



Preface

These essays are from the second in a series of symposia that have dealt with some of the semiotic dimensions of Trickster. The first was held at the 1997 meeting of the Semiotic Society of America in Santa Barbara, and the result was a special issue of *The American Journal of Semiotics* entitled “Trickster: Cultural Boundaries and Semiosis” published the following year. That special issue looked at Trickster from three perspectives: Trickster and Narrative, Trickster and Culture, and Trickster and Boundaries. However, since Trickster proved to be such a fertile field of semiotic study, in 1999 a second symposium on “Trickster Two: The Dance of Differentiation,” whose goal was to examine Trickster as a pattern of duality, was held in Pittsburgh. The program preface read:

Trickster, the undifferentiated hero, grows by a process of discrimination, distinction, division, and doubling. Like a cultural mitosis, Trickster morphs into a definition of cultural categories and mythic. By parody and laughter, by externalization of value into action and character, Trickster articulates the values of the culture, and one of his major devices in this cultural definition is doubling in the guise of the Twins as Trickster moves closer to the status of a culture hero. As Flesh and Stump, or Prometheus and Epimetheus, the Trickster figure doubles his way into semiosis setting up a conjunction of opposites out of which is spun the cultural illusion of a binary system. Since this use of doubling and pairing is so close to the nature of mythic and narrative development, this symposium will look at the Trickster element of differentiation and doubling.

Some fourteen scholars, ranging from literary people to anthropologists, offered these studies on Trickster, and they are expanded and reprinted here in this volume of essays trying to examine Trickster’s dual and ambivalent nature from several different viewpoints. The result is a wide range of approaches and a great variation in subject matter, but the linchpin here is Trickster and the dualities that surround his narratives, her experiences, and its cultural role. Above all, one needs to remember that this is a dance — a dance of differentiation by which culture explores, discovers, divides, marks, articulates, re-articulates its very narrative existence. Perhaps because this is the only real existence culture has, it is best to understand it as a dance of cultural ensignment.

In this text, then, the essays dance with Trickster and try to chart some of the patterns of the dualities which mark the trickster figure. C. W. Spinks, in “Trickster and Duality,” looks at the semiotic issues of using the binary structures of Trickster and details the semiotic processes by which

Trickster operates. Marilyn Jurich, in “‘Mastermaid’ to the Rescue! Tricks, TrickSTARS, and Tricksters: Transforming Gender Roles and Folktale Study,” looks at the role of gender in Trickster and challenges the received wisdom that Trickster is exclusively male. Richard M. Carp, in “Semiotrix,” does a performance piece that plays with a number of dualities characteristic of Trickster and shows how Trickster challenges our boundaries, our cultural norms, and our notions of what is scholarship. Christina O. Spiesel, in “Female Trouble,” looks at issues of gender boundaries in art and examines the role of Trickster in seeing and being seen — particularly as it relates to the patriarchal gaze and the consequent cultural limitation of women’s art. Inna Semetsky, in “The Adventures of a Postmodern Fool or The Semiotics of Learning,” examines the Trickster role of the Fool in the Tarot deck and the process of discovery that plays in divination. Frank Kersnowski, in “Sometimes a Windmill Really Is a Giant: Reflections on Miguel de Cervantes, Lawrence Durrell, and C.W. Spinks,” manages to play trickster games with Durrell and the editor to look at the problem of seriousness and game playing in narratives. Scott Simpkins, in “‘A Story Fram’d in Sport’: Narrative Tricks and Wordsworth’s ‘The Ruined Cottage’ Complex,” examines the tricksteresque role of the narrator in Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage.” Linda J. Rogers, in “Outstepping Time/Rainy Day Stories to Trick the Trickster,” looks at her daughter and her family history in terms of tricksteresque functions of doubling. Sean A. Day, in “Semi-reflection of Types of Synesthesia,” examines how one’s own body and perceptual processes can function as Trickster. Nancy Stockall, in “The Expert Pilot: Trickster Extraordinaire,” looks at the role of private pilots and the tricksteresque quality of their professional lives. Terry Stocker, in “Is There Really a Man in the Moon?” looks at the Trickster elements of Aztec time keeping and calendar making. Myrdene Anderson, in “A Trickster Of, By, and For Our Time: Y2K from Conception to Postmortem,” continues Trickster’s time aspects by looking at the most recent iteration of Trickster in the infamous non-happening of the Y2K problem of the millennial shift. Finally, Elzbieta Kasmerizec, who served as discussant for the symposium, here responds to the revised papers as commentator on the whole volume.

I am grateful to my colleagues here and in the Semiotic Society, who have encouraged me and taken my invitations to play with Trickster quite seriously. Without them this work could not have been done, and it is my hope you find these essays useful and productive for you. I hope that Trickster, like the Tar Baby incarnation, gets hold of your imagination and will not let go.

C. W. Spinks
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