent, the adversary as arrogant as he is wicked (Kernbach, 1989: 846).

In fact, what it ultimately compromise *Satan*, assimilating him forever with the principle of evil, of absolute evil is not, simply, the opponent position, (the term exists, in fact, as a legal concept), but the fact of opposing God, who created the World. He will remain an

adversary of God, but being defeated by Him (the fight between brothers-gods-creators is not new in Christian mythology), *Satan* will focus attention henceforth on God's creation, namely on man, weaker and always (after original sin) keen on temptation and sin:

The term shall appoint increasingly longer, an evil being, becoming proper name (at first it was legal term denoting an opponent), that the power of evil, synonymous with the *Devil*, the *snake*, other designations of the spirit of Evil. *Satan* tempts man to push into sin, like the *Serpent of Genesis* (Chevalier, Gheerbrandt, 1982: 846).

In other religious systems, too, such as, for example, African religion, Satan is the principle of evil which, however, this time, does not preclude the Godhead, which is mighty, invincible. The reason is, however, somewhat different from Christian mythology and especially to apocryphal legends concerning Creation (and according to which Satan and God were brothers with equal powers, Satan lost, then, the powers in the encounter with God).

In African tradition, the word comes from Islam. But here he is not God, for nothing can exist if put against God. Gueno is an evil spirit that works by malicious suggestions and incitation (*Ibidem*: 846).

It must be said that satanic "tradition" has roots in *illo tempore*. It comes from distant, mystery, times, when initiation into the divine mysteries was extremely limited, complex and specialized. In these mysteries, *Satan* appears as a linguistic alternative of *Saturn*. That is particularly important because it shows that the whole Satan's "career" in religion refers inevitably to the *principle of fire, of light* of which it is closely connected, whether this light (fire) is understood in the material sense, but especially spiritually.

In the Hermetic tradition, *Satan* is another name for *Saturn*, as a principle of materializing spirit, it is the spirit that cannot elevate, cannot change, falling in substance, the fall of Lucifer, the light bearer (*Ibidem*: 846).

We would understand, then, that celestial light carrier is not actually God, but *Satan, Lucifer*, the bearer of light is the really righteous son of Heaven. This, however, only at first glance. Because, in fact, the light of Satan is not the "good" one, it is a light derived from the primordial light, impure. It generates disorder, even if it attracts, it is seductive. Light from Satan is the primordial sin light and, following this path, man would have met evil with all the consequences and his forces.

The myth of Satan only caught up in what is called, commonly, bad, which is nothing but a Neptunian monster. Its existence, relative to human ignorance, is nothing more than a deviation of primordial light which enveloped in substance, wrapped in obscurity, reflected in human consciousness disorder always tends to become day. This deviation, by the sufferings it causes, may be, nevertheless, the

mean of recognition of the true values hierarchy and starting point of the transmutation of consciousness, which then becomes able to reflect, this time in pure way, the Light (*Ibidem*: 846–847).

Incidentally, in the tradition of other religions, the one who showed to men, prophets, first of all, would not have been God, because he cannot show people His being, but Satan, God's "brother". What people know, in other words, of the Godhead, is nothing more than the negative side, which is why, in fact, the real reason for which rules the world today is not Good, on the contrary, Evil.

For the Cathars, Satan is the demiurge, the creator of the world. He is the one who appears and speaks to prophets. No sight can catch the good God. There are undoubtedly connections between XIIth century ascetics Hebrew thinking and Cathars thinking, between it and the Bahir Book, a propos of the cosmic role of Satan, and between Kabbalist demonology and that of the Cathars, on the wives of Satan. Despite the inevitable contacts, the Hebrew scholars of Provence were aware of the chasm that separates them from the Cathars concerning the demons and the evil world, which can only be the work of Satan (*Ibidem*: 846–847).

A "variant" of Satanism is *demonism*:

The demon symbolizes a greater enlightenment than normal rules, allowing to see farther and safer of an irreducible way to arguments (*Ibidem*: 348).

Its power of seduction, of evil origin, is huge because the "stake" is the transcendental light. This is the mirage that lures the lucidity of human mind, it is the treacherous means in Christian tradition, the mind-bending devil cheats human reason, this is how, in other words, it gets lost himself, targeting absolute light of Godhead, but the ways, such N. Steinhardt says, are "reckless".

He even authorize the violation of rules of reason on behalf of transcendental light, not only of the order of consciousness, but also that of destiny (*Ibidem*: 348).

But there are voices in patristic literature, which refers to the demonic human being part as a divine accident. Demons would not be anything else than fallen angels, because God, says Pseudo-Denis Areopagitul, could not create the world than perfect, that is entirely good. Therefore, even if demons push on bad things, their essence is angelic:

Pseudo-Denis Areopagitul: Demons are angels who have betrayed their nature, but not bad, either by origin or by nature.

Thus, demons race is not bad, because it conforms to its nature but, on the contrary, because it does not comply.

The demons reveal themselves to be enemies' of any nature, being's antagonists (*Ibidem*: 348).

Devil has a fascinating mythological, folkloric and literary career. He was not in fact identified with *Satan*, as a figure, but as a principle. The world was made, according to the Fathers, by God, harmonic (*symbol* = together). By the act of sin, the devil (*dyabolos* = to split) had its own contribution, the world has become disharmonious. Therefore, the nostalgia of Paradise in any of the major religions is nothing but tinder for harmony towards peace, reconciliation. Evil-inspired life is, on the contrary, disorderly, chaotic and disharmonic.

Devil symbolizes the forces that disturb, shaded, weaken conscience and do regress to an indeterminate and ambivalence.

The devil is the symbol of evil, a permanent reduction to a manifest beast, symbolically, spiritual fall.

As divider (devil), a function that also devil complies is exactly the opposite of the symbol, which is to succeed! (*Ibidem*: 342).

The devil has no regrets, no nostalgia of Paradise, he is sufficient to himself, because it is unwise, that haughty:

Because of your beauty your heart is lifted up and for your arrogance you lost wisdom. Therefore I fell you down before kings and deliver thee to scorn (*New Testament, Gospel of Mark: 17*).

The biggest punishment that Lord gave is unrest in the grave, not to have crypt peace, to pursue your destiny with lucidity, you cannot get rid of it nor can you be otherwise, "a nice living eyes dead" and nothing more:

All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in their abode. And only you are thrown away from your grave, like a worthless branch, like the remains of those who were killed with swords, tossed on tombstones, like a trampled corpse (*New Testament, Gospel of Mark: 18, 19*).

And in the *Koran*, too, the devil is proud, he does not want to listen, does not understand the ordinance of God.

The devil speaks when it is not the right time; he cannot be silent because silence is a sign of absolute wisdom. Silence is the first good deed, is the beginning of good, you cannot be wise, unfriendly of evil, if you cannot listen; those who know how to do it can be wise. No wonder the devil is called by the people the *Unfriendly* (in Romanian: *Nefârțate*), he cannot accompany brotherly anyone, his only relative to those around is subordination, domination, or, for that, you need to talk and not anyway: the devil is a good orator.

Indians call Evil “the assimilation of passion, descent into the endless depths of unrest. Many facts are easily recognizable, are ours, too, other are different: for example, the act of someone ashamed, when he wants to do, when it does, must be reckoned by wise man as a sign of the darkness properties” (Pamfile, 1914: 7).

It should be mentioned here that Christian folklore draws inspiration from more or less heretical sources, ignoring myths and dogmas of the first magnitude for theology (e.g. the only known cosmogony in Southeastern Europe is the dualistic one, that is God-devil pair centered, reflected in Romanian folklore under the name: *Fârtat–Nefârtat* (name that is almost impossible to translate into English, it expresses the capability of being or not a good brother; in Romanian it is created with the help of the negative prefix *ne-*).

In folklore, as we anticipated, the devil is seen as an endless source of evil by continual temptations to submit it to the man, through permanent intervention in his life, until his soul will be lost forever.

Lucifer, in the human heart, protects fornication, love of money, hatred, hypocrisy, pride, greed and woman for greedy man and hell that shed fire from mouth (*Ibidem*, 1914: 25).

Romanian folklore assimilates it, therefore, the most important sources of Evil that have strayed on man from the beginning of the world. He is the one who tempted Adam and Eve, he is the one who taught the man with the wine and hard alcohol, made him lose his mind, to depart from God and inner essence, the divine one:

Christianity gives us as an enemy the devil, evil genius who through lies shattered the happiness of the first humans, Adam and Eve, which prevented Noah to make the ark and then sought to drown him with all floating the waves. Devil is due the invention of wine, too, the enemy of people, and the invention of strong drinks, with the same qualities. He sits in the church and grimaced in humans, to make them laugh and thus to depart from God’s love. He is the one who never does monasteries (*Ibidem*, 1914: 42).

Main character of Romanian mythology and religion, supreme embodiment of Evil and cunning, enemy of God, the *devil* or *demon* is called by the people through an impressive variety of terms, most having euphemistic value. Terms *devil* and *demon* (rom. *drac*) overlap almost perfectly, although different origins and meanings originating.

The word *devil* is bookish and came into Romanian through religious books in Slavonic (*dijavolŭ*) where a loan from Greek is and where we find *διάβολος* form, meaning “one who divides, that inspire hatred or envy”. I. Evseev says that *Satan* “has replaced an old divinity

of htonian type, which Romanian mythology, based on a cosmological popular legend, told more conventionally *Nefârtatul*".

The synonym term *devil* (rom. *drac*) is inherited from Latin. *Draco*, *-nis* had the meaning of "dragon" or designated the protector serpent of the house, being therefore a positive element. Negative connotations arose under the influence of Christianity, handing him the devil attributes.

A special case is the word *demon*, *devil's* partial synonym, as covering their meanings, but it is, in mythical thinking, the genius that inspires desires, passions. For the ancient Greeks, the word *demon*, *-as* designated a (semi) divine being, identified with ancestral spirits. In Romanian language, the word is a borrowing from Greek and occurs almost exclusively in literary language.

Another name of Evil, of cult origin, fairly common in Romanian mythology, we want to remember, because its attestations in popular language, is *mammon(a)*. In apocryphal legends and chants, the name of Syrian origin (where it was the god of abundance) appears in corrupt variants: *Mamora* and popular variants: *marmaroc*, *mamornița*, *marmoroiul*, *mamulan*.

The Greek *μαμωνᾶς*, personification of wealth, is borrowed from Old Slavic meaning "devil". In the north-Slavic area, the word has taken on other meanings, too: pole. *mammon*, *Mamun* "woman-looking evil spirit, temptation; demon who tortures children and women". From Old Slavic, it enters Romanian language, first entry being the Coresi's, *Four Gospels*, Brașov, 1560–1561): "One cannot work for God and Mammon, too".

If *demon* and *mammon* are bookish words like *Lucifer* and *Satan* (<gr. *satanas*< ebr. *satan* "adversary"), the *devil* and the *demon's* synonymous, they do not fall into this category, because they appear both in literary language, and in the popular one. However, it is interesting to show that they have a special status, because they are, undoubtedly, *taboo* terms. Saying the words *devil/demon* is usually avoided, especially in popular speech, because it was believed that his mere utterance causes the manifestation of the evil. Therefore, the expression was masked by phonetic transformations of the *taboo* word, or by using euphemistic words or phrases. In the popular imagination, the *devil/demon* has horns, tail, bat wings, goat legs, may be lame, has pointed and large ears, it's black, red or green. It's ugly, human enemy. This is exorcised by the power of the charm and sent away "in the desert, in chaos" (I. Evseev).

Another name known in Romanian folklore to the *devil/demon* is *Scaraoschi* (phonetic variant: *Scaraotchi*), whose far origin derived

from gr. *Ισχαριωτης* “Judas Iscariot”, entered the Bulgarian and Serb, from where it came into Romanian.

A euphemism with a special status for the *devil/demon* is *Aghiuță*, it is not created on Romanian field, as most of euphemisms in this category and it is not metaphorical, but it is borrowed from Greek. *Aghiuță* is the comic name given by the people to *devil/demon* and it is, in Evseev opinion, “a typical case of degradation of meaning, of desacralization arising from an ambivalent perception of things and of essence in the popular thinking dialectic”. The difference of meaning of this euphemism and wide range of examples we have quoted above is that the designated being, in addition to devilish attributes gets some elf specific attributes, thereby diminishing its negative connotation. Diminutive form of the name itself indicates a kind of familiarity, even sympathy for him, feeling totally absent in the other euphemisms.

The etymon of *Aghiuță* is the Greek *ἅγιος* “saint” and the diminutive form of Romanian has the meaning “little saint”, took ironic or euphemistically.

It is more likely that the relative sympathy betrayed by the diminutive form to due to reduced negative connotations – I. Evseev even mentions that “old ladies spells seem to be one of the specialties of *Aghiuță*” – than a certain “relic of an archaic demonological cult operating hidden in the wizardly countryside” as inferred V. Kernbach.

The impressive number of euphemisms that this mythical-religious character is called, proves, as we said, his central place in Romanians beliefs.

It is important to specify that only the etymology of the term is not sufficient to establish with certainty the status of the name and mythical representation concerned, but it is needed a comparative research of attributes and characteristics of that being in two (or more cultures) in which it is present.

In primitive societies, the word was considered consubstantial the appointed reality. It was able to trigger unmanageable forces; therefore their power was harnessed in incantations, spells, curses and even exorcisms.

In societies of the past, granting the name of a character or deities had ritual significance and of an act of God. Revealing etymology and meaning originating the names and putting them in relation to the essence of mythical being called, there was a strong link between name and being called by it, based on the idea that in ancient and traditional cultures, the name was not a label affixed to the character or object, but it was viewed as essence and as its total substitute, getting, thus, the sacred qualities or magical forces. Therefore, the research of

etymologies of these names can provide direct and safe way to discover the ancient meanings of ethnic and cultural realities designated by word.

The strong faith, existing in popular culture, that really uttering the name of a deity may stir the evil forces held by this led to the replacement of these names and epithets by euphemisms. Among these names and nickname there are many similarities, one very obvious is that starting from the correspondence between the name and the meaning of certain attributes of being called (the case of folk etymologies, too). These correspondences can be physical, moral, behavioral or of function. As with nicknames, these names become model of being itself, in the sense that there is a certain matching between them and information obtained by researching the name, from the name-called correspondence, information is obtained on the latter.

A feature of particular interest and importance in the semantic evolution of words related to folk beliefs is the law of *taboo*, acting permanent, changing sometimes in a totally unexpected sense meanings of words. With the help of data provided by the study of popular beliefs we can explain, in some cases, seemingly bizarre meanings of a word or surprising ramifications of meaning, if words derived from the same root.

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