



## INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSIONS: TRICKSTERS—METAPLAYERS AND REVEALERS

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Something about the antics of the trickster causes this figure to be enjoyed worldwide. The heartiest laughter within belief systems seems to be reserved for those mythic and ritual occasions when tricksters profane the most sacred beliefs and practices—be they occasioned by Hermes in Greece, Maui in Hawaii, Loki in Scandinavia, or Agu Tomba in Tibet. Systems normally busy generating firm adherence to their constitutive values are discovered to be simultaneously and contradictorily maintaining a raft of tricksters who perpetually counter, upend, and loosen adherence to these same values.

The preceding chapters witness the variety, frequency, and pervasiveness of tricksters. What significance may be attributed to the trickster phenomenon, sighted in such various contexts? Many of the authors of the preceding chapters have proposed insights into this question. Although the phenomena of tricksters are so rich as to put us on guard against definitive conclusions, this last chapter offers a range of interpretative theses ranging from the most apparent to the less obvious. In conformity with trickster logic, they can be considered to be inclusive of one another or not.

1. *Trickster myths are deeply satisfying entertainment.* These myths are entertaining at a variety of levels, both to those who tell them within their respective belief systems and to those who study them formally

from without. That it is necessary to begin here with such an apparently obvious observation again reveals the attempts in this book to offset a dominant Western cultural bias. Is there a bifurcation between matters serious and matters humorous? Between matters educational and matters entertaining? Contributors here have argued otherwise. Most of our authors would support the insight of the Catholic novelist, Flannery O'Connor that "the maximum amount of seriousness admits the maximum amount of comedy" (O'Connor 1980: 167).

Confronted with the inherent humor, dramatic timing, and narrative tension of the trickster myths, more than one scholar has remarked, perhaps a trifle sheepishly, that a central personal if somewhat unconscious motivation in studying the structure of these myths is the entertainment they provide. Witness Katharine Luomala of the Bishop's Museum in Hawaii: "Their basic human appeal, independent of cultural differences, is their initial attractive quality and their most enduring, for I find that rereading them and once more enjoying their humor soon dissipates any weariness from my endless dissection and attempts at synthesizing information about them and about the cultures in which they are popular" (Luomala 1966: 157).

Within Western cultures during the last century, a clear delight in and fascination with the trickster and tricksterish characteristics have gone a great distance toward establishing the trickster narrative as a literary genre. One volume of studies, *The Fool and the Trickster* (Williams 1979), cites tricksters across a range of Northern European mythology, medieval European fools, *Dr. Faustus*, and Shakespeare. Confidence men have been the central characters of Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1875) and Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (1954). Susan Kuhlmann's *Knave, Fool, and Genius* (1973) concentrates on the literary uses of the confidence man in nineteenth-century American fiction.

Within the more specific American literary scene, Gary Snyder has exhibited an intense fascination with the modalities of the Coyote tricksters in his poetry and fiction (1977). Playwright Murray Medick has recently completed a cycle of seven plays based upon the trickster myth cycle (see Kroll 1985; cf. Gelber 1981 on the work of playwright Sam Shephard). Gerald Vizenor's *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (1981) is one of the most successful sets of short accounts of contemporary trickster figures. Vizenor prefaces his book with a version of the

"whites have headaches, skins have anthropologists" saying: "The creation myth that anthropologists never seem to tell is the one where *naanabozho*, the cultural trickster, made the first anthropologist from fecal matter. Once made, more were cloned in graduate schools from the first fecal creation" (xv). The stories in *Earthdivers* parody a wide range of academic sanctities, particularly those about how to treat "minority cultures" (trickster themes reappear in Vizenor 1987 and 1988).

Although there are various real-life, twentieth-century tricksters, more often than not the tenor of their character tends not to be as rich, multivocal, or polychromic as that of mythic tricksters. Hugh Trevor-Roper wrote one study of a famous English scholar-trickster in his *Hermit of Peking: The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse* (1977). One of the leading sinologists of his time (1873–1944), Backhouse "discovered" and brokered rare Chinese literary texts to Oxford University and merchandized strategic military information to the British Foreign Office. He was professor of Chinese studies at the University of London and very nearly appointed to a similar chair at Oxford. By the time of his death, many of the texts he had passed along, such as the Empress Dowager's diaries, were discovered to be clever forgeries and the information sold to the Foreign Office equally bogus. Given Trevor-Roper's close familiarity with the guises and forgeries of tricksters, as well as his own earlier scholarly reputation as a scholar of the Hitler regime, it was doubly ironic that several years ago he was one of the first scholars to confirm the authenticity of the Hitler Diaries only days before they were revealed as forgeries.

More recently Bernard Wasserstein has traced the European career of a figure similar to Backhouse, Trebitsch Lincoln, who was variously a Jew, a Christian, and a Buddhist abbot, a member of the British House of Commons, and a German spy (Wasserstein 1988). Neither education nor social class forms dependable protections against the deceptions of the trickster; rather, they offer attractive occasions for his predictable deflations.

Carlos Castañeda, a contemporary American scholar whose several volumes documented a twelve-year encounter in the Sonoran desert with a Yaqui sorcerer, Don Juan Matus, might be cited as a case of the category "scholar-trickster." The initial volume earned Castañeda a doctorate in anthropology at UCLA, fame as a countercultural writer in the 1960s, and significant financial gain, but there are those who argue that Castañeda's writings are entirely fictive. Richard De Mille in *Castañeda's*

*Journey* (1976) suggests persuasively that Castañeda's meetings with Don Juan were completely fabricated. Within this fiction, De Mille suggests that there are other tricksterish elements, particularly those in which the sorcerer trains the budding anthropologist, Carlos, by using continual deceptions to open his more ordinary and linear perceptions to the realms of the extraordinary and nonlinear. The search for such realms by the counterculture of the 1970s resulted in near cultic status for Castañeda's works.

Conrad Hyers has explored the film persona of Charlie Chaplin as a trickster figure (1981). Howard Movshovitz, film critic for National Public Radio, treated both Chaplin and Chaucer in a dissertation at the University of Colorado entitled "The Trickster Myth and Chaucer's Partners" (1977). Real-life contemporary American tricksters have been celebrated both in book form and film: for example *The Flim Flam Man* (1967), the tale of a famous southern trickster in the Great Depression, as chronicled by Guy Owens, and *The Great Imposter* (1961), which told the story of Fred C. DeMerra and his complex imposterings as prison warden, navy surgeon, and Trappist abbot in the 1950s. The trickster theme could be traced readily in a wide range of popular films, as well as in other forms of popular culture. An example of the former might be the role played by Burt Reynolds in such films as *W.W. and the Dixie Dance Kings* and *Smoky and the Bandit*. With regard to popular culture, Abrahams (1968: 176) suggests that the trickster reappears in American white urban joke cycles in the form of Moron, Hophead, Drunkard, Moby Pickle, or Kilroy, as well as in the Traveling Salesman and in Elephant jokes. The recent collection, *American Indian Myths and Legends* by Erdoes and Ortiz (1984), demonstrates repeatedly that the trickster is very much alive in contemporary Native American culture, even as the figure spills over into mass media transformations.

Both within specific cultures and worldwide, the humor and laughter evoked by trickster myths are never exhausted in a single telling. Obviously something is being communicated that bears repeating. As Pelton argues, beyond the surface humor, there is a deeper type of insight, irony, and transformation at work in the trickster myths. So too Anthony Yu, in his translation of the Chinese classic, *The Journey to the West*, makes a parallel judgment about the monkey trickster, in which he sees him as both the occasion for humor and the bearer of enlightenment (Yu 1977).

Thus, the trickster's humor melds entertainment and education. We

may laugh, but a deeper unfolding is at work. At one level, the trickster bears the gift of laughter, but it is tied to another level, linked to another gift, one that evokes insight and enlightenment.

2. *Trickster myths are ritual vents for social frustrations.* Historically, the single most common significance overtly attached to tricksters and their antics by Western cultures has been their ability to function as a vent through which pressures engendered by a system of beliefs and behaviors can be dissipated. A good example of this position can be found in the fifteenth-century debates within the theological faculty of Paris I referred to at the end of chapter 3. Note the social utility argument implicit in this recounting of a defense of the Feast of Fools by a member of that faculty:

But they [the defenders of the Feast of Fools] say, we act in jest and not seriously, as has been the custom of old, so that the foolishness innate in us can flow out once a year and evaporate. Do not wineskins and barrels burst if their bungs are not loosened once in a while? Even so, we are old wineskins and worn barrels; the wine of wisdom fermenting within us, which we hold tightly all year in the service of God, might flow out uselessly, if we did not discharge it ourselves now and then with games and foolishness. Emptied through play, we may become stronger afterwards to retain wisdom. (Davis 1971: 48)

Fools and tricksters seem to have an affinity for linking foolishness and play with wisdom and work. Both "the foolishness innate in us" and "the wine of wisdom fermenting within us" need to be discharged through games.

Another example of this social venting explanation can be seen in the far more utilitarian and calculating view voiced at the end of the sixteenth century by the French lawyer Claude de Rubys: "It is sometimes expedient to allow the people to play the fool and make merry lest by holding them in with too great a rigor, we put them in despair. . . . These gay sports abolished, the people go instead to taverns, drink up and begin to cackle, their feet dancing under the table, to decipher King, princes . . . the State and Justice, and draft scandalous defamatory leaflets" (Davis 1971: 41).

Such a calculating view illustrates a darker use of tricksters, humor, sports, and diversions. Separating the entertaining humor from any inherent link with enlightenment results in mere diversions that distract

people from deeper social complaints, awareness, or action. Without this deeper element, sports, circuses, and other spectacles simply divert people from the more serious matters in need of attention and reformation.

Some time after the invention of steam power, the metaphor chosen to describe this social venting shifted away from the agrarian model of wine barrels and bungholes toward steam engines and safety valves. Babcock-Abrahams notes one of the first mentions of such rituals acting as social steam valves in Heinrich Schurtz's *Alterklassen und Männerbunde*, published in 1902 (Babcock-Abrahams 1984: 22).

Trickster myths and parallel ritualizations can offer an officially sanctioned escape clause whereby people can elude momentarily the rigidity or demands of their belief system and "blow off" the repressed vapors of frustration. That these myths can act as escape mechanisms while being both entertaining and educational, and also graph out the societal ethics, is remarkable. Perhaps, contemporary Western societies that sometimes separate humor and enlightenment, replacing this link with a heavy dose of moralism, might learn from trickster materials and emulate this lighter sort of temper so that "emptied through play, we may become stronger afterwards to retain wisdom" (Davis 1971: 48).

3. *Tricksters reaffirm the belief system.* In belief systems where entertainment is not separated from education, trickster myths can be a powerful teaching device utilizing deeply humorous negative examples that reveal and reinforce the societal values that are being broken (Gluckman 1965: 109). Breaching less visible but deeply held societal values serves not only to reveal these values but to reaffirm them (Garfinkel 1967: 35ff). Indeed, Garfinkel suggests this process can become a formal method whereby the sociologist or anthropologist can bring to the surface hidden values: only when one breaches supposed overt or possibly covert rules will one know if they really exist; only when there is a societal response will one know how seriously this rule is taken. Of course, the inventor of the method is not himself immune: Garfinkel was the professor at UCLA who signed off on Carlos Castañeda's anthropology dissertation that was supposedly based upon the *sine qua non* for anthropologists, that is, extensive fieldwork.

As Vescey argues in this collection, in breaking the rules, the trickster confirms the rules. Thus, the process is both disruptive and confirmatory. What is mocked is maintained. The trickster "affirms by denying"

(Zucker 1967: 317). For Babcock-Abrahams that which is "being broken is always implicit . . . for the very act of deconstructing reconstructs" (Babcock-Abrahams 1978: 99).

The trickster profanes yet affirms the sacred. Each time he causes laughter by his imitation of the powers and prerogatives of another being, the relative wisdom of the locus and boundaries of these rights and privileges is reconfirmed. Every time the trickster breaks a taboo or boundary, the same taboo or boundary is underlined for non-tricksters. Thus examples of the trickster's negative activity, such as the profaning of sacred beliefs, being seduced by pride, or engaging in antisocial behavior, can be understood as an adroit reverse stressing of the need for reverence, humility, or dedication to the common good.

Because tricksters are so often the official ritual profaners of the central beliefs of a given system, they can act as a camera obscura in which the reversed mirror image serves as a valuable index to the sacred beliefs of that same system. As the seventeenth-century Jesuit, Balthasar Gracian, notes in his novel *El Criticon* (1651), "The things of this world can be truly perceived only by looking at them backwards" (Babcock-Abrahams 1978: 13). Flannery O'Connor has remarked that the best way for her to understand and critique her own writing is to read it backwards: "Try rearranging it backwards and see what you see" (O'Connor 1980: 67). She also saw the value of distortion: "I am interested in making up a good case for distortion, as I am coming to believe it is the only way to make people see" (O'Connor 1980: 79).

Poised to explore and understand a new culture or belief system, the traveler might wish to inquire about indigenous trickster myths. If such myths exist and are shared without censorship, their profanations might serve to reveal the sacred beliefs at the heart of this system. Even as these sacred beliefs are ritually profaned by the trickster, they are simultaneously being reconfirmed, particularly for those who are not themselves tricksters.

4. *Tricksters are psychic explorers and adventurers.* The trickster has also been understood, particularly from psychological points of view, as representing a *speculum mentis* within which the central unresolvable human struggles are played out (Radin 1955: xxiv). As a prototypical human, the trickster "symbolizes that aspect of our own nature which is always nearby, ready to bring us down when we get inflated, or to humanize us when we become pompous. . . . The major psychological

function of the trickster figure is to make it possible for us to gain a sense of proportion about ourselves" (Singer 1972: 289–90). Thus, we can see the trickster as a jester holding forth in both the macrocosmic court of human society and the microcosmic court of the self.

In Freudian terms the trickster could be said to embody in dramatic form the ongoing battle between the id and the superego. The trickster constantly oscillates back and forth between self-gratification and cultural heroism (Piper 1978: 15). In neo-Freudian terms, the trickster is caught in a struggle between the pleasure principle and the reality principle (Bettelheim 1975: 33–34). Abrahams sees the trickster as the embodiment of a "regressive infantilism," and yet the pattern of a small animal outwitting a larger animal or human can also provide a model of hope to children or adults who find themselves suppressed (1968: 173–75). Pelton makes the same point more poetically when he observes: "The purpose of the stories is to put an adult mind in a child's heart and a child's eye in an adult head" (Pelton 1980: 279).

The contemporary and controversial psychologist of schizophrenia, R. D. Laing, has himself been described as a trickster advocating tricksterish logic by the social anthropologist Joan Wescott:

[R. D. Laing has] a tremendous talent for turning things upside down in order to free you from old modes of perception. He's like the Trickster, whose name means *the guide to travelers*. Among the Yoruba the Trickster is regarded as both father and child of all the other gods. He's responsible for change, an essential force in any culture. . . . Basically, I think [Laing] sees his task as mediating between man's present and potential states. The Trickster is also a mediator. He's usually pictured standing at a crossroads. He's very cunning. In one myth he walks along the boundary line between two farms wearing a hat that's white on one side and black on the other. Needless to say, this provokes a dispute between the two farmers as to the identity of the trespasser. You see, the Trickster is absolutely against any authority and without any allegiances. He's capable of transformations, a shape shifter. Ronnie [Laing], too, wears many hats—to show people that they see what they want to see. (Mczan 1972: 94–95)

The most familiar psychological interpretation of the trickster is that of Carl Jung and some of his disciples. Here the trickster is viewed as "a primitive 'cosmic' being of *divine-animal* nature, on the one hand supe-

rior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness" (Jung 1955: 203-4). Jung considers the trickster to be a "shadow" that brings to the surface the underside or reverse of dominant values. Breaking through into the world of normalcy and order, the trickster plays out subterranean forbiddens in dreamlike fashion. For Jung this process represents both the ongoing fugue between the personal consciousness and the more trans-personal unconsciousness, as well as the dynamic byplay between the civilized and the primitive. As a civilization rises to consciousness, it may attempt to clean up or repress the trickster altogether (Jung 1955: 202-9), yet even as civilization constructs a shared, conscious order of beliefs, the pesky trickster disrupts all such orderings with reminders of a shared disorder or collective unconsciousness (Neumann 1954: 8).

In Jungian interpretation, the trickster, as shadow, can therefore serve as the breakthrough point for the surfacing of repressed values. At a deeper level he remains a creative mediator between that which is differentiated, ordered, predictable, and distinct, on the one hand, and that which is undifferentiated, unordered, spontaneous, and whole, on the other. In this way the trickster may be understood as the embodiment of such productive chaos as creativity, play, spontaneity, inventiveness, ingenuity, and adventure. The trickster not only helps us encounter these yet-to-be-focused energies but also ventures forth in an ongoing exploration and charting of the inchoate, the "otherness" that always resurges to challenge our neat and organized sense of personal control. Even when he charts an aspect of the inchoate, however, the trickster would be the first to disassemble rapidly any chart. Even if maps are only pointings, they are essentially inadequate guides to the typography of the inchoate because the inchoate will always exceed their grasp.

When the Jungian trickster begins to resemble an archetypal or universal entity, it opens itself to strong criticism from the particularists. For example, T. O. Beidelman's critique is pertinent here: "Disparate figures have all too frequently been termed *trickster*, yet this term is clearly the product of the analysts' ethnocentric evaluations of deviance and disorder, and does not always derive squarely from the evaluations held by the members of the cultures in which they appear" (1980: 35). Even Beidelman, however, cannot resist using the "*trickster* in a shorthand manner to refer to a category of figures only in part resembling what are

conventionally termed *trickster* by those using universal categorizations" (1980: 28).

Implicit in both this discussion and the earlier treatment of universals and particulars in chapter 1 is the confrontation of a continuum: at one extreme a universal, so obvious to some so as not to need to be demonstrated, and at the other extreme, the particular aspects of a single trickster figure within a single culture, viewed as so distinctive so as to be virtually *sui generis*. In between are such terms as Beidelman's "shorthand" and my own "heuristic guide or typology." These middle terms imply that it is not necessary for the term "trickster" to have a set number of characteristics in all existing belief systems for the term to have meaning. As long as a number of shared characteristics are found in a large number of instances, it is possible to speak, albeit carefully, of "a trickster figure." Whatever one says generally still remains subject to revision by the specific aspects of individual belief systems.

As mentioned in chapter 3, in the process of bringing this volume to fruition, Laura Makarius suggested that only if a comprehensive grid of characteristics could be applied to all cultural instances of supposed trickster figures might we finally lay this issue to rest. For my part, I see the problem more at the level of the nature of knowledge, having less to do with the design and application of an empirical grid and more to do with the long-standing battle between universals and particulars. At times this battle has been played out as the issue of "analogy of proper proportionality," or the difference between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, or the nature of metaphor.

If never adequately captured by a formula, as psychic adventurer the trickster continues to go where others wish to venture yet fear to tread. He is guide both to actual travelers who live by their wits and to armchair explorers who live by their hopes. A stalking horse of the improbable, the trickster occasions discoveries of the possible while he proffers an exemplar for subsequent imitation. What makes the trickster's journeys those of a psychopomp is not simply his moving back and forth across the borders of life and death, but his passage and return across the stages and states of life itself as well. If we are the myths we myth, the trickster myth beckons us toward innovation; he is a psychic guide or hermeneut leading us on through the thickets of personal and social signifiers toward invention of the self and society.

5. *Tricksters are agents of creativity who transcend the constrictions of*

*monoculturality*. Perhaps the greatest empowerment that the trickster brings is the excitement and hope occasioned by "the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective" (Douglas 1968: 365). Beyond mere venting of frustrations, beneath the clever reverse reaffirmation of a given belief system, there is a more subtle, deeper, and broader meta-affirmation that life is much more than the sum of its social or religious constructs. Beyond all mere "scouting out" of possible alternate personal or social constructs, the trickster reminds us that every construct is constructed. Not only is someone not confined to a single construct or system of order, she is not confined to a choice among alternative constructs. The hermeneut puts us in contact with the sources of creativity from which we can be empowered to construct our own construct. The trickster's constant chattering and antics remind us that life is endlessly narrative, prolific and open-ended.

No narrative, category, or construct is ever fully watertight. Each one leaks, some more than others. The trickster redramatizes and reacquaints us with the "more than this" dimensionality of existence; he evokes the polysemous quality of life (Lorenz and Vecsey 1988 [1979]: 1-11). Unbordered multivocality triumphs over bordered univocality. As Tom Steele and I argued in chapter 10: "The trickster swivels in its socket the cyclopean eye of monoculturality; he roils the tribal waters of life lest they go stagnant." Just as the presence of a child reminds adults how rigidly they have taken on a certain kind of order, the trickster reminds us there is no single way to play. "Thus the trickster incarnates in every culture the oxymoronic imagination at play, literally 'fooling around' to discover new paradigms and even new logics. As such, he reveals man's freedom to shape the world just because it actively offers itself to him—even if he must trick it to make it come across" (Pelton 1980: 272).

The apparent return to order following the trickster's antics can be misleading because now the imagination has been stimulated toward envisioning "a wholly different kind of world" (Cox 1969: 3). At the one end of a scale of social consequences, the trickster offers ritual rebellion in lieu of actual rebellion—briefly reminding adherents of a belief system of its own inherent relativity may make it more bearable. But at the other end of this scale of social consequences, however, the trickster may prepare the way for adaptation, change, or even total replacement of the belief system—the very process of registering and sharing social complaints can initiate movement toward a new consensus. In fact, the system is reopened to its own inward resources of power where imagi-

native alternatives are glimpsed. Victor Turner reminds us that the liminal figure of the trickster breaks "the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation" so that there is a "promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories" (Turner 1969: 106). Furthermore, this promiscuous intermingling may engender new progeny, never of a type previously envisioned: "Such 'creative negations' remind us of the need to reinvest the clean with the filthy, the rational with the animalistic, the ceremonial with the carnivalesque in order to maintain cultural vitality. And they confirm the endless potentiality of dirt and the pure possibility of liminality. The *mundus inversus* [inverted world] does more than simply mock our desire to live according to our usual orders and norms; it reinvests life with a vigor and a *Spielraum* [an arena of playful inventiveness] attainable (it would seem) in no other way" (Babcock-Abrahams 1978: 32). Thus the trickster's breaking and reaffirming the rules represent a move "beyond order and disorder to transformed order significantly revitalized and repopulated with a wider breadth of options" (Pelton 1979: 8).

As an agent of creativity, the trickster is often associated with activities that center upon human creativity: the bringing of culture, laughter, business transactions, as well as opening of the doors of perception. As was noted in chapter 1, the trickster's association with creativity parallels his common linkage with creation and innovation; the creative process mimics the creation process itself. Tricksters in their own way counter the Stoic argument that the trait that we have in common with God and the universe is *logos*: word, logic, and order. Tricksters argue that the common trait is creativity: imagination, invention, and experimentation.<sup>1</sup>

As Makarius notes in chapter 5, innovations and creativity have a price. The cost of obtaining inventions, innovations or aspects of creation, is the breaking of taboos, which then unleashes punishments. However, the trickster has the knack of operating as a "pass-through-mechanism." He manages to break a given taboo, pass on the related cultural gift, and deflect the respective punishment from the recipients of the cultural benefit onto himself. This is nearly a paradigmatic truism of the pattern for many inventors: they create an innovation, whose benefits are utilized by others, while the creators are the recipients of the punishment and scorn bestowed directly upon them because they broke the set patterns of order and their reciprocal taboos.

As the agent of imposturing and ingenuity, the trickster often circles

around the sources of creativity and transformation. For example, in reviewing a recent novel by Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), Gerald Vizenor, himself the author of the highly acclaimed *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987), notes that ultimately the central trickster's "simian moves are comic transformations rather than mere imposture" (Vizenor 1989: 10). When we look beyond the trickster's surface antics, border-breaking, and profanities, in addition to the bas relief profile of the central beliefs of a dominant belief system, there is the path of vicarious explorations, potential new inventions, and behind all these the profile of human inventiveness.

6. *Tricksterish metaplay dissolves the order of things in the depth of the opened metaplay of life.* Clifford Geertz notes in his essay, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (Geertz 1972), one of the essential characteristics and attractions of "deep play" is that those involved in it are "in over their heads" because of the size of the stakes or because of the probability of disaster. Hence, Jeremy Bentham's *The Theory of Legislation* (1789), in which Geertz believes the concept of deep play is found for the first time, attempted legally to prevent such nonsensical opportunities. Those who engage in deep play are clearly "irrational—addicts, fetishists, children, fools, savages, who need only to be protected from themselves." (Geertz 1972: 433ff).

In *Man at Play*, Hugo Rahner captures precisely this distinctive transrational aspect of play: "To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic, to enact to oneself the absolutely other, to pre-empt the future, to give the lie to the inconvenient world of fact" (Rahner 1967: 65); in short, there is an "otherness" to play that we might call metaplay. To be sure, such otherness can often be viewed as irrational and threatening by the orderly and established that may seek to control or suppress it. Perhaps, because metaplay is fundamentally closer to the inchoate powers of creativity from which ordered social constructs have themselves originated and from which *new* constructs will arise, such metaplay can easily be perceived as a menace to those who represent the existing social constructs. Isn't this Adolph von Harnack's point about how religions evolve? Religions of heart, spirit, and substance all too soon pass into religions of law, form, and custom; expressions that were once fresh and lucid become outmoded, obscuring and encrustating the intangible creative forces they once so ably communicated (Harnack 1900/1957: 197). Is it not predictable that the old order should fear

metaplay, dancing as it does at the source of creativity, fecund with new orderings itching to replace the old?

Almost in programmatic fashion, metaplay ruptures the shared consciousness, the societal ethos, and consensual validation—in short, the very order of order itself. Thus when the trickster engages in metaplay he places the normal order of things under question. From the advent of metaplay, all previous orders and orderings are clearly labeled contingent.

Most chapters in this book argue that precisely this otherness of the trickster, often manifested in a blizzard of polyvalent activity, has confounded most serious scholarly studies. As Doueihi in particular argues, all too often this scholarship has attempted to sort through this ambiguous and contradictory activity in order to reduce it to a single key; for example, determining earliest features to use them as the key by which to interpret later additions and redactions. Such an approach results not only in a failure to understand the polysemous diversity and endless semiotic activity of the trickster, but it collapses the extraordinary into the ordinary; it trivializes the trickster's otherness, suppressing the underlying fecundity that is the source of the depth and breadth of his metaplay.

Just such a refusal to accept such polyvalent activity on its own terms, insisting that such activity be reduced down to a more manageable monochromic minimum is illustrated most vividly in a historical example given by Jean Dalby Clift in her study of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1972). Over the years, directors of this play have often been confused when confronted by the range of tricksterish activities in the key character Lucio. How could it be that the same character can utter some of the most profound, positive things about matrimony in one breath and then say some of the most scurrilous, demeaning things in another? Directors and scholars often speculated that two disparate characters must have been combined, perhaps because of the limited number of players in the original company of performers. Accordingly, when staging the play with a modern cast, some directors often separated Lucio's lines into two parts and assigned one set to another character; or worse yet, occasionally a director simply casts away one set of lines altogether (Clift 1972).

Because so much of what is said about the trickster comes from the perspective of order, it is not too surprising that the trickster is often seen

as the disrupter, the spoiler, and the thief. From the inverse perspective of the trickster, however, that which is ordered and set is viewed as pre-determined and closed. The inchoate, on the other hand, is the creative wellspring of the yet-to-be. What is undifferentiated and spontaneous can be understood as life-giving and generative. Nietzsche used this inversionary logic when he declared: "objections, digressions, gay mistrust, the delight in mockery are signs of health: everything unconditional belongs to pathology" (Nietzsche 1966: 90). The logic of order and convergence, that is, logocentrism, or logocentrism, is challenged by another path, the random and divergent trail taken by that profane metaplayer, the trickster.

On this trail, all creative inventions are ultimately excreta. Like the mystic who constantly reminds us that no words or doctrinal construct can express adequately the ineffable nature of God, the trickster reminds us that no one creative ordering can capture life. Insofar as an ordering continues to express life, it continues to be viable. If not viable, such orderings will drop away, be replaced by new productions, or these orderings will work to repel their potential replacements. As demigod the trickster constantly reminds us that there are no realms that are excepted from this process, be they sacred or profane. As Robert Pelton has put it so elegantly: "How amazingly large that order is, how charged with both danger and delight, how opposed to the mindless tinkering with mystery so fashionable in the secularized West, the trickster reveals, ironically: as he grasps for the ungraspable and spells out the unsayable, he shows forth divination's power to redraw in the plain earth of daily life the icon of all that truly is" (Pelton 1980: 289). The trickster brings us face to face with such richness of life, but none so rich as the continual rediscovery of the unquenchable fecundity of all that truly is and can be. So say we.

There is a special joy that comes from both studying and then putting aside the trickster for a while. It is exhilarating to watch this character reveal so much of the creativity at the heart of the source of order, while busily profaning and confirming all specific orderings, especially grammar and syntax. Yet, however far one attempts to trace the trickster's tracks, the trickster is ever so much more than what we can find and understand—be he a demigod, a mythic figure, a genre, a symbolic embodiment of the human imagination, or a postmodernist hermeneut

momentarily reflecting back to us our relative place in a nearly infinite chain of signifiers. Thus, when we put our studies to rest for a moment, there is both a distinct sensation of relief as well as a lucid realization that whatever acumen we may have gained, future students of the trickster will still find much to study and ponder in this intriguing and perplexing phenomenon.