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Trickster in American Folklore
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Trickster in American Folklore
Šibal v Americkém Folklóru

Bakalářská práce

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Abstract

This bachelor paper deals with animal short stories in American folklore, namely with Native American and African-American trickster tales. Theoretical analyses of both cultures, backed by text analyses of their trickster tales, indicate the importance of these stories both in the Native American and the African-American oral tradition. American Indian tricksters explain how things come about, and reveal human nature, whereas African-American trickster tales rather focus on keeping hope for better future. Coyote, the most famous Native American trickster, represents a character that is basically selfish, and lives to satisfy his own needs. He also likes to trick and imitate others and, therefore, is disliked by them. Brer Rabbit, on the other hand, is the most famous African-American trickster, who is hardly ever defeated and usually admired by others. Last but not least, Native American as well as African-American trickster tales prove to be very humorous and, surely, provided an entertainment for the people.

Abstrakt

Předmětem této bakalářské práce jsou zvířecí příběhy v Americkém folklóru, a to zejména indiánské a černošské o šibalovi. Teoretická analýza obou kultur společně s textovou analýzou vybraných příběhů o šibalovi ukazuje důležitost těchto příběhů v lidové slovesnosti těchto kultur. Indiánské příběhy vysvětlují, jak věci vznikaly, a také odhalují lidskou povahu, kdežto černošské příběhy spíše představují naději na lepší život pro otroky. Kojot, nejznámější indiánský šibal, je v podstatě sobecký a žije jen, aby ukojil své potřeby. Rád také napodobuje a hlavně klame ostatní, kteří ho kvůli tomu nemají rádi. Naopak „Bratr“ Králík je nejznámější černošský šibal, který málo kdy prohrává, a většinou je obdivován druhými. Tak či onak, tyto indiánské i černošské příběhy o šibalovi jsou velice humorné a určitě byly formou zábavy pro tyto lidi.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Folklore.....	3
2. 1. The importance of animals.....	4
3. Fables.....	7
3. 1. Aesop's Fables.....	8
3. 2. Aesop's characters.....	9
4. Native American trickster.....	10
4. 1. American Indians.....	10
4. 2. Native American oral tradition.....	12
4. 3. The art of the story teller.....	13
4. 4. Fascination with Coyote.....	13
4. 5. Coyote creates the world.....	15
4. 6. Coyote's sexual adventures.....	17
4. 7. Coyote's cruelty.....	20
4. 8. Coyote's self-destruction.....	20
5. African-American trickster.....	22
5. 1. African-American culture.....	22
5. 2. Slavery.....	22
5. 3. Joel Chandler Harris.....	24
5. 4. Harris's mastery.....	25
5. 5. Uncle Remus.....	26
5. 6. African-American Vernacular English.....	27
5. 7. Brer Rabbit.....	28
5. 8. The Tar Baby.....	30
5. 9. Brother Rabbit.....	31
6. Signifying Monkey.....	34
7. Trickster today.....	37
8. Conclusion.....	38
9. Resumé.....	40
10. Bibliography.....	43

1. Introduction

“Animals are nothing but the forms of our virtues and vices, wandering before our eyes, the visible phantoms of our souls.”

Victor Hugo

“Coyote is a living, breathing allegory of Want.”

Mark Twain

For majority people, animals represent mystical world of unknown beauty that has always stimulated their minds, since they possess unearthly abilities, which people do not have. Bartoňková claims that, in almost every culture, wild animals as well as insects are part and parcel of their folklore, saying how things were formed and how people should behave, because primary oral people did not understand how the world originated and how the things around them “operated”. She explains, “To find the answers, primary oral people, who neither wrote nor read, created fables or trickster tales and myths.” (in Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 9)

Every culture has its tricksters, who are widely spread and very popular. In the Old World it is Aesop and his tricksters in his fables. Out of all American Tricksters, Coyote and Brer Rabbit are the most famous American tricksters, whose presence is still evident in today’s world, especially in North America. Due to the success of American film industry and music, they have also spread worldwide. Meléndez states that the best examples are Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny, who became famous owing to Warner Bros (in Gillespie and Mechling 203). These two characters became celebrities, and make laugh millions and millions of people every day. These two tricksters have been here for centuries, but people no longer realize their origin and their original purpose.

The aim of this paper is to try to draw a conclusion to our research question: *What is the role of trickster in American Folklore?* We explain who a trickster is as well as trickster's importance in American folklore. Namely, we analyze Native American Coyote and African-American Brer Rabbit in chosen trickster tales, because these two characters represent different American cultures. We also touch on African-American Signifying Monkey and *Aesop's Fables*.

The first part of this paper focuses on the importance of folklore in every culture. Next, it explains the significance of animal stories and tricksters in oral tradition. Finally, we study briefly the most famous trickster tales in the world, *Aesop's Fables*, to understand their importance and immortality.

In the main part of the paper, we analyze the most influential American trickster tales characters; Coyote and Brer Rabbit. Namely, we attempt to study selected Native American and African-American trickster tales by breaking each literary work down into its elements, such as author and title, date of publication, name of central character and character's important traits, point of view setting of action, significance of setting, summary of plot, nature of conflict, tone, style, central event(s), and theme (Abcarin and Klotz 1346-1347). Nevertheless, this is only the first step in our paper. In addition, we not only attempt to study the Trickster in isolation, but we also focus on it in relation to the other elements and the work as a whole. Next, the short stories will be analyzed as an embodiment of a particular religious, social, political or scientific principle, and whether they are relevant to the world we live in (Abcarin and Klotz 1357).

Finally, we compare and contrast Native American and African-American trickster tales to understand their similarities and differences, and to see their development and importance.

2. Folklore

According to Coffin, we cannot only talk about the selected works; we must also understand the connections or aspects influencing a group of people and, consequently, their folklore. Folklore, as old as humanity, varies depending on location, language, situation, age, community and so on. Folklore is the beliefs, traditions and customs of a community that are passed on from generation to generation. It is divided into ballads, fairy tales, folk tales, legends and myths, as well as songs, games and rhymes, jokes, proverbs, riddles, superstitions and holiday and religious celebrations. Folklore can be very short and simple as well as long and complicated. “Time is money” is a perfect example of folklore that has a meaning, is short and unchanged has been around for a long time (IX – XXIII).

In the beginning, folklore was only transmitted orally from person to person. As soon as peoples developed a writing system, they started to record it. However, this does not imply that all the peoples possessed a writing system or that all folklore started to be written down. Even today, there are many peoples who do not have a writing system, so they pass down all their folklore orally. In addition, peoples who have a writing system do not record all their folklore. They mainly focus on folk stories, letting their children learn games, such as jump rope, marbles, by watching and imitating from their older mates. Folklore, even though it is recorded, changes as it is passed from one person to another. It also changes as people move from one country to another with their folklore and adopt it to their new locality or society. To prove this, scholars have identified more than one thousand versions of the fairy tale “Cinderella” in Asian and European countries (Folklore World Book F:320 - 325).

Another example of folklore that had to change and adapt to new surroundings represent slaves from Africa who brought their trickster stories to the New World with them. Among them were peoples who enjoyed telling folk tales about sly Brer Rabbit, which over the years became so widely-spread and today are typical for black folklore and its protest against slavery.

Unfortunately, these exiting stories are not very known in Europe. European peoples like stories collected, for example, by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Asian Shahrazad and her *The Thousand and One Nights* became one of the most famous books in the world. People often think they are for children but they were originally for adults. Professional story tellers told them in coffee houses in Turkey, Egypt and many other countries. Many hit movies have been made based on Shahrazad and the Grimm brothers. However, there is one storyteller, Aesop, whose fables have been around for centuries owing to the messages they carry (Folklore World Book F:320 - 325).

Authors of these tales are not known. Due to folklorists, we have the chance of exploring these mysterious works that were passed down orally. We could distinguish between two types of folklorists. First group only writes down folklore without any changes, whereas the other group not only writes down folklore, but also adds new ideas to the stories, for example, new characters. These changes are very important if the folklorists want to popularize the stories, which may represent different cultures, setting and so on.

2. 1. The importance of animals

Gillespie and Mechling suggest that animals are important in every human's life, because they are not only the resource of food for human beings, but they also accompany them as their friends and helpers (1-10). For majority people, animals represent mystical world of unknown beauty that has always stimulated their minds, since they possess abilities people do not have, and can only dream of. In almost every culture, wild animals as well as insects are part and parcel of their folklore saying how things were formed and how people should behave (Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 9). Old Egyptians, whose society was advanced in 2000 BC in comparison to the ones in Europe, America or Asia, were not only capable of building huge palaces, pyramids, but they also practised difficult surgery. Yet they worshiped scarabs for their ability to push a secretion pellet with their larva. This, consequently,

led to the belief that the scarab pushed the sun, too. They admired many other animals or insects for their abilities providing them with many explanations about life. Another reason for worshipping wild animals was danger. To prevent themselves, they treated animals, as if they were their friends or gods even though they represented a danger to their lives. This still persists in India where cobras are glorified, and nobody can ever hurt them, or the people will die. These animals are often pictured half human, and have become very popular as tourist souvenirs.

Bartoňková points out that people use animal characters, because animals are well-known and widely-spread. Next, people like to generalize and, therefore, animals represent mankind as a whole not an individual. These animals possess human qualities, in other words, they can talk, think, wear clothes, feel, kill, and eat human food et cetera. Based on their animal behaviour, these characters feature fixed qualities. Foxes are usually sly, wolves are malicious and violent, monkeys are boastful and silly, and so on (in Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 9-10).

Another reason why people started using animal characters is kinship with animals (Shedlock 88). Shedlock explains, “Animals are also one of the most desirable elements, introduced in our stories, because they encourage relation with animals” (88). She adds that this is easy when children are very young. Compassionate imagination gives them the opportunity to enter into the feelings of animals, because their mind is not filled with knowledge (88). Andersen supports this idea:

Children who cannot talk yet can understand the language of fowls and ducks quite well and cats and dogs speak to them quite as plainly as Father and Mother., but this is only when the children are very small and then even Grandpapa’s stick will become a perfect horse to them that can neigh and in their eyes, is furnished with legs and a tail. With some children this period ends later than with others. (qtd. in Shedlock 88)

This suggests that animals are good for teaching purposes, because children can identify with them. In addition, they know a lot about them, because they get in touch with them since they are born. Adults also provide

them with animal toys. Interestingly, animals are funny and their presence makes people calm and happy. By providing an amusement, people who suffer tend to forget about their difficulties. Goshen confirms:

What I want for the young are books and stories which do not simply deal with our daily life. I like the fancy even of little children to have some larger food than images of their own little lives, and I confess I am sorry for the children whose imaginations are not sometimes stimulated by beautiful fairy tales which carry them to worlds different from in which their future will be passed. I hold that what removes them more or less from their daily life is better than what reminds them of it at every step. (qtd. in Shedlock 70)

In the words of Gillespie and Mechling, wild animals are very attractive symbols for Americans, because they are connected to their everyday life. Some animals are unique to the Americans as they help us understand what the life of Native Americans was like, some other animals represent evidence of relationships between European people and Afro-Americans. Wild animals are good to use, since Americans associate themselves with certain wild animals as they provide rich and ambiguous symbols connected to their own experiences (1 – 10).

3. Fables

Probably, the best examples of stories featuring tricksters are fables, especially *Aesop's Fables*. Trickster tales and fables are very similar, because they not only feature people, but also animals with human personality. Both are short narratives that were originally passed down orally until they were written down by folklorists. It is said that there are some differences between trickster tales and fables.

While fables tend to end in moral or cautionary lessons, trickster tales often celebrate values or actions that are disapproved of by society but that may be necessary for the survival and success of the small and weak (*Animal Fables and Trickster Tales*)

Bartoňková suggests that fables and myths represent the oldest folklore genres, and were also very important to the oldest people, because the myths help them to understand how the world and everything around them originated, whereas the fables as well as proverbs served them like instructions about what they should do and how they should behave (in Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 9). Fables are mainly animistic, which means that the main characters of these stories are animals with human abilities.

The fables often end in morals. When reading fables, readers quickly notice that fables consist of two parts – the narrative and moral. Bartoňková mentions that these two parts brought about endless arguments among folklorists, who did not know which of these two parts was primal. Nowadays, they claim that it is the moral, because the fables are short and head quickly to the end. If they were long, the moral would evaporate. In addition, when a new genre comes into being, the most important is the goal (in Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 10).

In ancient times, fables were not only made up as moral tales for offspring. They were also used as a mean of explaining how the world and life originated and how people should behave. However, today these stories are very different from those of ancient times, because of the development of society.

3. 1. Aesop's Fables

In the writing of Bartoňková, fables are mainly popular in The Old World, especially *Aesop's Fables* that have been rewritten many times. As well as these stories that have been changing over the centuries, Aesop, one of the world's most famous storytellers, who teaches morals to our children, has been changing over the centuries, too. It is not clear today whether Aesop, who became one of the greatest fabulist of all times, was the author of these fables (in Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 1-10).

Aesop's Fables are a mixture of different stories from different times (Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 1-122). Some stories feature animals only, some humans and the latest ones even proper names of the protagonist. We can divide them into four groups according the purpose of the message, they carry. First are educational fables, still popular with children. Their purpose is to warn of the dangers, they could face or how to behave. Their main characters are animals, having human qualities.

Second group, probably the largest, are fables serving as social protest and psychological release. These fables feature animals as well as humans. The weak and small outwit the strong and big. It is clear that the big are not as clever as the small.

Third are fables that depict the origin of people, animals and so on. For example, it explains why turtles always carry their homes on them, how the world originated. Interestingly, a story about an ant depicts him as a greedy person, and that is why he was turned into an insect, whereas today ants are seen as strong and hard working. Reading these stories carefully, we found many of these stories that play a massive role in deciding if the moral or the narrative was first. It is clear that these fables lost their origin impact many centuries ago, but when people add a moral it could serve for many other centuries as a warning of being lazy or greedy.

Last group contains sexual stories that picture sexual desires and practices of that time. A perfect example is a story about a dumb daughter and her mother. One mother has a dumb daughter, who is still a virgin. Her

mother prays,” Dear God, bring her to her senses, please.” Next day, her daughter sees a man having sex with a donkey. She is very curious and asks him what he is doing. He says to her that he is bringing the donkey to her senses. So, she wants him to do it to her to become clever. It describes how pleasant sex was to her, as well as having sex with animals.

There are also stories about cheating on partners, pretending in order to have sex with women or wanting sex with own children. These stories do not have morals and were originally for adults. Shedlock believes that avoiding direct moral application improves the impact of the story on the listeners. They should work out themselves what the message is (30). This also suggests that the moral was added later, because it was no longer easy to decode the hidden message. Finally, whatever their purpose is, *Aesop's Fables* are very funny and due to their simplicity of delivery immortal.

3. 2. Aesop's characters

Aesop's characters are interesting, too. The Fox is the lead trickster. Nothing can fool the Fox but his vanity. The Fox can win a lot, but in the end he loses everything, because his greediness seems to be endless. The Monkey is signifying and deceitful. Another aspect, playing a massive role, is the presence of Aesop in some stories. Aesop, who is said to be a slave, is used here as a mean of foreshadowing. This is another example of the development of these stories, because it reinforces the message the fables carry. The morals as well as Aesop could be modern inventions that are the testimony of years of development and came after these immortal fables had been written. *Aesop's Fables* and Aesop himself help us understand the Indian and slaves' culture, especially their myths and trickster tales and vice versa. *Aesop's Fables* proved to be a very effective weapon of common people against aristocracy (Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš 9-20).

4. Native American trickster

4. 1. American Indians

Nabokov claims that Indians seem to represent the mysterious, unfathomable dimension of the unknown that first frightened the settlers and which transformed itself time and again in each generation to produce that unarticulated fear of the unknown which has characterized much of American history. Before Christopher Columbus came to America, bronze-skinned men and women from northern Asia had been scouting and settling Americas for ten to fifty thousand years. By the fifteenth century descendants of the first people, who came from Siberia to Alaska, had spread to populate both continents. Native American peoples developed about three hundred distinct cultures and spoke more than two hundred different languages (IX-XII).

He further explains, after the first face-to-face encounters between Columbus and white people when he made the notorious mistake of calling them “Indians”, European explorers, treasure hunters, traders, missionaries, trappers, soldiers and colonists brought to the New World their own characteristics and interests. Seeing that Indians were very primitive in comparison to the Europeans, many nations started to exploit them. The Spaniards saw the Indians as slave labour for their silver mines in Mexico and the Southwest and plantations in the Caribbean. Of all the newcomers, the French were probably the nicest to the Indians. Unlike the Spaniards who considered the Native Americans to be both heathen and inferior, the French became fascinated with Indian life, adopting Indian customs and dress, learning native languages and intermarrying. Stories based on dramatic face-to-face encounters became a part of tribal folklore and it is not surprising that they have been influencing Indian and white relations to the present day (IX – 22).

Highwater points out that when Hernando Cortés and his troops invaded and, subsequently, defeated the Aztec civilization, they entered the empire of a great sovereign state where religion could have been comparable to the height of the Holy Roman Empire. On the other hand, tribes in the

North America were not interested in building massive temples or pyramids that symbolized theocracy (system of government by priests or a priestly class in which the laws of the State are believed to be the laws of God) as it was in the South. These simple people believed that all natural objects and phenomena (for instance trees, stones, the wind and so on) had souls; they also believed in and worshiped all gods; a sky father force and an earth mother force. In addition, their general tribal spirituality focused on the circumstantial elements of daily life: mainly farming, hunting or gathering (3-221).

Highwater states that animals, surely, played an enormously important role in their lives. They not only considered animal worshiping very important to them, but they also worshiped their capture and death, as well as the weapon and methods used in order to capture them. After killing an animal, they maintained that it became a part of them, and they took over their abilities. The hunters felt a strong desire to please an animal spirit in the same way they would like to be pleased, and they offered gifts and praise to get a permission of the animals to kill one or two of their kind, because they needed to feed themselves as well as their families. Farmers and food-gatherers treated the earth and its spirit in the same way since they were convinced it controlled plant life (3-221). “To Native American peoples the land they inhabited was sacred, sanctified” (Nabokov 59). Therefore, any thing forming wildlife figured in their folklore as supernatural forces. Some tribes even proclaimed their descent from the eagle, the raven, the wolf and other animals (Nabokov 59-60).

“The world of contemporary Indians is puzzlement. These people are victims of more than greed and oppression” (Highwater 38). Many people remember Indians from movies as great hunters and warriors. However, these images, we can often watch on TV, are no longer true. These once famous hunters and warriors live in reservations where they are kept as a minority by the white people. After many years of genocide and poverty, the white people have agreed on paternalism, which is protective custody, but the Indians do not know what values they should prefer. Some try to assimilate and go to

church, some do not and want to keep and prevent their vanishing traditions. This has divided the Indians and has led to quarrelling between families, clans, tribes and generations (Highwater 38, 39).

4. 2. Native American oral tradition

Native Americans did not leave many written records of their folklore. Although they were the first people who inhabited the Old World, they are not considered to have started American literature (Armour 9). In the opinion of Armour, settlers from the Old World started American literature, because they could write and read, and their writings are found in American museums. He maintains that writings in a form of smoke signals and magazines made of pieces of birch bark are not sufficient evidence. We think that Armour is mistaken, because literature can be passed down orally not only in a form of writing. Entirely illiterate people, who could neither write nor read, created a fascinating world of myths and legends that have been hidden for centuries due to their different cultures and languages. Lang confirms:

Without our savage ancestors we should have had no poetry. Conceive the human race born into the world in its present advanced condition, weighing, analyzing, examining everything. Such a race would have been destitute of poetry and flattened by commonsense. Barbarians did the dreaming of the world (in Shedlock 80-81)

Now we can face these fascinating stories owing to folklorists, who play a very important role to every culture, since they capture the presence of the tradition-bearer. Lummis explains:

Some tribes have regular story-letter, men who have devoted a great deal of time to learning the myths and stories of their people and who possess addition to a good memory, a vivid imagination. Indian children learn a fairy-tale designed to explain how children first came to know that it was right to do this and detailing the sad results that befell those who did otherwise. This man was called a dreamer (in Shedlock 102)

4. 3. The art of the story teller

Shedlock points out, “The finest animal stories are to be found in the Indian collections.” However, a lot of people find them difficult to understand, because nowadays people live in towns, whereas Indians lived with the love to nature and everyday life (Shedlock 89). She further states, since storytelling represents struggle in conveying a message and the Indians could not write anything down, they really mastered the art of the story telling.

These primary oral people were absolutely absorbed in the story. They did neither use awkward gestures nor harsh voice. The narrator, responsible for the whole drama, created the whole atmosphere which surrounded it. He had to live the life of each character and understand the relation which each bears to the whole. The dreamer drew illustrations using a stick and soil. They also used light, especially fire, costumes of animals, facial expressions and gestures. Their simple narratives pictured inanimate objects become alive and move, displaying individuality. Finally, they avoided direct moral application; they let the listeners work out themselves (Shedlock 1-133).

4. 4. Fascination with Coyote

Mourning Dove is probably the best known Native American folklorist, who was of Indian origin. She made Coyote’s stories popular by rewriting them in English. The only reminiscence of the Indian language is a few names of some characters, otherwise the rest is written in Standard English. After reading Dove’s stories, people realize that she only collected them. She did not make any changes in order to give a true picture of Indian live.

Having divided all trickster tales characters and, subsequently, counted them, we found out that Coyote is the most numerous trickster in Native American folklore. To understand why Indians were fascinated by the coyote and chose this animal as their main doer we looked at the real coyote (*Canis latrans*) for further study. Almost immediately, we noticed many aspects which were similar to Indian behaviour and culture. Knowlton says that in the wild, the coyote is a sly and cunning predator that has adapted to a constantly

changing habitat, and has expanded its range through the years like the Indians. It is known for its enigmatic howl that can be heard during the evening, night or early morning. It is not easy for this small lonely wolf of the plains of western North America to survive among much bigger predators such as wolves who hunt in packs. It is in its nature to poke its nose into everything it finds, to steal from others while they are not looking in order to survive. Sometimes it gets bitten, but it will try it again (in *Encyclopaedia Americana* 8, 136).

So, coyotes are respected for their intelligence and ability to solve a conflict or threat to their life as well as being able to manipulate others in a cunning and deceiving way. Believe it or not, coyotes have a gift to make the best of a miserly situation in order to survive. Another reason, why Indians were obsessed with these animals, was that coyotes, even though they were almost everywhere, were elusive, almost invisible residents, because they are more likely to be heard rather than seen. Their characteristic howl is very similar to the one Indians used to signal that they were close. Finally, female coyotes are said to be exceptional mothers. If they feel their pups are threatened, they leave their den location immediately, find a new den and move the offspring (Coyote, Life History Notes).

However, the Indians were not the only people who found the coyote interesting. Famous writer and traveller, Mark Twain, noticed a coyote in the wild and described it in *Roughing It*:

Along about an hour after breakfast we saw the first prairie-dog villages, the first antelope, and the first wolf. If I remember rightly, this latter was the regular coyote And if it was, he was not a pretty creature or respectable either, for I got well acquainted with his race afterward, and can speak with confidence. The coyote is a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton, with a gray wolfskin stretched over it, a tolerably bushy tail that forever sags down with a despairing expression of forsakenness and misery, a furtive and evil eye, and a long sharp face, with slightly lifted lip and exposed teeth. He has a general slinking expression all over. The coyote is a living, breathing allegory of Want. He is always hungry. He is always poor, out of luck, and friendless. The meanest creatures despise him, and even the fleas would desert him for a velocipede. He is so spiritless and cowardly that even while his exposed teeth are pretending a threat, the rest of his

face is apologizing for it. And he is so homely! (qtd. in Gillespie and Mechling 210)

4. 5. Coyote creates the world

The Indians possessed some knowledge. They knew that animals were here before humans. A long time ago, Coyote is the last living animal on Earth, because the Monster has eaten all his friends. So he climbs the highest mountain, and attaches himself to the top to prevent him from being eaten. Knowing that Coyote is sly and cunning, the Monster changes the strategy and makes friend with Coyote. The Monster lets Coyote get inside of him. He cuts his heart and sets fire to his entrails. Coyote frees his friends and creates people by throwing the monster's remains different directions (Nichols).

This great story reveals the importance of animals to the Indians. It is obvious that the Indians were very animistic. Although quite primitive and barbaric in comparison to the white people in 1500, the Indians were not the only people who worshipped the animals. Even today there are still many peoples who worship the animals due to their magical abilities. These animals present great danger and mystery for humans. For example cobras in India are still worshipped to be nice to the people.

So, this is exactly what the Indians did. Though they did not understand many phenomena, they tried to make friends with them. Seeing their supernatural abilities, the Indians thought these animals were the gods who determined their fate. In addition, they wanted to possess their supernatural abilities. Interestingly, this story features animals only. There is use of personification and, therefore, we sense the importance of the animals to the Indians.

Here, the trickster is Coyote, who does not possess any supernatural abilities. If you want to survive, you must be clever and tough. Coyote outwits the monster very easily in order to save his less fortunate friends. Then he creates first people. Now we can define the Trickster as being a tough, sly and cunning creator, survivor and saviour. This story also reminds us of Little Red

Riding Hood, who is very similar to the trickster. In fact, she is the same Trickster but in different culture and a bit more up-to-date.

For example in “The Origin of Eternal Life”, Coyote's family dies as well as Eagle's, a friend of his. They decide to go and look for their beloved ones. They find an old woman whose job is to help dead people to get to the underworld every night. As soon as they learn her ritual, they kill her to gain control over her ritual. Due to Coyote's curiosity and haste, many dead people come back to this world. As a result of his wrongdoing, the dead are where the moon is, up in the sky (Nichols). Coyote sometimes is as bad as the worst people (Lauter A:21). Violence has always been around in storytelling as well as among all people. Although we know the Indians believed in gods, they were not afraid to try to cheat them when they were in need. It also shows how much their families really mattered to them and the severe conditions influencing their living. Here, Coyote is a creative force that transforms the world in a bizarre and outrageous way, not minding what could happen.

Coyote's greediness seems to be endless. For example, he feels very hot in “Coyote and the Colombia”. First he asks for a cloud to have some shade. He gets it, but he is not satisfied. He wants more clouds then some rain. Seeing that this works, he demands more and more rain until he nearly drowns. Coyote's behaviour gets him into trouble again. His endless greediness is a warning to everyone who would like to be like him. Besides, it tells us about the origin of the Colombia River (Schlosser).

Coyote, as a character in “The Spirit Chief Names the Animal People”, is often disliked by others. It is again his behaviour that has decided his fate. He likes to imitate people. He can do anything that other people do and he pretends to know everything. He frequently asks a question, and when the answer is given he says: "I knew that before, I did not have to be told." Such smart talk does not make friends for Coyote. Nor does he make friends by the foolish things he does and rude tricks he plays on people. Therefore, he wants to change his name to Grizzly Bear, Eagle or Salmon. He thinks he will now be respected. Sadly, he does not realize that it is not his name that causes him trouble but his nature. Moreover, he treats his wife badly often telling her

words of abuse. Furthermore, he does not feed his children properly and despise them. Interestingly, he is probably the first person to come up with the idea of bracing his eyelids apart when he gets sleepy and his eyes grew heavy (Dove 15-26). Although Coyote is only interested in satisfying his needs, he also manages to create everything. So, Coyote represents an anti-hero, who is not afraid to do anything. It is obvious that these stories play an educational role. Besides, Coyote is a very funny character whose presence is essential, because it arises interest in audience.

4. 6. Coyote's sexual adventures

Another example of scandalous behaviour is the trickster's sexual desire. Usually, the trickster deceives others in order to gain both material and sexual rewards. Mourning Dove did not include sexual stories in her works although these were very popular among the Indians. Dove knew that her stories would never be published if she had included these sexual details because the non-Indian audience could have found it too offensive (Dove, VIII).

Nevertheless, we have, accidentally, come across these stories in *American Indian Trickster Tales* by Erdoes and Ortiz. So, we can touch on them to see what the Indian life was also about. We also mention these stories, because these sexual explicit stories are not in many books and were taboo in the Old World for many centuries for their explicit sex details. Is it coincidence or purposeful manipulation? Having read *Legends and Myths of American Indians* by Judson, we did not find one single story about Indian sexual life. When we looked at *Aesop's fables* by Bahník, Kuthanová and Valeš, we discovered few stories at the very end of the book. Therefore, it may look as if trickster tales and fables are only for children or for slaves as a weapon. This part of the paper gives the evidence that these stories were for adults, too.

Coyote, as an anti-hero, serves as the worst example of bad behaviour due to his endless greediness and lust. "Coyote makes a woman valuable by

breaking the teeth in her vagina” is an astonishing tale, depicting Coyote as a sex addict who is walking down the woods when he sees a very beautiful woman. Immediately, he wants to make love to her. Unfortunately, he notices the teeth in her vagina. Coyote has to solve this little catch before he can do so. He knocks the teeth off her vagina. Now women are worth a lot owing to Coyote (Native American Religion). His desires earn him what he wants. In addition he makes very important changes in evolution. So, this trickster tale is similar to the Adam and Eve story. Every religion has its own explanations how certain things come into being. Coyote represents neither a god or nor a scapegoat. The Indians use him to explain almost everything.

In the “Coyote’s Amorous Adventures”, Coyote notices two girls, walking along the road. He wants to have sex with both of them. Knowing how difficult it is to get them, he turns into a salmon and manages to enter their bodies. Later, he turns back and laughs at them how he fooled them. Later that day he sees other two girls digging plants near the river. Again he wants to make love to them. This time, he turns his penis into a stalk, which goes under the river to enter those two girls. (Erdoes and Ortiz 55-56). This story warns of some people who are only interested in sex. It also depicts the difference between men and women. Men are greedy and lustful, whereas women are innocent.

It seems as if nothing can stop Coyote from his sexual gratification. One day, he spots his daughters’ vulvas and becomes excited. He knows, he cannot sleep with his daughters, yet he decides to leave everything and pretends to be dead to have what he wants. Humiliated, his daughters become stars (Erdoes and Ortiz 58-61). Sometimes, he pretends to be a woman to marry a great hunter, Wolf, because he is starving. He likes being treated like a beautiful woman, but one day he has to copulate with the Wolf. Coyote rapes the Wolf Mother in order to escape (Erdoes and Ortiz 63-65).

Also, Coyote’s sons are interested in masturbation. When his wife dies, he keeps her genitals. He dries them and pounds them to a powder, which he puts in a pouch. Every time he gets lonely, he sprinkles a bit on his penis to have an orgasm. One day, when Coyote has left, his sons find his pouch and

sprinkle the powder on their penises. They ejaculate in all directions when Coyote returns (Erdoes and Ortiz 66-67).” Though very sad at the beginning of this story, it turns out to be very funny when his youngest son responds, “It didn’t work on me. No white stuff came out, though my penis grew big. I had only a pouch.” All these stories remind us of our life. Although we are not used to talk about sexual matters, these are part and parcel of our life. It is society or religion that says what is appropriate and what is not. It also provides evidence of Indian sexual practices. Coyote represents an individualistic anti-hero, who is born to sin.

There is also one story featuring the White Man. Coyote wants to marry the chief’s daughter but he is no good for her. However, he is the only one who knows what the White Man, and has a few of the White Man’s things. He shows it the chief’s daughter. Amazed by the beauty of the things, first, she lets Coyote kiss her. Next time, he even fondles one of her breasts, then he fondles her buttock and he last wants to look between her legs. He tells her that her vagina is upside-down and, therefore, has to be redone. (Erdoes and Ortiz 74-78). It is really interesting that Coyote, who no one loves, possesses such magical powers. He always manages to trick others. This narrative warns of dangers what may happen if the Indians get involved with the White Man. The Indians realize who the White Man is and what he wants. Here, Coyote represents the White man.

The Indians talk about cheating on their partners as well as using a false penis to get satisfied. “The Gods of the Sun and the Moon” explains how the Sun and the Moon “work” (Dove 179-184). The story starts at the Coyotes’ where Coyote’s lonely wife, Mole makes love to an oddly-shaped rock and the next day she digs a white root to please her. At the end, the story says that white people are descendants of the Indians and sometimes handsome warriors marry ugly women and ugly warriors marry beautiful women. This story is about pleasures and desires. It also describes Indians’ live. It was probably normal for Indians to have intercourse with other people. Although they felt they should not do it, they did it, but they did not want anyone to

know. It is evident that this story is not so old, because it states how the white people originated.

4. 7. Coyote's cruelty

Let us take a look at the darker side of the trickster character. Lautner confirms, "The Coyote can sometimes be just as bad as the worst people at times." (21) People often get into trouble when they cannot feed their family. As a result, they start arguing as well as attacking their partners. This is exactly what happened in "Coyote quarrels with Mole". Coyote and his family live away from others, as a consequence of his laziness and trickery. One day, Mole comes home to find out that Coyote has eaten their last food. Their quarrel results in stabbing Mole but she turns into a real mole and escapes. Later on, he tries to kill her again when they meet accidentally. Since then, he has been travelling and deceiving people in other countries (Dove 113-118).

Trickster tales can play an educational role. This is a perfect example of what can happen if people cheat others instead of hard work. The consequences are terrible, but Coyote can "handle" it. Once you do bad things, you get used to it. This tale served the Indians as prevention or warning. Look, what happened to Coyote due to his laziness and trickery. In addition, it mentions the importance of being a good friend or neighbour.

4. 8. Coyote's self-destruction

Next, the trickster is violent towards himself. Coyote is taking a nap. He wakes up, but forgets that he has put a forked hat on his knee. He thinks it is the head of some animal playing a joke on him. He makes believe that he does not see it. He grabs a stone and brings it down on the hat. He hits his own leg. "Oh, I've done things like this many times!" he cries (Native American Religion). He truly does other things that hurt him, such as cutting off his left arm with his right one or burning his own anus (Trickster). It seems as if he does not understand that he could hurt himself. Apparently, this story teaches people about consequences. Nowadays, people use drugs

thinking that they will not get hurt by them. However, just like Coyote, people find out about the danger when it is usually too late. So, the trickster represents a foolish person who thinks that he is immune or immortal. Jennifer Brewer suggests:

I think he sees his body parts as having their own mind. His body parts seem like they're not really attached to him. For example when his penis is flying across the lake to find someone to have sex with. I think this whole idea is showing how in "the beginning" all the different parts of the body came together. Like, when he talks about his intestines and how they came about. (in Trickster)

On the contrary, we think that these stories did not play only education role, yet they were rather a kind of entertainment. Nowadays, people have television and other media in order to spend their free time. However, the Indians used to have none of these. We see a wide range of different Trickster tales serving different purposes. It is amazing to discover that they created “educational television” for children and adults, dramas, comedies, “Discovery Channel”, “MTV”, as well as romance or erotic programmes. Although the Indians are considered to be the first writers in America due to their magazines made of pieces of birch bark and smoke signals (Armour 9), we found out that not many people valued their skills. Armour says, “One might pick up some interesting ideas, as well as an occasional splinter” and “Efforts to deposit them in libraries led to poor visibility, fits of coughing, and mass resignations by cataloguers.” He states that the first American writers were the first English settlers (9-10).

5. African-American trickster

5. 1. African-American culture

Due to the absence of written records and the ignorance of the rest of the world, we did not know much about the African culture which plays a significant role in African-American culture. Oral tradition was passed down by tribal elders. They had to learn common myths, legends, traditions and explanations for events that occur in the world. Music and dance were very important to them. Unlike African art, oral literature tradition is less known to the world. It has been estimated that there are more than 250 000 myths, legends and folktales in Africa. Although myths, legends, folktales, anecdotes and jokes are the most collected forms of African oral literature; proverbs, riddles, songs, drama texts, poetry, and tongue twisters are important to the society as well.

The best known narratives feature tortoise, hare, rabbit, chevrotain or spider. These animal narratives, featuring tricksters, are the most collected. For example, proverbs provide significant insight into the basic value system of the culture of which they are part. Riddles are mostly told by children to emphasize their moral implications. They serve to sharpen the wits of young people. These genres of oral tradition had many functions:

1. Providing amusement
2. Educating the young
3. Validating ritual and belief
4. Promoting conformity to cultural norms
5. Providing psychological release in an institutionalized manner
(Africa, Encyclopaedia Americana 273-296)

5. 2. Slavery

Slavery is an act in which people are owned by other people for two main reasons. First, people can be enslaved as a form of punishment, either, for wrongdoing in social behaviour or for defeat in wars, and second as a response to the demand for human labour. Nowadays, even though slavery is

illegal in almost every country, it is still present in some parts of Africa, Asia and South America as these Third World countries, filled with hatred, lead their people to absurd wars.

Slavery began about 10 000 years ago when farming gave people an opportunity to engage their war prisoners, but the greatest expansion started during the 1500's and 1600's as a result of the colonization of the New World. At first, the Europeans enslaved thousands of Indians, who soon died from European diseases and bad treatment. Realizing the rising demand for sugar, coffee, cotton and tobacco, the Europeans consecutively shipped about 12 million African slaves there. About two million slaves died on the way. By the year 1860 there were about four million slaves in the United States. Change in views on slavery lead to its decline and subsequently forced the USA to abolish it in 1865. In the USA slavery was mainly concentrated in the south-east (Slavery, Encyclopaedia Americana 25:19-24).

Slaves in the South America and the West Indies did not have to adjust to white culture as much as slaves in the USA, because South American slaves easily outnumbered the white people, and logically there were more slave revolts, and they also retained their customs more easily. In the Southern USA, there were twice as many white people than black. By law, the slaves were not allowed to marry, testify in court or earn their freedom. They were not allowed to study either. The slaves were led to total obedience in order to prevent themselves from punishment, such as lashings, short rations and threats to sell their family members elsewhere. So, they used various tactics, like sabotage, flattery to outwit their slaveholders. Since there were African slaves from various places and parts of Africa, who did not understand one another, they had to learn their masters' language that quickly developed into their own language. They also created their own means of communication and folklore, based on a mixture of African and Christian beliefs helping them to bear the inhuman practices (Slavery, Encyclopaedia Americana 25:19-24).

5. 3. Joel Chandler Harris

The role of a folklorist is of a great importance, because he or she gives a picture of oral tradition that can be lost easily if no one writes it down. The best known African-American folklorist is Joel Chandler Harris, who was raised in poverty, and made friends with plantation slaves, who passed along their stories. Harris learned the Negro dialect from listening to animal stories on a Georgia Plantation, memorized them and later published these slaves' stories called "Uncle Remus Stories" in various newspapers (Harris front flap). In the opinion of Armour, Joel Chandler Harris is not only local-colour writer of the South but he may be considered as coloured local writer because of his use of Negro dialect (89-90). Harris concludes:

I am advised by my publishers that this book is to be included in their catalogue of humorous publications, and this friendly warning gives me an opportunity to say that however humorous it may be in effect, its intention is perfectly serious, and, even if it were otherwise, it seems to me that a volume written wholly in dialect must have its solemn, not to say melancholy features. (Harris front flap)

It is clear that the white ruling society was not interested in publishing the problems of slavery. They tried to lighten the "black" situation or even sweep it under the carpet. Despite this, Harris manages to picture a genuine flavour of the old plantation by keeping the original simplicity of the stories as well as the dialect. The United States of America has been trying to fight this discrimination for about 150 years but the black people do not still feel coequal to the white people. They are often pushed out to suburbs or ghettos, where they still fight the society especially by music.

According to Murray and Perella, Harris claimed that these stories were collected only for documentary purposes not for folklore analysis or ethnology, yet his stories became very popular immediately after they had been published in 1789. He doubted that these stories would have a lasting impact on listeners either. Now we will try to analyze what made them so

famous (Remus). However, we are not sure, whether Harris only collected the stories since they are well-thought up. They are also cleverly connected.

5. 4. Harris's mastery

First, Harris's stories were something new in that time. He portrays two hostile cultures dependent on each other. Although he claims that these stories were only documentation (Harris front flap), we must appreciate what he achieved. He is responsible for the whole drama and the whole atmosphere which surrounds it. He lives the life of each character and understands the relation which each bears to the whole.

The description of the setting, the events constituting the plot, concrete speeches of character and imagery in his literary work, are deliberately incorporated by him to create a rather mysterious intellectual and emotional event for the reader. Before we can understand the purposes of the work, we have to decode his purposeful manipulation of language. He uses various means that make the stories fun to read and carry a hidden message at the same time. When reading these stories, we feel the difference between those two hostile cultures immediately. Let us give the evidence which could also suggest coequality because Harris did not use Standard English only.

“Well, but Uncle Remus, you said rabbits had long, bushy tails,” replied the little boy. “Now you know you did.”

“Ef I ain't fergit it off'n my mine, I say dat ole Brer Rabbit wuz gwine down de big road shakin' his long, bushy tail. Dat w'at I say, en dat I stan's by.”

Uncle Remus uses AAVE whereas the little white boy and narrator use Standard English. This combination guarantees authenticity as well as readers from both groups. Another way, helping to spread the message across, is simplicity of delivery. When we think about the slaves, we should realize the fact that they were entirely illiterate audience, who could neither write nor read. In all stories, in order to produce the desired effects, he lets the people in the story be judged by their deeds, and leaves the decision of the listener

free in this matter. So, he avoids direct moral application, listeners should work out themselves. He is not afraid to describe gestures and movement, since these are language themselves and enhance the whole realness. We can often spot this at the beginning of the stories when he depicts Uncle Remus and his moods.

With our hands we ask, promise, call persons to us and send them away, threaten, supplicate, intimate dislike or fear, we signify joy, grief, doubt, acknowledgment, penitence indicate measure, quantity, number and time (Shedlock 35)

Furthermore, all the stories are connected and, therefore, make a whole. In addition, he tells the story in sections and spreads it over many occasions to increase interest. Finally, the use of animals plays a very significant role in these stories. Brer Rabbit is the trickster character, the hero who is not afraid to fight his enemies even though he loses his properties and even his children. Brer Rabbit has been with the black people for centuries. They brought him to the New World from Africa and many stories, featuring this character, have been thought up since then. Brer Rabbit always represents the slave who has nothing but bad luck. However, he seems to solve any problem eventually by deceiving others. Another theme of these stories is amusement. Brer Rabbit also outwits his friends sometimes for fun and sometimes as a way of escape (Harris 1-62).

Harris also collected narrative poems. These poems do not feature Uncle Remus any more. The themes of these poems are always the same. Brer Rabbit is the poor small hero, who always outwits his friends. Sometimes he does it for fun and some other times he does it, because he is in an awkward situation. Often he bosses his friends around who are eventually tricked by Brer Rabbit.

5. 5. Uncle Remus

The narrator of these stories is Uncle Remus, an old black slave who works on a plantation. He always tells these stories in the evening and he does

not have many listeners. In fact, there is always only one little white boy who is the master's son. This strange looking couple of people plays the most important role in these stories, although the content or the plot of the stories is very important too. First, the couple represents two old enemies – the black slave and slaveholder. The old slave (Uncle Remus) is the last generation of slaves and the young boy depicts the first oncoming generation of planters who will not be able to possess any slaves, because slavery is just about to be abolished.

Second, these two seemingly unimportant persons are the key or the direct link to the animal characters. They guide readers through the story, making them realize the importance of the stories for the black people. This is a great way how to make discreet connections between the animals and the narrator and his listener. Uncle Remus tells his stories to this boy hoping for not only new changes but also as a threat. Harris uses Uncle Remus as a mean of foreshadowing. At the beginning of every single Uncle Remus's story, author describes Uncle's mood or what Uncle Remus is doing at that moment. This takes at most two lines, but it is very significant as it determinates Uncle Remus's selection of a story.

5. 6. African-American Vernacular English

Harris's stories are a perfect example of a great use of language. A conflict of two cultures is present in every story yet very cleverly hidden. Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit, who represent the slaves, use their own language called African American Vernacular English, whereas the young white boy represents the educated white society.

According to McCrum, Uncle Remus's language developed as a by-product of social isolation and discrimination. English spoken by the slaves on the plantations is known as Plantation Creole but Uncle Remus's English is not spoken anymore because the Blacks had to assimilate linguistically due to social pressure. However, many features of Plantation Creole are still found in Black American English. In the nineteenth century, so-called "Nigger English"

and later the “Negro dialect” became widely recognized among both Blacks and Whites. At the present, AAVE is very popular owing to Black music and movies (195-200).

The most obvious distinguishing features are often referred to as bad speech because they represent different linguistic structure, for example, frequent absence of the verb be or double negative constructions that are in standard English unacceptable. AAVE can be defined as a hybrid language because it features the elements of Euro-American English and West African languages. There are many differences between AAVE and Standard English (McCrum 195-211). Other grammatical differences, which make AAVE difficult to understand are omitting inflected forms (plural, possessive, third person singular), repeating the subject for emphasis and using been to indicate the past. Apart from the grammatical distinctions, there are some pronunciation and spelling patterns followed, such as non-rhotic – r in final position is not pronounced, z instead of s in plural endings, d or t instead of th, ph instead of f, k instead of ck/c, uff instead of ough, final doublings: dd instead of d and use of x. We have just listed these seemingly unimportant distinctions, because they are very popular for their simplicity.

5. 7. Brer Rabbit

We have chosen a few stories by Harris to demonstrate what the author achieved. “The sad fate of Mr Fox” is an excellent story, in which the narrator first sets the sad and ironic tone of the story by describing Uncle Remus’s mood that leads to the important role of the setting of the story. The story pictures bad conditions, which slaves have to bear (Uncle Remus). They are ill; do not have food and other basic necessities of life. Even though some white people feel sorry for them and try to help, the slaves are afraid of the white rulers and their world because they do not have any rights, and their word is worth nothing. That is why Brer Rabbit blames his friend for killing that cow although Brer Rabbit is the one who has killed the cow. Consequently, the white owner kills Brer Fox instantly due to the fact he was

hidden inside the cow. In addition this act suggests what the slaves have to do in order to survive. Then, Brer Rabbit takes his dead friend's head to his family. We feel that this represents the irony of the story. These acts, the blacks have to do to stay alive, influence their behaviour and they do not feel guilty for that as they are forced to do that. The end as well as the beginning takes place on the farm which implies the seriousness and urgency of Brer Fox story connected to Uncle Remus and other black people.

Another story "The Awful Fate of Mr Wolf" takes us again on the plantation where the two cultures battle (Uncle Remus). Yet again, the beginning of the story is very significant, since it not only sets the tone of the story, but also determines what the story will be. Uncle Remus reveals that riots are quite frequent on farms due to harsh treatment. He also mentions his Master's whipping to make clear what could happen if slaves are disobedient. When he starts a story about Brer Wolf, he portrays bad conditions, such as killing children and ruining homes, slaves have to face. Reading this story, we realize what slaves want. They want peace and quiet as well as revenge if something bad has happened to them.

"A Story about the Little Rabbits" depicts Uncle Remus telling a story about Brer Rabbit's children (Uncle Remus). His children are very obedient and always do what they are asked to. Murray and Perella suggest that this story has a didactic quality, because you can prevent yourself from being killed or hurt if you follow your farther and mother's advice (Remus). This is exactly what Brer Rabbits children do. But this story gives evidence about what the slaves have to stand. It lists a number of impossible tasks the slaves have to do. This suggests that they are many slaveholders who take great pleasure in torturing their workers. They both know that there is nothing the slaves can do about it. Even though the slaves know their Masters want to kill them, they have to pretend as if nothing happens, are nice to them and wait till they die.

How Mr Rabbit Lost His Fine Bushy Tail is a bit different story (Uncle Remus). Uncle Remus is in a bad mood today. However, he decides to tell a story about Brer Rabbit and his fine bushy tail. The young boy objects that

rabbits do not have big bushy tails. Brer Rabbit is proud of his big bushy tail, and it makes him feel so good. One day he meets Brer Fox with a lot of fish. He tells him to go to the creek after sunset and fish there till sunrise, because there is nobody there at that time. He fixes big bait on his magnificent tail. Unfortunately, he falls asleep, as he gets drunk. The bait gets heavier and heavier. Suddenly, he jumps up and his beautiful tail breaks. Since then, all rabbits have got short tails. First, this story can be interpreted as the slaves' history. Once they were free, they felt proud but one day everything changed. Even a short moment can make great changes. Now, they have short tails, in other words, nothing to be proud of. Second, it can be understood how things originated, in this case the rabbit's short tale.

5. 8. The Tar Baby

“Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby” is probably the best known story by Harris, in which Brer Fox wants to defeat Brer Rabbit for good (Uncle Remus). He decides to build a tar statue and places it near the road. Hidden in the bushes, he waits for Brer Rabbit. Having tricked Brer Fox, Brer Rabbit is hopping along the road when he meets the Tar Baby. He talks to her but she does not answer. The Tar Baby's listlessness and Brer Rabbit's impatience result in Brer Rabbit's aggression. He starts threatening her, and later he even hits her. Unfortunately, he gets caught and, subsequently, he threatens to kill her. There more endings to this story. In Harris's story it is ambiguous, but Brer Fox does not eat him. Although Brer Rabbit is unable to move, he keeps threatening, which makes Brer Fox laugh a lot. Maybe, someone helps him, in the end. This time Brer Fox takes his revenge on his nemesis. This story is significant in many ways. Firstly, it reveals the slaves' nature, their ability to talk. This has not changed for centuries, the Black people still ask for attention. White listlessness and black impatience lead to violence, but this time the slaves lose. It warns other slaves of danger that the white people represent. The slaves, on the other hand, never give up although they cannot do anything but talk.

This story represents a perfect example of developing folklore as well as Harris's mastery. Harris was not the first person who published them. We found another two stories similar to this one. It is said that Robert Roosevelt first published it in New York. Yet it did not become very famous until Harris introduced Uncle Remus. We also know that Harris knew Robert Roosevelt's nephew, President Theodore Roosevelt. President Roosevelt remarks, "Joel Harris Chandler was a genius, and his books were the most striking and powerful permanent contributions to literature that have been produced on this side of the ocean." (Joel Harris Chandler Biography)

The other story brings back Biloxi, a small practically extinct tribe that used to live in the southern part of Mississippi (Erdoes, Ortiz 269). This story, called "Tar Baby", depicts two friends, the Rabbit and the Frenchman, farming together. Due to their misfortune, they split up and the Rabbit does not want to work any longer. So, the Frenchman builds up a well by himself only. To protect the well from the Rabbit, he makes a tar baby to guard it. The Rabbit gets stuck in the tar baby as he tries to hit it and kick. In the end, he tricks the Frenchman and escapes. Although the Native Americans and the white people try to live together, their expectations are different. These stories picture the great danger of the white people to Native American and African-American cultures. Both cultures realize their enemy's advanced technology, in this case the tar baby. Obviously, they both chose the Rabbit as their main character, because rabbits are very similar to them. Unlike hares, rabbits make nests and give birth to blind, helpless offspring in underground nests. Rabbits also have many enemies, such as stoats, buzzards and foxes (Rabbit, Encyclopaedia Americana 23:109-111). Brer Fox personifies the sly European colonist, who can never be trusted.

5. 9. Brother Rabbit

Another story, we want to talk about, is "Who Ate up the Butter" by R. M. Dorson, who collected the tales in Arkansas, Mississippi and Michigan in 1952 and 1953 (in Lauter 2:199-201). As you will notice, the stories had

changed since 1879 when Harris collected his. This story is a perfect example how folklore changes and develops in the same way as society and culture. Another very interesting feature is the language containing only a few reminders of African-American Vernacular English, due to growing interest in learnedness of the black people.

This trickster tale takes us on a farm where all the animals farm and share a crop together. Brother Rabbit's wife gives birth to four children who eat all animals' food. When they all get home, they first accuse Brother Rabbit. "I didn't accuse Brother Terrapin, Deer and Fox, even though they had been here too," he quickly answers. They jump over the fire to convict the thief. Brother Terrapin is worried, so he tricks Brother Bear. Flattered, Brother Bear falls into the fire. They push the fire on him so that he could die quickly. Although Brother Bear was the only one who had not been to the house, they all give credit to Brother Rabbit for convicting the thief. Just like in a law case, people are convicted although they are innocent due to smart lawyers.

This present-day story is very similar to Uncle Remus's. However, there are some differences. First, these are not a narrator like Uncle Remus and his young listener, so one does not have to think about the connections much. Instead, it contains a moral, in other words, a practical lesson, at the end of the story. This story depicts the harsh conditions; the black people had to bear. Babies were born, but their parents did not have food for them. They had to steal from others to survive. It is evident how smart the black people must have been to avoid the punishment. It also shows what happened to the black people because of their colour. They were accused of anything very easily and convicted as well. Alarmingly, it gives a picture of a society that is easily convinced of someone's guilt. It seemed normal at the time. Here we have two tricksters; both are victims of the society. Brother Rabbit does not have food for his children, so he steals it. Later, when they look for the thief, Brother Terrapin is more worried than Brother Rabbit, because he has neither skills nor finances.

Another important thing is the presence of the moral. This story helps us understand why there are morals in Aesop's fables. Although the story is

short, it is clear, that the message, hidden in this story, is not easy to decode or readers are not familiar with the setting or plot of the story. Therefore, the author included the moral to make it a bit easier. In addition, this story is a fiction and, therefore no longer connected with the presence. These different stories are a perfect example of what will happen when people start mixing Native American and African-American tricksters.

6. Signifying Monkey

Finally, we look at *The Signifying Monkey* by R. D. Abrahams (in Lauter 2:203-204), who collected Negro narrative folklore in the streets of Philadelphia. Gates reveals, “The Signifying Monkey explores the relation of the black vernacular tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition.” (IX) This means, that oral tradition has always been very important to the black people and is still developing, influencing not only the literary tradition but also music and movies. Labov confirms, “Black English vernacular is a healthy, living form of language showing signs of people developing their own grammar.” He continues, “The black vernacular is reflecting a larger social picture of segregated speech communities.” (qtd. in Gates IX) Yet again, this story features a trickster. However, it is not Brer/Brother Rabbit as a symbol of oppression. In this case, it is the Signifying Monkey.

In this narrative poem, called a toast, the Signifying Monkey enjoys stirring up troubles among his friends. He often sets Mr. Lion against the Elephant. The Signifying Monkey tells him that the elephant has been insulting his mother verbally but Mr. Lion does not know that the Signifying Monkey is making fun of him. Mr. Lion takes it literally, and speeds down the jungle to find the daring Elephant and demands an apology.

*“Come on long-eared motherfucker, it’s gonna be you and me.”
Now the elephant looked up out the corner of his eye,
Said, “Go on bird-shit, fight somebody your size.”
Then the lion jumped back and made a hell of a pass.
The elephant side-stepped and kicked him dead on his ass.
Now he knocked in his teeth, fucked-up his eye,
Kicked in his ribs, tied-up his face,*

This trickster poem still uses personification, in other words, animals have human quantities. But we are no longer on a farm or plantation, now it is the jungle – the town. It is not very easy to understand black poetry, because things may represent something else. Brooks confirms:

At the present, black poets are twice-tried because they have to write poetry and they have to remember that they are Negroes. They wish they could solve the Negro question once and for all. They are likely to find significances in those subjects not instantly obvious to their fairer fellows. The raindrop may seem to them to represent racial tears. The golden sun might remind them that they are burning. (in Langston 13)

There are new problems the black people have to face. They find it difficult to assimilate. As we can see, the toast is full of swear words and its primary purposes are making fun of others and persuasion. The Signifying Monkey is a part of every real “Nigger”, who is the only person good at it, as well as can use it appropriately. They do not allow other peoples to use it, they are the only people who can call themselves “Niggers” without any consequences.

It also marks their social background referring to their ghettos where there are the best conditions for observing and developing their oral traditions. When they meet naturalized black people or white people, they have great difficulties in understanding what is going on. These days, there are many Hollywood movies featuring these toasts. These are the parts where black people argue, shout without a reason. Abrahams best describes the language of signifying:

Signifying seems to be a Negro term, in use if not in origin. It can mean any of a number of things, in the case of the toast about the signifying monkey, it certainly refers to the trickster’s ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. Thus it is signifying to stir up a fight between neighbours by telling stories, it is signifying to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back, it is signifying to ask for a piece of cake by, “my brother needs a piece a cake.”(qtd. in Gates 53-54)

The language of signifying is based on African-American oral tradition. Black people are very musical, so rhyming and rhythms are very important to get the desired humorous effect. The most typical is end rhyme. We think that

its primal purposes are psychological release and amusement. Therefore, the use of figurative language is essential in the toast. The narrator uses similes, “The lion’s tail shot back like a forty-four”, metaphors, personification and hyperboles for exaggeration and emphasis. We have already mentioned the use of swear words and colloquial language represents the social status.

7. Trickster today

The Native American Trickster has not changed for centuries, because the Indians do not want to change their lifestyle. If they want to, they can stay in their reservations and they mainly do, since they find it difficult to assimilate. In spite of this, their favourite trickster, Coyote, has spread worldwide.

On the contrary, African-American tricksters have been changing over the past centuries. Yet, they have always reflected the social situation of the black people. In general, Native American as well as African-American trickster tales are mainly pessimistic showing bad life conditions. A fickleness of fate is omnipresent, and although we work harder and harder, in the end, we come to the conclusion that our starting position was better than now. These two tricksters are still used today. Owing to movies, they become celebrities.

Brer Rabbit and the Coyote are famous owing to Chuck Jones who created them for Warner Bros. in 1948 (Looney Tunes – Stars)F. Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny soon became world famous although they are completely different. The Coyote, always extremely starving, tries to catch his prey – the Roadrunner who is extremely fast. This represents a huge obstacle for the Coyote especially when he is too slow and very hungry. However, he is not only very sly and sharp-witted but he also has the latest high-tech resources. Unfortunately, he is never lucky. In the end, he is always humiliated. These cartoons are located in the South-western United States (Best of Road Runner, Volume One).

On the other hand, Bugs Bunny has everything except for some peace and quiet. His eternal and omnipresent nemesis Elmer Fudd takes his happy quiet days away by shooting at him. Bugs Bunny's stories are very similar to the ones about Brer Rabbit, who struggles to survive. Elmer Fudd, surely, represents the white society (Looney Tunes – Stars).

8. Conclusion

In our paper we have tried to find the answer to our research question: *What is the role of trickster in American Folklore?* First, we defined the importance of folklore in every culture. Then, we moved on to the use of animals in narratives.

The main part of the paper reveals the significance of the trickster tales in the Native American oral tradition as well as the in the African-American. For Indians, Tricksters explain how things come about and reveal human nature whereas in African-American trickster tales rather focus on keeping hope for better future while providing a little enjoyment at the same time.

Coyote, the most famous Native American trickster, represents a character that is basically selfish and lives to satisfy his own needs. He also likes to trick and imitate others and, therefore, is disliked by them. His extreme greediness and lust forces him to break all rules. Unlike African American trickster stories, Native American trickster tales reveal open sexuality as a significant part of Indian life.

Brer Rabbit, on the other hand, is the most famous African-American Trickster, who is hardly ever defeated and usually admired by others. Brer Rabbit represents a black slave, who has to bear whipping and other forms of discrimination. These stories help the slaves survive these unbearable conditions.

We mainly analyzed stories collected by Joel Chandler Harris. Harris is a perfect example of mastery. He uses many interesting devices to explain the problem of slavery. The narrator of these stories is Uncle Remus, who uses black vernacular English, whereas his opponent is his master's son, who uses Standard English. These two characters play a massive role in decoding the hidden message the stories carry.

Native American as well as African-American trickster tales prove to be very humorous and, surely, provided an entertainment for the people. "Whether the trickster is the wise or the fool, the one who tricks or the one who tricked, he is a character many people can identify with," in the words of

Radin (19). In addition, the trickster tales are still very important for teaching small children valuable lessons about the dangers, of certain behaviours, such as lying, stealing, insulting and so on while providing quite a lot of enjoyment at the same time.

Last but not least, this paper has also dealt with *Aesop's Fables*, since they are the most famous animal tales featuring tricksters. After reading the Native American and African-American trickster stories, we discovered that these stories are much more similar than ever before. Amazingly, it gives us the evidence the folklorist have not had for centuries. *Aesop's Fables* contain stories similar to those of Native American as well as African-American. In Addition, the development and range of American stories says clearly that the moral came after the story.

9. Resumé

Pro většinu lidí zvířata představují tajemný svět nepoznané krásy, který je vždy přitahoval, protože zvířata, na rozdíl od lidí, mají magické schopnosti. Proto jsou nedílnou součástí každé kultury, ve které jsou používána k pochopení vzniku světa a také jako názorný příklad chování. Přestože naši předci neuměli psát ani číst, vytvořili mýty a bajky, aby jim posloužily jako odpovědi na všechny nejasné otázky.

Každá kultura má své oblíbené zvířecí postavy, šibaly. V Evropě a Asii jsou nejznámější a nejrozšířenější Ezopovi Bajky, ve kterých většinou malý a nemajetný, šibal, přelstí většího a silnějšího nepřítele. V Americe jsou rozšířené podobné zvířecí příběhy, jenž se velmi rozšířily do celého světa díky populární americké kultuře. Nejpopulárnější jsou Bugs Bunny a Wile E. Coyote, kteří se stali celebritami a rozesmávají milióny lidí každý den.

Předmětem této bakalářské práce jsou zvířecí příběhy v Americkém folklóru, a to zejména indiánské a černošské o šibalovi. Teoretická analýza obou kultur společně s textovou analýzou vybraných příběhů o šibalovi ukazuje důležitost těchto příběhů v lidové slovesnosti těchto kultur.

Indiánské příběhy vysvětlují, jak věci vznikaly, a také odhalují lidskou povahu, kdežto černošské příběhy spíše představují naději na lepší život pro otroky. Kojot, nejznámější indiánský šibal, je v podstatě sobecký a žije jen, aby ukojil své potřeby. Rád také napodobuje a hlavně klame ostatní, kteří ho kvůli tomu nemají rádi. Kojotovi příběhy ale nejsou jen o vzniku světa, kojot v nich také vystupuje jako osoba, mající nekonečné sexuální touhy. Není mu svaté souložit se svými vlastními dcerami, ale ani znásilňovat staré ženy. Změny v evoluci, které způsobí Kojot, jsou výsledkem jeho vynalézavosti hlavně z důvodu uspokojení svého chťiče. Tyto indiánské příběhy také popisují nejrůznější sexuální praktiky, ale i používání nejrůznějších sexuálních pomůcek, a podvádění.

Kojot je také násilníkem, který se nebojí v hádce zabít svoji ženu. Dále se nestará o své děti, a kvůli své povaze ho nikdo nemá rád. Můžeme tvrdit, že Kojot je záporný hrdina, který ale slouží jako vynikající příklad toho

nejhoršího chování. Musíme však vyzdvihnout humornou stránku těchto příběhů, které jsou pro dospělé Indiány zaručenou formou zábavy.

Naopak „Bratr“ Králík je nejznámější černošský šibal, který málo kdy prohrává, a většinou je obdivován druhými. Králík představuje černošského otroka, jenž byl dovezen otrokáři do Ameriky. Tito otroci museli žít v neutěšených podmínkách, kdy museli snášet bití, upírání svobody, manželství a vzdělání. Když přijeli do Ameriky, jediná víra, která jim zbyla, byla jejich touha po svobodě. Pomocí příběhů a hudby pomáhali přežít tyto neúnosné životní podmínky.

Předmětem analýzy byly především příběhy, které sesbíral Joel Chandler Harris. Tyto příběhy jsou názorným příkladem Harrisova mistrovství. Harris mistrně používá nejrůznější formy k tomu, aby problematiku otrokářství co nejvěrohodněji, ale také co nejskrytěji přiblížil čtenářům. Jeho příběhy se ihned po vydání staly hitem, a to díky postavě vypravěče starého otroka, Uncle Remus. Uncle Remus každý večer po práci vypráví své příběhy synovi svého pána. V nich se setkává mladý pán s Králíkem a Lišákem. Oba představují šibaly, kteří se snaží navzájem přelstít.

Králík představuje otroka, ale možná i Uncle Remus, který vypráví příběhy svého mládí. Avšak Lišák je bílým otrokářem, jenž neustále ztrpčuje Králíkovi život nejrůznějšími nástrahami. Králík často nemá jídlo, aby nakrmil rodinu. Jeho dům je často zničen, ale i jeho děti jsou zabity jen z rozmaru bílého muže. Králík se proto snaží nejrůznějšími způsoby zabezpečit svoji rodinu, i za cenu svalení viny na nevinnou osobu, která zemře. Králík je obdivován pro svojí lstivost a odolnost. Harris mistrně používá černošský dialekt a standardní angličtinu, a tím umocňuje skrytý odkaz v těchto zvířecích příbězích.

Tyto příběhy jsou také jasným důkazem toho, jak se mění folklór vlivem času, místa, ale i společnosti. Vybrali jsme ještě dva příběhy, každý z jiného období, a oba přesně mapují rozvoj černošské společnosti. Naopak, indiánské příběhy se prakticky nezměnily po mnoho staletí, protože indiáni, ač zprvu využíváni bílými lidmi, mohou žít ve svých rezervacích, kde mohou pokračovat ve svých tradicích.

Na začátku této práce jsme krátce analyzovali nejznámější *Ezopovi Bajky*. Je obecně známo, že bajky se skládají ze dvou částí a tyto části vzbuzovali až donedávna mnoho dohadů. Folkloristé se přeli o to, zdali první vzniknul příběh nebo ponaučení. Dohodli se a tvrdí, že první bylo ponaučení a pak až příběh. My však tvrdíme pravý opak. Po detailní analýze indiánských a černošských příběhů jsme zjistili, že tomu je naopak. Klíčem k tomu jsou příběhy obou kultur. Tyto všechny typy příběhů jsou zastoupeny i v *Ezopových Bajkách*. Jsou tam tedy příběhy o vzniku světa, o útlaku, poučné, stejně tak i příběhy se sexuální tematikou, které se vyrovnají těm indiánským. Dále ne všechny příběhy obsahují ponaučení. A nakonec černošské příběhy nám poskytují nezvratný důkaz o vývoji folklóru, který se dá vystopovat i v *Ezopových Bajkách*.

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