

**The Trickster:
A Coalition Between the Heavens and the Hells**

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Dedication

To my loved ones, for your unwavering support and encouragement; to my professors and colleagues, whose passion for mythology and dedication to research have been a constant source of inspiration. This work is a testament to your guidance, wisdom, and the love for knowledge we share.

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Abstract

This research explores the concept of the Trickster figure across many different cultures and time periods, focusing on their roles, purposes, and the challenges in defining them in a universal sense. Examining fundamental Tricksters such as Sun Wukong (The Monkey King), from *Journey to the West*, Satan and Archangel Gabriel from Judeo-Christian traditions, Prometheus from Greek mythology, and many others; this research delves into the boundary-crossing nature of the Trickster and how that has evolved throughout time. Using a comparative mythology approach, this study analyzes primary texts, such as: *The Holy Bible*, *Journey to the West*, *The Theogony*, among others; to uncover the multifaceted and complicated nature of the Trickster. The findings showcase that, while the Trickster is an immutable, and transcendental figure that crosses both cultural and temporal boundaries, attempting to define the archetype of the Trickster in one, universal way is extremely complex. This research contributed to a deeper understanding of the Trickster, its endurance, and its relevance in shaping cultural narratives and identities.

About the Author

Abel R. Acevedo Chalusant was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico on January 6, 2000. His passion for literature, with a focus on mythological texts, stemmed greatly from both his father, and from reading Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* book series at a very young age. Pursuing this passion led him to obtain a Bachelor's Degree of Arts on English – Literature, in December 2021. Immediately after, he continued with higher education as his desire to explore and research mythological figures and texts only grew stronger. This extreme interest has made him ecstatic to contribute, not only in the field of education, but also as a fictional writer as he has begun composing his own stories. The passion that Abel exudes with regards to mythological literature has made this present study possible, as it served to inspire him to be a part of something he loves.

The Trickster: A Coalition Between the Heavens and the Hells

Throughout history, cultures have had their own belief systems, their own ways of being, and their own types of rules and regulations. These belief systems, which are connected to religions and mythologies, are characterized by their different characters and stories, and the respective roles that they entail. From primordial beings to king-gods, to figures of death, these belief systems have entities that fulfill a specific duty. However, there are those that do not necessarily follow all the established rules, and while they can be labeled, their natures are wild and free. This, of course, refers to the figure of the Trickster.

The Trickster is one that presents itself as an immutable force of nature, one that despite its paradoxical nature and its presence in cultures that comprise almost the entire world and its different time frames, does not really change. The role of the Trickster is to cause mischief, bring chaos, and cross every type of boundary imaginable. While the context surrounding the different Trickster figures changes from culture to culture and throughout time, at its core the Trickster remains the same. Whether it be Loki, Archangel Gabriel, Anansi, Coyote, The Monkey King, Satan, Maui, Prometheus, Bugs Bunny, and many others, the actions of the Trickster have a sense of universality that travels beyond the scope of that of other deities. This study will compare ancient trickster figures found in literature, myths, art, and folklore, with recent manifestations of the archetype found in tv series, video games, comics, and many other popular culture outlets, to argue for their continued relevance in helping to expose and negotiate cultural boundaries and, in doing so, to assist in the continual reshaping of cultures and societies.

The Trickster: The Troublemakers of Societal Structures

According to Lewis Hyde in his book *Trickster Makes This World - Mischief, Myth and Art*, Trickster figures can be defined as beings who cross boundaries. To define a Trickster in this way, one must first understand what types of boundaries they are crossing and what those entail. Hyde himself mentions this best: “We constantly distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case, Trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the crossdresser, the speaker of sacred profanities” (Hyde 7). The Trickster becomes one with change, an ever-malleable figure who shifts and fits anywhere and everywhere. They make it so that the metaphorical line between opposites becomes blurred.

However, boundaries are not always present, so what happens then? Hyde argues that the absence of boundaries does not matter to Trickster figures, as they will just end up creating them. “In a case like that, boundary creation and boundary crossing are related to one another, and the best way to describe Trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found – sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing, or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms” (Hyde 7). This puts the Trickster in a sort of paradoxical role, as they become the very boundaries that they cross.

All of this being said, the Trickster is not only a boundary crosser. Tricksters are beings that do not necessarily abide by the established order/rules of their respective societies. This has caused them to be used as cautionary tales or even as kinds of folk heroes. This viewpoint of what Tricksters represent, brings forth a relevant argument with regards to what differentiates Tricksters from other beings, gods, or creatures that also engage in trickery. For example, some

higher deities, such as the Greek's Zeus or the Nordic Odin, do engage in acts of trickery through their deeds and their shape-shifting abilities. In that case, what is the difference between them and their mythologies' respective Tricksters? The difference is a case of hierarchy, as the aforementioned deities perform a kind of "демиurge-like" role as the one who stands above the rest. That being the case, basing this explanation on the idea that Tricksters go against, or do not follow the established order/rules that were put in place by a being of higher authority; therefore, these "King-Gods" cannot be considered Tricksters themselves, as they embody the pinnacle of their respective hierarchies.

Having established the Trickster's paradoxical nature and multifaceted essence as: monstrous and divine, good and bad, sacred and profane; it would be prudent to more vividly consider how this archetype is shaped and manifested across various cultures, traditions and mythologies. The Trickster is a figure that embodies unique aspects and usually displays a deep cultural significance as either a type of folk-hero, a necessary evil, or a cautionary tale. For example, the Greek Trickster, Prometheus, is usually portrayed as the heroic figure that brought knowledge (in the form of fire) to humanity and tricked Zeus into allowing humans to partake of the good portions of meat while the gods received the scraps, and in some cases he is even shown to be the one who created humans in the first place. Taking this into consideration, the figure of Prometheus as a Trickster is apparent as he presents many aspects of what befits a Trickster. His story serves as a type of cautionary tale, indicating the consequences of going against authorities, but those very same acts are what set him apart as a cultural hero for the Greek traditions.

Despite his usual visage as a benevolent ally to mankind, Eliot Wirshbo argues the following in his "The Mekone Scene in the 'Theogony': Prometheus as Prankster.": "Before the

chain of events initiated by Prometheus' fateful act, the great distinction between men and gods had not yet come about. That is, until this moment in cosmic history, the only difference between the two groups was their disparate life spans" (Wirshbo 103). The "Mekone Scene" is identified as the moment that Prometheus presents the humans with the good portions of meat, Wirshbo argues that this act may not have necessarily been completely benevolent. The reasoning for this being that at this moment in time, there were no extreme distinctions between man and god, as these were unveiled through Prometheus' act of inequality. This interpretation of the tale showcases Prometheus as a deceitful, mischievous Trickster, not unlike other figures such as Loki, Satan, and Sun Wukong. This interpretation is reinforced by Ellen Kushner's comment found in the Preface to *The Coyote Road*, in which she states the following: "...one thing you have to remember is: Trickster is not your friend! Trickster's acts may benefit people, or damage them – Trickster doesn't really care, as long as the trick is a good one" (Datlow and Windling 3).

Despite these acts however, many Tricksters, including Prometheus, are still seen in a positive light and are celebrated by the people of their respective cultures regardless of the consequences that their actions wrought upon humanity. Whether it be Prometheus' act of separating man and god through the unequal distribution of food in the *Theogony's* "Mekone Scene", Satan's act of making humanity suffer by introducing knowledge and the ideas of what was right and wrong during *Genesis*, or even Maui accidentally causing humans to be mortal in his attempts to achieve the opposite, Tricksters are beings that not only cross boundaries, but create them, as Hyde argues.

Through their trickery, their wit, and their mischief they bring humanity many things. So then, why exactly are they so important? What do they end up representing? Besides what has already been previously mentioned, the role of the Trickster is also meant to ridicule, to express

shameful actions, in a completely shameless way. Lewis Hyde explains this best in his “Speechless Shame and Shameless Speech,” in which he writes the following: “You and I know when to speak and when to hold the tongue, but Old Man Coyote doesn’t. He has no tact. They’re all the same, these tricksters; they have no shame and so they have no silence” (Hyde 153). Tricksters therefore are mediums to express what should not be so readily expressed outwardly. They represent many of the worst aspects of society, in the best way possible, because to them, those things are not something to be ashamed of, or to be censored. In fact, that extreme censorship provided by many societal structures can end up hurting that society itself as it creates a limit, a barrier to the capabilities of people. As Hyde argues: “Better to let trickster steal the same covers now and then. Better to let Coyote have a ride in the Sun-god’s lodge. Better to let Monkey come on your Journey to the West” (Hyde 172). The sense of liberty and defiance comes naturally to Tricksters, as they become a cultural symbol of subversion.

It is for this same reason that the figure of the Trickster is such an undying, universal, and timeless one, because there will always be a human desire to challenge restrictions placed upon them, whether they be right or wrong. They become, in that type of scenario, symbols of resistance, of rebellion. Prometheus rebelled against Zeus by bringing fire to humanity, Sun Wukong rebelled against the heavens and the Jade Emperor’s army after being ridiculed, and Lucifer attempted rebellion against God. Tricksters are figures that cannot be contained, they move at their own pace in their own ways. Contemporary examples of this line of thinking can be observed through the Church of Satan/The Satanic Temple, whose beliefs are not theistic in nature, but instead serve as a type of role model, to not be constrained by society’s restrictions. Therefore, the Trickster serves not only as a comical or cautionary character, but also as one that

exhibits and challenges the extremes that are both present and absent in their respective traditions.

If Tricksters are presented as being against established societal order, does that necessarily pit them against other deities or the world itself? Could they be considered more monstrous than divine? To properly answer these questions, one must know what a monster is, and what a Trickster's role truly encapsulates. In Weinstock's introduction to his *Monster Theory Reader*, a definition that can be given is that a monster is that which unsettles, that which creates a sense of anxiety and challenges established cognitive categories. The monster is the thing that, from a particular perspective, shouldn't be, but is. Based on that definition, a monster would be something unnatural that does not fit in the mundane reality. Therefore, a Trickster could indeed be considered to be monstrous, however the same can be said about deities/gods. As Matthew Looper implies in his "The Maya 'Cosmic Monster' as a Political and Religious Symbol," whether something is categorized as monstrous and divine can very well be done through a religious scope. Explaining that, through a Christian lens, any deity from other cultures, despite being religious figures to those more familiar with it, would be "demonized," seen as monstrous. Yet that does not entirely counteract the conflicting duality of monstrous/divine. Timothy Beal goes over this in his "Introduction to Religion and Its Monsters," wherein he argues the following: "By playing God, does one inadvertently end up playing monster? More radically, does being God end up being monstrous? Who is more monstrous, the creature who must live through this vale of tears, or the creator who put them there?" (Beal 296). This theological dilemma calls into question not only what defines a monster, but also what defines a divine being. When it comes to Trickster figures, however, as was previously stated, they represent

paradoxical extremes. Therefore, defining a Trickster as divine or monstrous is not mutually exclusive, as they can very well be both at once.

The Divine Messenger and the Hellish Adversary: The Judeo-Christian

Tricksters

If we base our definition of monster on its Latin etymology of “monstrare”/ “monere,” which roughly translates to “to warn/ to portend,” then the figure of the Trickster would definitely be counted as a monster, making it so that those mythological figures who take the role of “messenger” could be counted as Tricksters. One of the most well-known messengers would be the figure of Hermes of the Greek mythology, who is widely known as the messenger of the gods. Hermes is acknowledged as one of the main Trickster figures of Greek culture, and while his role as the messenger is important, it is not the only thing that denotes him as such. As Doty mentions in his “A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster”: “As the patron of roads and travelers, Hermes guided transitions from one place to another. Because he was particularly active at the twilight margins between daylight and darkness, he was described as the ‘companion of dark night’...” (Doty 48). This figure is therefore seen as a boundary crosser, someone who is constantly in the middle of what is divine and what is mundane.

If serving as a messenger is a way that a mythological figure can become a Trickster, then that line of thought can take us to Abrahamic traditions, specifically the figure of Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel is seen as a messenger throughout these traditions. Whether it is interpreting the visions of Daniel the prophet in the Hebrew Bible, announcing the births of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ in Christian tradition, or being sent by God to various prophets within Islamic discourse; Gabriel has always been sent to pierce the veil and bridge the distance between God

and His creations. Not only that, but it is said that Gabriel also takes the form of a man, which implies that the form he presents to those in the mortal world is not his own. This demonstrates another core aspect of what defines a Trickster figure, the ability to shapeshift. It should be noted however, that despite his abundance of Trickster-like qualities, Archangel Gabriel is missing one pivotal role that other Tricksters seem to excel at, the ability and willingness to go against higher authorities. At every point that Gabriel is present, he is there on orders from God, at no point seen as someone who chooses to undermine or challenge that hierarchal system. Of course, the whole point of a Trickster figure is that they are presented as versatile, and trying to define the archetype through comparisons is an endeavor verging on insanity, yet it is still an important aspect to consider. Hermes himself, a very famous and well-defined Trickster, does not tend to go against the higher authority in his hierarchy, the contrary being true as he is often seen assisting Zeus through his thievery, and mischief. Therefore, despite the lack of any type of direct “insubordination,” this does not necessarily imply that Gabriel is not a Trickster.

If this approach is further expanded, then Gabriel would not completely count among the ranks of what a Trickster is, yet his Trickster-like role in the Abrahamic traditions should not be ignored. Popular culture includes an example of Archangel Gabriel being presented as a Trickster: in the widely popular television series *Supernatural*, created by Eric Kripke. In this series, the viewers are introduced to a character known as “The Trickster,” which presents himself as a very powerful entity capable of creating pocket universes with their own timelines and everything else that accompanies that. Eventually, his true identity as Gabriel is revealed, showcasing his skills as a deceitful individual. Not only that, but his character is shown as one that stands on the boundary of divine, profane, and mundane. He eventually sides with humanity

against a higher power, proving to be a type of folk-hero. While he is a character from popular culture, this version of Gabriel would in fact fit into what the archetype of a Trickster should be.

Gabriel's Trickster persona is seen many times throughout the series, whether it is through his many cunning and mischievous actions, or even introducing himself as the Norse Trickster Loki. However, his actions in season 5's episode 8 "Changing Channels" exemplifies many of the aspects found in the Trickster archetype. Following Hynes' guide of what makes a Trickster, the viewer is able to ascertain all of those key characteristics that define him as such. The protagonists are completely confused as to Gabriel's true intentions, his wit and deceitful actions are only made more prominent through his shape-shifting and reality bending capabilities, as he traps the Winchester brothers in a different reality in a television-like setting. His reveal as the Archangel Gabriel at the climax of the episode only serves to portray him as a Trickster figure even more as he is the messenger, a boundary-crosser. In that same vein, the character himself exclaims that he is on neither side when he says: "I have to watch my own brothers kill each other, thanks to you two! Heaven, Hell; I don't care who wins! I just want it to be over!" ("Changing Channels" 35:10). This, alongside the previously mentioned attributes, presents Gabriel as a being that is outside conventional normality, an ambiguous character that does not belong on either side, in other words, he becomes the very same boundary that he crosses.

While the Abrahamic Gabriel is missing some qualities that would make him out to be a Trickster, his portrayal in *Supernatural* is not entirely inaccurate, as it borrows some of the attributes that make him who he is, emphasizing his role as a Trickster. While some characteristics may have been exaggerated or slightly altered to fit into the overarching plot of the series, both iterations of this character offer an interesting and compelling understanding of

not only the nature of divine beings and their roles in their respective cultures and mythologies, but also the multifaceted identity of the Trickster figure. The same could be said for some of the other figures as well, since the archetype of the Trickster is a fluid one, malleable and changing. This is something that can be further appreciated even more through observing the main Trickster figure in Judeo-Christian mythology: Satan.

In her book *The Origin of Satan*, Elaine Pagels defines the figure of Satan in the following way: “In this book, then, I invite you to consider Satan as a reflection of how we perceive ourselves and those we call ‘others.’ Satan has, after all, made a kind of profession out of being the ‘other’; and so Satan defines negatively what we think of as human” (Pagels XVIII). Basing our understanding of Satan through this definition, we can learn of the etymology of the word (meaning “adversary/one who plots against others”), and the role it played throughout religious history. Yet, throughout religious texts Satan becomes much more than just “the enemy,” and more of an ambiguous Trickster. His capstone, and possibly most well-known act of trickery occurs during the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Here, in the form of a snake, suggesting that he also possesses the ability to shapeshift, he tempts Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. In doing so, he gives humanity knowledge as an act of rebellion, and emphasizes the boundary between divine and mundane, as Adam and Eve learn their place and role in the world that they live in. God does not take this defiance of his authority kindly and punishes all of those involved. He makes it so that men must work to eat and survive, women will feel pain during childbirth, and snakes will only be able to crawl through the ground as he banishes all involved from the sacred garden of Eden. This act already showcases various aspects that depict Satan as a Trickster. Not only was he conniving and persuasive, but he also

displayed his ability to shapeshift, to tempt, to oppose hierarchical status, and to receive punishment for his actions.

It is important to note that the action of convincing Adam and Eve to eat the fruit can also be interpreted in a very positive light. Similar to the actions of the Greek's Prometheus, or the Māori's Māui, Satan was the one who provided humanity with knowledge. Therefore, while his actions had severe consequences they did work in favor of humankind, in a manner of speaking, making him seem as an ally or as a heroic figure. Not only this, but the story of the Garden of Eden also serves as a cautionary tale, in which Tricksters often play a part, about the dangers of rebelling against authority. Therefore, this one example already describes the figure of Satan in an entirely different light, not strictly as the ultimate evil, but more along the lines of a chaotic, yet ambiguous Trickster.

In Matthew 4.1-11 of the New Testament, Satan is shown to tempt Jesus during his fasting through the wilderness. The wording of the first verse is quite fascinating, as it states: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." This line, while presenting Satan as a deceitful Trickster, does not necessarily paint him in a negative light. In fact, the very line says that Jesus's meeting with Satan there is the will of the Holy Spirit. This presents an interesting angle of reasoning, as it seems to imply a similar situation to the one that can be observed during *The Testament of Job*, in which God and Satan are basically working together to test the faith of Job. Satan's actions in both of these cases are not necessarily done in opposition to God, but rather he acts as a tool in God's overarching purpose for both Job and Jesus. In fact, as Rutherford briefly mentions, in Job 1.6-12 and Job 2.1-7, it is heavily implied that Satan seems to form part of God's celestial court, as someone who responds to Him and carries out his will. In that case, like Archangel Gabriel, Satan's status as a Trickster could very

well be challenged, and yet evidence points to the contrary. The reason for that being his previous actions in the temptation of Adam and Eve, his actions of rebellion as Lucifer, his role as the unsuccessful tempter of Jesus and Job, and his eventual role as “The Adversary” during the end times. Not only that, but he is always presented as someone who stands at the precipice, someone who constantly manipulates and crosses the boundaries of the world.

Satan’s role as a Trickster is further accentuated even further during *The Testament of Job*, as was previously stated, where he basically works alongside God to tempt and torment the titular Job, in an attempt to test his faith. Miranda Rutherford explains this further in her Capstone Essay “A Trickster in Disguise: Reading a New Type of Satan in 2 Corinthians,” stating the following: “The Testament does not depict a grand battle between good and evil, but merely a testing of Job’s patience. Satan may trick and try Job, even so far as to ruin his life, but the outcome is predetermined and does not in any way threaten the cosmic balance between good and evil” (Rutherford 19). Rutherford argues that Satan, as with Tricksters, is hard to define in only one specific way as all the many different, sometimes paradoxical, versions of him can very well exist at once. Following that argument and understanding that the figure of Satan can be both the ultimate evil, as well as a Trickster, emphasizes the paradoxical existence of Trickster figures.

If the figure of Satan is meant to be the same as the entity known as Lucifer, then his refusal to comply, his rebellion, and his attempt to overthrow God are clear indications of his nature as a Trickster, as he would be going against hierarchical status, and established order. Being seen as a type of “Harbinger of the Apocalypse,” or as the ultimate enemy to God, does not really diminish his role as a Trickster, as others have had similar roles to that. For example, in Norse mythology’s Ragnarök, their version of the end times, Loki, the Nordic Trickster figure,

takes a stand against Odin and the rest of the gods, heralding their coming demise. While not entirely the same, The Monkey King Sun Wukong, also goes to war against the gods in the heavens, and similar to Satan's fate after the Apocalypse, he is severely punished and sealed. As Rutherford states: "...Perceiving the trickster Satan in 2 Corinthians suggests new ways of looking at evil in the Pauline epistles and early Christianity more broadly: Paul may have perceived of Satan as partially an apocalyptic figure, but did not discount Satan's presence in his own life or God's own involvement in testing and tormenting humanity" (Rutherford 33). Therefore, as Rutherford argues, the figure of Satan does not necessarily need to be viewed solely as an apocalyptic being, but as a part of a much larger, multifaceted entity.

Satan's role as the Judeo-Christian Trickster is quite clear as he does represent many of the qualities that depict a Trickster. He is both an enemy and an ally in different stories, he is both an angel and a demon, he undermines hierarchical authorities, he tempts and lies, his actions have severe consequences on the world of mortals. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that he is the sole Trickster figure in Abrahamic tradition. Despite his lack of questioning and going against authority, Archangel Gabriel should still be considered a Trickster, as he has many similar qualities to the figure of Satan. They both cross the boundaries between mundane and divine, they both test the faith of humans, they are both implied to be shapeshifters, and more. Understanding and recognizing the multifaceted nature of the Trickster figure, presents a more diverse and complex analysis into the Trickster archetype.

The Quintessential Trickster: A Look into The Monkey King Through the Lens of Hyne's Trickster Characteristics Guide

Having learned and explored the Trickster archetype, and mentioning Trickster figures, we should turn our attention to one of the most iconic and beloved Tricksters in the literary world: The Monkey King, Sun Wukong. The Monkey King is arguably one of the most important and influential Trickster figures in Eastern cultures, and in more recent times, Western as well. Sun Wukong, also known as “Qí Tiān Dà Shèng” (The Great Sage Equal to the Heavens), is one of the protagonists of the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, in which he is presented as the quintessential Trickster who always yearns for more than he has. Born from an unnatural birth with extreme intellect and power, he very quickly took control of the mountainous region that surrounded him. Despite all that he already had, his immense greed and desire to have more caused him to be in situations beyond imagination. Through trickery, mischief, and stealing, he achieved immortality in eight different ways, made his way to the heavens, rebelled against them, and almost annihilated them completely had it not been for the intervention of the Buddha. Due to all his actions, he was eventually punished and sealed under the Five Elements Mountain after a wager with the highest authority, one that despite his best efforts, he was not able to undermine.

Through this brief introduction of his character, it is immediately obvious that he fits the Trickster archetype completely, as he showcases many characteristics associated with them. To explore and explicate this further, basing our understanding of Sun Wukong’s character in *Journey to the West* on Williams J. Hynes’ six important characteristics that Tricksters should have – which he writes about in the chapter of his book titled “Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide” – his role as a Trickster is completely clarified. The first characteristic that is given is that a Trickster must be ambiguous. Throughout his many escapades and adventures, The Monkey King is not shown to do things out of any obligation or

adhering to morality, more so doing the things that he wants to for the simple reason that that is his desire. It should be noted however, that The Monkey King does exhibit some degree of compassion for his subjects, as he constantly protects and saves them from many adversaries. However, at the same time the compassion that he seems to display in those scenarios could very well be a sign of greed and his desire to not lose what he considers to be his. The reader is never truly made aware of whether or not those feelings are legitimate, making him an ambiguous and unpredictable being.

The second characteristic would be their deceitful perception and actions. As a Trickster, a being who lives on the precipice of every boundary imaginable, Sun Wukong has no qualms about lying, bragging, and deceiving those around him. While it is something that is present throughout most of his appearances, this is most noticeable in the early stages of the novel, while in his quest to achieve immortality. In his attempts to convince a humble woodcutter to tell him the way where the Immortals live, Wukong tells him the following: "...I'd be grateful if you could show me where that Immortal lives, so that I can go and pay my respects" (Wu 17), when the reason he wants to meet them is actually more selfish in nature. This can be seen once again when he reaches the cave where the Immortals live, immediately saying that the master was expecting to see him, without knowing nor caring whether that was true or not. Through this, his deceitful nature is in full display, as lying and cheating comes natural to him, even recognizing that the humans there had been very honest and truthful.

The third characteristic that Hynes brings up is one mentioned above, the ability to shape-shift, to change form. The Monkey King uses this ability many times throughout his adventures, both before and after having met the monk Sanzang. Through his studies with the Immortal sage, he acquired the ability to transform his body in many ways, and even clone himself. This can be

seen almost immediately after parting ways with the sage, when he confronts the Demon King that attempted to conquer his lands: “Sun Wukong now had an immortal body, and there was no magic transformation of which he was not capable. Since he had followed the Way, he could change each of the eighty-four thousand hairs on his body into anything he wanted” (Wu 34). The ability to shapeshift is one of the most recognizable attributes that The Monkey King possesses, as he uses it in many ways, whether it be changing into another animal, an object or even just changing his own size so as to not be found easily.

The fourth characteristic that can be observed in Hyne’s chapter is that of inverting situations to their favor. Wukong was present in many battles against both demons and gods, and other than his big defeat at the hands of the Buddha, he was somehow able to come up on top despite the insurmountable odds. An example of this can be seen when his theft of the pills of immortality and leave of the heavens caused the Jade Emperor to send a celestial army against The Monkey King’s forces in an effort to subdue him, and yet they failed. “As the battle had gone on for a long time the Great Sage saw that night was drawing on, so he plucked out one of his hairs, munched it up, spat out the pieces and shouted, ‘Change!’ They changed into thousands of Great Sages, all with gold-banded cudgels, who forced Prince Nezha and the five Heavenly Kings to withdraw” (Wu 74). Despite his army being completely overwhelmed by the heavenly forces, at the end of the day The Monkey King is completely victorious.

The fifth and arguably most important characteristic is that of the boundary crosser. Despite the ephemeral and intangible nature of what defines a Trickster, the consensus is that boundary crossing is their most noteworthy aspect. The Monkey King, of course, exhibits this ability as well, as he not only crosses the physical boundaries between the mortal realm and the divine realm, but also completely violates any type of boundary, barrier or restriction placed

upon him, whether that be physical, hierarchical, or mental. From the very beginning through his unnatural birth, he was in-between the realms, being given extreme intelligence and power beyond mortal limits. Not only that, but his many forays which took him to other realms such as The World of Darkness (the land of the dead), and the heavens themselves, are already clear indicators of his ability to cross those boundaries without much trouble. One could even argue that Wukong has completely gone over the boundaries of life-and-death, as he became completely immortal in eight different ways, completely shattering the natural order.

The sixth and final characteristic that Hynes focuses on, is the dichotomy/paradox between sacred and profane. At the simplest level, one is made aware that The Monkey King is both a Demon King and a divine being. He is given a place in the heavens, and all he ends up doing there is lying, cheating, and stealing. Wukong challenges the authority of the deities and the Jade Emperor himself, and at every point all he has in mind are selfish, self-fulfilling actions and thoughts. Throughout all of this he is shown to be a walking oxymoron: a demon, yet also a god; a being of nobility, yet also a cheat and thief; a compassionate ruler, yet also a selfish loner. Due to all of this, he stands at the periphery of these things, yet at the same time completely representing both aspects. As a Trickster, he is meant to have a paradoxical existence that calls the world itself into question, as he cannot and will not be contained by any means.

Therefore, taking all six of Hynes's defining characteristics of what makes a Trickster, The Monkey King is explicitly one, as he has all of them. Not only does he have these six characteristics, but he also showcases others that present him as the quintessential example of a Trickster. He is a comical character, he undermines every type of authority, he is selfish, he is both extremely smart, yet ignorant, he had an unnatural birth, his actions led to punishment, and much more. It is most likely due to this that he is such a compelling character that one cannot

help but like and cheer for throughout the entirety of *Journey to the West*, even when he is doing bad things.

The reach of his character has grown exponentially throughout the years, and is not only found in Eastern traditions, but also in modern Eastern and Western literature, art, popular culture (such as movies, series, video games, etc.) and much more. In fact, he is also the inspiration for many characters, not least of all the protagonist of the extremely popular series, *Dragon Ball*. The character of Goku, and his original adventures during the early stages of *Dragon Ball* are completely based on the story of The Monkey King and his journey alongside Sanzang (Tripitaka). Authors Datlow and Windling mention in their book *The Coyote Road*, that the figure of the Trickster, is one that is not necessarily tied to a specific time period, and that it can influence cultures at any point in time. Of course, The Monkey King is not the only influential Trickster, but the reach that his character had, and still has, is impossible to ignore. Thus, he transcends the boundaries of his culture and time, crossing and ignoring it to become a worldwide phenomenon. That, at its most raw and bare aspects, is exactly what a Trickster is supposed to represent according to the arguments of scholars like Hyde, Hynes, and Datlow.

The Contemporary Trickster: An Analysis of the Archetype in Recent Times

Due to their versatility and their malleability, Trickster figures are present in many known mythologies ranging from a widely documented one such as the Greek mythology, to others that have not been given as much emphasis such as Māori mythology. Due to the roles that they play in their respective tales, Tricksters can be seen as a type of “hero for the people” in their own twisted ways, which causes them to be loved and admired by the populace. This type of acknowledgement can be seen even in our contemporary age through popular culture. This can

be seen with the Norse mythology's Trickster, Loki, taking a central role in the widely known Marvel Cinematic Universe. The inclusion of his character in this scenario made the mythological character much more famous, to the point that he ended up being the subject of his own television series. This can also be seen with other Tricksters such as The Monkey King, Sun Wukong, as he is the basis for extremely famous characters such as Son Goku, the protagonist of the widely known series, Dragon Ball. The Trickster, therefore, is seen as a figure that transcends time itself, as they have always been present regardless of the age, belief system and customs. Datlow and Windling reinforce this in the Preface to their book *The Coyote Road*, wherein they mention that very same idea and even give further examples of how the archetype of the Trickster has been utilized in famous characters such as Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* and even Bugs Bunny from *Looney Tunes*.

However, these examples are not the only ones present in our contemporary age, as the archetype of the Trickster can be found in completely original characters that are not derived from preexisting ones, like the ones previously mentioned. An excellent example of this phenomenon can be found in Alex Hirsch's television series, *Gravity Falls*, in the form of an entity known as Bill Cipher. This being is like no other in the entirety of the series, as he is shown to be almost omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient; this is to such an extreme degree that he is subliminally present in every single episode, even prior to his introduction. Being introduced as an entity from another plane of existence, the viewers are immediately made to realize that there has been a strange and unimaginable force behind every single action taken by every single character, and that it is slowly weaving everything together. Realizing that he was the cause of all the events taking place is quite shocking, as he initially does not appear to be more than a simple, dapper, charming, and innocently mischievous Trickster. However, as soon

as the truth is revealed, the viewer is made blatantly aware of the absolute horror that had been unleashed. His extreme intellect and cocky personality display how good of a Trickster he is, and his eventual downfall is caused by his own hubris and through trickery. Yet, his supposed demise also has an interesting twist, as he reveals that he will return. His return, however, is not on that same plane of reality, instead being present in other television series, such as *The Simpsons*, appearing on a table with other Tricksters such as: Coyote, Anansi, and Sun Wukong. The boundary he crossed was metaphysical in nature, due to the creator of the series hiding a statue of him somewhere in the United States, making it seem as if crossed over to the real world.

As was previously mentioned, Bugs Bunny is also a quintessential example of the Trickster archetype. For starters, while probably unintentional, being a rabbit already links him with other Tricksters, such as the Rabbit from Native American tradition, to Br'er Rabbit from African oral and written tradition, to even the figure of the Hare in Aesop's fables. Of course, his species is the least of what makes him fit into the archetype, but it was still curious enough that it warranted mention. Datlow and Windling say it best: "Of all modern Tricksters, however, the infamous Bugs Bunny is surely the best known and best loved. Bugs fits the archetype perfectly: he's a sly, anarchic, troublemaking clown, a hero and delinquent at one and the same time" (Datlow and Windling 3). The figure of Bugs is therefore presented in a paradoxical way, as befits a Trickster. He steals, cheats, cracks jokes, talks to the audience and much more. Bugs completely ignores societal rules and taboos, being an irrational being. He dresses in drag, uses violence at almost any given moment, commits acts of bestiality (randomly kissing Elmer Fudd or some other humans), an act that is considered to be extremely profane. His wit and smarts put him in very favorable positions, and yet sometimes it causes everything to crash and burn in the end. He even breaks the boundary between the imaginary and the real, as he casually breaks the

fourth wall into our 3-dimensional world, having an awareness of a higher and different plane of existence. Therefore, as with the previously mentioned Bill Cipher, Bugs Bunny is by definition a contemporary Trickster figure, as he completely encapsulates the chaotic nature of the archetype.

Yet, the question remains, what role do these figures play in our society? Are they any different than the Tricksters found in mythologies and traditions dating back thousands of years? The answer to that could depend on one's own perspective, yet evidence suggests that they are not entirely different, if at all. Bill Cipher and Bugs Bunny both represent extremes, taboos, profane and indecent acts, the same as figures like Coyote, Anansi, Loki, and many others. The taboos and boundaries that Bill Cipher and Bugs Bunny question or cross (metaphysical and representational boundaries; the boundaries between animal and human, and the taboo of bestiality, in the case of Bugs Bunny) would not be different than those boundaries and taboos that Coyote, Anansi, or Loki cross or transgress. They are beings that cross the boundaries of normality and life itself, no different than figures like Satan, The Monkey King, Prometheus, and many others. Therefore, as it was previously established, the Trickster is a figure that crosses the boundaries of time and culture, inserting itself in situations and in places that no one expects. Their narratives and representations encourage an awareness of and reflection on society's boundaries and taboos, possibly sparking societal change (whether it be through cautionary tales, warnings, tales of values and proper conduct, the importance of certain things like humility, knowledge and kindness, and others), or at the very least, alleviating tensions and anxieties created by rigid categories of the permissible and forbidden.

Conclusions: The Trickster - Boundary Crosser Beyond Definition

The Trickster is a figure that cannot be truly defined in any one simple, conventional way. Instead, to truly appreciate and begin to comprehend the figure of a Trickster, one must understand their most important aspect. The consensus of many authors and scholars such as Lewis Hyde, Ellen Datlow, Terri Windling, and William Hynes, among others, is that in the simplest of terms, the Trickster is a boundary crosser. The boundaries in question could be anything that one could imagine, it does not necessarily even need to exist, yet the Trickster will still find a way to create it if necessary, and then cross it. Despite not having one completely universal definition that can be applied to every Trickster figure, they still have a number of attributes that can be explored to identify the archetype.

Tricksters such as Sun Wukong, Prometheus, Satan, Loki, Coyote, and many more are entities that do not conform to any established order or norms, as they adhere to their own sense of things, which usually, makes no sense within the dominant rules of their respective cultural contexts. Through that, defining a Trickster can be paradoxical in nature as the figures themselves are. Due to their nature as boundary crossers, Tricksters even cross the boundary of being defined in a proper and concrete manner, making their existence all the more fascinating. Specifically, it is because of that ambiguity that they are such an important aspect of culture, as they embody all aspects, extremes, and attributes that are part of a society.

The Trickster Bugs Bunny is no different than the Trickster Coyote, while the timeframes are widely apart, they fulfill the same role, share very similar characteristics, and exhibit many extremes and taboos that are present in their cultural contexts. Satan is both a profane and holy being. Sun Wukong is both a compassionate yet selfish creature. Prometheus is a heroic yet

divisive force. Maui is both a hero and a villain. Coyote is both wise and ignorant. Loki is an honest liar. These entities create a type of coalition between opposites, making it work due to their chaotic, and paradoxical existences. Every single one of them becomes the boundaries of what they represent; they become symbols that pierce the veil between what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, what is living and dead, what is animal and human, what is real and virtual; and they cross the boundaries of time, reveling in their finite infinity.

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