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Cultural Heroes and Mirrors of Darker Desires: Transitioning Tricksters of Our Past into Contemporary Society

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CULTURAL HEROES
AND MIRRORS OF DARKER DESIRES:
TRANSITIONING TRICKSTERS
OF OUR PAST INTO
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the trickster character, and its major importance and existence cross culturally, as well as in contemporary society. Many individuals are confused as to what exactly a trickster is. This paper will attempt to explain its nature in terms of defining characteristics. Although the trickster is generally thought of a lost icon or an extinct character, this paper will show that it is very much alive and well in today's culture.

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by Laura R. Nadelberg

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INTRODUCTION

> "Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. But not only he, so our myth tells us, possesses these traits." (Radin, 1972: xxiii)

The trickster is a creature of mystery and wonder, playing the lead role in an incredible social phenomenon. Most everyone has heard of this character, even allowing reference to him[1] to creep into everyday conversation. But, do we as people living in the twenty-first century really know who, or what, he is? Or do we simply take our recognition of his general name, "trickster", to think that we know what this character is all about. Unfortunately, I believe that through the ages, we have lost touch with what exactly the importance of such a character is. Yet, showing true to his characteristics as a shape-shifter, the trickster has remained in our canon of thought and memory, simply by changing his outward appearance, even if in modern societies, we are not quite sure of the implications of his existence. But, to better understand his importance and ultimate reason for retention in contemporary society, we must first start with the basics: Just what is a trickster?

Roger Abrahams once expressed

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[1] Although female trickster characters do exist, the majority of those discussed here are males. With that in mind, this paper will refer to them in the masculine form, unless otherwise noted.

> Trickster is…the most paradoxical of all characters in Western narratives – at least as far as the western mind is concerned – for he combines the attributes of many other types that we tend to distinguish clearly. At various times he is clown, fool, jokester, initiate, culture hero, even ogre…He is the central character for what we usually consider many different types of folk narratives. (Doty and Hynes, 1993b: 17)

Yet, not only does this creature embrace all aspects and characteristics of contradiction and ambiguity, yet merely trying to label them as a trickster is a feat in itself. The question "What is a trickster" is paradoxical in nature. There is no single universal definition of such a character. The names, definition of, and characteristics of such individuals change drastically from one place to another. It seems, rather, that the appearance of the trickster is almost a cross-cultural phenomenon; all cultures acknowledge them in one way or another, but never was there a universal gathering that expressed the need for them within every cultural group. It is without a doubt that this character is more than what meets the eye. Why would we as people universally choose to allow them into our stories and histories, unless we regard the trickster's importance in similar ways?

According to William G. Doty and William J. Hynes in their essay, "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster",

> Successful analysis will transcend simplistic categories, allowing both for flexibility with which to confront polarities, dualities, and multiple manifestations and for complexity with which to grapple with the ambiguity, border-occupying, paradox, marginality, peripherality, liminality, and inversion portrayed by various trickster characters.
> (Doty and Hynes, 1993b: 25)

The inability to allow for easy classification of this individual is due to the liminal personality of the trickster. Tricksters are complicated characters, as they easily slip and slide between one extreme to the next. They are everything from lewd in their actions and crude in their nature, to being the cultural initiators and heroes. In order to better understand them, a deeper look is necessary to find out just what and who they really are.

The first step in tackling the trickster's importance in society is to see just what exactly it is. Not surprisingly, there are multiple interpretations given when trying to define such a cultural character. Though difficult to categorize, there are underlying similarities between all tricksters cross-culturally. According to Barbara Babcock-Abrahams,

> No figure in literature, oral or written, baffles us quite as much as trickster. He is positively identified with creative powers, often bringing such defining features of culture as fire or basic food, and yet he constantly behaves in the most antisocial manner we can imagine. Although we laugh at him for his troubles and his foolishness and are embarrassed by his promiscuity, his creative cleverness amazes us and keeps alive the possibility of transcending the social restrictions we regularly encounter. (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975: 147)

There are several different ways to approach this examination. The first and easiest way is to look at all of the varied and typical identifications of the trickster. Though they appear in different cultural stories, and all come from different backgrounds, their underlying use in folklore and culture are very much the same. These common identifications are seen including an animal exuding a human-like personality (typically seen in Coyote, Raven, and Spider, among others), the anti-hero, Selfish

Buffoon, Transformer, Lord of the Animals, Clever Hero, Clown, and Boundary Figure, among others. (Doty and Hynes, 1993b: 24) Using these identifications, an examination between the definition of "*the* trickster" versus a character that possesses trickster personalities (but is ultimately not a "trickster" in its entirety) can be examined.

Chapter One

DECODING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ELUSIVE TRICKSTER

ANTHROPOLOGIAL THEORY

Many people have asked me about this thesis, and what exactly I am writing it on. When I explain to them that it is based on observations of the trickster, they get incredibly excited. I have had responses from various individuals, commenting things like "Oh! I talk to my patients about that! Everybody has their own inner trickster, waiting to test their personality," to phone calls days later from others, saying "I thought of modern tricksters! I watched a movie last week featuring Tom Hanks! He was quite a trickster in the film!" I always thank them for their help, and say, "Oh, I'll definitely look into that." Yet, deep down, I know that they have fallen into the trap that most people have, confusing what exactly a trickster is. Doty and Hynes made yet another observation in their writings "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster":

> Sometimes the term "trickster" may be applied to figures who could be described "tricksterish" at best by a strict constructionist, but related figures may be elucidated using the typologies developed to identify features. So for instance, the clown […] may have tricksterish functions, may perform in tricksterish manners, without being explicitly "tricksters according to particular formal definitions. (Doty and Hynes, 1993b: 24)

Like Doty and Hynes, I, too, feel that most people, though having heard of a trickster in literature and lore, do not fully understand just what qualifies such a character to be defined as so. The term has been questioned by many anthropologists, suggesting that

it's ambiguity requires it to be dropped all together. Additionally, they believe that the term "trickster" implies that a global approach to studying such a character is possible, when in reality, many find that it is easier to study a single example in one culture at a time. (Doty and Hynes, 1993a: 4)

I tend to disagree with these anthropologists. I feel as if in their minds, they are taking an idea and making it seem too different from culture to culture to have any expansive comparison. I believe, however, that though these trickster characters appear outwardly different from one another as they are examined cross culturally, there are underlying similarities that can be seen and applied to each and every one of them. The context in which they appear, both in cultural folk stories, as in well as more contemporary instances, varies from group to group. Yet, the overall traits which appear with these characters – how they interact with others, and their influence within the society in which they reside – can all be seen as very similar to each other. It is in this way that though they may be outwardly different, trickster characters ultimately have the same underlying characteristics as one another, seen when the jump is made from culture to culture to examine them. These characteristics can ultimately be categorized into six main groups. They are all very diverse, and in fact can be broken up into many more, smaller groups of characteristics, yet for simplicity, they have been recognized as six main categories. The fact that so many different terms and characteristics are used to attempt to define the trickster only emphasizes its indefinable nature.

The six main characteristics that can be pulled from the jumbled mess of multiple traits include the ambiguous and anomalous trickster personality, the deceiver and trick player, the shape-shifter, the situation-inverter, the messenger and imitator of the gods, and the sacred, yet lewd individual. (Hynes, 1993: 34)

The first characteristic examined is that of his location and placement in society. Described by Hynes as "ambiguous and anomalous," the trickster lives a life of extremes. He is completely composed of binary opposites, continually battling one another through his actions and thoughts. He is not able to be contained by one opposite or another, nor is he able to be fixed in place by understood social boundaries. He appears on the edge of all borders, crossing in and out of every standard, continually in transit. (Hynes, 1993: 34) Claude Lévi-Strauss' study of structuralism led him to investigate this idea of binary oppositions. According to Lévi-Strauss, it is natural for the human brain to think in dichotomous terms, setting up a systematic way for us to place things in our everyday lives; for example, high versus low, nature versus culture, and foreign versus familiar. He stresses that we use the amazing ability of language to set up a system of signs to help us understand things in relationship to one another. As shown, something may only exist as being foreign in relation to something else being familiar. Outside of this relationship, no sense is made of the first idea. (Deliège, 2004: 36) The trickster character, however, possesses both elements of these binary opposites. Instead of living within the bounds of one or the other, he crosses realms, inhabiting what should only be understood as one area of character, with regards to its polar opposite.

As a deceiver and a trick player, obvious by his name, the trickster is found as a liar, a cheater, and a deceiver to those around him. He uses his wit in an attempt to dupe those around him so that he himself may benefit. Yet, almost always, his tricks backfire and tend to snowball out of control, ultimately tricking the trickster himself into failing what he started out to accomplish. (Hynes, 1993: 35)

The third main characteristic of the trickster as defined by Hynes is his role as a shape-shifter. As such a character, the trickster has the ability to alter his shape or outward bodily appearance in an effort to be deceptive. It is with this characteristic that we really begin to see the ability of the trickster to cross what are assumed boundaries with ease. Not even those of sexuality and species are safe from the trickster character, who is often seen tramping across, back and forth, with ease. The ability for a trickster to take on such disguises doesn't always necessarily need to be as complex as a complete sexual re-assignment. It many times often occurs as a simple change of clothes or costumes. Yet, it cannot be argued that the trickster reigns supreme when it comes to the act of change and metamorphosis. (Hynes, 1993: 36)

Fourth on the list of typical trickster traits is that of a "situation-inverter". According to Hynes, the trickster "exhibits typically the ability to overturn any person, place, or belief, no matter how prestigious. There is no 'too much' for this figure. No order is too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high, no profanity too scatological that it cannot be broached or inverted." (Hynes, 1993: 37) Through this description, it is reiterated that the trickster has no boundaries. He reverses the order of everyday life, causing confusion and trouble, but can also use his wits to ultimately save the

day. He has the capability of uprooting any institutions a culture views as stable and dependable. However, through his actions, he helps to bring about a way of measuring a culture's beliefs and setting up the bounds of acceptability amongst community members.

The trickster is also seen as playing the role of a messenger, and an imitator of the Gods. Correlating to the tricksters' nature of being neither truly here nor there, they also are capable of straddling the line of humanity and divinity, possessing traits of both groups. According to Hynes, "Admixing both divine and human traits, he can slip back and forth across the border between the sacred and the profane with ease." (Hynes, 1993: 39-40) The trickster also has the ability to cross over the line between life and death. He can sometimes be displayed as a messenger of death, but is more often seen "conducting individuals to restored life." (Hynes, 1993: 40) Additionally, the trickster is often associated with being a donor of essential gifts to a certain culture. Though he often takes advantage of tricking those with powers greater than his and lying to get what he wants, he does act as a provider for the culture in which he resides.

The final trait of the trickster as acknowledged by Hynes is that of the "sacred and lewd bricoleur", or a jack-of-all trades. According to him, "the bricoleur is a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution." (Hynes, 1993: 42) The trickster, again, breaks taboos associated with social acceptability, diving into the world of lewdness associated with sexuality, flatulence, phallic references, gastronomic abilities and fecal

accomplishments. The trickster, a creature with an insatiable appetite for all things taboo and not, is forever seen indulging in the utmost extreme of all things, from food to bodily functions.

In "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered", Barbara Babcock-Abrahams takes the time to analyze the trickster character, using Paul Radin's Winnebego studies as a starting point. Her focus is mainly on the liminal (or, as she claims, marginal) state of the trickster in traditional folklore. Upon analyzing the complete Winnebago trickster cycle, Babcock-Abrahams developed her own list of characteristics that she feels the trickster possesses, which is seen as a base for Hynes' own expansion on trickster characteristics. The characteristics as proposed by Babcock-Abrahams stated that to some degree, most tricksters:

> 1. exhibit an independence from and an ignoring of temporal and spatial boundaries;
> 2. tend to inhabit crossroads, open public places (especially the marketplace), doorways, and thresholds. In one way or another they are usually situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos;
> 3. are frequently involved in scatological and coprophagous episodes which may be creative, destructive, or simply amusing;
> 4. may, similarly, in their deeds and character, partake of the attributes of Trickster-Transformer-Culture Hero;
> 5. frequently exhibit some mental and/or physical abnormality, especially exaggerated sexual characteristics;
> 6. have an enormous libido without procreative outcome;
> 7. have an ability to disperse and to disguise themselves and a tendency to be multiform and ambiguous, single or multiple;
> 8. often have a two-fold physical nature and/or a "double" and are associated with mirrors. Most noticeably, the trickster tends to be of uncertain sexual status;
> 9. follow the "principle of motley" in dress;

10. are often indeterminant (in physical stature) and may be portrayed as both young and old, as perpetually young or perpetually aged;
11. exhibit an human/animal dualism and may appear as a human with animal characteristics or vice versa; (even in those tales where the trickster is explicitly identified as an animal, he is anthropomorphically described and referred to in personal pronouns);
12. are generally amoral and asocial – aggressive, vindictive, vain, defiant of authority, etc.;
13. despite their endless propensity to copulate, find their most abiding form of relationship with the feminine in a mother or grandmother bond;
14. in keeping with their creative/destructive dualism, tricksters tend to be ambiguously situated between life and death, and good and evil, as is summed up in the combined black and white symbolism frequently associated with them;
15. are often ascribed to roles (i.e., other than tricky behavior) in which an individual normally has privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code;
16. in all their behavior, tend to express a concomitant breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975: 159-160)

Every distinction made by Babcock-Abrahams speaks of the anomalous nature of the trickster, and how all of the battling dualisms of his persona are extremely interconnected and interrelated. According to Babcock-Abrahams, "The most important characteristic of these related dualisms, however, is their expression of ambiguity and paradox, of a confusion of all customary categories." (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, 160) These characteristics not only speak of the nature of the trickster based upon his actions, but also address his ultimate residency in society itself.

There are mixed feelings concerning the placement of the trickster. Due to his liminal state, his inability to be neither here nor there calls for a very confusing

categorization not only of himself, but also of his effects on the world around him. The trickster is seen as both human, yet divine as well; he is seen as creative, yet destructive at the same time; he is seen as being successful in many things that he does, yet also falls short and experiences failure. Living in a world of battling dualities and binary opposites provides such a character with no truly grounded realm of existence. He is banished to a life of continual floating from all understood realms of existence (human, superhuman, etc). (Vecsey, 1993: 106)

This paradoxical, "betwixt and between" position that the trickster takes on often places him in the way of being seen as a threat to not only the order of greater cosmic rulings, but also to the order of the society in which he resides. He breaks rules. He mocks rituals. He invests his time in the performance of completing taboo actions. He makes a mockery of all the society has established as their way of being. (Vecsey, 1993: 106) Trickster breaks the rules set up by a society to determine appropriate cultural patterns and norms. His actions provide him with the assumed role of a rule-breaker, completely disregarding the respected ways of the culture in which he resides.

However, if close attention is paid to his actions, another perspective to the reasons for his ways can be seen. By breaking rules and not following ways of cultural acceptance, he is actually helping to define what exactly these patterns and rules are. Through telling and re-telling his stories, members of the cultural group are able to continually re-confirm the ideals that they hold important to themselves. His actions may seem threatening to those who hear of them, but really, they also help to

teach those who pay attention to the lessons trickster learns from his actions. (Vecsey 1993: 106)

When looking at the trickster character in a cross-cultural context, certain patterns of representation can be seen taking form. Most noticeable is the physical representation of the character. Though differences are seen in specific characters, there are generally similar patterns that begin to form, regardless of the geographic area or culture in which the character resides.

Michael P. Carroll, professor of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario, discussed in "The Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero" that there is a way of examining the trickster character in terms of animals associated with them. Though he generally observed traditional American Indian tribes, I noticed that similar patterns apply to a number of characters, cross culturally. The main "animal associates" Carroll described are the hare, the spider, the coyote and the raven. (Carroll, 1984: 110) Though all of these tricksters have human characteristics and qualities, they all correspond to an animal body or trait. Even their names (especially in North America) correlate with the animal with which they have such a relationship (for example, the Dakota Sioux trickster, Iktomi, whose name literally translates to "spider").

Though not all tricksters must fit into one of these four animal types, an overwhelming number happen to, leading us to again consider the cross-cultural phenomenon of the trickster. There are various theories surrounding how it is these

animals specifically that were chosen to become the dominant figures of trickster literature.

As stated before, Claude Lévi-Strauss was influential in his structuralist theory when it came to discussing myth and the trickster character that resides within it. He was very determined that the study of language and linguistics was incredibly similar to the overall study of myth itself. Language is an innately human ability that we all share. It is something that is hardwired into our brain at birth, and just needs to be unlocked by the right keys. After all, humans are the "language animal." Lévi-Strauss argues that just as we all have the potential for language, we also all share the same potential in the creation of myth. He states "[…] myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech." (Lévi-Strauss: 1963: 209) The difference that Lévi-Strauss saw between myth and language is that myths are created to function on a much more complex level, spanning multiple patterns of cross-time expansion (taking place in past, present, and future), as well as being constructed of many smaller units which can be dissected into their own meanings (very similar to language itself).

Though Lévi-Strauss' work was formed by observing the trickster as seen in Native American folklore, the idea of structuralism allows the concept and the nature of the character to be applied to a much more cross-cultural set of variables. In general, Lévi-Strauss felt that the presence of myth was cross-cultural; that every group allegorically uses myth to help explain the origin of their institutions, as well as help them relate to their past. (Deliège , 2004: 96) Myth is a way for individuals to

maintain social order within their society. Additionally, individuals taking a psychological standpoint believe that myths are the first step in approaching the observation of the deepest underlying aspects of the human psyche. To Lévi-Strauss and his structuralist approach, myths can appear by themselves, and are used to express every single aspect of a society. Within these myths, the unreal becomes normality, with everything constructed to veil an array of hidden meanings and messages. (Deliège , 2004: 97)

One possible way of dealing with this image of the trickster is to approach it as Lévi-Strauss did in his writing "The Structural Study of Myth". In this study, Lévi-Strauss examines the trickster characters of Coyote and Raven, as seen in many native North American tales. He addresses the idea that these individuals thrive off living in a world of binaries, inhabiting both sides of many lifestyles. With this knowledge, he makes the point that both Coyote and Raven are carrion eaters (carrion being the carcasses of dead animals), the most binary of all ways to consume food, as they are the intermediary between both herbivores and carnivores, therefore settling between the two extremes of most other animals. Additionally, their intermediary nature is exemplified by the fact that they do not actively kill these animals, yet, by feasting on their carcass, benefit from their death. As stated by Lévi-Strauss, "Thus, the mediating function of the trickster explains that since its position is halfway between two polar terms he must retain something of that duality, namely an ambiguous and equivocal character." (Lévi-Struass, 1955: 102) This again stays true to the trickster

being a living set of binary opposites: creator and destroyer, offensive and sacred, genius and fool.

According to Michael P. Carroll (as mentioned in both "Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem", as well as "The Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero") there is yet another reason for the possession of these animals personas with the trickster character. He explains that though the raven, hare, fox and coyote may seem randomly chosen animals, the one similar quality that they all possess is that they can be categorized by their solitary habits. Living in solitude not only allows them to come and go as they please (playing into the notion of their liminality), but also lets them remain unattached to others and continue to practice their trickery.

This idea of liminality was contested by Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, who examines the trickster and his role in folklore and society, based on the idea that he is living in a state of marginality. She addresses that the notion of "marginality" has become just as difficult to define as the trickster itself, due mostly to the much too encompassing use of the term. (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975: 148) When looking at the definition of "marginality" from a sociological point of view, it is best to take into account the works of Robert Park and Everett Stonequist. Stonequist defined the idea of a marginal area as "the region where two cultures overlap, and where the occupying group combines the traits of both cultures," (Stonequist: 1937: 213) while a marginal man could be looked at as

> a personality type that arises at a time and a place where, out of the conflict of races and cultures, new societies, new peoples

> and cultures are coming into existence. The fate which condemns him to live, at the same time, in two worlds is the same which compels him to assume, in relation to the worlds in which he lives, the role of cosmopolitan and stranger. (Stonequist, 1937: xvii)

Babcock-Abrahams went on to discuss that marginality does not always need to go hand and hand with deviancy, as it often appears in the minds of many. Rather, she suggests that "'marginality' exists whenever commonly held boundaries are violated, be they those of the social structure, of law and custom, of kinship, family structure and sexuality, of the human person, or of nature." (Babcock-Abrahams: 1975, 150) Yet, whether one views tricksters as "marginals", "liminals", or "betwixt and between", the factor that remains constant between all of them is their overall nature, one that straddles borders of acceptability and taboo, culture and nature, and cleanliness and impurity within their home culture.

Of these universal taboos possessed by tricksters, almost all can be seen as having an incredibly insatiable appetite. They are gluttonous, not only for food, but also for sex. Their appetites lead them to cheat and lie their way for a meal, often attempting theft, and usually seeing their efforts fail as they starve. Additionally, many will stop at nothing to quench their sexual appetite, and are often depicted as running around the villages chasing people for sex, having intercourse with family members, and engaging in other highly taboo acts. (Christen and Gill, 1998: 10) To examine the characteristic of gluttony, it is best to break it up into two separate categories of gastronomical gluttony and sexual gluttony.

Tricksters are often driven to their devious ways because of their insatiable appetite. Though he may be cunning and sly when it comes to setting up traps of his own, he often finds it hard to avoid them, leading him to become ensnared in his own deviant ways. If hungry enough, a trickster will often lose his wits, succumbing to his foolishness and greed. An Apache story, in which Rabbit continues to play multiple tricks on Coyote, ends as:

> Rabbit came to a field of watermelons. In the middle of the field, there was a stick figure made of gum. Rabbit hit it with his foot and got stuck. He got his other foot stuck, then one hand and then his other hand and finally his head. This is how Coyote found him.
>
> "What are you doing like this?" asked Coyote.
>
> "The farmer who owns this melon patch was mad because I would not eat melons with him. He stuck me on here and said that in a while he would make me eat chicken with him. I told him I wouldn't do it."
>
> "You are foolish. I will take your place".
>
> Coyote pulled Rabbit free and stuck himself up in the gum trap. When the farmer who owned the melons came out and saw Coyote, he shot him full of holes. (Lopez: 1977, 113)

While Coyote is careful in setting traps to better himself, he is exactly the opposite when it comes to avoiding the traps and tricks of others. He is a fool who allows his appetite to get the best of him. (Hyde, 1998, 19-20)

Though his hunger can often force him to abandon all wit, the trickster is still a clever fellow, and can find himself still being a step above the rest. There are stories of hunters leaving the carcasses of dead sheep laced with poison out on their ranches for wolves and coyotes, in an effort to rid themselves of these "pests." They said that the wolves easily fell for these traps, and many were killed. However, the coyotes

were smart and avoided the traps, overcoming their urges to scavenge and putting aside a gift of free food. (Hyde, 1998: 20-21)

In a similar fashion, another story about the African Zulu trickster, Thókunyana, shows how he is just one step ahead of those who the traps are intended for. Thókunyana is described among the Zulu as a small man, about weasel-sized. Interestingly enough, another name for the trickster Thókunyana refers to a red weasel that resides in the area. (Hyde, 1998: 21) The Zulu story goes

> […] cleverer than all others, for its cunning is great. If a trap is set for a wild cat, [the weasel] comes immediately to the trap, and takes away the mouse which is placed there for the cat: it takes it out first; and when the cat comes the mouse has already been eaten by the weasel. (Callaway, 1970: 3)

This story does exactly as was stated before; it shows the trickster as cunning individual, attempting to satisfy his hunger. Yet, it is more than just that. Both the coyotes and Thókunyana had to play the part of prey; a submissive position, and not one generally associated with the trickster. Yet, through the use of their wit, they are able to avoid not only danger, but in the case of Thókunyana, benefit in the end.

This insatiable appetite extends into depictions of the trickster's body as well. Characterized by oversized body parts, associated both with his gastrointestinal system as well as sexual organs. These obviously allude to this incredible appetite that the trickster has, both for food as well as lust. A direct connection between hunger and lust can be seen recounted by Paul Radin in a trickster story he received from the Winebago during his time conducting fieldwork among them. In this story, Trickster had used his sneaky ways to coerce several small ducks into dancing for him with their

eyes closed. While they were not looking, Trickster takes this advantage and strangles them, knowing that they will make a nice meal for dinner. He falls asleep while they are roasting, and leaves his anus to keep guard. While he sleeps, some foxes come up and take the meat that Trickster had been cooking. His anus noisily breaks wind (symbolic of actual speech) at the foxes in an attempt to send them away, but they pay no attention and devour all the ducks. When Trickster wakes up and realizes that his meal is gone, he exclaims

> ‘Alas! Alas! They have caused my appetite to be disappointed, those covetous fellows! And you, too, you despicable object, what about your behavior? Did I not tell you to watch this fire? You shall remember this! As a punishment for your remissness, I will burn your mouth so that you will not be able to use it!’
>
> Thereupon he took a burning piece of wood and burnt the mouth of his anus. He was, of course, burning himself and, as he applied the fire, he exclaimed, ‘Ouch! Ouch! This is too much! I have made my skinsmart. It is not for such things that they call me Trickster? They have indeed talked me into doing this just as if I had been doing something wrong!’
>
> Trickster had burnt his anus. He had applied a burning piece of wood to it. Then he went away.
>
> As he walked along the road he felt certain that someone must have passed along it before for he was on what appeared to be a trail. Indeed, suddenly, he came upon a piece of fat that must have come from someone’s body. ‘Someone has been packing an animal he had killed,’ he thought to himself. Then he picked up a piece of fat and ate it. It had a delicious taste. ‘My, my! How delicious it is to eat this!’ As he proceeded however, much to his surprise, he discovered that it was a part of himself, part of his own intestines, that he was eating. After burning his anus, his intestines had contracted and fallen off, piece by piece, and these pieces were the things he was picking up. ‘My, my! Correctly, indeed, am I named Foolish One, Trickster! By their calling me thus, they have at last actually turned me into a Foolish One, Trickster!’ Then he tied his intestines together. A large part, however, had been lost.
> (Radin, 1972: 14-18)

Eventually, the trickster consumes the rest of his intestines, thus supposedly leading to explain how the human anus is in its current shape today. This story shows a correlation between appetite and change of organs; his general appetite is whittled away as his organs experience the same type of change.

Tricksters, though sometimes expressed as female, are more often than not seen as male characters. Very often, this distinction in gender influences their personality traits – an integration of vulgar sexual exploits, many times with specifically male genitalia, as well as continual chasing after women to satisfy their lusty personalities. The focus of many of these trickster tales focuses on sexual exploits and escapades of these characters. Though it may sometimes come across as the trickster enjoying the pleasures of life, it is more often than not invoked by their insatiable and lusty appetites. The trickster is seen going to extreme measures to do anything he can in order to satisfy this craving, ranging from "shape shifting" and changing gender, all the way to committing rape, incest, and murder. (Christen and Gill, 1998: 185) Among the Azande (as studied by Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard), the spider trickster Ture, waits until his mother-in-law falls asleep before "he began to ravish her" instead of watching the termite mound as he was supposed to be doing, allowing all the termites to fly away. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 145) Not only does this go against his marriage to his wife Nanzagbe and interferes with his job, but it also falls into the incest taboo, showing that such a character will go to extremes to satisfy his lust.

The overly sexual trickster is also characterized by exaggerations and personification of his genitalia. Just as with his other organs, Tricksters are often equipped with larger than life sex organs, capable of doing things that very often even humans cannot do. For example, the Winnebago trickster, Wakdjunkaga, keeps his penis in a box on his back. It is described as being incredibly long in length, so much so that when he sleeps, his penis will sometimes become so stiff that his blanket floats far above him. It is for this reason that he began to carry it around in a protective box. (Radin, 1972: 18) One story, however, describes how Wakdjunkaga expresses his desire to have intercourse with the chief's daughter, who he sees swimming on the opposite side of a lake. He says to his penis "My younger brother, you are going after the chief's daughter. Pass her friends, but see that you lodge squarely in her, the chief's daughter". (Radin, 1972: 19) Not only does he refer to it as his own blood relation, but speaks to it as though it will respond to him. Finally, he sends his penis sliding across the water, where it "created waves as it passed". (Radin, 1972: 19) Attributing animal like actions (representing it in a similar fashion to an eel or a water snake), as well as emphasizing the distance that it needed to travel to reach its "goal", Wakdjunkaga's penis is shown as an extreme influence in his life, most likely pushing him in the direction of playing the role of the lusty, over-sexed trickster. In many cultures, size is very influential in creating a hierarchy among men, following along the thought lines that "bigger is better." (Ballinger, 2004: 91) Though not all male tricksters are directly associated with phallic grandiosity, a general iconic imagery is attached to them.

In addition to an exaggeration of the size of many sexual organs that tricksters have, they are also personified, acting in ways similar to those interacting with the trickster. This can be seen in the story of Wakdjunkaga, as seen before, when he addresses his genitals as one of his relatives. An even greater example of genital personification can be seen in the story of Ture and his mother-in-law. The morning after they perform their incestuous act of sleeping together, both Ture and his mother-in law's private parts begin speaking:

> They went and arrived home to Nanzagbe. She asked "You there, where are the termites, as you return with only an empty basket?" […] Anyhow, Nanzagbe had collected plenty of termites. She made porridge and cooked them to go with it, and when she gave Ture his share and her mother her share, and they at once began to eat them, Ture's private parts blurted out "Oh! So you're eating termites, you who were just sleeping with your mother-in-law whilethey were flying away!" His mother-in-law's private parts answered,saying "Do you say it is a lie?" Nanzagbe was shocked and she was enraged against Ture and his mother-in-law, her mother. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 146)

The ability for his genitalia to be able to speak of his actions leads Ture into trouble with his own wife, and calls him out on being unable to control his urges which ultimately not only get him in trouble with his family, but for committing the taboo act of incest. Ture feels ashamed for his actions, but ultimately, in any trickster story, the shame wares off (if there was any to begin with), and he is once again a sexual machine, on the prowl for his next conquest.

TRICKSTER CONCEPTS

This analysis of the trickster up until this point, has considered choice selections of anthropological theory. However, in order to gain a better understanding of the trickster, it is important to consider the various concepts surrounding him, and take a more in-depth look at which ones help to not only define the trickster character, but make him more accessible to us as humans.

One of the most general anthropological theories to use when beginning such an analysis is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism**.** Though the majority of his ideas were applied to trickster characters of Native Americans, the overall implications of his work can be applied in a broader, cross-cultural nature. Lévi-Strauss stated about mythology in his book "Structural Anthropology" that

> Mythology confronts the student with a situation which at first sight appears contradictory. On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic; no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be found. With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: If the content of a myth is contingent, how are we going to explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?
> (Levi-Strauss, 1963: 208)

Lévi-Strauss first de-mystified this phenomenon by comparing the study of myth to the study of linguistics. This was the first step that he took in deciphering this concept of an underlying structure in various cultural systems. He understood that language is a universal trait of human nature, a trait that is hard-wired in our brains from birth, and is possible when called to use. To understand language as a whole,

one must first understand syntax, that is, the underlying structural units that make up a language itself, including rules for grammar and sounds produced by the human voice in trying to convey this language. (Barnard and Spencer, 1997: 530) Yet, according to him, this potential is almost identical to the making of myth. He said, "There is a very good reason why myth cannot simply be treated as language if its specific problems are to be solved; myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech." (Levi-Strauss, 1963: 209) As in linguistics, myths are formulated through the use of repetitive symbols, used to carry messages through the story and add to its coherency and overall soundness of the story's structure.

It is with this attitude that Lévi-Strauss addresses the idea that though these symbols are not necessarily the same from culture to culture, their inclusion is a cultural universal. What a myth "is about" and has to say is determined by the universal use of symbols, as the attitude towards them remains the same cross-culturally; they are unchangeable, and necessary in order to continually deliver the story in the same matter time and time again. (Burridge, 1969: 100)

With the trickster's seamless relationship with societal taboo, it is only logical that one would study the works of Mary Douglass and her observations of cleanliness and the association of taboo in her work Purity and Danger. In this book, she explores issues and relationships of the trickster and his way of boundary crossing, taboo breaking, and his liminality between lewdness and sacredness. Douglass first explains the nature of taboos, stating that Robertson Smith coined the term over one hundred years ago. According to him, the term taboo reflected "a system of restrictions on

man's arbitrary use of natural things, enforced by dread of supernatural penalties." (Smith, 1956: 152) Douglass draws parallels between the ideas of 'primitive', fearful thoughts of taboo, compared to fear of un-cleanliness and un-holiness.

The most important issue that Douglass deals with in Purity and Danger is the concept of "dirt." She explains that in every society, boundaries are set up by social networks and customs of that society that determine what is "inside" of the accepted realm, and what is "outside." Those things that are outside of this boundary are considered abnormal, or "dirt." This dirt "[…] is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder…[it] offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment." (Douglas, 2005: 2) Additionally, Douglass feels that pollution and dirt are both threats to social order in various societies. She explains how in both "primitive" and "complex" civilizations, there are rules and practices upheld to follow standards associated with the notion of pollution and impurity. (Barnard and Spencer, 1997: 437)

E.E. Evans-Pritchard's work among the Azande was not influential only in the general world of fieldwork. His book, The Zande Trickster of 1967, is possibly one of the most well known collections of trickster stories other than Radin's The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology. Evans-Pritchard used his work as a comparison to Radin's studies among the Winnebago. He concluded that the Zande do not view their stories in a cyclical thought pattern like the Winnebago, as they don't have such cycles. (Doty and Hynes, 1993: 18) The beginning of Evans-

Pritchard's work focuses around the social structure of the Azande, and encourages the reader to understand this cultural information in order to better understand the details of the trickster stories he is about to share. This work proved to be very important, as it gave cultural context to the stories being recounted, as opposed to simply "folk material" with no real meaning or context. (Doty and Hynes, 1993: 19)

One of the most important aspects of the work conducted by Evans-Pritchard was his notion of cultural relativism, as applied to the idea of the Zande trickster, and the trickster character as a whole. He is very critical of the comparative method, feeling that instead of looking for similarities between the tricksters in various cultures, one should look at the differences. (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 15) For example, when looking at the trickster in two related Native American cultures, useful data may be obtained. However, when looking the same criteria when examining tricksters of Europe or Africa, the figure will ultimately become too abstract to compare. He once said "The wider their range, the more universal they aim at being, the more tenuous the abstractions become." (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 25) This character can only be examined in relationship to those who are close to it, in its single existence in a culture. "Any claim to universality demands in the nature of things an historical or psychological, rather than a sociological explanation, and thereby defeats the sociological purpose, which is to explain differences rather than similarities." (Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 16)

T. O. Beidelman provides another analysis of cross-cultural examination of the trickster. Similar to Evans-Pritchard, Beidelman did cultural studies on specific

trickster characters, focusing always on those in similar or same cultural contexts. Beidelman's main idea was that the trickster studies should focus intensely on the trickster character within the society in which they reside, and not as cross-cultural phenomena. One can only learn about this figure through a specific cultural eye. Beidelman stressed how the real key to understanding this character is through cultural context, and vice versa. He stressed that studying the trickster gives insight to the specifics of a culture, as these in depth studies of a culture will help to explain the trickster character.

QUESTIONING THE TRICKSTER'S IMPORTANCE

A close examination of the trickster leads us to the important question of why – if we know for a fact that the stories he is found in are accepted as just *stories* and nothing more – do we continue to not only tell trickster stories and study them, but pay attention to the lessons learned and the actions played out in them? Why do these characters continue to live on, challenging our definition of societal acceptance in contemporary society? This is easy to understand if dissected and looked at from a cultural context. Tricksters are employed to take on the role of the representatives of cultural ideas and rules found within the stories in which they are told. In the words of Barbara Babcock-Abrahams,

> The tales of the trickster reflect another process as well. As Trickster travels through the world, develops self, and creates for mankind haphazardly, by chance, by trial and error without advance planning, he reenacts the process that is central both to

> perception and creation, to the constant human activity of making guesses and modifying them in light of experience – the process of "schema and correction". (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975: 181)

In his stories, the trickster is seen roaming across our cultural landscape, experiencing situations, mostly those with taboo undertones, which help him to develop a self-identity as well as a cultural-identity, just as we find ourselves doing as well.

The trickster character ultimately represents both human beings as a whole, as well as the human condition to which we are all a part of. By acting out and engaging in social taboos, as well as rebelling against acceptable societal actions, tricksters are teaching others about inappropriate ways to conduct themselves (for example, teaching children to behave as they grow into adults). These rogue characters display this type of behavior as a vehicle for members of a society to use in order to act out whatever their deepest desires are, no matter how taboo they may be, without actually engaging in any of the unacceptable behaviors. Members of the society are able to mirror their darker desires in the form of a being which cannot be punished for what they do, and ultimately face their own form of "punishment" within the story itself, resulting often in a moral tale. Ultimately, the trickster and his actions help to build and strengthen important societal concepts. (Vecsey, 1993: 107)

Chapter Two

TRICKSTER TALES FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

COYOTE STORIES

The first example of a trickster character that can be analyzed is Coyote. Appearing in the stories of multiple North American Native tribes (making him the most popular trickster among all groups in the Americas), Coyote changes names but generally stays the same in terms of characteristics. He not only crosses social and cultural boundaries, but tribal boundaries as well. For example, he is known as Mica among the Lakota, Yogovu among the Ute, Italapas among the Chinook people, and Isáahkawuatte to the Crow. (Christen and Gill, 1998: 33) These are just a few of the groups who allow Coyote to set up residence in their culture. Though these names change, he is almost always consistent in terms of his personality and actions within the stories in which he resides. Coyote also finds himself sometimes existing with other North American tricksters, such as Iktomi (the spider trickster). (Leeming and Page, 1998: 48)

Coyote exemplifies all of the traits that the trickster embodies. In all groups, he is gluttonous, incredibly sexual, and deceitful. He is also very creative, sometimes for the good of others, but mostly in his own favor. Yet, very often, he is represented as the creator of tribal group histories, and the initial carrier of their cultures. These clashing characteristics seem unable to co-exist within one entity, as they are polar

opposites. Never in a normal individual do we see the cohesiveness of good and evil embodied in one. Yet, as Carl Jung once stated about Coyote, he was

> […] in his earliest manifestations, a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level. He is a forerunner of the savior, and like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being. (Lopez, 1977: xvii-xviii)

Coyote tales are part of the oral tradition, being passed on from generation to generation through the telling of the tales. They were meant to engage the listener, bringing out excitement, awe, laughter, and surprise. Yet, through this oral tradition, it was possible for the stories to change slightly between generations. Additionally, the variation of groups re-telling the stories accounted for their varying differences. However, despite all of these differences, the general themes and overall morals behind the stories remained the same.

It is often been questioned "why coyote?" when it comes to using an animal as the main character of these trickster tales. One suggestion relates to the biology of real coyotes, and how they interact with their environment. They are capable of making lifestyle adaptations to fit into any environment they encounter. They will eat fresh meat, but also carrion. They will go so far as to eat garbage, but will also feast on wild fruits and plants. They are seen operating in packs, but again, they can be seen acting as an individual. (Ballinger, 2004: 43)

The first story that to analyze comes from the Okanagon people of Washington state. Titled "Coyote Keeps His Name", it tells the story of coyote at the beginning of time during the naming of the Animal People.

One time Great Spirit called all the Animal People together. They came from all over the earth to one camp and set up their lodges. Spirit Chief said there was going to be a change. There was going to be a new kind of people coming along.

He told all the Animal People they would now have to have names.

"Some of you have names now, some have no names. Tomorrow everyone will have a name. This name will be your name forever, for all your descendants. In the morning you must come to my lodge and choose your name. The first one to come may choose any name he wants. The next person will take any other name. That is the way it will go. And to each person I will give some work to do."

All the Animal People wanted to have powerful names and be well known. They wanted to be the first to Old Man's lodge in the morning. Coyote walked around saying he would be the first. He did not like his name. He was called Trickster and Imitator. Everybody said those names fitted him, but he wanted a new name.

"I will take one of the three powerful names," said Coyote. "The Mountain Person, Grizzly Bear, who rules all the four-leggeds, or Eagle, who rules the birds, or Good Swimmer, the Salmon, the chief of all the Fish People. These are the best names. I will take one of these names."

Fox, who was Coyote's brother, said, "Maybe you will have to keep the name you have, which is *Sinkalip*. People don't like that name. No one wants it."

"I am tired of that name, *Sinkalip*!" said Coyote. "Let some old person who cannot do anything take it. I am a warrior! Tomorrow when I am called Grizzly Bear or Eagle or Salmon you will not talk like this. You will beg to have my new name, brother."

"You had better go home and get some sleep, *Sinkalip*," said Fox, "or you will not wake up in time to get any name."

But Coyote didn't go home. He went around asking the Animal People questions. When he heard the answers he would say, "Oh, I knew that before. I did not have to ask." This is the way he was. He lost his shirt in a game of hoop and stick, then he went home and talked with his wife. She would be called Mole, the Mound Digger, after the naming day.

"Bring in plenty of wood now. I must stay awake all night. Tomorrow I must get my new name. I will be Grizzly Bear. I will be a great warrior and chief."

Coyote sat watching the fire. Mole went to bed with the children. Half the night passed. Coyote got sleepy. His eyes grew heavy and started to close, so he took two small sticks and wedged them between his eyelids to hold his eyes open. "Now I can stay awake," he thought, but before long he was asleep with his eyes wide open.

The sun was high in the sky when Coyote woke up. Mole made a noise that woke Coyote. She did not wake him up before this because she was afraid if he got a great name he would go away and leave her. So she didn't say anything.

Coyote went right over to the lodge of Old Man. He saw no one around and thought he was the first. He went right in and said, "I am going to be Grizzly Bear. That shall be my name." He was talking very loudly.

"The name Grizzly Bear was taken at dawn," said the Great Spirit.

"Then my name shall be Eagle."

"Eagle flew away at sunrise."

"Well, I shall be called Salmon then," said Coyote in a quiet voice.

"The name Salmon has also been taken," said the Great Spirit.

"All the names have been taken except yours. No one wanted to steal your name."

Coyote looked very sad. He sat down by the fire and was very quiet. The Great Spirit was touched.

"Imitator," he said, "you must keep your name. It is a good name for you. I wanted you to have that name and so I made you sleep late. I wanted you to be the last one here. I have important work for you to do. The New People are coming, you will be their chief.

"There are many bad creatures on the earth. You will have to kill them. Otherwise they will eat the New People. When you do this, the New People will honor you. They will say you are a great chief. Even the Ones who come after them will remember what you have done, and they will honor you for killing the People-devouring monsters and for teaching the New People all the ways of living.

"The New People will not know anything when they come, not how to dress, how to sing, how to shoot an arrow. You will show them how to do all these things. And put the buffalo out for them and show them how to catch salmon.

> "But you will do foolish things too, and for this the New People will laugh at you. You cannot help it. This will be your way.
>
> "To make your work easier, I will give you a special power. You will be able to change yourself into anything. You will be able to talk to anything and hear anything talk except the water.
>
> "If you die, you will come back to life. This will be your way. Changing Person, do your work well!"
>
> Coyote was glad. He went right out and began his work. This is the way it was with him. He went out to make things right. (Lopez, 1977: 1-3)

This tale begins the Coyote stories by setting up something similar to a creation story. It explains the beginning of the human race, and describes Coyote's close relationship with The Great Spirit. Here, coyote is told what his role in the lives of these New People will be. He will do great things, and he will do foolish things. It is also here that his ability to shape-shift is established. This relationship with The Great Spirit also carries into the idea of Coyote being a cultural hero. Here he is seen interacting with the overall creator of Native life. By having the acknowledgement of The Great Sprit that he will do great things, Coyote is ultimately given the recognition that though he will make mistakes, he will also be held in the eyes of the people as a heroic icon, associated closely with the Great Spirit himself.

This story also speaks of coyote's sneaky ways. He tries to keep himself awake all night so that he can have his pick of the best names. Yet, his plan is spoiled when he falls asleep. His greedy nature backfires, and he is left with the only name not chosen by all of the other animals, his own.

The next story comes from the Arapaho, a plains tribe hailing from the areas of Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming. It is known as "Coyote and the Bear Women",

and strongly shows his cunning, deceitful, and taboo ways, as well as his shape-shifting nature.

> Coyote was walking along the edge of a river and he came on some ripe plums. Farther down the shore he saw a lodge with a little smoke coming out of the top. He picked a few red plums and went over there. There were four women inside with their children.
>
> "Coyote, what brings you here to see us?"
>
> "Oh, my sisters and nieces, I have brought you some fine ripe plums. I found them up the river, just a little ways from here. I am surprised you didn't see them. They are very good to eat." He gave them some plums and the women thanked him. Coyote made himself at home.
>
> The women were all nursing their children. "Sisters," said Coyote, "make these children go to sleep and I will watch them while you go up and get some more of these plums."
>
> So the women made hammocks inside of the lodge for the children to sleep in and put their babies there.
>
> As soon as they had gone, Coyote took the big kettle down to the river and filled it with water and hung it up on a tripod over the fire to boil. While the babies slept he sneaked over and cut their heads off. He put the bodies in the kettle and put the heads back in the hammocks, just sticking out of the blankets a little.
>
> The women came back, bringing many plums in big rawhide bags. "Sisters, while you were gone I went out a little way from here and found a den of gray wolves. I took them out and killed them all. They make very good eating. I have them boiling and they will be ready in just a minute."
>
> The women thanked him for supplying them with all this meat.
>
> "Well," he said, "this has been hard work. I am sweating with all this cooking. I think I'll go outside and cool myself off a little. When the wolves are done you can help yourselves."
>
> Coyote went outside and sat down. He stuck the corner of his blanket back in the door so they could see he was still there.
>
> When the meat was done, the women spooned it out. They looked at each other in a funny way but finally began eating.

“Sisters,” said one woman, “this meat tastes like our children.”

“Oh! Don’t say a thing like that. It is a very bad idea to talk like that,” said another woman. “This meat tastes strange because it is from gray wolves.”

“Surely, Sisters, this meat tastes like our children,” said a second woman after a while.

Coyote cut off the corner of his blanket and left it sticking in the door of the lodge and ran off.

After he got a good distance away he shouted to the women, “I have fooled you. You have been eating your own children. I have boiled them up and you ate them!”

The women ran to the hammocks but only found the heads of their children. They began to cry and cut their flesh with grief. But these women were bears, too, and they went right after Coyote.

Coyote was running but they were very close to him. He called on his power to make a tunnel he could run into. Just then a tunnel opened up and he ran in and came out the other side and turned around and closed the end up with rocks and brush. Then he put mud over one of his eyes and changed the way he was dressed and went around to the front of the tunnel just as the Bear Women were coming up.

“Hey, Sisters, what is the trouble. What is going on here?” He told them his name was One-eyed Sioux.

“Coyote has fooled us. While we were picking plums he cut our children’s heads off and cooked their bodies for us in a kettle. We’re after him. He went in this tunnel.”

The women were very angry but they were crying, too, and a little out of breath.

“You look tired. Let me go in that tunnel after him while you rest here. I’ll fetch him right out. He shouldn’t have done this.”

He went in but came right out and told the women that Coyote was in there and looked very strong. The women told him not to go in, but he said he would fight him anyway. He went back in the tunnel. The women heard a lot of yelling and howling inside. Finally he came out with his hands and face all scratched up and his clothing torn.

“Say, women, he is a terrible man, but I am going to try again for you.” But the women said no, that they had better go in themselves.

“All right,” said One-eyed Sioux. “I’ll watch right here.”

> The women went into the tunnel. One-eyed Sioux gathered up a lot of sticks and started a fire at the entrance to the tunnel. Then he heard one of the women say, "I think there is a fire outside."
>
> "No," said One-eyed Sioux, "that is just the crackling birds flying by."
>
> He then put more sticks on the fire which made it smoky in tunnel.
>
> "I guess there must be a fire outside because it is getting smoky in here," said the women.
>
> "No," called out One-eyed Sioux, "the smoking birds have just gone by."
>
> He was still piling wood up on the fire. The smoke became so thick inside the tunnel that the Bear Women were smothered to death. After he heard no more sounds, he went in and found the four women dead. He brought them all out and cooked them up for himself.
>
> "I was very lucky to find these bears like this," he said to himself. "I like bear meat. You don't find this kind of food laying around. It's work." (Lopez, 1977: 36-38)

When I first read this story, I was appalled. I had become so engrossed in the disgusting acts that Coyote committed, that I forgot that it was only a trickster tale, and not a real event. Coyote goes to the extreme of the trickster personality, committing incredibly taboo societal acts such as murdering children, tricking the mothers into eating their children, and then eating the mothers himself. He murders, he lies, and he deceives. His shape-shifting comes into play when he uses his powers to change himself into "One-eyed Sioux". He obtains the trust of the Bear Women, and deceives them into thinking he is actually helping them look for Coyote, the culprit who killed their children. It also relates back to the trickster's insatiable appetite. Was this whole ordeal simply to gain some food? I feel as though the trick of getting the Bear Women to eat their children was simply a bonus when trying to obtain bear meat for himself to eat in the end. Through confusing the women,

disguising himself and covering his tracks, we see Coyote's cunning nature and intelligence.

Though this story does not seem to have a bold and obvious moral tale to tell, it certainly displays the traditional traits of the trickster character. While coyote tales often take this form, many of them end with coyote being tricked at his own games, or having his disguise found out. It is in these instances that real moral lessons can be learned. They subtly hint towards the idea of what is acceptable versus unacceptable in society, as well as then explaining the consequences if such actions were to be taken. They allow listeners to gain what they would like from them, and offer encouragement as to how to act, rather than stating outwardly. They allow for them to learn on their own what is and is not acceptable according to societal norms.

TURE TALES

If we move away from North America, we will see that the trickster is just as prominent in other parts of the world. The continent of Africa, for example, is chock-full of trickster characters, including Anansi, the spider trickster of the Ashanti, as well as Eshu-Elegba, the Yoruba Trickster. However, one of the first African tricksters to gain much recognition in the western world was Ture, the Azande trickster, popularized by Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard.

Studying this specific group of people who live in Sudan, Evans-Pritchard collected and recorded these "Ture Tales", publishing them all in his book The Zande

Trickster in 1967. This book first explains the social and cultural background of the Azande which is very helpful in letting the reader truly understand how they live, and how these tales have an impact on their day-to-day lives. For example, Evans-Pritchard explains how in Zande culture, there is a lot of emphasis made on the importance of kinship, as well as relative relations (including in-laws). This emphasis on their place in an individual's life, as well as respect and tension towards them, is an evident theme in these stories. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 10)

Among the Azande, the notion of witchcraft is a strong force in dealing with the occurrences of their everyday lives. The Azande often attribute their misfortunes to the act of witchcraft, known to them as *mangu*. These misfortunes can range from illness, to problems in hunting, to injury. To resolve this misfortune, an oracle is visited, in an effort to seek out the witch who caused such disaster. These magical practices are a staple in the belief system of the Azande and, though they are not mentioned often, do make an impact when found in these tales. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 12-13)

The name Ture means "spider", signifying similarity to the Anansi tales in West African culture. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 20) Though he is called by an insect name, Ture is viewed in all the stories as a man, in similar fashion to Iktomi, one of the Native North American spider trickster characters. Evans-Pritchard states that all of the Azande individuals that he discussed this issue with assured him that he was given this name due to his clever nature. Some feel that Ture once lived among them, as his stories have been passed on for many generations. Others say that he is still

around to this day, though no one has seen him. Yet, whether he is among them to this day or not, his stories hold strong to many cultural lessons that continue to be passed, from generation-to-generation. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 23-24)

Ture is a quintessential trickster. He even goes as far as to describe himself, saying "I am Ture, the son of Ture's father, who tricks people all the time." (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 28) The stories focus mainly on his mishaps and tricks, incorporating other important lessons into them.

Ture stories are recognized as children's tales, yet show Ture in a very negative light. He is a cheat, a liar, and a murderer. He commits adultery and incest, and leads individuals astray. He is a braggart, is selfish, and is extremely ungrateful, essentially exemplifying everything that the Azande warn their children against. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 28) One can ask "why would such tales be told to young children?" Although they are riddled with unsavory actions, they are used to represent a moral code that Azande community members must follow, and are used to teach the children life lessons as well as acceptable and unacceptable social behavior.

Despite all the negative connotations associated with Ture, there are appealing things about his character too. His actions, though wrong in many ways, are almost never meant to be malicious or harmful; they are simply ways for him to get ahead of others, often resulting in problems for himself. He also shows emotion, coming across as endearing in some events. He will get in trouble, and breaks down into tears of frustration, making us pity his pathetic nature. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 28-29)

Evans-Pritchard explains that Ture tales are generally told after sunset. Adults of the community tell these stories to children, most often by the head man of the home, though they can be told by women as well. Evans-Pritchard took note that every Zande that he knew during his time there knew of at least a few Ture tales, showing their staying place in the lives of young and old alike. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 18-19)

The first Ture story that I will analyze is known as *How Ture brought out his intestines*. It speaks of Ture's greedy ways, and how he rarely pays attention to the warnings of others, thus leading him to end up in trouble.

> There once was a man called Bakusireru.[2] This man used to eat like other people, but every now and again he would go to a pool and smear his belly with his (magic) oil extracted from bulbs which was always with him. The belly would then open easily. He would then take out all his intestines and wash them thoroughly and then put them back, and when he smeared his oil again on his belly it closed up as it was before. In the course of Ture's wanderings he came across this man washing his intestines. Ture went close to him and said "My friend, what a wonderful thing you are doing. So while my intestines become black in my body, you clean yours often. O friend, can't you reveal this cunning to me? I shall bring you a woman, man!" Bakusireru agreed to show Ture the secret for nothing. He rubbed his oil on Ture's belly and it opened up. Ture took out his intestines and began to wash them, rejoicing meanwhile: "Ha! Those ugly women at home with their dirty intestines. I shall really jeer at them today." Ture brought out his intestines and washed them twice and twice smeared his belly with the oil and twice it closed. When he begged Bakusireru for some of the oil he gave it to him in a small horn. Ture would travel a short distance and then sit down and rub the oil on his belly, and when his intestines came out he would examine them and then put them back again and continue on his way.

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[2] According to Evans-Pritchard, the name Bakusireru means "one without his intestines". (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 111)

> He once more brought out his intestines under a big tree. While he was examining them, turning them in his hand, a (strong) wind came and blew down the horn, and all the (magic) oil that was in it was spilt on the ground. Ture's intestines remained outside. Ture put them back into his stomach and he smeared his belly with ash from any tree,[3] but it would not close. He rubbed it with this-and-that leaf, in vain, and he rubbed it with this-and-that bark, in vain. Ture tried every kind of little thing: dung of birds, blood of toads, everything he could lay his hands on. Meanwhile Ture's intestines were drying up and beginning to pain him. Soon after, Ture burst out wailing and his cries could be heard far off:
>
> "Ture, my intestines have remained outside ooo,
> My friend run to me with the oil ooo,
> O Ture, you have been suffering many things ooo."
>
> When his friend Bakusireru heard this cry he said "Oh, I thought so, I knew Ture would get into trouble today. Was he told I wash my intestines as often as he tries to do?" Bakusireru rushed to his aid with the oil and some water in a gourd with which he wetted Ture's intestines, and when he rubbed the oil on Ture's belly his belly closed up after his intestines. Ture then went straight home without washing his intestines again. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 111-113)

This Ture story is a perfect example of his "traditional trickster" attitudes and actions. Ture uses his cunning ways to convince his friend to lend him his magical knowledge, without thinking of the consequences. He is obsessed with washing his intestines, to the point of excess (playing into the notion of his excessiveness in other areas, including sexual and gastronomical appetite). He is also foolish, not thinking of the result of his actions before completing them. Knowing he was dealing with magic, he should have considered the consequences of abusing the matter prior to taking full advantage of it.

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[3] According to the text in Evans-Pritchard's The Zande Trickster, "This means magic paste made by mixing the ash of burnt woods (medicines) with oil. Ture did not know the right wood (medicine) to use." (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 112)

The story ends with Bakusireru helping out Ture, who reverses the mistakes that Ture has made, while Ture goes home, regretting what he had just done to himself. In a way, this is also speaking to the children to whom the story is being told. They learn the lessons of thinking before they act, of being careful with magic (something prominent in Azande society), and to avoid excess and extremes. The elder members of the community use these stories to stress the importance of avoiding gluttony in all senses of the word.

There is another story in the Zande Trickster repertoire known as *Ture and how it began with an egg*. It begins with Ture wandering along, participating in something similar to a "bigger or better" game. He gives an egg of his to some buffalo to play with. The buffalo break the egg, and in return, give Ture the tail of the one who dropped it. He then came across a *tutue* (explained in The Zande Trickster to be a large black stinging insect). The *tutue* drops Ture's buffalo tail into the fire, and gives him an axe to make up for it. Next, Ture encounters a woodpecker who borrows the axe to acquire honey from a tree. However, the woodpecker drops the axe into the hollow center of the tree and gives Ture a large amount of honeycomb as an apology. He eventually encounters a group of women trying to fish, while their children are crying restlessly on the bank of the river. Ture tells the mothers that he will calm them by feeding them honey so that the women can fish. Ture, being the cheater that he is, eats most of the honey, and feeds the empty honeycombs to the children. This bloats their stomachs, giving the illusion that they had been fed sweet honey. Just before all of the women come out of river, Ture smears the lips of the children with

the remaining honey, tricking the mothers into thinking he really took care of their children. In return, the mothers offer Ture fresh fish for being so kind to them and letting them fish, but Ture ignores their offers.

He follows one of the women to her homestead who he assumes to be a widow. She invites him in, where he convinces her and her friends that in his home, his wife carries him to the fire, puts food in his mouth for him, carries him to bed, and undresses him. He also convinces them that his wife "lifted Ture to her breast" and that all the women in the village should do this as well (especially after he helped them with fishing and their children that afternoon). The story continues:

> So Ture lives with these women as their husband. The women washed and dressed Ture and brushed his feet with maize cobs and trimmed his toe-and finger-nails and fed him like a baby and carried him to bed. One evening as Ture lay across the women's thighs they were cracking their finger-nails on his head and his eyes were closed.[4]
>
> A small boy asked his mother to inquire of Ture about their empty honeycomb: "Hasn't he collected some more?" His mother questioned him closely in the kitchen about the honey which Ture said he had fed them with. The child said "You see, when Ture ate his honey after he gave us only the honeycomb (he spat them from his mouth)! After that he smeared our mouths with honey." She hurried to the fireside and broke the news to her friends. The women rushed against Ture with their mortar pestles. He fled with all speed from them at night.
>
> After a long time Ture sought some cunning whereby he might go again to visit those women. So he went and dressed leaves over his barkcloth and looked like a woman. He gathered flowers of spear-grass and rubbed them into his hair and his hair was very white with them like that of an old

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[4] According to Evans-Pritchard in The Zande Trickster, "Women crack their finger-nails – not their fingers, that is something different – on the heads of children. This soothes a child and sends it to sleep. It is an endearment. A woman may do the same with her lover. It is called *fo ba kpe* from the sound made." (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 123)

woman. Ture rubbed ashes on his face so that it was just like that of an old woman. When he took a staff in his hand to lean on it (stooping), nobody could believe it was Ture. In the evening Ture hobbled into the women's courtyard supported by his staff. The children ran to welcome him, rejoicing, saying "Here comes grandma, here comes grandma, there is granny, there is granny!". Ture came and collapsed by the fireplace, and the women surrounded him, making a lot of fuss over him, thinking that he was their old mother who had come. They gave food to Ture. He ate it and then went in and lay down to sleep. The children lay beside Ture cheek-by-jowl, believing that it was their grandmother. Early in the morning Ture came out and sat under the granary, as is the way with old people. The women dispersed to prepare food and only the children gathered around Ture while he told them stories of the old days. Ture sat carelessly (his private parts were visible). One of the children saw his parts at the corner of his barkcloth and went to his mother, singing thus:

"I have seen Ture's testicles in the corner of my eye,
I have seen Ture's fat (testicles) in the corner of my eye,
I have seen Ture's testicles in the corner of my eye,
I have seen Ture's fat (testicles) in the corner of my eye."

Her mother seized and beat her and rubbed her in chickens' dung and chased her away, asking why she was speaking ill of her grandmother! The child returned and sat down and sang the same song. She was beaten in vain, the child persisted in saying the same thing. The women came together and decided to investigate the matter. However, Ture had already heard the child's song. When the women were near, Ture sprang up and landed far off, saying "It is I, I am the son of Ture's father! I have been fooling people all my life. I have got the better of you. I have eaten up all your food. What will you do to me now?" When they made for him with their mortar pestles Ture fled with all speed. So when somebody does something very naughty like deceiving people we say "Even Ture who did many things, did he ever do that?"
(Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 119-124)

This is one of the longest stories in Evans-Pritchard's collection. As most last not much longer than a full page to a page and a half in length, *Ture and how it began*

with an egg spans for almost five and a half pages. It is filled with so many important aspects of traditional Zande Ture tales, that the length is almost unnoticeable. To analyze this story, it is best to start at the beginning and go through its entirety.

The tale begins with Ture doing what he does best, swindling and cheating. He goes along from one individual to another, allowing them to borrow what goods he has on him, almost as if he knows something will backfire when they attempt to use them. In this way, he allows himself to participate in the "bigger or better" chain of events, cunningly swapping one thing to the next based off the mistakes that others make. This chain of events eventually leads him to what he desires most, procuring attractive women to fornicate with. He goes so far as to deceive them into thinking he is caring for their children, while he just does whatever he can to shut them up.

Ture then goes on to trick the women of the settlement into sleeping with him, earning him the position of their husband. He gets them to treat him as a combination of royalty and their own children, tending to his every need. His plan is spoiled, though, when one of the children from whom he kept the honey tells his mother about what type of person Ture is. I found it interesting that these mothers allowed themselves to get so caught up in Ture's charming ways, and it was the innocent child who finally was able to blow his cover. Perhaps this child has not yet had his mind polluted with the ideas of deception, and therefore, was able to confront Ture about his ways, snaring him in his own web of lies.

The second part of the tale goes on to talk about how Ture's gluttonous nature influenced him to try and make a return to the village to visit the women again. Even

knowing he would not be well received, he lets these lustful feelings get the best of him, as he tries to "shape shift" (another traditional trickster concept) and disguise himself as an old woman. This time, he is able to confuse both the women and the children, as they all mistake him for a grandmother figure. Staying true to respecting elders and remaining close with kin, Ture is welcomed into the village without question. It is not until he gets too sure of himself and lets his cocky nature divulge his secret that one of the children sees his genitalia, and runs to tell their mother. Again, it takes a lot of convincing this is indeed Ture the trickster, but they finally run him out of the village once again, proving that they cannot be successfully fooled all of the time, and will eventually see through his disguises. Interestingly, it is Ture's genitalia that ultimately give away his cover. Though Ture doesn't display the oversized, pronounced genitalia of many North American tricksters, the fact that this gave away his disguise is telling to his lustful personality, allowing such sexual desires to interfere with his overall goal.

At the very end of the tale, Ture announces "It is I, I am the son of Ture's father! I have been fooling people all my life […]." Even he himself knows of his deceitful ways, something that he has been practicing since he came to be. Yet, despite his nature of fooling people, he never fully deceives anyone. While he comes very close, he is always discovered, or uncovers himself to try and backtrack out of the trouble he has gotten himself into. This is where a very important lesson can be taught to listeners. In saying "Even Ture who did many things, did he ever do that?" the listener is set up to compare themselves to this cheating, conniving, manipulative

being. It is without doubt that one would never want to compare themselves to such an individual, and therefore, a lesson is learned to never try and deceive or cheat anyone.

Brian V. Street, in his essay "The Trickster Theme: Winnebago and Azande", also feels that these Ture stories of the Azande can be viewed as stories used to re-affirm moral and cultural rules of society. They serve as models of what to avoid, and what will happen if these rules are broken. They are specifically geared towards children, using Ture as a character who accomplishes a child's desire to break rules, yet ultimately shows the consequences of the actions, thus ending the child's desires to imitate what he or she sees and hears. (Street, 1972: 85-86)

The main reason that we as people cannot hate Ture is due to his balance of personalities, including his love of life. He loves how he lives, and playing tricks is just a part of him and what he does. This passion for living is what redeems him in our eyes, from being a malicious conman to being a mistake-making, yet jovial character. (Street, 1972: 90) Even in the words of Evans-Pritchard, "his whimsical fooling, recklessness, impetuosity, puckish irresponsibility, his childish desire to show how clever he is, his total absorption in song and dance, his feathered hat, and his flouting of every convention…even to us is appealing." (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 28)

Chapter Three

CONTEMPORARY TRICKSTERS

QUESTIONING TODAY'S TRICKSTERS

Where has the trickster gone? When we talk about traditional stories of Coyote, Ananse, Ture, Loki, or Raven, we tend to think about them in the past tense. These stories bring up visions of sitting around fires, and elders spinning tales of such characters for young children, hoping to send messages of good behavior into their minds, while entertaining the group as well. Never do we think of sitting around our living rooms and reciting tales of how Coyote got his head stuck in a buffalo skull, or how the Winnebago trickster fashioned breasts and a vulva out of an elk's kidneys and liver, wore a dress, and tricked fox into having intercourse with him as a woman. And, when we go to a bookstore or a library, these tales are all located in the children's section, though traditionally they carry very risqué topics. Today, they have been toned down, made into humorous, even "cute" fables, similar to the nature of those by Aesop. It would seem to a normal eye that these stories are not still around today, and that the trickster character has essentially died as we have become a more globalized and modernized society. What use do tricksters have to us in this day and age?

In recent years, the transition of traditional trickster to modern trickster has been difficult. They absolutely exist, though as we have stopped sharing their stories

with one another, the visual image in which they are represented has drastically changed. Additionally, their actions and characteristics are not the extremes of tricksters from years ago. They are, rather, represented in a modern day package, sent out to us through other forms of contemporary media other than oral tradition.

EARLY EXAMPLES OF A MODERN TRICKSTER

In America, the early forms of "contemporary" tricksters can be traced back to African American folktales. This is not surprising, as most African groups of people had their own form of a trickster character; those who were sent to America, mostly through slavery, retained these traditions, and adapted them to fit their own new cultural lifestyles. A fine example of an early "American" trickster is Br'er Rabbit.[5]

Joel Chandler Harris popularized the tales of Br'er Rabbit in the United States in the early 1900s through his Uncle Remus books. These stories originated from American slaves, most of whom had originally come from West Africa. The character of the rabbit itself is already a popular character in both African folklore, and native North America, possibly helping to secure its place in "modern" trickster literature. (Vest, 2000: 25)

Br'er Rabbit plays the part of the eternal trickster in the Uncle Remus tales. He is often given motives for his actions (as opposed to simply doing them for no real

[5] In doing research, I have seen many versions for the spelling of this name: Brer, Br'er, Bre'r. I have chosen to use the spelling of Br'er in this paper, though I have yet to come across any evidence that these names are not interchangeable.

reason at all). Whether it is to simply play a trick on another character, or to seek revenge on someone who has gotten the best of him, he will go to extremes to accomplish these goals. (Dauner, 1948: 135)

For whatever reason, Br'er Rabbit is almost always smarter than those around him, giving him the ability to dupe and fool his gullible friends and acquaintances. The other characters in these stories will even sometimes band together to try and thwart Br'er Rabbit's tricks and put him in his place, but in the words of Uncle Remus, "He mos' allers come out on top." (Dauner, 1948: 135)

Like the tricksters of traditional cross-cultural folklore, Br'er Rabbit follows suit with similar characteristics. He adds humor to the everyday lives of those telling the stories as well as those listening. He shows cultural "no-no's" in terms of the tricks he plays on others. He even goes so far as to teach us lessons of patience and how to act, similarly to the tales of other cultures. Br'er Rabbit's character and stories are a stepping-stone in transitioning the trickster character from its traditional roots to a more contemporary viewpoint.

Another example of these "modern day tricksters" can be seen in the characterization of Felix the Cat. Premiering in 1919 as "Master Tom", Victor De Bann's cartoon cat combined elements of high society with a low art form. Felix was, in a sense, a transgressor of boundaries, similar to the trickster character of cross-cultural folklore. (Tom, 1996: 65)

Felix, a small, wide-eyed black cat, is the main character in a series of cartoon movies. Through his actions in these films, he is seen utilizing a vast number of

characteristics that are unique to the trickster character. He undergoes metamorphosis, interacts in fantasy worlds, and is his own free entity. (Tom, 1996: 67) Even the choice to create a character as a cat has something to say about the underlying trickster references. Cats themselves are curious, sly, agile, and indestructible – the quintessential characteristics of the classic trickster. (Tom, 1996: 72) De Bann uses these traditional themes, and updates them to take the form of something more tangible and understandable to the population of the 1920s, when the films first became popular. Additionally, as a male tomcat, it is implied through De Bann's stories that Felix carries a characterization of sexual promiscuity, in the same nature as his biological counterparts. Perhaps this was initiated because of a sexual revolution that was beginning at the same time in society, but it definitely holds true as a similarity to those tricksters of North America and elsewhere. (Tom, 1996: 72)

Felix is viewed as a social outsider. He travels alone on the fringe of society, interacting with others as a true "outcast". He breaks societal rules, and crosses boundaries that are assumed to be unbreakable. He also has the shape-shifting ability of traditional cross-cultural trickster characters. In one episode, he falls from high above to the ground, smashing into many smaller versions of his original self. He is also capable of detaching his tail, allowing it to take the form of a tool or a weapon, or turn it into something completely different (for example, a snake). (Tom, 1996: 79) His detachable tail helps in defining him as a trickster through his identity, as opposed to verbally expressing his emotions (for example, a drooping tail to represent sorrow, or an erect tail to elicit the idea of fear and/or surprise). (Tom, 1996: 79) By having

his tail act as both its own entity, as well as an expression of his thoughts and actions, Felix can be viewed as similar to tricksters such as the Winnebago trickster, Wakdjunkaga, as well as the traditional trickster character Coyote. Both of these individuals are associated with genitalia that tend to think and act independently of the individuals they are attached to.

Felix seems to exist as a modern version of a traditional individual, updated to inhabit a rapidly changing society. Appropriate to an age of modernity, Felix subtly carries important themes and traditions from years ago into contemporary times, not only purely for enjoyment or entertainment, but to keep important values alive in our lives.

CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION TRICKSTERS

In recent years, our major forms of communication have completely shifted and changed. No longer do we live only in the days of the radio or the newspaper. Today, with our lust for anything technologically savvy, the easiest way to reach the masses is through either the internet, or, just as commonly, the television.

The television has been providing us with both news and entertainment for over fifty years, pumping us full of information, both consciously and subliminally. Through commercials, movies, the news, and regular programs, we become sponges for the information placed before us. We rarely think about our sub-conscious associations to those things being viewed, making television the perfect way to mask

ways that we used to think under a disguise of how we now believe ourselves to view the world. Trickster characters are everywhere in pop-culture today; it just takes a while to find them under their contemporary disguises.

One of the most obvious examples of a pop-culture trickster can be found in the job of advertising breakfast cereals. Generally, these cereals are geared towards children and a younger population, not at all different from the target audience for trickster tales when it was commonplace to tell them years ago. To aid with marketing, cereal companies have worked hard to come up with characters or mascots that would easily be associated with their brand. However, cereals seen as both "tasty" by kids and "healthy" by adults are the ones that receive such mascots the most, rather than cereals that mostly appeal to older masses through the idea of a healthy and all natural breakfast option.

The trickster is characterized by an insatiable appetite and desire for all things, from sex, to material objects, to food. Many stories focus on this need to acquire food any way they can, generally through a dramatic scheme or plot. For example, Ture claims that he will feed the children of the mothers in the river honeycombs to stop their crying, but really eats them himself, and only gives him the empty combs. In a Winnebago story, Trickster manipulates ducks into dancing with their eyes closed so that he can kill them for food. While breakfast cereal tricksters are no where near as "violent" or devious as these traditional tricksters, they will still go to extremes, including stalking, stealing, and deceiving, in order to procure a bowl of the cereal they represent to satisfy their extreme appetite. (Green, 2007: 57)

The breaking of cultural taboos is also a typical trickster activity, like Ture sleeping with his mother-in-law, or killing his father. In a more contemporary version, these breakfast cereal tricksters also break taboos. Though they do not commit what some would consider sinful acts, they try to eat these foods that are typically deemed for children, while more often than not, they themselves are anything but children. Additionally, tricksters are notorious for their shape-shifting and ability to disguise themselves to fool others. For example, in a traditional North American tale, Coyote disguises himself as "One-Eyed Sioux" in order to trick the Bear women. In another story, the Winnebago trickster Wakjunkaga gets his head stuck inside of a elk skull and is mistaken for a tribal shaman. Cereal marketers utilize this notion of disguise and deception, and apply it to their own characters. (Green, 2007: 58) Sometimes these individuals will disguise themselves in ways that would allow them to fit in with the rest of the society around them, tricking the children who act as the guardians of the breakfast food. Whether dressed as a police officer, demanding the children pour him a bowl, or a grandmother who coaxes them to feed their elder, there are no boundaries that these tricksters will not cross to achieve their goal of a hearty breakfast.

Cereal box tricksters are incredibly well recognized. From Barney Rubble (who helps to market both Post's Fruity and Cocoa Pebbles), to Lucky the Leprechaun (the trickster of the General Mills' Lucky Charms cereal), to the Cookie Crook (known for his association with General Mills' Cookie Crisp), cereal tricksters can

take on various forms and representations. However, one of the most traditionally "trickster" characters is the Trix Rabbit.

The most noticeable similarity of the Trix Rabbit to traditional tricksters is the fact that he is just what his name suggests: a rabbit. Following the traits of traditional North American tricksters, rabbits and hares are one of the four most popular representations of the character (along with coyote, spider, and raven). The Trix Rabbit also has anthropomorphic characteristics; he talks, and thinks in a very human-like way, allowing us to relate to his plight of how to obtain the succulent, fruity morsels that are Trix cereal. Like all the tricksters previously observed, the Trix Rabbit is driven by his incredible hunger, and uses this drive to do anything he can for it.

It has become understood in these commercials that he will dress up in an effort to trick the children who are the keepers of the cereal. Depending on the audience and the era, he has disguised himself as an astronaut, an old lady, a breakdancer, and a karaoke singer, among other things. Yet, though these disguises pertain to a more contemporary audience, the same underlying actions are there. He changes his shape, and alters his outward appearance in order to fool those around him, just as traditional characters are known to do. (Green, 2007: 59) Unfortunately for him, the Trix Rabbit's plots are always foiled by the kids, who discover that he is a rabbit at the last minute, and proudly declare "Silly Rabbit, Trix are for kids!" in case he is still unsure.

Marketed at children with their bright colors and humorous plot lines, these commercials use our inherent need for a trickster character to appeal to the masses. The trickster is someone we can relate to, and someone we have come to recognize and know well as humans. Though the much flashier aesthetics of these commercials are a great contrast to the traditional stories of cross-cultural groups, they still retain the same elements that made them successful then, and allow them to appeal to us now.

Commercials are not the only method that television uses to reinforce the tradition of the trickster character in contemporary society. Television shows are riddled with them, though they are not always outwardly recognized. Though many of them take the form of cartoon characters, and often animals (such as Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny of Looney Toons fame), there are other times when they are played by real people in television series or in movies. Though cartoon characters more are often thought of as relating to or entertaining young children, actors and actresses are hardly ever outwardly thought of as "trickster characters" until a close analysis is conducted.

One would hardly think to look for tricksters in a popular television series. We learn to love these characters, and most people assume that tricksters are hard to embrace due to their greatly flawed personalities. Who would ever think that one of TV's most popular series ever contained a character that is quite possibly one of the best representations of a modern day trickster? If we examine the hit show *Seinfeld*,

we can easily look and relate the trickster character to none other than George Costanza.

Played by Jason Alexander, George is notorious for his bumbling mishaps and outlandish ideas. He whines to his friends, he lies to get out of situations he does not want to deal with, and he cheats to get ahead of others. He is lazy, looking for an easy way out of situations, is narcissistic, and is continually lusting after women, yet hardly ever succeeds with them. As a character, we wonder why he is so popular if he is riddled with so many character flaws. Just what is it that makes us love George Costanza? (Morris, 1999: 47)

The overlaps in characteristics between both George and the traditional trickster character are numerous. We can often look and view him as a cultural hero of sorts, as many find themselves relating to him. Yet, in a way, his heroism is more along the lines of the notion of the trickster as a selfish-buffoon and a culture-hero by Michael P. Carroll. He is never malicious in his actions, but often finds himself caught making poor decisions and trying to cheat his way out of unsavory situations. He does, however, always straighten out the situations, allowing for joking about the subject to be made by his friends at him. (Morris, 1999: 50-51) It is because of these character traits that make him comparable to more modern tricksters like Br'er Rabbit, as well as traditional tricksters like Coyote. And, because we enjoy watching the mishaps of George Costanza, and feel as though we can relate to many of his episodes, does this not mean that we relate ourselves to the trickster characters that he reminds us of as well?

Another television character whom is undoubtedly viewed as a trickster is aimed more at a younger generation. Zack Morris, as played by Mark-Paul Gosselaar in the hit teenage television series *Saved By The Bell*, is, without a doubt, incredibly close in representation to the traditional trickster character. Though some may feel that this is all accidental or by chance, it is clear that there must have been some underlying thought towards this idea when his character was created.

Zack, a member of Bayside High School in the fictional town of Palisades, California, is the lead character of the television series, and often gives insight to his personal life as he essentially narrates each episode from his point of view. Creating a character for a young adult television sitcom where he is molded after the trickster character is not something that strikes me as common. However, Zach Morris embodies multiple elements of the trickster, ranging from his representation as scholastic hero to teenage hooligan.

His character is well known for his scheming personality. He will make a bet on anything, from athletics at Bayside High to if he can get a girl to accept going on a date with him. Generally, as these bets normally are not in his favor, he often will come up with an elaborate plan to deceive others and sway the odds in his favor. Though he thinks ahead about these situations, he only really focuses on the positive outcomes. However, this usually does not help, as more often than not, he is foiled by a backfiring of his plans, and needs to back-peddle to prevent himself from getting into more trouble than before. This constant tango with troublesome situations is almost identical to the relationship that traditional trickster characters have with the

situations they get themselves into. By continually attempting to cheat systems and cut corners, they undoubtedly run into problems that are often greater than the ones that they attempted to finagle themselves out of in the first place.

Zach Morris prides himself on his nonchalant attitude towards his schoolwork. He is certainly not known among his friends as the extreme academic, or the hard worker. However, in the final episodes of the original series, the viewer learns that he is actually an incredibly smart individual, scoring in the 1500s on his SAT test (when the scoring was still out of a total of 1600 points). (Saved By The Bell, 1991: 3[17]) His academic prowess should not be unbelievable, as in order to pull off most of the schemes that he comes up with, some sort of intelligence must be had. Again, similar to the trickster character, Zach is cunning and intelligent, which allows him to not only get out of sticky situations, but also keeps him ahead of others and prevents him from getting caught.

Additionally, Zach is outfitted with many redeeming qualities, specifically relating to those of a "hero" personality type. Traditional trickster characters are often associated with being the "bringers of culture" and "culture heroes". They aid introducing the community in which they reside with many different cultural concepts and items, as well as help to retain certain aspects of their life. In *Saved By The Bell*, Zach, too, plays the part of a Bayside High School cultural hero. He works incredibly hard to re-start a school radio station that had previously closed due to lack of student interest. By re-starting this program, he "brought the culture of radio" back to Bayside. (Saved By The Bell, 1990a: 2[3]) Additionally, he has saved The Max (a

local hangout spot for the teens) by hosting a radiothon, (Saved By The Bell, 1990a: 2[3]) as well as spearheading a carnival in order to get money for a school ski trip. (Saved By The Bell, 1990b: 2[7]) All of these endeavors have involved his cunning, plotting ways, but what makes them different is how they are more to benefit the good of the student body, rather than to propel himself ahead of others into a position of superiority.

Interestingly, the aspect that confirms that Zach was specifically intended to act as a modern day trickster is his Native American background. In the second season of the show, an episode aired that was known as "Running Zack". (Saved By The Bell, 1990c: 2[13]) In this episode, Zack is a member of the track team, as well as doing everything else that he normally does with his friends: goofing off, playing tricks, and dating girls. The things that Zack is not focusing on are his studies, so his father hires a tutor for him in order to help get his grades up. Zach meets with this tutor and finds out that the man is a Native American. As Zach becomes closer to this man, he begins to learn more about his own heritage, and eventually learns that he, too, is part Native American.

This story plot and fact could not be a coincidence. Not only does Zach Morris embody all of the general character traits and motives of a traditional trickster character, but the writers of the show decided to ultimately give him a partial amount of Native American heritage, as though he himself is the modern day embodiment of the trickster. In this day and age, the trickster character subconsciously slips its way into the minds of individuals worldwide. Incredibly, as traditional trickster tales were

told to young children, almost as life lessons, the intent has stayed the same all the way to contemporary times. The children that these stories used to be told to ultimately took the roles of adults sooner than children of today, so it makes complete sense that these lessons from this show would be targeted to a slightly older audience. Zach Morris entertains both pre-teens and teenagers, while still expressing ideas of morality, right and wrong, and sneaky acts of heroism.

CONCLUSION

> "Considering the crude primitivity of the trickster cycle, it would not be surprising if one saw in this myth simply the reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness, which is what the trickster obviously seems to be." [6]
>
> -Jung, The Trickster

So where are we left today in terms of this character? Just how did he ultimately come to be? And why, most of all, do we still retain him in our contemporary society? By allowing him to continually appear in various aspects of our lives, there is no doubt that we still feel the need to hold onto him. The trickster's overall importance is rooted deep within the realm of the human subconscious. The most efficient way in exploring this international appearance is to first look at the work of they psychologist Carl Jung, and his notion of the trickster character as one of the four universal archetypes of the human subconscious.

According to Jung, all mythical figures are created in direct correspondence to inner psychic experiences of the individual. He reasoned that it is because of this process that the "trickster phenomenon" is not as much a phenomenon as it comes across as; rather, it is logical that our inner experiences would lead to the creation of such an individual that allows us to reflect on inner experiences and thoughts. (Jung, 1970: 136)

Following traditional trickster characteristics, it is understood that he straddles the natures of divinity, animal, and human. Jung understood this liminal characteristic. He explained that in being a *divine-animal* in nature, the trickster is, on

[6] Radin, 1972: 201

one hand, superior to mankind, as he also is capable of superhuman abilities. However, the trickster is also subject to clumsiness, an inability to see problems all the way through, and being tricked at his own games, among other flaws. Amongst these vices, we still see the mark of humanity. The inclusion of such qualities show how the Trickster acts almost as a therapeutic way of analyzing our own flaws, and allowing them to be discussed and viewed openly by the rest of society. (Jung, 1970: 144) When Jung addressed reasons for the retention and preservation of the trickster myth, he stated that,

> like many other myths, it was supposed have a therapeutic effect. It holds the earlier low intellectual and moral level before the eyes of the more highly developed individual, so that he shall not forget how things looked yesterday. (Jung, 1970: 148)

When viewed in this light, we see that the trickster acts as a time capsule. We utilize him as a way to preserve ideas and concepts that may otherwise escape our memory. Through this attempt to retain these concepts, we allow ourselves to stay in tune with how we once were, in addition to use this knowledge to continue to grow as cultural societies. Jung then went on to say

> The figure works because secretly it participates in the observer's psyche and appears as its reflection, though it is not recognized as such. It is split off from his consciousness and consequently behaves like an autonomous personality. The trickster is a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. (Jung, 1970: 150)

The need to take a psychological stance in understanding our need for such a character is obvious when made clear through the works of Jung. The trickster as a translation of our human subconscious allows us to find ourselves and understand who we as

humans, and where we have come from culturally. It also confirms the concept that as a subconscious thought, which we still have today, the trickster is without a doubt still playing a major role in contemporary society.

Like Jung, Radin's view of the trickster is that they are a symbol for a uniform psychic state that was experienced by all growing cultural groups during their early stages of formation. He stated

> The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one. It contains within itself the promise of differentiation, the promise of god and man. For this reason every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew. No generation understands him fully
> but no generation can do without him. Each had to include him in all its theologies, in all its cosmogonies, despite the fact that it realized that he did not fit properly into any of them, for *he represents not only the undifferentiates and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual.* This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction. (Radin,1972:168-169)

Radin agreed with the idea that this notion of a uniform past was experienced by all "primitive" individuals, and is seen repeated across cultures. It is through this uniformity that the need for a trickster character becomes a cross-cultural universal. Though underlying cultural differences are apparent from one group of people to another, the most basic human needs are seen as universals. Because of the notion of universals, it is understandable why the pattern of the trickster character can see itself being repeated over and over again through the ages. We as humans all share this need, making it understandable for such a "cross-cultural phenomenon" to occur.

As I have discovered, the most relevant and easily acceptable notion for the purpose of the trickster was concluded by Evans-Pritchard during his time among the

Azande. He questioned just what it is that is so attractive in Ture tails that ensures their generational flow. Evans-Pritchard said "Ture acts in a manner that would evoke horror and the strongest condemnation in any self-respecting Zande." (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 29) It would make very little sense to most people as to why stories of such an atrocious being would be perpetuated for future generations to hear. Yet, Evans-Pritchard made a very important claim; are these stories not just outlets for us as humans to express and point out elements of our "darker desires" (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 29), acting as mirrors into our subconscious? Similarly to Jung, Evans-Pritchard felt that the Azande utilized many of the negative things that Ture was capable of getting away with as a way to cope with taboo elements in their own society that they normally would not be able to act upon. Not only are these stories vehicles to deliver cultural boundaries and order to society, but they are a way for individuals to feel satisfied in "living out" actions and thoughts that are normally considered unacceptable by the rest of their kith and kin. In a summarizing thought, Evans-Pritchard stated

> It is as if we were looking into a distorting mirror, except that they are not distortions. We really are like that. What we see is the obverse of the appearance we like to present. The animals act and talk like persons because people are animals behind the masks social convention makes them wear. What Ture does is the opposite of all that is moral; and it is all of us who are Ture. He is really ourselves. (Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 30)

Though all trickster tales are fantasy, their underlying roots lie in the human subconscious. Our relationship with the trickster is completely symbiotic in nature; while he needs us in order to survive, relying on encompassing our deeper, darker

thoughts, we too rely on him to help make sense of the societies in which we live. If there was no true importance with the trickster, than why is he seen appearing in some form or another worldwide? And, additionally, why do we continue to perpetuate his existence into our lives today? The answer is simply that we are creatures of habit, and are all hard-wired in the same way, no matter how our culture varies from one group to another. As humans, we have the need to make sense of the world around us, and therefore, saw it essential to construct such an individual to aid in this process. Through the process of creating societal taboos cross-culturally, we also felt as though an outlet was needed to expel such desires from our deep subconscious. By removing these desired from ourselves and re-distributing them to the trickster, we are able to go on with our lives, attempting to live it the best that we can in accordance to societal boundaries. It is through the employment of the trickster character that we allow ourselves to explore these forbidden thoughts and urges, while still teaching moral righteousness.

We may think to ourselves "Where do we go from here?" Do we really still need such a character in our lives? The answer is clear: whether or not we feel that we need him in our lives, he will ultimately be there whether we like it or not. Staying true to his shape-shifting abilities, the trickster morphs and changes in accordance to our growth as societies, allowing himself to continually appeal to us in one way or another, as though he himself is aware of our need for him.

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