



## MAPPING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MYTHIC TRICKSTERS: A HEURISTIC GUIDE

*William J. Hynes*

At the start of these essays detailing the complexities of the trickster, the reader may find it helpful to ask the central question: What characterizes a trickster figure as such? Using a diverse selection of trickster myths, this chapter advances six characteristics common to many trickster myths. More characteristics could be chosen, but these six serve as a modest map, heuristic guide, and common language for the more complex individual studies of particular tricksters within specific belief systems that follow. Thus, these initial six characteristics invite and anticipate not only the intricacies of the careers of particular tricksters, but emendations from the reader as well as outmaneuverings by that multicultural and multiform figure, the trickster.

The sheer richness of trickster phenomena can easily lead one to conclude that the trickster is indefinable. In fact, to define (de-finis) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture; they are notorious border breakers. By the same token, scholars who focus primarily upon the distinctiveness of specific tricksters within particular belief systems may underline the impossibility of any definitive cross-context, common content to the term "trickster."

However, if we steer a course between full delimitation on the one hand and no common content on the other, a number of shared charac-

teristics appear to cluster together in a pattern that can serve as an index to the presence of the trickster. At least six similarities or shared characteristics can be identified to craft an initial guide or typology. The reader should not be deceived into confusing such an initial guide with a unified definition or theory.

At the heart of this cluster of manifest trickster traits is (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Flowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation-inventor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur. Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. Still, more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities. Several scholars, including Laura Makarius, have suggested that one could use such shared characteristics as a matrix by which to survey all known examples of tricksters and to judge their degree of "tricksterness." This might be a very useful way of testing the degree of commonality of such characteristics, but one should be cautious about the imposition of communality from without.

1. *Ambiguous and Anomalous.* Because the trickster appears as fundamentally ambiguous, anomalous, and polyvalent, this figure might well be the living embodiment of Nicholas of Cusa's fifteenth-century philosophical principle of the "coincidence of opposites." In striking parallel, our contemporary Claude Lévi-Strauss views the trickster as the epitome of binary oppositions, a necessary anomaly incorporating every set of extremes (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 224–26). His cosmic interplay engages unceasing sets of counterpoised sectors, such as sacred and profane, life and death, culture and nature, order and chaos, fertility and impotence, and so on. Still, none of these arenas fully captures or defines the trickster: he is not fully delimited by one side or the other of a binary distinction, nor by both sides at once, nor by a series of oppositions. Anomalous, a-nomos, without normativity, the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories. In several of the accounts referred to in this volume, the trickster is cast as an "out" person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order. No borders are sacrosanct, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical. Breaking down division lines, the trickster characteristically moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all borders with virtual impunity. Visitor everywhere, especially to those places that are

off limits, the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal. With regard to the more general phenomenon, we are fortunate to have Colin Wilson's seminal study of the alienation associated with being a creative outsider to society, *The Outsider* (1956).

Robert Pelton has observed that the trickster "pulverizes the univocal" and symbolizes the multivalence of life (Pelton 1980: 224). Embodying this multivocality, the trickster himself eludes univocality by escaping from any restrictive definition: the trickster is always more than can be glimpsed at any one place or in any one embodiment. If one states that he is ambiguous, he will "insist" that this assertion is far too simple, that he is more polyvalent than merely ambiguous. If one then asserts that the trickster is polyvalent, he will "reply" that this is still too simple—and so on and so on. The trickster disorders and disassembles. One might say that his presence is felt in the writing of this book; "the trickster" is constantly disassembling and deconstructing it. Such polynomos perversity could easily earn the trickster the title of masked disassembler of the cosmic order!

2. *Deceiver and Trick-Player.* As his name explicitly states, the trickster is a consummate and continuous trick-player and deceiver. In many cultures and religions, the trickster acts as the *prima causa* of disruptions and disorders, misfortunes and improprieties. All semblances of truth and falsity are subject to his rapid alchemy. His lying, cheating, tricking, and deceiving may derive from the trickster being simply an unconscious numbskull, or, at other times, from being a malicious spoiler. Once initiated, a trick can exhibit an internal motion all its own. Thus, a trick can gather such momentum as to exceed any control exercised by its originator and may even turn back upon the head of the trickster, so the trick-player is also trickster-tricked.

In a number of North American Indian tales, the trickster entices a group of ducks into dancing with their eyes closed, whereupon he wrings their necks, one by one, anticipating quite a nice meal. Almost always, however, the trickster is in turn tricked out of enjoying his newly acquired food. In a Menomini version of this tale, the trickster places the roasted ducks in a sandbar so that he may take a nap to rest from his activities. Once he is asleep, other animals eat the ducks, saving the heads and tails, which they carefully stick back in the sandbar to fool the trickster (Thompson 1929: 54–56).

The African Akan gum-baby and the derivative African-American Br'er Rabbit tar-baby are additional examples where those who are normally the butt of the trickster's trickery turn the trick back upon him. Trickery can sometimes overreach itself, causing the trickster's own downfall, as can be seen in the tale of Horang-i, the Korean tiger trickster who inhabits the liminal area between town and forest. On one occasion, he chases two children who flee, climbing a tree to hide. When the tiger pursues them up the tree, they begin to pray to the God of Heaven:

"Oh God, please save us. If you are willing, please send us the Heavenly Iron Chain. But if you mean us to die, send down the Rotten Straw Rope!" At once a strong Iron Chain came gently down from Heaven to them, so that they could climb up without difficulty.

When the tiger reached the top of the tree the children were gone. It wanted to follow them, so it too began to pray, but in opposite terms, because it was very afraid that it might be punished for its misdeeds. "Oh God of Heaven, if you would save me, send down the Rotten Straw Rope, I beg of you. But if you mean me to die, please send down the Heavenly Iron Chain." By praying in this way, it hoped that the Iron Chain would come down, and not the Straw Rope, for it expected that as punishment it would receive the opposite of what it had prayed for. But the gods are straightforward, and always willing to save lives by answering prayers directly, and so it was the Rotten Straw Rope that came down after all. The tiger seized the rope, and began to climb up it, for in the darkness it could not see that it was not the chain. When it got a little way up the rope broke, and so it fell down to the ground. (Zong 1970: 7-10)

3. *Shape-Shifter*. The trick-playing of the trickster clearly distinguishes itself from other forms of trickery by its frequent association with shape-shifting and situation-inversion. As shape-shifter, the trickster can alter his shape or bodily appearance in order to facilitate deception. Not even the boundaries of species or sexuality are safe, for they can be readily dissolved by the trickster's disguises and transmorphisms. Relatively minor shape-shifting through disguise may involve nothing more than changing clothes with another. Thus the Tibetan trickster Agu Tompa (Uncle Tompa) puts on the robes of a nun so he may invade a cloister and make love with all the nuns; he is discovered only when there is an

outbreak of pregnancies (Dorje 1975: 17-23). Relatively major shape-shifting may involve the alteration of the physical form of the trickster's body. As William Doty notes in an upcoming chapter, the main *Hymn to Hermes* depicts the infant Hermes as a thief; having stolen Apollon's cattle, Hermes returns home by transforming himself into a mist and sliding through the keyhole so that he can swear that he never "stepped over" the threshold. The Navajo Coyote trickster shifts his form, becoming a dish in order to obtain food, or becoming a tree in which to capture birds. The anthropoidal Winnebago trickster not only shifts among numerous animal shapes, but also shifts from human male to female in order to trick a chief's son into marriage. The trickster is the master of metamorphosis.

4. *Situation-Invertor*. As situation-invertor, 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 breached or inverted. What prevails is toppled, what is bottom becomes top, what is outside turns inside, what is inside turns outside, and on and on in an unending concatenation of contingency.

The trickster often turns a place of safety into a place of danger and back again. He can turn a bad situation into a good one, and then back into a bad one. Bad becomes good, good becomes worse, worse becomes better, and so on. Tranquility can become disaster and vice versa. In one Yoruba tale, the West African trickster sets fire to a farmer's house, helps the family get all their possessions out safely, and then gives these goods away to passersby on the road (Mezan 1972: 94). Agu Tompa, finding a farmer despairing because his cursed field did not produce its normal crop but rather a thousand penises, turns the situation into a highly profitable one by arranging to sell the penises to Tibetan nunneries (Dorje 1975: 9-16). He has noted carefully that although it is forbidden that a nun may sleep with a man, nowhere is it written that she may not sleep with a penis!

As will be seen in this volume, the trickster is often the official ritual profaner of beliefs. Profaning or inverting social beliefs brings into sharp relief just how much a society values these beliefs. These profanations seem to exhibit a clear pattern of proportionality: the more sacred a belief, the more likely is the trickster to be found profaning it. For example, given the central importance associated with communal action and shared

values within the life of the Plains Indians, it is not entirely unexpected that the trickster tales of these groups often center upon the most outrageous antisocial acts imaginable. The trickster profanes and inverts the preparations for war, gives false alarms, causes disruptions and chaos within village life, and even causes the blind to attack each other.

This inverted profaning associated with the trickster is also evident within the numerous examples of Saturnalia in western European history, including the Feast of Fools, the Abbeys of Misrule, Charivaris,<sup>1</sup> and the Mass of the Ass.<sup>2</sup> In 1444, the Theological Faculty at Paris complained that "In the very midst of divine service masqueraders with grotesque faces, disguised as women, lions and mummers, performed their dances, sang indecent songs in the choir, ate their greasy food from a corner of the altar near the priest celebrating mass, got out their games of dice, burned a stinking incense made of old shoe leather, and ran and hopped about all over the church" (Du Cange 1733-36: 1666).

During the Renaissance the trickster was often incorporated into such literary works as Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *As You Like It*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. Elements of tricksterish activity can also be seen in the *Picaro* of Spanish literature, beginning with *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), and also in the *Luftmensch* of German literature.

There are nonliterary parallels in the cognate phenomenon of the court jester. Here the King of Order is balanced by the presence of the King of Disorder. In Hasidic Judaism, where the rabbi can have the status of a minor potentate, there is a very interesting example of a religious court jester: Herschel Osterpolder. Herschel constantly mocks the rabbi, the intricacies of Talmudic learning, and even Jewish motherhood! These tales often turn on the fine meanings of a word or Talmudic glosses. Many of the tales have still not been transcribed. Here is a favorite tale handed down within her family to Joanne Greenberg, the author, best known for *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*:

[A lot of Herschel's tricking is done against his wife. She saves and he doesn't. He often gets money out of her by different ruses. He once got a burial association to pay for her funeral when she wasn't dead.]

Herschel went up to the attic of his tiny home. His wife heard all kinds of pots banging and clattering, and screaming, thumping and falling. He came down looking ghastly pale. He said, "Do you know

who is up there?" She said, "No, who?" He said, "Destitution." "Destitution, oh my God! What does he want," she asked. "What does he want? He wants my life; he was going to kill me!" "Well," she asked, "maybe there is some way to fend him off." "Oh, yes! He wants a coat." "A coat?" "Yes, he said that he would beat me to death if I didn't get him a coat!" "That's terrible!" "Yes, he threatened me, threw me down, and now he has to have a coat." She asked, "Well, what should we do?" "We have to give him a coat or he will kill me." So, she rifled her little money out of a little sugar bowl and gave him the money, saying, "What's his measure?" Herschel said, "Well he's about my measure. That's why he chose me, because I was about his measure. And when he saw that I didn't have a coat, he really got mad that I didn't have anything to give him." So Herschel took the money, went out, and got measured for a fine coat.

Several days later, he came back with the coat; he went up into the attic, and there was more moaning and groaning, frightful screams, and everything else. He came down again. She said, "Well what happened?" He said, "The whole thing is off; it's a failure." She said, "How come?" "Well, the coat doesn't fit him." She said, "I thought that you said that he was your exact measure, that's why he chose you." "That's true," he replied, "but now that I have this coat, Destitution has grown so much smaller!" (Greenberg 1982: 5-6)

Mac Linscott Ricketts has noted how the sacred beliefs and person of the shaman in North American Indian cultures are subject to the counterbalancing of the profanations of the trickster (Ricketts 1966: 336). The latter closely mimics the songs and healing ceremonies of the shaman. However, when shamanistic curing acts are performed by the trickster, the patient is made much worse or even dies. By the same token, when the trickster attempts to fly to the world of the spirits in imitation of the shaman, he crashes to earth or forgets how to get back. Elsewhere in this volume, Robert Ellwood suggests a number of similar parallels within Japanese mythology: the trickster, Susa-no-o, for example, is a counterfigure to the shamanistic character of his sister, Amaterasu. In such examples, the trickster seems predisposed to stand as a ritual parody or satire of sacred values within a given belief system.

5. *Messenger and Imitator of the Gods*. Often of uncertain or impure birth, the trickster can be both a messenger and an imitator of the gods. Admixing both divine and human traits, he can slip back and forth

across the border between the sacred and the profane with ease. He may bring something across this line from the gods to humans—be it a message, punishment, an essential cultural power, or even life itself. Thus, Eshu/Elegba, a trickster with minor divinity status among the Yoruba, is sent by the senior gods to cause trouble for those who have offended them (Bascom 1969: 79).

The trickster is often a psychopomp, a mediator who crosses and resets the lines between life and death; associated imagery may include skulls that get stuck on the inquisitive trickster's head, or skeletons that come alive and give chase. Most often associated with conducting individuals to restored life, he can also be the messenger of death. The Shoshone credit Coyote with bringing death itself into the world; other groups consider death the result of the trickster's fumbling accidents.

The trickster quite regularly brings gifts essential to human culture, usually by breaking a central taboo established in the divine order. Thus he may bring fire to humans by stealing it from the gods, as in the case of the Polynesian Maui. Laura Makarius argues in this volume that the trickster is the unique mythic vehicle through which human culture may acquire sacred powers while avoiding the direct involvement in the necessary breaking of the taboo surrounding the possession of these powers. Because it is the trickster who breaks the taboo, while conveying the benefits of this act to humans, the appropriate consequent punishment is deflected from humankind. Thus, the cosmic boundaries are preserved while a crucial power slips across to human use. As Alan Aycock has argued: "the 'trick' played is to transcend ordinary reality by violating it in such a way (through obscenity and violence) that society is simultaneously disrupted and renewed—an act of creation with death as its inescapable attendant" (Aycock 1983: 124). Furthermore, within this process, the trickster often seems to operate within a perpetual bubble of immunity that protects him from the full weight of retribution.

In short, the trickster's position midway between the gods and humans allows him to function as a cultural transformer. However, even this function is subject to parody. When Hermes steals or discovers fire, he is totally unconcerned to share it with humans. The Winnebago trickster forgets what it is he has been sent to do for humankind. When Eshu/Elegba is sent to punish someone, he often punishes the wrong person or fails to punish anyone at all. Christopher Vecsey notes elsewhere in this volume that the Akan trickster, Ananse, attempts unsuc-

cessfully to keep all wisdom to himself in a small pot. He has the further dubious distinction of having introduced that most ambiguous of cultural gifts—debt.

The trickster's status among the gods is equally unstable. There are numerous examples of his attempting to imitate or to usurp the powers of the gods above him. As Hynes and Steele relate in another chapter, the Yaqui have a marvelous tale that not only provides an example of this usurpation but also shows a noteworthy instance in which the figure of Saint Peter has been expanded by popular imagination into a more full-blown trickster figure.

There are parallel examples of Saint Peter's elaborated role as trickster in earlier medieval European folklore. Italo Calvino's *Italian Folktales* (1980 [1956]) contains a good selection, slightly recast in modern idiom. "Put the Old Woman in the Furnace," one tale of Jesus and Peter traveling through Sicily, evidences the same usurpation-through-imitation theme found in the Yaqui. However, in this tale Peter's effort at imitation is notably unsuccessful. When a man approaches them and asks Jesus to make his aged father strong again, Jesus recognizes the burden of old age and suggests to the son that "if you slip your father into the furnace, he'll come back out as a child!" When the man follows these suggestions, his father emerges from the furnace as a young boy. Peter immediately sees the possibility of his turning "some old soul into a child." Thus, when Peter meets a man seeking to have the Lord to cure his dying mother, Peter gives him the same instructions: "The Lord isn't here yet, but Peter is, and he can help you. Know what you have to do? Fire up the furnace, slip your mother into it, and she will be cured." The poor man, knowing that Saint Peter was dear to the Lord, believed him. He slips his mother into a fiery furnace. However, this old woman is burned to a crisp. The man attacks Peter asking what kind of a saint he can be who burns up old women. When Peter tells the Lord, Jesus splits his sides laughing. However, in response to the son's pleas, Jesus blesses and rejuvenates the woman, sparing Peter "the punishment he deserved" (Calvino 1980 [1956]: 595–96). Calvino comments that "Popular tradition makes of Peter a lazy man, glutton, and liar, whose elementary logic is always contrary to the faith preached by the Lord, whose miracles and acts of mercy never fail to put Peter to shame. Peter, in this sort of common man's gospel, is the human opposite of the divine, and his relationship with Jesus is somewhat like Sancho Panza's

with the *hidalgo*" (the nobleman, i.e., Don Quixote; Calvino 1980 [1956]: 742/n. 41).

6. *Sacred and Lewd Bricoleur*. The sixth and, for our immediate purposes, the last characteristic of the trickster is his role as sacred and lewd bricoleur. The term "bricoleur" is here used in the sense offered by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966: 16–18). 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. Because the established definitions or usage categories previously attached to tools or materials are suspended/transcended for the bricoleur, these items can be put to whatever inventive purpose is necessary. Elsewhere in this volume, Robert Pelton speaks of the trickster as "sacred bricoleur." Using the inverse logic of the trickster, I would make the suggestion that the trickster can also be a "lewd bricoleur." The trickster manifests a distinctive transformative ability: he can find the lewd in the sacred and the sacred in the lewd, and new life from both. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests a parallel binary contrast here when it lists the original meaning of the word lewd as "lay, not in holy orders, not clerical." Thus, the fuller background against which the trickster transforms may be the contrast between sacred-clerical and lewd-lay.

Accordingly, the trickster traffics frequently with the transcendent while loosing lewd acts upon the world. Gastronomic, flatulent, sexual, phallic, and fecal feats erupt seriatim. Yet the bricoleur aspect of the trickster can cause any or all of such lewd acts or objects to be transformed into occasions of insight, vitality, and new inventive creations. The Chippewa trickster, Wenebojo, transforms his intestines into sweet food for his aunts and bloody scabs from his rectum into sweet tobacco for his uncles; of course, tobacco is understood as a "sacred link with the supernatural" (Barnouw 1977: 22–23, 29–30, 52–53).

The trickster seems impelled inwardly to violate all taboos, especially those which are sexual, gastronomic, or scatological. Most tricksters are forever hungry and in search of food. No prohibition is safe from the trickster, especially if it lies between the trickster and a prospective meal. But when such food is gained it is seldom actually consumed. Although the trickster is represented as being insatiably hungry, on those rare occasions when he does eat, little overt evidence of pleasure or enjoyment is indicated: the process of the search and not its fulfillment is the rule.

Sexual exploits abound in most trickster myths.<sup>3</sup> Some of the most infamous are to be found in the Winnebago traditions. Here the trickster's penis is extremely long, detached from his body, and often carried coiled in a box in his pack. Such detachment allows the penis great mobility and autonomy. The trickster sends it swimming across a lake to lodge in the chief's daughter. On one occasion he attempts to use it as a weapon against a pesky chipmunk, with highly polyvalent results. In order to find and kill the chipmunk, who has retreated into a hollow tree, he probes the tree with his extraordinary penis. Forced to unwind more and more of its length, he probes deeper and deeper with no results. Finally, in frustration, he retrieves his penis but finds that it has been gnawed down in size by the chipmunk: "My, what a great injury he has done to me! You contemptible thing, I will repay you for this!"

Kicking the log to pieces, the trickster finds the chipmunk and flattens him, and discovers the gnawed remnants of his penis. "Oh, my, of what a wonderful organ he has deprived me!" What is left is closer to normal size so that when the trickster leaves the scene he no longer needs the box in which to carry his penis. The episode concludes: "And this is the reason our penis has its present shape. It is because of these happenings that the penis is short. Had the chipmunk not gnawed off Trickster's penis, our penis would have the appearance that the Trickster's had first had. It was so large that he had to carry it on his back. Now it would not have been good had our penis remained like that, and the chipmunk was created for the precise purpose of performing this particular act. Thus it is said" (Radin 1955: 38–40). With respect to the trickster's role as transforming bricoleur, it should be noted that this tale continues with a discussion of the various plants and foods that were subsequently grown from the discarded pieces of his penis.

In both ritual actions and artistic depictions, the trickster sometimes carries a phallus or phallic club. Within Western culture, the public ritual use of such overt sexual objects was largely suppressed by the time of the Enlightenment. John Townsen and William Willeford have noted the devolution of the phallus in clowning and tricksters. Thus the phallus is still discernible in the jester's bauble, with its miniature human head or heads at one end and animal bladder at the other (Willeford 1969: 11ff.). The only vestigial evidence remaining in contemporary clowning may be the large flat, bladder-like gloves of circus clowns (Townsen 1976: 22).

Last and certainly not least, the trickster is closely associated with the most profane of lewd profanations, excrement. Winnebago tradition includes the tale of the trickster being nearly blown to bits by an excess of stomach gas and finally being pushed rapidly toward the sky on an ever-increasing pile of his own feces. The cosmic counterbalancing that can be associated with this most profane profanation is clearly evident in the Tibetan story entitled, in its English translation, "Uncle Tompa Drops Shit on the Ruler's Lap." The story also illustrates the trickster's abilities as bricoleur, transforming shit into sacred object by the use of writing:

Once there were many rulers in different regions of Tibet. Uncle happened to be a good friend of one of these rulers, and so he got a job as his secretary. The ruler himself was not able to write or read, but he was highly devoted in [*sic*] the religion of Buddhism.

At first, Uncle made the ruler very happy with his work, but one day he annoyed him greatly. The ruler tried to punish him. He took off all the clothes Uncle was wearing and put him on the palace roof during the coldest period of the year. Poor Uncle suffered from the cold all night long.

Early the next morning Uncle scraped off some of the white lime used to whitewash the palace wall. Soon he had enough to spread out on the floor. Then he shit on the white lime dust, picked up a stick and stabbed it into the shit. It soon froze because of the cold. He picked up the stick which now had the frozen shit on it, and a white bottom from the lime. He wrote some words on the bottom.

Uncle looked down into the skylight in the Ruler's private worship room and saw him sitting cross legged and meditating before a splendid altar of Buddha and all the gods. Uncle dropped the shit right on the ruler's lap through the skylight.

The ruler woke up from his meditation and was very surprised. When he looked at this object more carefully, he saw there was some writing on the bottom.

Since he could not read, he ordered his servants to bring Uncle down into his presence. Uncle, still shivering from the cold, was served a hot breakfast.

Soon after, the ruler ordered Uncle to read the "Miracle Shit." Uncle bowed down three times in respect and sat below the ruler's throne in a very humble posture. He picked up the shit and read the writing on the bottom very loudly:

"WOODEN HANDLED AND WHITE BOTTOMED,  
THAT IS THE SHIT FROM HEAVEN. HE IS THE  
LUCKIEST RULER WHEN IT DROPS ON HIS LAP!"

Uncle stood up in amazement and said, "Ah! You are very fortunate because this is shit from heaven and when it drops on someone like you, you're the luckiest person on the earth. You should eat a little bit of it to get its blessings."

The ruler touched it to his forehead, ate a piece of it, and put the rest on his altar. Uncle Tompa saluted and was dismissed. (Dorje 1975: 41-43)

What a powerful epistemological and metaphysical tool literacy can be in the hands of a bricoleur!

Beyond these six characteristics or similarities shared by trickster figures, there are others that could easily be elucidated. Nonetheless, these six are the most common to the trickster figure and probably are most central to his identity. While many specific trickster figures appear to have most of these characteristics, a particular figure may occasionally have only one or two. It is hoped that as the reader enters the following chapters, this cluster of characteristics may prove a helpful map, heuristic guide, and common template through which to become better aware of the complexities of specific trickster figures within particular belief systems.

In the final chapter, following the intervening chapters on particular trickster figures, a range of interpretative frameworks will be offered by which the complex and often puzzling meaning of the trickster can be more fully assessed.