In the Shadow of Trickster. Research Fields and Controversies in the Discourse on the Trickster Complex in the Studies of Myth

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Abstract

Since its appearance in the scientific discourse, the figure of trickster has become a subject of many controversies and a source of speculation in many research fields. Despite multiple endeavours to synthesise this topic, researchers seem to be still far from solving the "trickster problem." The article attempts to recall the classical arguments in the field, in order to identify the sources of puzzling issues and to find common motifs linking diverse deliberations. Researchers of different schools seem to agree on the archaic nature of trickster myths. This is indicated by the paradoxicality, ambivalence, unpredictability and multidimensionality of the trickster figure and its specific wisdom in the form of cunningness gravitating towards a shamanic complex, as well as the dispersion and chaotic character of mythical episodes.

Keywords: trickster, myth studies, ambivalence, deity
Słowa kluczowe: *trickster*, mitoznawstwo, ambiwalencja, bóstwo

Since its appearance in the scientific discourse, the figure of trickster has become a subject of many controversies and a source of speculation in many research fields, so that it is justified to repeat after Mac Linscott Ricketts that the problem of the trickster is the most perplexing one in the world's humanities.[1] Despite multiple endeavours to synthesise this topic, researchers still seem to be far from solving the "trickster problem." The article attempts to recall the classical arguments in the field, in order to identify the sources of puzzling issues and to find common motifs binding

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[1] M.L. Ricketts, *The North American Indian Trickster*, "History of Religions" 1966, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 327.

diverse deliberations. The trickster's figure has constantly been used for reconstructive procedures. The belief in its archaic nature was why the ideas of divinity, dualism, and heroic or soteriological mythologies were widely sought in it. However, trickster mythology does not have a relict character; it also functions perfectly within contemporary culture forms.

Trickster – creation of the term and formative features

The term "trickster" was first used by American anthropologist Daniel Brinton in 1885 in an article concerning the paradoxical features of the Supreme Being of the Algonquian.[2] Referring to the *Dictionnaire de la langue des Cris* by Albert Lacombe, Brinton states that "The Cree, living northwest of the Micmacs, call this Divine personage […] *Wisakketjak*, which means 'the Trickster,''the Deceiver'."[3] As he also observes, "The Chipeways apply to him similar term *nenaboj*, or as it is usually written *Nanabojo*, and *Nanaboshoo* – 'the Cheat'." Moreover, Brinton indicates that *Michabo* is the main deity, who does not use force but trickery, which is why it is called the "Arch-Deceiver." The same concepts are repeated in Brinton's book *The Lenape and Their Legends*[4] (also published in 1885) in which he states that terms like "Liar," "Cheat," "Trickster" are translations of names of indigenous deities.

Contrary to popular beliefs,[5] Brinton did not introduce the term "trickster" in the second edition of *Myths of the New World* from 1896. In this book he did show, however, the significant role of god-culture hero figures (like *Manibozho* and *Ioskeha* – original spelling) in religwions of North American indigenous peoples.[6]

Brinton also presents the first theory concerning the peculiarity of the trickster figure. In his opinion, the features depicting (for instance) Michabo as a buffoon and a simpleton are a late distortion of the original mythology, in which such figures were the degeneration of the idea of the god-creator (Great God of Light). The direct reason for such degradation was (in his view) the identification of the Algonquian term "light" with term "white rabbit." According to Brinton, the root *wab-* may refer both

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[2] D.G. Brinton, *The Chief God of the Algonkins, in his Character as a Cheat and Liar*, "American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal" 1885, pp. 137–139.

[3] A. Lacombe, *Dictionnaire de la Langue des Cris*, Montreal 1874, p. 653. In fact, Lacombe only gives a description of *Wisakketjak* and does notexplain his name.

[4] D.G. Brinton, *The Lenape and Their Legends: With the Complete Text and Symbols of the Walam Olum, A New Translation, and an Inquiry Into Its Authenticity*, Philadelphia 1885, p. 130. Contrary to Hansen's doubts (G.P. Hansen, *Trickster and the Paranormal*, Bloomington 2001, p. 433, note 1), the article from "American Antiquarian" was published as the first (because in *The Lenape…*, Brinton refers to it in the note on p. 130).

[5] Cf., e.g., M.L. Ricketts, *North American Tricksters*, [in:] *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade (ed.), vol. 15, New York 1987, pp. 48–51; W. Doty, W.J. Hynes, *Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster*, [in:] *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts and Criticisms*, W.J. Hynes, W.G. Doty (eds.), Tuscaloosa–London 1993, p. 14.

[6] D. Brinton, *The Myths of the New World: A Treatise on the Symbolism and Methodology of the Red Race of America*, New York 1868, p. 162.

to whiteness (of the morning light – *wabas*), and to a rabbit (*wabos*).[7] Mythology is born as a disease of language, hence Manibozho – the abstract uranic Great God of Light (*michi* [*manito*] *wabas*) – became the Great Rabbit (*michi wabos>Michabo*).[8]

The most important part of Brinton's reconstruction of the trickster figure – if one rejects the interpretation adopted from Max Müller's (then dominant) theory of myth – is the recognition of the basic regularity of the North American pantheons of sacred forces. Brinton notes that they are commonly filled with ambivalent beings which, at the same time, are viewed as culture heroes, forefathers, even creators, as well as cheaters, rogues, and fools.

The term proposed by Brinton was adopted by Franz Boas, who in the preface to James Teit's book *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians*[9] noted that the trickster figure also acts as a demiurge (transformer)[10] and a culture hero. Thus, it combines seemingly separate, and even contradictory roles, like the role of the creator of the cosmos with the role of an obscene, animal-shaped trickster. The combination of such different functions in one figure has become an issue obscuring other problems and forcing researchers to discuss which of these components is primordial. In this respect Boas stood in opposition to Brinton, justifiably pointing to the ubiquity of the trickster figure in mythologies of North American indigenous peoples. Consequently, in Boas's view, the Algonquian phonetic transformations could not influence the shaping of the trickster figure in other North American cultures. According to him, this mix of roles indicates that the trickster figure is deeply archaic. Originally, what dominates is the trickster complex: the protagonist is amoral, egoistic, and insubordinate to any external, higher imperatives; it acts only in accordance with its desires. Sometimes, accidentally, such a trickster performs acts that are beneficial to humanity. Then the heroic element begins to dominate in the protagonist; culture-forming acts in humanity's favour, being undertaken consciously.[11]

It is only in the next period of the development of mythology, morality, and religion that the functions of the culture hero/creator and the trickster separate.[12] The first step towards separating these two functions is the appearance of a figure that is theoretically distinct from the creator (e.g., his son or messenger), in North American myths. Its task is to complete the second stage of the creational process; it is, therefore, a demiurgic transformer establishing order, reshaping the face of the world so

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 198.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 164.

[9] F. Boas, *Introduction*, [in:] J. Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson Indians of British Columbia*, Boston––New York 1898, p. 4.

[10] The term "transformer" was taken by Tait and Boas from the Coast Salish languages, in which such figures as As'aiyahatl, Qals brothers (*Xa:ls*), Coyote and Crow are described as *Kêxrxo'iêm* "Changer," "The one who changes." This is the name given to mythical figures who can "magically" transform themselves and the outside world. Cf. J. Teit, *Mythology of the Thompson Indians*, The Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. 8, p. II, Leiden–New York 1912, p. 226, note 1.

[11] F. Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, New York 1948, pp. 474–475. Nowhere, however, has Boas proved such a transition, because he failed to find the "pure" egoistic trickster devoid of the features of a culture hero. This is only his theoretical presumption based on the evolutionary paradigm. Cf. M.L. Ricketts, *The North American…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 327–329.

[12] F. Boas, *Introduction…*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

that it reaches the present state of differentiation. Often, however, this figure completely replaces the creator, becoming the architect of the cosmos (e.g., *Nápi* in Algonquian mythology), or the contrary – it performs the function of the Earth Diver and transforms into the adversary of the creator. In fact, as Åke Hultkrantz notes, the mythologem of a culture hero absorbs other forms.[13] The role of the culture hero, who by his brave deeds acquires fire, water, light, and other boons for mankind, is also realized in the creation of the foundation of social community – the culture hero is a provider of culture goods and principles of the community's functioning.

The discourse of the subsequent years was dominated by the those considering trickster as a frequently encountered role in the vast range of creator figures. Boas's arguments were adopted by the anthropologists focused on the research of North American indigenous cultures, most of whom had been his students. As a consequence, the trickster figure founded on North American mythologies ought to be regarded as a prototype. Subsequently, researchers should seek similarities and differences in other culture circles.

Theories of trickster's paradoxicality

The first researchers, noticing the ambivalence of the trickster figure, considered it to be a consequence of its original place in the evolution of divine features. In 1905 Kurt Breysig's book devoted to the category of the *Heilbringer* was published.[14] The following year Paul Ehrenreich released a polemical article.[15] In the discussion, both researchers refer to North American data in order to show that these examples concern a human or animal figure (or a combination of both) endowed with supernatural features, a figure halfway between the ordinary animal spirit and a god. What they mean, therefore, is the intermediate state of evolution from animism to monotheism, which is of a universal nature; its elements are scattered through the traditions of the whole world. This animistic thesis was criticised by Wilhelm Schmidt and his students, for whom the Heilbringer would always be subordinate to the Supreme Being. The important consequence of this discussion is the fact of noticing the Heilbringer as a figure mediating between mankind and the sacral sphere. It later led Van Deursen to search for parallels between North American forms of the Heilbringer and Christ, or at least to notice the beginning of the path leading to the idea of an eschatological saviour. The fundamental element of this figure's construct is the association with the principles of causality (etiological myths), the idea of a culture hero, and the idea of a messenger transmitting divine knowledge to mankind and mediating in the contact with the sacred. The animal form of such an archaic saviour is ascribed to its twofold function, beneficial and destructive, associated with its lunar

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[13] A. Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians*, Boston 1979, p. 34.

[14] K. Breysig, *Die Entstehung des Gottesgedankens und der Heilbringer*, Berlin 1905.

[15] P. Ehrenreich, *Götter und Heilbringer. Eine ethnologische Kritik*, "Zeitschrift für Ethnologie" 1906, vol. 38, no. 4–5, pp. 536–610.

connotations.[16] In subsequent works the tendency to identify the Heilbringer with the trickster is dominant.[17]

Regardless of the findings of anthropologists-Americanists, in 1928–1929 William Brede Kristensen and Pieter de Josselin de Jong initiated another discussion about the figure of the "divine rascal" in the history of religion.[18] According to Kristensen, intermediary figures, "helpers of humanity," appear between the realities of the sacred and the people. Their task is to unite these two spheres. They may include a saviour-healer (*Heilbringer*), a culture hero (*Kulturheros*), a shaman (*Schaman*) and a trickster (*Trickster*). In Kristensen's opinion, it is worth comparing the concept of the "divine cheater" with such figures as Hermes, Ea, Varuna or Seth.

> Like Hermes, the heroes of primitive cultures are both great benefactors and rogues, gods and clowns. Like Hermes, they belong to the world of infernal deities: alive and dead at the same time. Like Hermes, they provide connection between heaven and earth, cosmic unity, and their ambivalence makes it possible to pass from one side to the other. Despite the divine essence, Hermes is as close to mankind as possible; he is a mediator between gods and people.[19]

Ambivalence is, therefore, the fundamental common element of such figures. Examining Hermes' features, Kristensen highlights his ithyphallic character, and a thievish nature which allows him to achieve life hidden in death. Hermes is therefore the god of deception, who lies to people to make them die, and who at the same time lies to the underworld gods to offer an "absolute life" to mankind.[20] Hermes and similar figures are carriers of the form of knowledge characterised by fraud and deception, which is opposed to the visionary "divine wisdom."[21]

Josselin de Jong argues with Kristensen, denying the possibility of dividing the dualism of trickster figures into two primary beings. Tricksters' actions and words are so ambiguous that people are able to neither understand them nor position them within their own system of values. They are associated with both life and death, and are bisexual and morally ambivalent.[22] Hermes should be seen as a multidimensional figure, for which deception as a *modus operandi* is only a partial characteristic. An example of it may be seen in his connection with Aphrodite in the form of Hermaphrodite. This is why Hermes and tricksters share a mediatory character and a tendency towards

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[16] A. van Deursen, *Der Heilbringer. Eine ethnologische Studie über den Heilbringer bei den nordamerikanischen Indianern*, Gröningen 1931.

[17] J. Loewenthal, *Der Heilbringerin der Irokesischen und der Algonkinischen Religion*, "Zeitschrift für Ethnologie" 1913, pp. 65–82.

[18] W. Brede Kristensen, *De goddelijke bedrieger*, "Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van wetenschappen" 1928, série B, no. 3, pp. 63–88; J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, *De Oorsprong Van Den Goddelifke Bedrieger*, "Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen" 1929, Afdeeling Letterkunde Deel 68, série B, no. 1, pp. 1–30.

[19] W. Brede Kristensen, *De goddelijke bedrieger…*, *op. cit.*, p. 103. Pettazzoni uses these findings to construct the thesis that trickster is a degraded form of an Animal Master, whose omniscience is of a magical character. R. Pettazzoni, *Wszechwiedza bogów*, tłum. Barbara Sieroszewska, Warszawa 1969, p. 346.

[20] Kristensen analyses this issue closely in the book *Livet fra doden* (1925).

[21] W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, The Hague 1960, pp. 235–236.

[22] J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–16.

contradictions. Hermes is not a great god; as an *agoraios* he is an intermediate in trade and ceremonial exchange. Mediation is indeed the essential feature of a trickster. In this manner Josselin de Jong precedes Lévi-Strauss. In fact, he is considered to be one of the precursors of structuralism in the Netherlands.[23]

It seems that it was Lévi-Strauss who eventually resolved the problem of the para-doxicality of the trickster's actions. In his analysis[24] he starts with the scavenging nature of the main North American tricksters: Raven and Coyote. This feature is a deter-minant of the mediating between animal (live) and plant (dead) food. "He must retain something of that duality – namely, an ambiguous and equivocal character."[25] Thus trickster is an ideal operator with mediatory functions. The critics of Lévi-Strauss's approach either mention the fact that coyotes are not really scavengers,[26] or pointed to his omission of the hare/rabbit as the third main trickster of North America.[27] How-ever, the explanation is almost explicitly expressedin *Myth and Meaning:*[28] a hare is a good example of a trickster not due to its feeding behaviour, but through a compli-cated association with the division of the body (harelip), and in consequence – with twins. The scavenging nature is not a *sine qua non* of tricksterness, but only a strong indicator, as scavenging is the most ambivalent way of obtaining food. Thus a hare may be an equally good trickster. The same goes for the spider: hanging between the sky and the earth (spider web), between the home and the wild (inhabitant of human settlements, but not domesticated), and finally between nothingness and existence (producing thread out of nothing).

In the analyses of the French structuralist, it was not deceiving, unconventional actions or an overload of comedy that were underlined as distinctive trickster fea-tures in the following literature, but the conspicuous mediating between different orders:

– the sublime actions of a hero/transformer, and malicious and scatological actions of a trickster leading to its and others' detriment;
– a hero representing his or her own ethnicity/humanity, and an adversary rep-resenting an enemy/inhuman world;
– human and animal forms;
– life and death.

Nowadays, especially in literary studies, the dominant view is that previous re-searchers have been caught in the trap of categorial distinctions: trickster – culture

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[23] W. Hofstee, *Phenomenology of Religion Versus Anthropology of Religion? The "Groningen School" 1920–1990*, [in:] *Man, Meaning, and Mystery: Hundred Years of History of Religion in Nor-way. The Heritage of W. Brede Kristensen*, S. Hjelde (ed.), Leiden 2000, p. 178. See also P. Berger, *The Inventiveness of a Tradition: Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands from an Outsider's Perspective*, "Zeitschrift für Ethnologie" 2009, vol. 134, pp. 23–49.

[24] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, New York 1963, pp. 224–227.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 226.

[26] M. Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, New York 1979, pp. 200–201.

[27] M.P. Carroll, *Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem*, "American Ethnologist" 1981, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 301–313.

[28] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning,* London–New York 2001, pp. 11–14.

hero,transformer – monster killer, and so on; losing sight of the holistic dimension of a literary act.[29] "The methodology [of anthropologists] is narrow, bigoted, and colonial […] most of what they say […] about colonial people is […] at very best, bullshit,"[30] as Gerald Vizenor, Ojibwa author, wrote. Vizenor suggests considering trickster as a discourse, as it calls into question every truth, making it relative, and transforms everything into word play. By deconstructing the reality, it may become the father of postmodernism. He proposes looking at trickster from the holotropic perspective, as a reflection of the whole experience of a community. Therefore, trickster is not an objective divine or human figure, but word play based on paradox.

Vizenor published his manifesto *Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games* in 1989.[31] In his approach, the trickster discourse includes authors, storytellers, and artists, who recreate its figure by trying to identify themselves with trickster and to empathise with it (*compassionate tricksters*). In the preface to the comic novelette *The Trickster of Liberty*[32] Vizenor presented his theory combining trickster with the issues of the construction of imagination and language. Trickster narratives break formal boundaries with their absurdity. They are suited for marginalized people, who are better at sensing the narrative's character. In this manner Vizenor inscribes himself into the anti-colonial discourse; he attempts to answer the question of why trickster narratives are still a popular form of folklore, and of written literature of indigenous Americans and black descendants of slaves.[33] The message is clear: the main hero of trickster's mythologies is neither strong nor powerful, but he is able to outmanoeuvre or to ridicule his cleverer or stronger opponents.

Trickster as an evil demiurge

Theories developed before the second half of the 20th century failed to deal with the multidimensionality of the trickster. They focused on attempts to disrupt the ambivalence of the figure, trying to find traces of evolutionary processes in myths – from animal/selfish fool, through demiurge/culture hero, to anthropomorphic deity. The most important theory of that time was proposed by Ugo Bianchi in *Il dualismo religioso*,[34] in which he presents his thesis on trickster sources of god of evil, based on its unpredictability as the main feature.

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[29]   J.S. Nigonwedom, *Trickster Reflections I*, [in:] *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, D. Reder, L.M. Morra (eds.), Waterloo 2010, p. 38.

[30]   G. Vizenor, *Trickster Discourse,* "American Indian Quarterly" 1990, no. 2, p. 286.

[31]   *Idem*, *Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games*, [in:] *Narrative Chance, Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*, Norman 1989, pp. 187–211.

[32]   *Idem*, *Tricksters and Evaluations*, [in:] *Tricksters of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage*, Norman 1988, pp. IX–XVIII.

[33]   *Idem*, *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives of Mixed Descent*, Minneapolis 1981.

[34]   U. Bianchi, *Il dualismo religioso. Saggio storico ed etnologico*, Roma 1958, pp. 69–72; *idem*, *Pour l'histoire du dualisme: Un Coyote africain, le renard pale*, [in:] *Liber Amicorum: Studies in Honor of Professor Dr. C.J. Bleeker*, Leiden 1969, pp. 27–43.

In general, Bianchi agreed with reconstructions provided by the culture-historical school. The earliest known cosmogonies pertain to the creation of the world by the Supreme Being. The next level is the introduction of a demiurgic craftsman whose creative powers are of an utterly different nature. Myths justify its presence by the fact that the Supreme Being cannot or is unable to complete the process of creation on its own.[35] The process is undertaken by the "secondary creator," the *demiurgo--trickster*, who may either display unusual abilities and cunningness, or stupidity and incompetence, or all of these traits at the same time.[36] Over time it is identified with the figure of the Supreme Being's adversary, whose emancipation appears primarily on cosmogonic grounds. In Bianchi's opinion, the division of the *demiurgo--trickster* into two figures, one of which concentrates the prerogatives of a culture hero, results in ethical valorisation of both of them.

He notes that the process of division starts with the appearance of twin brothers. At first, they act together, unanimously, and myths do not distinguish between them (e.g., Pueblo twin gods of war). However, in more developed traditions their diversity becomes apparent (e.g., Iroquoian Ioskeha and Tawiskaron), which imposes the necessity to qualify one of them as the creator of evil. This gives rise to dualism in the strict sense. Its strong variant links ethical values with the spirit/matter dichotomy in cases in which the secondary creator proves to be the creator of the material world. Bianchi's dualistic perspective is applied, then, to the analysis of the figure of Native American Coyote or Eshu from Yoruba mythology.[37]

Bianchi also uses the example of Paleo-Asian Raven to show how trickster's actions lead to its association with moral values. In a myth provided by Bogoraz,[38] the Creator of the World (Tenamtongyn) and his wife represent demiurgic activity. Having created the landscape and the animals, they forget to create Raven, so Raven appears spontaneously from the rejected materials and proclaims to be "self-created" (*tomwatkyn*). Since this is contradictory to the Creator's self-knowledge (everything in the world had to be made by his own hand), he subjects Raven to the test of truth. It proves that Raven is a liar and thus the first lie appears, as well as the first opposition to the Creator's will, which is subject to negative ethical valorisation.

Consequently, there is no homogeneous phenomenon that could be described as dualism. Dualistic tendencies appear at the level of the trickster figure and may develop in various ways, forming three axes of coordinates:
- radical – alleviated;
- dialectic – oreoeschatological (predestining the victory of the good);
- procosmic – anticosmic (where evil is immanently bound with the creation).[39]

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[35] U. Bianchi, *Le dualisme en histoire des religions*, "Revue de l'histoire des religions" 1961, vol. 159, no. 1, p.17.

[36] U. Bianchi, *Il dualismo religioso…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–113.

[37] U. Bianchi, *Edschou, le Trickster divin Yoruba*, "Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde" 1978, vol. 24, p. 123.

[38] W. Bogoraz, *Chukchee Mythology,* Leiden–New York 1910, pp. 154–155. This myth becomes the basis of Hervé Rousseau's reflection on the beginning of dualism in *Le Dieu du Mal*, Paris 1963.

[39] U. Bianchi, *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy*, Leiden 1978, p. 413.

Therefore, the "demiurgic trickster" is a comprehensive category connected with the figures of ancestor, Heilbringer and adversary, and possessing the ability to transform itself into each of them in various ways.[40]

The organization of trickster cycles

Since 1954 the discussion about the trickster figure has been largely dominated by the release of *The Trickster* by Paul Radin,[41] the Winnebago researcher. In *The Trickster* Radin used psychological interpretations by Karl Kerényi and Carl Gustav Jung, who decided to publish Radin's text – which in fact was but a draft of the Winnebago trickster myths extended with Kerényi's and Jung's explanations and additions.

Radin had already treated trickster figures as representations of a universal model of a protagonist who is simultaneously a deceitful, stupid, and sometimes perverted fool/buffoon.[42] Such figures are a result of a tribal community's effort to obtain a clear image of a deity through the sublimation of a spirit guide's or a totemic ancestor's features.[43] The trickster figure becomes the notion of the archaic features of primordial tribal spirits, "inchoate culture-hero[es],"[44] accidentally creating beneficial or detrimental phenomena. At the same time, Radin found monolatrous tendencies in the Winnebago, as a result of which all the other mythical figures, like Wakdjunkaga or Hare, become subordinate to the Earth-Maker.[45] The theory was fully developed by Radin in 1927 in his *Primitive Man as Philosopher.*[46]

According to this theory, within traditional cultures two ways of development the idea of sacrum personification may be found. On the one hand, there is a tendency of sophisticated individuals such as shamans or priests to sublimate the idea of a deity into the form of a transcendent, monolatrous creator. On the other hand, there is a folk trend to equip deities with jovial and humorous features, and to create anecdotal stories about their mistakes and wrongdoings. This "folk" trend produces divine trickster figures, which sometimes may bear the same name and have the same characteristics as the sublime deities of theological reflection. In such cases, these two styles intertwine in myths, producing images and ideas surprising to Western researchers.

Hitherto, trickster mythology researchers primarily tried to determine whether trickster was originally a deity of a twofold nature, which in the course of the evolution

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[40] U. Bianchi, *Der demiurgische Trickster und die Religionsethnologie*, "Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde," vol. 7, no. 7 (Jun., 1961), pp. 339–340.

[41] P. Radin, K. Kerényi, C.G. Jung, *Der göttliche Schelm. Ein indianischer Mythen-Zyklus*, Zürich 1954.

[42] P. Radin, *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin*, New York 1937, pp. 164, 202.

[43] *Ibidem*, p. 215.

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 217.

[45] *Ibidem*, p. 263. As it was stated by Radin's source named Crashing Thunder, from whom he obtained the text of Healing Ritual, also known as the Road of Life and Death (*Idem*, *The Road of Life and Death: Ritual Drama of the American Indians*, New York 1945.

[46] P. Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, New York 1957, p. 347.

of religion disintegrated into the two forms of demiurgic and tricksterious, or whether these were two independent figures, which merged into one being. Radin seems to support the former idea: "primary archaic figures like Trickster always had two sides, divine culture-hero and divine buffoon."[47] However, he does not perceive trickster's initial form as a transcendent deity.[48] In comparison with trickster mythologies, such a deity appears later, usually being introduced by "home-grown theologians" codifying tradition. The ambivalent trickster is therefore a primordial protagonist of myths, preceding both the idea of a deity and of a destructive "demonic" element. On this basis Radin rejects the idea that trickster was the original creator of the world. "I think it is safe to assume that it began with an account of a nondescript person obsessed by hunger, by an uncontrollable urge to wander and by sexuality."[49]

Using his knowledge of Winnebago folklore, Radin presented the mythology of Wakdjunkaga (*Wakda-junkaga*), whose name can be literally translated as "the Tricky One," showing it in the context of myths concerning other Winnebago trickster figures (especially Hare), as well as trickster figures of the Tinglit (Raven) and the Assiniboine (Sitkonski and Inktonmi). In his opinion, the trickster mythology is one of the oldest known to mankind, and its characteristic intertwining with the figure of the creator-transformer in North American myths proves its archaic character and makes it worthy of interest. "The similarity of the exploits attributed to *Wakdjunkaga* and all other trickster-heroes in North America is quite astounding. The only possible inference to be drawn is that this myth-cycle is an old cultural possession of all the American Indians, which has remained, as far as the general plot is concerned, relatively unchanged."[50] The common features of the North American tricksters include:

– a propensity for demiurgic actions mixed with destructive behaviours;
– deception as a basic *modus operandi* in relations with other mythical figures;
– thoughtless yielding to instinctive needs and desires;
– amorality, ambivalent actions, a propensity for sacrilegious acts;
– powers of creation, often of a shamanic and magical nature; nomadicity, lack of permanent dwelling;
– shapelessness with the tendency to assume animal form, and at the same time monstrosity and shape-shifting;
– greediness, sexuality, and scatology as a basic motivation of actions, organising the plots of myths.

In Radin's opinion, the mythology of their bearer should therefore be regarded as a universal phenomenon, a product of mental speculations, and a way of coping with the world that is not arranged in structures explicitly rewarding a specific type of behaviour.[51] The aim of the trickster stories is therefore to alleviate social pressures by a carefree reference to "regressive infantilism."

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[47] *Idem*, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, New York 1956, p. 125.
[48] *Ibidem*, pp. 162–163.
[49] *Ibidem*, p. 191.
[50] *Ibidem*, p. 158.
[51] *Ibidem*, p. X.

In Radin's interpretation, the Wakdjunkaga cycle has not only the structure, but also the episodes ordered in such a way as to demonstrate the hero's transformation from animal-instinctive features to human and/or divine dimension, from amorphousness to structure. Initially, Wakdjunkaga breaks all possible ritual rules, making a show of stupidity by destroying a war boat for no reason, and fighting with his right hand against his left one. In the following episodes Wakdjunkaga gains consciousness and integrity. Eventually, Wakdjunkaga returns to his village and takes on the duties of a spouse and a tribe member, to finally advance to the role of deity residing on his own underworld island "just under" the island of the Earth-Maker.

Consequently, Radin believes that, at least in North America, the trickster cycle was inextricably intertwined with the cycle of a culture hero (discussed by Radin previously).[52] The protagonist does not so much transform from a trickster into a culture hero, as it acts according to different strategies.

Contemporary researchers have questioned this standpoint. Ricketts points out that Radin had too much confidence in the model character of the Wakdjunkaga cycle, and shows that the hero's spiritual journey and the shaping of psyche (that are present in this cycle), are also typical of every trickster figure.[53] Meanwhile, trickster cycles of North America proceed/evolve – as a rule – in an entirely different way. Barbara Babcock notes that typically trickster cycles are a rather chaotic wandering of the protagonist from place to place, and that the episodes are of greater importance than the structured whole. If the consequence of the Wakdjunkaga cycle seems to indicate an author's intention (as Radin suggests), then the cycle is of an exceptional character. However, regardless of the nature of the final episodes, whether they are a conscious addition or a traditional narrative, Wakdjunkaga continues to play the double role of trickster and culture hero. His final departure from the horizon of the ecumene is a confirmation of his liminal nature.[54] Therefore, if he breaks some rules in one episode, he must run away, and the next episode begins with his lonely wandering.

Andrew Wiget's research on the syntagm of episodes in Algonquian myths proved to be a breakthrough in the understanding of cycles of North American mythologies.[55] In his approach, every trickster episode may be reduced to a simple scheme:

> Trickster wanders – feels uncomfortable – sees an animal protagonist – calls it "younger brother/sister" – obtains a recipe for miraculous skills/powers that remove discomfort – he applies the recipe incorrectly – suffers damage – regrets – leaves.[56]

In Wiget's opinion, individual episodes are linked by a weak connection between the closing formula of one episode and the opening formula of the next one. As a result:

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[52] P. Radin, *Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature*, Baltimore 1948.

[53] M.L. Ricketts, *The North American Trickster…*, *op. cit.*, p. 333; *Idem*, *The Structure and Religious Significance of the Trickster-Transformer-Culture Hero in the Mythology of North American Indians*, [Ph.D. thesis], Chicago 1964, p. 10.

[54] B. Babcock-Abrahams, "*A Tolerated Margin of Mess": The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered*, "Journal of the Folklore Institute" 1975, vol. 11, no. 3, p. 173.

[55] A. Wiget, *Algonquian Trickster Tale*, "Oral Tradition" 2000, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 39–73.

[56] *Ibidem.*

The weak external boundaries of the Trickster episodes make it possible for the storyteller to combine these episodes in nearly any sequence he or she chooses. […] Trickster episodes can be unified in any number of ways. As with other episodic constructions, one can use recurrent themes, recurrent actors, recurrent stylistic features, even mnemonic devices like geographical or temporal matrices to anchor a story.[57]

Interestingly, culture hero-related activities are much better motivated and organised as a whole (with the order sanctioned by tradition) than is the trickster's performance. According to Wiget, these activities include, among others: birth, fire thievery, conflict with a brother, fight against an underwater manitou, flood and cosmic diving, transfer of shamanic knowledge (Medicine Dance), and marriage.[58]

The main part of trickster's activity concerns its body and it boils down to eating, defecating, sexual intercourse, and exchanging body parts with different animals. Wiget proposes terms for naming them: Oral, Anal, Sexual and Transformational Actions.[59] Storytellers sometimes apply this scheme in order to organize episodes, e.g., relations with women revolve around the Sexual circle (if women are passive) or the Transformational circle (if they are aggressive), but they do not refer to a "biographical" circle.

Wiget concludes that in Algonquian cycles there is a strong consequence in the sequence of episodes in which the protagonist acts as a culture hero, but the trickster tales are a set of loosely linked episodes. It implicates that trickster and culture hero/transformer narrative complexes were initially separate, and merged due to the unity of the person. If his findings are true for other forms of culture tricksters as well, then they partially correspond to Yeleazar Meletinsky's theses on distinctness of shaping of the Raven-trickster figures in Asia and in North America, which are based on a different valorisation of Paleo-Asian mythical forms. Thus, they are a subject to similar criticism, which is presented elsewhere.[60] At this point suffice it to say that the separation of trickster and transformer episodes, on which Wiget's conclusions are based, is arbitrary in nature and is a consequence of previously described long tradition of searching in trickster myths for formative features of the figure of the ethical main deity.

Ritual side of trickster

An important attempt at overcoming the unresolved discourse of anthropologists and study of religion researchers relied on ritual reflections of trickster mythology. Barbara Babcock-Abrahams's theory[61] became the best development of such approaches.

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[57] *Ibidem*, p. 56.

[58] *Ibidem*, p. 62.

[59] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

[60] Cf. A. Szyjewski, *Organizacja Cyklu Kruka w paleoazjatyckim i paleoindiańskim kręgu kulturowym*, [in:] *Epos od Homera do Martina*, B. Błaszkiewicz, J. Godlewicz-Adamiec (eds.), Gdańsk 2019, p. 119–140.

[61] B. Babcock-Abrahams, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–186.

It is based on the structural way of understanding liminality in the views of Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Arnold van Gennep.

In the critical approach of Babcock-Abrahams, none of the previous theories was able to operationalize the theory of trickster.[62] Due to its liminal nature, it cannot be limited by any categorial grids, as it notoriously crosses their borders. Trickster must therefore be described through paradox and marginality. Trickster is never a member of a community; it is always a marginalised outsider. The category of marginality does not invoke only negative meanings. Through paradox and constant change of orders, trickster encourages to revaluate our image of the world. As a consequence, in religious systems it becomes an essential figure as it calls into question rigid principles, enabling change of state/status, dynamics, and development (analogous to the Hobsbawm's "social rebels," which share many features with trickster).[63]

Marginality has its tragic and comic dimensions, implemented respectively by the scapegoat complex (persecution of the Other) and the ritual clown complex (the fool alleviating the tensions). Trickster belongs to the latter. As a result, the ritual concepts of trickster are compatible with ideas of Michail Bakhtin and Johan Huizinga, who both analysed the social function of humour. According to Laura Makarius, the features of ritual clowns match those of tricksters:

> […] systematic trampling over rules and norms; full licence to ignore prohibitions and break them; ambivalence; magical power; ominousness; "non-violence"; prohibitions and prerogatives; "backward speech"; and reverse behaviour; individualism, asocial characteristics, insolence, buffoonery, phallicism, vulgarity, a sort of madness – all these traits [are] common to both clown and *trickster*.[64]

Christopher Vecsey's research confirmed the ritual transfer of trickster mythical actions into the institution of ritual clowns. Vecsey emphasises that it is erroneous to consider the nature of *Chukuwimkiya*-type clownsof the Hopi as purely entertaining.[65] *Chukuwimkiya* also belong to the group of personifications of sacred powers (*Kachina*), although the whole of their activity is the obverse of the "regular" *Kachina*. In line with this approach, the satirical and sacrilegious aspects of trickster's adventures are not values separated from the whole of its symbolism, but are important if not necessary parts of religious system's functioning. The role of the *heyoka* society of the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains[66] may serve as another example. The role of the *heyoka* was to demonstrate the paradoxicality of existence and to teach how to break common patterns, but above all, it was to protect the community from the

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[62] Cf. Katharine Luomala's words: "a monistic theory of any kind is inadequate for understanding the nature of the hero's [Maui] character and exploits." K. Luomala, *Maui-of-a-thousand-tricks: His Oceanic and European Biographers*, "Bernice Pahuai Bishop Museum Bulletin" 1949, no. 198, p. 27.

[63] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, New York 1959, p. 24.

[64] L. Makarius, *Ritual Clowns and Symbolical Behaviour*, "Diogenes" 1970, no. 70, p. 66.

[65] Ch. Vecsey, *Imagine Ourselves Richly: Mythic Narratives of North American Indians*, New York 1991, p. 55.

[66] V.F. Ray, *The Contrary Behavior Pattern in American Indian Ceremonialism*, "Southwestern Journal of Anthropology" 1945, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 75–113.

destructive effects of cosmic powers and to use those powers for the community's welfare.[67] Thus, in a specific imitation of thunderbirds, the *heyoka* were reversing the influence of sacred forces.

Such skills were referred to shamanic powers quite early in research on the trickster mythology. The body of literature on the subject is dominated by two opposing approaches. According to the first, trickster mythology differs from the shaman mythology, because the basic activity of trickster relies on its own powers, while shamans use the powers of the summoned spirits. In consequence, "very often some deed of the trickster is a parody and caricature of some shamanistic experiences or sacred priestly rite."[68] According to the second approach, shape-shifting, the ability to dismember body parts or transformative powers – characteristic of trickster – are of shamanic provenance; they are not a parody of shamanic deeds. The trickster figure comes from archaic times,[69] perhaps even a Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer period, when it was a universal representation of the shaman. Joseph Campbell associates it with the cosmogonic myth of the Earth-diver, which indeed is of shamanic provenance.[70]

Vladimir Toporov reaches similar conclusions – analysing the trickster figure,[71] he points to its transformational function. Trickster, behaving differently from everyone else, is able to overcome the schematic nature of culture patterns, and thus shows that a solution to an unexpected issue can be found. Of course, trickster does not always succeed; it is defeated as well. However, its paradoxical nature makes it "immune" not only to ridicule and battery, but also to death itself – after every failure trickster rises again, even from the dead. Trickster is the ideal Lévi-Straussian binary operator. Therefore, according to Toporov, its functions may be compared to shamanic healing activities, both on the individual and on the social levels. The characteristic paradoxical nature of the trickster figure manifests its liminality and transformational powers resulting from the deactivation of divisions.

Conclusions

Since Daniel Brinton's 1885 article, the idea of trickster has haunted myth researchers in many ways. This figure, with its temptingly archaic features, provokes those interested in the genesis and prehistory of myths to include it in reconstructive procedures. Trickster's initial animal form prompted theorists of evolution to search for its totemic sources. The tendency to combine the roles of a demiurgic creator of the

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[67] T.H. Lewis, *Evolution of the Social Role of the Oglala* heyoka, "Plains Anthropologist" 1982, p. 249.

[68] M.L. Ricketts, *The North American Indian Trickster…*, *op. cit.*, p. 336. Cf. E. Mieletinski, *Pochodzenie eposu bohaterskiego. Wczesne formy i archaiczne zabytki*, Kraków 2009, p. 46.

[69] E.J.M. Witzel, *The Origins of World's Mythologies*, New York 2012, p. 296.

[70] J. Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, Harmondsworth 1959, pp. 273–275.

[71] V.N. Toporov, *Obraz trikstera v enisejskoj traditsii*, [in:] *Traditsënnye verovaniia i byt narodov Sibiri*, I.N. Gemuev, A.M. Sagalaev (eds.), Novosibirsk 1987, pp. 5–27.

world, a culture hero, and a demonic destroyer in one figure resulted in perceiving it as a model of a proto-hero with a thousand faces. Then, depending on the adopted perspective, trickster was regarded either as a degraded great creator of the world, or on the contrary – as an embryonic stage of development of the idea of transcendent opposition between Supreme Being and devilish Adversary in religious dualisms. Some theorists placed it in the frame of human universal experiences as an archetypical figure, while others fiercely denied the possibility of reducing different cultural realizations to a common denominator. In the background of disputes over the trickster's nature, there were arguments of strong shamanic parallel figures, which must use trickery to contact sacred forces, take animal form, or die and rise from the dead.[72] They have been juxtaposed with the thesis of a conscious parody of shamanic actions in trickster myths.[73] Regardless of the adopted paradigm, researchers of different schools seem to agree on the archaic nature of trickster myths. This is indicated by the paradoxicality, ambivalence, unpredictability and multidimensionality of the trickster figure, its specific wisdom in a form of cunningness gravitating towards shamanic complex, as well as the dispersion and chaotic character of mythical episodes.

The belief in the archaic nature of the trickster figure is why the ideas of divinity, dualism, and heroic or soteriological mythologies have been widely sought in it. However, trickster mythology does not have a relict character; as Richard Erdoes and Gerald Vizenor state, it also functions perfectly within contemporary culture forms. Contrary to some criticism,[74] it is universal in nature, even though such contemporary researchers as Makarius, Ricketts and Robert Pelton, having abandoned the North American trickster prototype, point to the exceptional complexity of mythical protagonists (Vizenor's *comic holotrope*).

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[72] *Ibidem*.

[73] E.M. Mieletinski, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 50.

[74] Cf., e.g., D. Sabatucci, *Sui protagonisti dei miti*, "Quaderni di etnologia religiosa 2," Roma 1981; T.O. Beidelman, *The Moral Imagination of the Kaguru: Some Thoughts on Tricksters, Translation and Comparative Analysis*, "American Ethnologist" 1980, no. 7, pp. 27–42.

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