

TRICKSTER'S CROSSROADS, THE PREPARED MIND, AND MONEY
-- Katharyn Waterfield

Hyde (1998) enumerates many of the similarities between the trickster and a psychopath. With many similarities between them, the trickster is often thought of as a psychopath. However, Hyde points out that the trickster is much more multifaceted than the psychopath (creation *and* destruction, e.g.) and also is responsible for his actions (resulting in good or bad, but still responsible). We may find comfort in distancing ourselves from the disconcerting experience by naming it 'psychopath', instead of, as Hyde asserts, the disturbing choice to experience the "real contact" of the trickster. That "real contact" is rarely going to be enjoyable like the reading of a trickster tale, so there is preparation required to be able to hold the experience. "Trickster is among other things the gatekeeper who opens the door into the next world; those who mistake him for a psychopath *never even know such a door exists.*" (pp. 158-159).

Such is where my experience of personally engaging with this paper on the trickster begins. This explication and comparison also served as a means for me to fully recognize where I did, at least temporarily, insert some distance into my own most recent extreme 'crossroads' experience. For it is in the wake of a psychopath that I am personally brought onto a new (or revived) branch of my vocational path, into this very richly fulfilling study, and into part of the answer to a deep psychic calling.

As I initially began to puzzle about this novel comparison of trickster and psychopath, I wondered if the trickster archetype 'simply' utilizes whoever is present, in my case a psychopath, for the purpose of generating the unexpected that then lands in the

traveler's path. (It took me a while, but I now understand that any archetype does not show up in/as *a* person, but instead the archetype expresses through the available array of people, events, and energies that are gathered. All of this can then generate an archetypal experience within those events. Much of my struggle to connect with this character rests in my ongoing struggle to more fully understand archetypes in general.) Was the experience of the trickster also then 'simply' 'in the mind of the beholder'? I cannot begin to answer that in anything but the affirmative, since I believe that any 'reality' *is* in the mind of the perceiver, after all. But this recognition moved the locus of action, and of my attention. That it is in the mind of the beholder in no way minimizes the experience or the effect, nor, for myself, my own recognition that my trauma itself was exactly that unexpected element dropped in my path.

As almost an aside, regarding my trying to figure out what is an archetype, what is an expression of the archetype: I believe I may be in the midst of a bit of an archetypal experience. My entire experience of trying to pin down the focus and approach and content of this paper has been more elusive, more evasive, and more aggravatingly transmogrifying than any paper I have yet tackled. If this is not a personal experience of the abstract archetype in question, then I am simply not figuring things out at all. (I suspect, however, that I am.) So with this realization I do choose to pause and wonder at the confusion and mental congestion that is certainly a demonstration of the trickster's presence. And from all that I have read, I take this as a reminder to pay attention.

In searching for the content and structure of this paper, I found myself predominantly attracted to 'trickster and the crossroads'. As I read on, my attention was humorously captivated by all of the 'c' characteristics that aligned with trickster and his

role at the crossroads. Amused, I noted that in with the trickster's role at the 'crossroads' there are also found: chance, contingency, collision, chaos, coincidence, convergence, and, well, seemingly ever-more examples kept coming to mind. Trickster *is* funny!

Eshu, Legba, and the other trickster figures do rule the crossroads. They are considered to be threshold *guardians*, but I feel that they are fully crossroad *gods*. Thresholds being optimum places for crossroads, contingency, chance to occur, it makes sense trickster would 'hang out' there! The crossroad, however, is truly the domain and the dominion of the trickster because he actually generates the crossroads, he does not just watch and guard it! It is in trickster's creating the chance, the convergence, the chaos, bringing about the coincidence that we are then presented with truly new choices. We can look away, stay on our original path (probably a rule-governed, and culturally blessed one) or we can investigate the option, the intersection; we can allow our self to become curious about the nature of what is in front of us.

So now faced with the unexpected, the accident, fate, a new road... what makes it *good* luck or a *fortuitous* event? This is where our part and our participant is especially required. We need to open the channel between us and the gods, and we need to be ready to accept whatever happens. This requires sacrifice, preparation... and getting Eshu on our side!

Hyde and others point out that a sacrifice is required to Eshu, especially before requesting connection to any other god, as Eshu is the mediator between heaven and earth, man and the gods. (He is also the mediator between our inner experience and our outer experience.) The sacrifice to Eshu opens the channel, it starts the commerce between heaven and earth. Since this is true of any 'communion' with the gods, so this is

also or especially true at the crossroad. And let us not define ‘crossroads’ too narrowly. As we venture forth in our daily life, undertaking the routine or the novel activity, we are best to recall that at any moment we may be crossing *that* threshold, we may be entering new territory, we may be the recipient of the unexpected. This sacrifice, then, is advisedly undertaken *at all times*.

The sacrifice? In my mind, and I think supported with all that I read, it is the payment of attention. We make an *offering* of our *attention*. This sacrifice, this attention that must be paid, has an effect on the quality of fortune. Hyde does point out that paying attention to Eshu, to trickster, has an effect (positive) on the luck we experience. (Likewise, not paying attention to Eshu also can have a potentially catastrophic effect on the luck we experience!) “If people refuse to sacrifice, Eshu will certainly bring them suffering” but for those that remember to make this ‘payment’ “he will mix luck into fate’s design” (Hyde, 1998, p. 125).

Then there is this correct and necessary state of mind. My earliest excitedly gathered notes on this subject are all about the state of mind, the attitude that is necessary to perceive, to notice, and to acknowledge the possible presence or revelation of an unexpected gift, a lucky find, wrought by the trickster. The question for me was to understand the nature of the “prepared mind” (Hyde, 1998, p.140) that is needed to become aware of, to accept, and even possibly to transform ‘whatever has happened’ into good fortune. For it became clear that it is the ‘prepared mind’ that makes *possible* the existence of the gift, the lucky find, the good luck: “...the shapeshifting mind pesters the distinction between accident and essence and *remakes* the world out of whatever happens.” (p.100). So not only does this ‘prepared mind’ *receive* and recognize what

may lay disguised before it, but it has the power to transform the outcome of whatever has occurred *into a gift*, a good, a blessing. Fortune is not just an accidental, unintelligent stroke of an anonymous brush, but it is the convergence of preparedness and opportunity. I see in this lesson about trickster, and how life works, a very early expression of what we consider positive thinking, or philosophies recognizing the mind-experience connection - ‘as a man thinketh, so is he’.

One important divergence of the trickster teachings from the ‘positive thinking’ genre that I have been deeply impacted by in the past, is the different emphasis that is placed on intention. In the realm of much of today’s ‘new thought’, mind-spirit-body philosophies is a great allegiance to *intention*. The power of intention is at times sacrosanct in these circles, and co-existing with it is a nasty backlash if one experiences ‘bad’ fortune. That backlash is the ostensibly caring but very cutting: “So, you must have had an unconscious intention of *not* having x...”

This allegiance to intention pins us also to what is known, what already exists. Intention can only come from the known desire, the known lack, the known aim. But the power of the crossroad is the power of the “2 road chance” (Hyde, 1998, p. 122), that which alone can create “absolute newness”. Devotion to intention can even cut off the ability to *see* the absolutely new! (And besides all this, “chance circumvents intention” (p. 145)! So this prepared mind better be a flexible one! Set your sites, but then let go the outcome!)

So, what is this ‘prepared mind’? What kind of mind is required to make the most of “whatever happens”? What kind of mind is needed to be blessed with a ‘lucky find’? Fortunately it seems to be a state of mind we already have and can nurture, as Hyde

discusses. But, he continues, “those who take it seriously awaken and school it through attention to its gods” (Hyde, 1998, p. 141). If we wish to foster the appropriate state of mind, then the sacrifice is a most significant piece of that nurturance. We can nurture it by the attention we pay via some small ritualistic action we perform. This ritual serves us greatly “...at the thresholds where one crosses into territories of increased contingency, such small ritual actions bring to mind the mind contingency demands” (p.141). As we pay attention in this way, we remain curious, open, and responsive. We allow ourselves to investigate, wonder, and look at what is anomalous, unexpected, and when we find it we are intrigued by it. We allow ourselves to be *affected* by this find. Only in this way can the unexpected be seen and accepted and harvested.

It is only in putting these words down, that I am struck with really how thoroughly the idea of *commerce* permeates trickster’s purpose and mode of being in almost all expressions. For Commerce is exchange, it is relationship. Whether it is the exchange between the body and the world for satiation, or between inner and outer, spiritual and mundane, or between individuals or organizations... this exchange is the commerce that the trickster works to ensure.

The crossroad, the confluence, the lucky find for me while wrestling with this subject and paper came while reading Pelton. I suddenly had a memory come crashing through my consciousness and connecting trickster with previous teachings about the spiritual nature ...of money! I began to wonder if money is this culture’s trickster. Remembering that previous class, I also recognized two more “c” words! Suddenly ‘commerce’ and ‘currency’ are added to the “C list”. On top of that, ‘community’, and

‘connection’ emerged, as did intercourse (that last not making it to the ‘c’ list, of course, without some real convolution).

Can we see a few, maybe many, of tricksters characteristics in money? Money, in all of its forms, cash, currency, check, or barter, brings us constantly into community, into relationship with others in our larger group, in our society, our culture. We need (or desire) things that others have to offer. We need to go to where they are, or vice versa, there is an agreement and then an exchange of agreed upon value, and, voilá, we have a relationship. And if we do not *pay* it the proper *attention*, Money *can* begin to own us. It can seem to keep us in jobs, keep us inside the rule-governed structure of corporations and society. Then, with money as the (attention deprived) master, the *unexpected* can happen to disrupt our allegiance to the rule-bound and the safe. Money can vanish, be taken, be sacrificed wholly for survival or love or out of stupidity. Then we may suddenly find ourselves on an unexpected road that has diverged from where we thought we were going. Conversely, money’s sudden *abundance* can do the same, and have similarly devastating or enriching effects. (Luck, as with beauty, is [made possible only] in the mind of the beholder. “What the *lucky find* reveals is neither cosmos nor chaos but the *mind of the finder*.” P139 Hyde.)

As Pelton points out about the trickster (and I attempt to offer regarding money), he springs out of the social structure: “...the trickster is rooted in the social patterns out of which his imaginative forms spring” (1980, p. 231). Pelton emphasized that each incarnation or expression of trickster is uniquely expressing those characteristics that are called for *in and by its own culture*. What does this say about us, if money is our trickster? I am afraid that answer may be more derogatory than hopeful. If it is just a few

of trickster characteristics showing up as money...? Maybe we are so destitute, so spiritually impoverished that this is all of trickster that we can handle.

I am going to end with a nod to our culture, to a grounded hope based in the deep and abiding trickster heritage that *it does indeed have*, whether we can see it yet or not. I came to discover that the year of my birth and that of our nation's birth is, in Chinese astrology: The Year of the Monkey! Another classic trickster. We have hope!

Monkeys have flexible principles and serene self-confidence so they are completely content; but they usually manage to complicate the lives of others. After yet another plan or project has gone wrong, they are seldom there to help clean up the disorder and confusion that they leave in their wake. Monkeys can handle that too; with their charm and persuasiveness they can make people believe that just knowing them is a privilege. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monkey_\(zodiac\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monkey_(zodiac)))

References

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