

Myths is a valuable  
source for such



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Myths are the oldest records of human vision of life and universe. These stories reflect the way people saw the better world its realities. The Norse myths developed during the 8th and 11th centuries in Northern Europe. They came to us from the oldest manuscripts dating the 13th century.

One of the Norse myths is The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe which encloses the story about creation of the universe and ancient Norse gods. In this paper, we are going to analyze this myth in order to define its meaning through the discussion of its content, form and context. This myth was chosen for the analysis because it reflects the Northern European beliefs about the structure of the universe, natural phenomena and the cycle of life.

It also provides the understanding of the Norse Cosmogony. Thus, The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe is a significant historical record which serves source of information about society, culture, beliefs and traditions of the people of the ancient Northern Europe. However, this myth does not provide the detailed information about life of people of the Northern Europe, as it does not contain description of life people led. In addition, there is no information about traditions and attitudes of people towards gods. But, the content of the myth is meaningful in terms of representation of human beliefs in the creation of the world, structure of the universe and reflect people's vision and explanation of the power of gods and natural phenomena. Moreover, this myth is a basis for other Norse myths because it provides the reader with the information about all Norse gods and gives answers to the questions that bothered ancient people.

Every ancient nation had its beliefs about the structure of the universe and how all things were established. These views were reflected in the myths and stories created by people. Anthony Winterbourne in his book *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism* provides the system of Norse beliefs and ideas concerning the creation of the world through the analysis of the Germanic cosmogony.

He says: “ Germanic cosmogony – the interrelationship of space, time, and causality – as represented in such precise images as a world-tree, provides the context for analysis of specific metaphors for the operation of fate as woven or spun by such figures as the Norns, the Norse goddesses of destiny” (19). In this light the myth *The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe* is a valuable source for such analysis. First of all, because the myth is a record that is aimed at explaining the essence of creation from the gods’ point of view. Though, the beliefs of ancient people were based on their imagination and had nothing in common with the modern beliefs, they created the basis for the modern Christian religion. First of all, because they also believed that the world was created by god, second, it consisted of two opposite world (world of fire and world of fog), which can be interpreted as an allusion to Christian Hell and Haven.

Furthermore, the myth mentioned about first man and women, which can also be seen as an allusion to Adam and Eve, “ meanwhile when the endless winter kills most human beings, one man, Lif (life), and one woman, Lifthrasir (desiring life), will seek safety...” (Lebowitz n. p.). In addition, these two people survived during the Ragnarok – three years war – with would end up in destruction of the old world and birth of the new one. Thus, it is the

allusion to the Biblical Flood as well. We can see that this myth stands at the foot of the modern religious beliefs.

The meaning of the myth is great as according to Ashliman work *The Norse Creation Myth*, “ the myths reflect a universe in which the physical environment often threatens human survival, and the oppressive environment in the myths is understandable in a society” (n. p.) Indeed, the myth is meaningful in terms of understanding the Norse attitude to the better world. In the myths of all other nations, gods were severe toward human beings and governed their lives. However, as we can see from *The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe*, the Norse god was indifferent toward human fates, their main responsibility was to watch so that everything was in its place: the earth was fertile and the sun rise: “ Frey decides when the sun will shine and when the rain will pour. Therefore, he is responsible for the fertility of the earth” (Lebowitz n. p.).

Thus, every god had his/her responsibilities. The influence of the myths was so great that when in 1000 AD the Christianity was introduced, people still believed that gods, such as Odin or Thor really existed. Today, these images are inseparable part of the culture and national traditions. The meaning of the myth also can be seen through its context. The work by Kathleen N. Daly *Norse Mythology A to Z* provides the insight into the Norse religion and traditions: “ myths are as ancient as humankind and have their origin in the efforts of primitive people to explain the mysteries of the world around them” (6).

The author provides the idea that the myths, The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe in particular, reflect the geographical and historical particularities of the period when the myth was created. It provides better understanding of the social events of the time period, cultural values of the society. In the images of the Norse gods, the perfect types of Norse people were reflected, thus, “ the Norse gods speak and act like human beings, and the Norse gods know and accept their fate and are determined to face it with courage and dignity” (Ashliman n. p.). Every god represented particular profession and the way people had to behave. Consequently, from the myth we can see how people behaved and what their attitude to the natural phenomena was.

Furthermore, from the myth, we can see that people lived in hard conditions, we can judge about weather, clothes. We know that there were long winters and short summers, thus it was very difficult to get good harvests. People relied on gods and saw them as asked them protection. The content of the myth provides a very interesting and deep subject. As Josiah Lebowitz mentions in the work Norse Gods and Goddesses, “ Instead of running around trying to avoid the future, they embrace what must eventually come and march towards their destiny ready to accept what hand fate has dealt them” (n. p.

) Thus, the main message of the myth is that everyone has his/her destiny and one cannot run away from his/her fate. The Norse gods were very different from the Greek gods, for example. First of all, they were stronger and wiser; second, they did not govern the human lives and did not interfere into their everyday affairs. When Gangleri came to gods to find answers to

his questions, he was politely accepted and the gods gave detailed answers to all questions: ““ I am searching for the wisdom of the gods.” Gangleri announced. “ Is any one among you knowledgeable?” “ Ask of use whatever you will,” High One replied, “ and you will leave here wiser than when you arrived.” (Lebowitz n.

p.) The myth relates about the conversation of Gangleri with three gods. During this conversation, he asked questions concerning the creation and structure of the world and universe, creation of gods and people, function of every god and future of the earth and people.

The content of the myth describes life as the repetitive cycle which no one can break. Thus, we see, that even gods were not omnipotent and cannot resist their fate. Apart from the cultural and religious information provided by the myth, we can find there philosophical views of the Norns.

For example, the gods said that it was impossible to prevent the death of the world, but they gave hope that new beginning will be and new world will be better than the old one. Moreover, they gave hope that the world is immortal a priori and that “ Lif and Lifthrasir will become the parents of the next race of human beings” (Lebowitz n. p.). Another message of the myth is that one should learn from his/her own mistakes, “ together the gods will remember the knowledge of the high ones, the World Serpent, Fenrir, and Ragnarok. But evil will have left the word” (Lebowitz n. p.).

Furthermore, from the content of the myth, we can see that people respected their gods, but were not afraid of them, as in the ancient Greece for example. They were grateful to their gods for they protected the world

from evil giants and created conditions for human life. So, we can see that the gods are the main characters of the myth, though, they only tell the story. The most popular god is Thor, though, he was not a prime god, but he is still the most famous Norse god and often depicted in films and computer games. He was described as strong and a just one.

He was very important for ancient people because he was the god of lightning that brought rain and harvest. However, there were also evil gods as Loki, “ he is very clever, but he also lies and cheats. Some call him the Father of Lies and the Disgrace of Gods and Men” (Lebowitz n. p.

). Thus, we can come to a conclusion that some gods also represented human bad traits of character: “ The Norse creation myth introduces the major concept of the conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The myth describes the destiny of the universe from its creation to the destruction and inevitable death of the gods and mortals.

” (Ashliman n. p.) So, it cannot be argued that the myth The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe has a rich content and a great meaning which enables us to understand the way of thinking of people of the ancient Northern Europe. In general, the myths of the Norns provide valuable and in-depth insight into religion, beliefs, culture and literature of people of Northern Europe and present a wonderful example of the ancient poetry.

The next question under consideration is the form of the myth The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe. Ciklamini provides the idea that: “ The indifference towards chronological sequence and structure, so striking in Norse mythology, seems more consistent with mythological tradition in flux.

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Myths are only loosely connected to a specific time during the chronological span of the mythological world” (138).

Indeed, we cannot strictly define when the myth was written and how it is connected to other Norse myths. Moreover, it has an unusual structure for ordinary myths. It is look like a parable. The myth is organized in the form of the dialogue between human and gods. In addition, the gods reply in an appointed sequence: two gods continue the speech of the major god. This arrangement makes the myth an easy-to-read one and understandable.

Thus, the myth The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe has a great meaning for the interpretation of the cultural and religious beliefs of the ancient Norns. The analysis of the content, context and form of the myth shows that attitudes of people of the Northern Europe towards their gods was unique, and they expressed these attitudes in the myth The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe. Moreover, the myth had a great influence on the development of culture and religion of the modern Europe. So, The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe is a meaningful historical record which shaped our view on the life and beliefs of people of the ancient Northern Europe.

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