ABSTRACT

SCAR-LIP, SKY-WALKER, AND MISCHIEF-MONGER: THE NORSE GOD LOKI AS TRICKSTER

by Shawn Christopher Krause-Loner

Loki, the mischief-maker and adversary of Norse mythology, is a dynamic and ambiguous persona, best understood as figure belonging to the mythic type known as Trickster. This thesis presents three distinct points in its treatment of the mythic figure Loki as Trickster. The first is an argument of the criteria and attributes that make a mythic figure a trickster and the validity of the trickster as a comparative category within the study of religion and myth. Next the Norse myth cycle is examined as it pertains to the attitudes, actions, and personality of Loki, showing him to be an ambiguous contradictory creature. Lastly, there is an explicit comparison between the descriptive and theoretical rubrics and the myths, illustrating how Loki is best understood as a liminal, Trickster figure.

Scar-Lip, Sky-Walker, and Mischief-Monger:

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Dedicated to

My family, friends, colleagues, and professors,

Thank you for all your guidance and support

And especially to my wife Lynette,

For believing in me.

Chapter One

Dancing with the Fool: A Study of the Trickster Typology

> No figure in literature, oral or written, baffles us quite as much as the trickster. He is positively identified with creative powers, often bringing such defining features of culture as fire or basic food, and yet he constantly behaves in the most antisocial manner we can imagine. Although we laugh at him for his troubles and his foolishness and are embarrassed by his promiscuity, his creative cleverness amazes us and keeps alive the possibility of transcending the social restrictions we regularly encounter.[1]

The trickster figure is a creature of contradictions, both within its cultural context and for the scholars who have addressed it. As the opening quotation makes clear, the trickster is creative, often identified as a culture bringer or culture hero,[2] yet he[3] can be offensive, antisocial and destructive. The trickster is the fool who tricks and is tricked, the sly genius and the bumbling dimwit. The trickster is often a creature of gross appetites demonstrated, "by his prodigious biological drives and exaggerated bodily parts."[4] The figure's actions and attitudes are often lewd and profane yet he is indoctrinated into the sacred life of his culture. "The trickster represents a complicated combination of three modes of sacrality: the divine, the animal, and the human."[5] With a myriad of attributes and talents, one sees why defining the trickster is a complicated and contradicting process. The figure resists easy classification; he slips from one extreme to the other, restless in his wanderings through categories. For the scholar, the trickster, "is a problem because he combines in one personage no less than two and sometimes three or more seemingly different and contrary roles."[6] This problem has led to several definitions of the trickster's

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[1] Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," Journal of the Folklore Institute 11/3 (1975): 147.
[2] Culture hero is the accepted term to describe a being who secures the trappings of culture (fire, agriculture, etc.) for humanity. In the case of the trickster, these interventions are often unexpected and unintentional.
[3] I have chosen to use the masculine pronoun(s) when addressing the trickster character(s) because, within the contexts I am working, the figures are portrayed most often as male. I am aware of the possible sexist overtones this decision might produce, but they are ultimately unintentional.
[4] Lawrence Sullivan, "Tricksters: An Overview," The Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987) 45.
[5] Ibid, 45.
[6] Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," History of Religions 5/2 (1968) 327.

character and function, with these descriptions and interpretations being as divergent as the figure itself.

The characters that have been identified as Tricksters play an important role within the myth cycle or cycles of the cultures in which they are found. Since this thesis is not primarily a specific ethnographic work, it will deal with the possible functions of the trickster in general, comparative terms. However, it should be noted that each culture has its own unique way of describing and utilizing its trickster. Studying the cultural context of a figure is an important aspect of understanding that figure and its place in the society. Whenever possible, the specific culture's understanding of the trickster should be included alongside the comparative, cross-cultural interpretation.

The trickster and his tales are interpreted in a number of ways. His exploits are viewed as mere diversion, entertainment to relax the group, "as a 'time-changer' that offers temporary respite and relaxation from the tedious business of daily life and social reality."[7] The figure is viewed psychologically where, "the role of the trickster seems to be that of projecting the insufficiencies of man in his universe onto a smaller creature, who in besting larger adversaries, permits the satisfaction of an obvious identification to those who recount or listen to these tales."[8] The trickster tales are variously seen as cathartic, societal release valves, social criticism, or, "as moral examples re-affirming the rules of society; or rather they serve as a model for these rules, demonstrating what happens if the prescriptions laid down by society are not observed."[9] These various interpretations, and others, will be explored in greater length throughout the paper, but it is clear just how intricate and complex, how slippery, the trickster can be.

Within the scholarship concerning the trickster, there are a number of controversies that should be raised in this preliminary discussion and will be addressed in more detail when the various scholars and their positions are discussed.

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[7] Babcock-Abrahams, 182.
[8] Maria Leach, ed., "Trickster," The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend (New York: Funk & Wagnall's Co., 1950) 1123.
[9] Brian Street, As cited in William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, "Introducing the Fascinating and Perplexing Trickster Figure," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 6-7.

One debate concerns the validity and value of the typology itself, especially regarding its use as a comparative category and tool. There are those scholars who insist that the trickster is a universal category, present in similar forms in every mythology. To many of these persons, the various trickster characters are extensions, mythic personifications and examples, of a universal trickster figure that lies within the individual and collective human unconscious. The contrary position questions the validity of the category itself, stating that comparative categories are broad generalizations that do not add anything to our understanding of the culture or the individual figure being studied. The arguments become meaningless abstractions. This issue is best conceived of as a continuum of thought with most contemporary scholars falling somewhere in the middle. Another issue that is raised in the study of the trickster is how should the tales themselves be classified. Are these individual stories sacred myths, legends or fairy tales[10]?

> Like Trickster himself, the tales tend to confound sacred/secular tales, or as an intermediate mixed category. Then too, actual performance may confound theoretical distinctions. As Barre Toelken points out about Navaho [sic], "secular" trickster tales are often told in the middle of "sacred myths. Similarly, trickster tales tend not to conform with anthropologists' and folklorists' favored tripartite division into myth, legend, and folktale.[11]

This discussion has generally failed to take performance contexts and specific cultural, emic[12], categories into account. There seem to be few definitive answers to the questions posed; rather it can be seen as further evidence of the contradictory and complex nature of the trickster, and the need for sensitivity when dealing with the stories and beliefs of other cultures.

With so many definitions and interpretations offered concerning the trickster, it would be wise to explore the scholarship surrounding the figure. In that way, it is

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[10] Within the study of folklore, folk narratives have been categorized as myths, legends, or fairy/folk tales. Myths are "truthful" accounts of the remote past, which are considered to be sacred. Legends are stories that are considered to be true but occur in specific places in a less remote time. They can be either secular or sacred. Fairy/Folk tales are narratives regarded as fiction that can be set in any time or place. For more information on the distinction between these categories see:
William Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives." Alan Dundes, ed. Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

[11] Babcock-Abrahams, 165.

[12] Emic categories are those which are found/used within and by a cultural group as compared to etic categories which are those applied by scholars from outside the group.

possible to arrive at general criteria and interpretative schema that can be later applied to the focal character of this thesis, the Germanic god Loki. The term trickster first appeared in English during the eighteenth century to morally designate anyone that deceives or cheats and later became a technical term after its use in Daniel Brinton's *Myths of the New World.*[13]

"More has probably been written about tricksters' than any other single category of character that appears in the myths and folktales of the world."[14] While many scholars have written on the subject of tricksters, the most influential work is Paul Radin's The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology. This work is a landmark in trickster scholarship and can be credited with bringing the trickster into the consciousness of literate people. Radin recounts and analyzes the myth cycle of the Winnebago trickster Wakdjunkaga, whose name means tricky one, as well as the Winnebago Hare cycle. Radin obtained the stories from a Winnebago informant by the name of Sam Blowsnake, who apparently received it from an older member of the tribe, one who was well versed in Winnebago lore and had the traditional right to narrate. Although Radin claimed not to have known this narrator, he is believed to be a reliable source.

Radin relates the stories of Wakdjunkaga as a well formed myth cycle that begins with his deliberate separation from the human society and ends, after many successes and failures, with his retirement from this earth and his ascension into the heavens to be in charge of a world under the world of Earthmaker.[15] The analysis Radin draws from this cycle treats the trickster as, "a transcendental or 'archetypal' characteristic of the human psyche stemming from its most archaic strata."[16] Radin's interpretation is heavily influenced by the theories of Carl Jung, who contributed an

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[13] William Doty and William Hynes, "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 14.
[14] Michael Carroll, As cited in Doty, William and William Hynes, "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 14.
[15] Paul Radin, The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology (New York: Greenwood Press, 1956) 3-53.
[16] William Doty and William Hynes, "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 15.

essay on the trickster to Radin's work. The trickster archetype, for Radin, represents a, "primitive developmental level that is common to all humanity."[17] The cycle of trickster stories represents a psychosexual/psychosocial journey from a figure foreshadowing the shape of humanity to a fully developed human being. The trickster is, "a *speculum mentis* wherein is depicted man's struggle with himself and with a world into which he had been thrust without his volition and consent…"[18] In fact, Radin believes that only by viewing the trickster as an attempt by humanity to solve its problems, both within and without, does the contradictory, asocial figure become intelligible and meaningful.[19]

The trickster figure undergoes an evolutionary journey from a subhuman, infantile creature to a fully functioning member of the human community. The trickster begins the cycle, "completely unconnected with the world of man and…gradually evolving from an amorphous, instinctual and unintegrated being into one with the lineaments of man and one foreshadowing man's physical traits."[20] Radin believes that the trickster's journey through the myth cycle represents both the individual's journey into integrated adulthood and the journey of a culture from "primitivism" to "sophistication." Wakdjunkaga begins as an instinctual being with the mental disposition of a child. In addition, the trickster's body is a gross parody of a human's; his bodily parts match his incredible appetites. At the beginning of the cycle, the trickster has his enormous intestines wrapped around his body and his huge penis, which is detachable, in a box strapped to his back. Throughout his adventures these abnormal parts are whittled down to normal, human size. The trickster, in one episode, eats his own intestines thus losing his gluttonous instinct and coming to more resemble a "proper" human both in appetite and in appearance. His sexual appetites are also immense and his exploits both legendary and laughable. In one episode he sends his detached penis across a body of water, as if it were a serpent, to have intercourse with the daughter of a village chief. He later changes sex and marries the son of a chief in order to secure food and shelter. In his final sexual act,

[17] Ibid, 15.
[18] Radin, x.
[19] Ibid, x.
[20] Ibid, 133.

> [h]e attacks chipmunk with his penis, not ostensibly, in order to cohabit with him but to punish and destroy him for making him aware of his genitals and of his sex…Be it remembered that his penis is still of tremendous length. The farther he penetrates the hole in which chipmunk has sought refuge, the more of his penis the latter bites off until it finally has been reduced to human size. In such fashion does Wakdjunkaga become a male and attain sex consciousness.[21]

The trickster has evolved and matured, from an undifferentiated creature to a socialized being with awareness of himself, his body, and others, much as a child does.

For all his tricks, "Trickster is represented as the creator of the world and the establisher of culture…"[22] He is the culture hero of the Winnebago people but his bestowing of gifts is often unintentional. Radin believes that the trickster, whether he be a deity or a buffoon-hero, is primarily focussed on his own growth. The benefits he bestows are accidental or at least secondary. Humanity and its social life are merely backdrops to the drama of the trickster's maturation. However humanity,

> cannot…permit a deity to attain differentiation unless the possibility for man's differentiation is also provided…He [man] becomes merged with the gods and the gods with him, and the differentiation and education of the gods becomes as much the education of man as it does that of the gods. Since man begins as a completely instinctual being, nonsocial and undomesticated, dominated by sex and hunger, so also the gods must begin or, better, so the gods are forced to begin.[23]

The trickster is an instinctual, gluttonous being. He is an expression of an animalistic, proto-human creature. Because of the trickster's primal nature, Radin claims that, "[h]e is admittedly the oldest of all figures in American Indian mythology, probably in all mythologies."[24] The archetype is universal for Radin and the maturation model is paramount. As well as representing human differentiation and development, the trickster is also a religiously maturing figure. The figure begins as buffoon and matures into a being that is less trickster and more accurately called a demiurge and a true culture hero, an active agent in the welfare of humanity. It is interesting to note that Joseph Campbell adopts/adapts Radin's evolutionary model

[21] Ibid, 142.
[22] Ibid, 125.
[23] Ibid, 126.
[24] Ibid, 164.

but instead, "sees the trickster story as an earlier and less developed paleolithic form of the hero archetype."[25]

Included in Radin's The Trickster are two companion essays, one written by classicist Karl Kerényi and the other by psychologist Carl Jung. Kerényi looks for classical parallels to the Winnebago trickster and finds them in combinational characters such as Prometheus-Epimetheus and a "Herculean Hermes."[26] The Trickster, especially the "Herculean Hermes," is phallic in nature as demonstrated by Hermes affiliation with the phallic road-markers called herms. The main point of Kerényi's treatment centers on the ideas of disorder and boundary crossing. The trickster is the,

> spirit of disorder, the enemy of the boundaries…Disorder belongs to the totality of life and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster…His function…is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed boundaries of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.[27]

The disorder of the trickster completes the individual's experience, giving the audience a taste of the forbidden.

Jung's thoughts concerning the trickster and archetypes in general seem to be the cornerstone of Radin's analysis, but Jung's interpretation,

> is undermined by too close a reliance on Radin's collection of the Winnebago trickster cycle. Jung simply assumes that this cycle is normative and that its trickster's movement from undifferentiated psychic state to an adult capacity for differentiation represents a pure survival of an archaic form.[28]

Even with such criticisms, Jung's ideas have been very influential in the study of the trickster, and are still utilized in depth. "Jungian psychotherapists consider the Trickster Archetype to be the guide of the journey of individuation and of

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[25] Joseph Campbell, As cited in William Doty and William Hynes. "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 21.
[26] Karl Kerényi, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology, Paul Radin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1956) 186.
[27] Ibid, 185.
[28] Robert Pelton, The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) 228.

psychotherapy, much as alchemists saw Mercurius as the guide of the opus, and the Greeks saw Hermes as the guide of souls."[29]

For Jung, "all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them."[30] The trickster is no exception, representing a part of the individual and collective unconscious. The trickster is something base and instinctual, a manifestation of simple drives and thoughts.

> He is obviously a "psychologem," an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestation he is a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level…the reflection of an earlier rudimentary stage of consciousness.[31]

The trickster is seen as an unconscious figure, the precursor of rational humanity. The trickster develops as a collective figure, the collective shadow figure, but becomes personalized and individualized as society progresses into what is believed to be a higher, more rational and enlightened state. However, the shadow figure is not forgotten, only repressed, cropping up as, "countertendencies in the unconscious, and in certain cases by a sort of secondary personality, of a puerile and inferior character…"[32] The shadow also finds an outlet in folklore and literature in such characters as the little tailor and the Shakespearean fool. It also can be seen in clowns and carnival revels.

The trickster also represents a figure of positive worth. The shadow is that which is dark in the psyche yet it is, "a forerunner of the Savior, and like him, God, man, and animal, at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being."[33] The shadow hides the meaningful behind the meaningless; behind it lies the anima/animus[34], the archetypes seen as the helpers of liminal heroes.[35] The trickster

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[29] Deldon Anne McNeeley, Mercury Rising: Women, Evil, and the Trickster Gods (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, Inc., 1996) 9.
[30] C.G. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology, Paul Radin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1956) 195.
[31] Ibid, 200-201.
[32] Ibid, 202.
[33] Ibid, 203.
[34] The anima is the feminine 'soul image' of men and the animus is the masculine 'soul image' of women.
[35] Carl A.P Ruck and Danny Staples, The World of Classical Myth: Gods and Goddesses; Heroines and Heroes, (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1994).

represents a potential for completeness, both regression into the unconscious and movement away from it. The shadow/trickster aids in the process of psychic growth known as individuation. The goal of this process is to get in touch with the Self, the center and totality of one's psychic being. Individuation is a sequential process; it begins with confronting the shadow, all that has been disowned by the conscious mind. By coming to terms with all that has been repressed, both the positive and negative, the shadow opens the door allowing one to make contact with the anima/animus, the messenger, and eventually the Self. "[L]ike many other myths, it [the trickster] was supposed to have a therapeutic effect. It holds the earlier low intellectual and moral level before the eyes of the more highly developed individual, so that he shall not forget how things looked yesterday."[36] The trickster is the dark guide toward individuation, an archetype that leads one to differentiation and completion.

It is relatively easy to see how Freud would have interpreted the trickster figure. As a seemingly infantile and gluttonous figure, at least as described by Radin, the trickster is a mythic representation of the Id, the basest unconscious aspect of the tripartite psyche. The trickster is libidinal, driven by his bodily appetites. He is a child, unable to employ reason, driven only by his wants and needs. His creativity is accidental, a by-product of his foolish attempts to satisfy his urges. As he matures into the truer culture hero, one can see the emergence of the ego. There is another way Freud's theories might be applied towards the trickster. Freud's notion of the joke and the laughter it causes can be applied to the trickster tales as an ultimately non-threatening attack on social control. Something formal is attacked by something informal, something static tricked by an upsurge of libido.[37] The trickster pokes holes in the status quo, injecting a bit of libidinal energy, the psychic energy of life, into a static system. The outcome is a revitalization of social life, a fresh outlook on the workings of the world and the culture.

These psychological interpretations serve as the foundation of the argument for the universalism of the trickster. He can be found in every mythology as he is

[36] Jung, C.G., 207.
[37] Babcock-Abrahams, 164-165.

found in every psyche. However, this position has been criticized for its general insensitivity towards the material, reducing the character to something of the "primitive past." It also does not seem able to deal with the trickster's antisocial or "unwholesome" conduct. "Most critics of this persuasion…tend to explain away, rather than explain, these antinomian tales as satire, 'ritualized rebellion,' 'licensed aggression,' etc., and shift into…[a] psychological explanation in terms of projection and sublimation."[38] The trickster tales are seen as an outlet for protesting against social restrictions, a way of acting out one's desires without actually engaging in the activity. They are a way of slipping loose the bonds of society and yet still remaining part of the order. "In short, the trickster tale becomes little more than a functional steam-valve, be it social or psychological."[39]

Another approach toward understanding the trickster has been undertaken by the influential trickster scholar Mac Linscott Ricketts. Working with Native American sources, Ricketts conceives of the trickster as a dual, and at times tri-form, figure. The figure is a tricky fool, a creative transformer and a culture hero or "trickster-fixer for short."[40] Ricketts sees the trickster as playing many roles:

> He is the maker of the earth and/or he is the one who changes the chaotic myth-world into the ordered creation of today; he is the slayer of monsters, the thief of daylight, fire, water, and the like for the benefit of man; he is the teacher of cultural skills and customs; but he is also a prankster who is grossly erotic, insatiably hungry, inordinately vain, deceitful, and cunning toward friends as well as foes; a restless wanderer upon the face of the earth; and a blunderer who is often the victim of his own tricks and follies.[41]

It is the contradictory nature of the trickster that Ricketts attempts to address. Unlike Radin, who sees the trickster as evolving into the culture hero, Ricketts believes that the trickster-transformer-culture hero is an original, unified, yet contradictory entity. Splintering of the figure may occur, but it is a later process not the result of maturation or evolution of the character.

Ultimately the trickster is a representation of humanity and the human condition. "[T]he trickster-fixer is the embodiment of a certain mythic apprehension

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[38] Ibid, 183.
[39] Ibid, 183.
[40] Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The North American Indian Trickster," 327.
[41] Ibid, 327.

of the nature of man and his place in the cosmos."[42] The trickster's way is the human way, the natural (as opposed to the supernatural) way of creating and affecting change. "The trickster may best be understood as the personification of all the traits of man raised to the highest degree."[43] All the gross appetites of the trickster are simply human appetites, drives and desires, raised to mythic proportions. Additionally, the trickster represents humanity being religious in a way that denies or at least does not pay homage to the supernatural. "The trickster-transformer-culture hero is man being religious in the 'other way,' the godless way of humanism,"[44] as opposed to the priestly or shamanistic approach to the world, that of seeking and submitting to the divine.

This "other way" illustrates the basic antagonism that Ricketts sees between the shaman and the trickster. The two are the polar opposites of spirituality.

> The shaman…represents the religious experience of humility and awe before the Spirit…the trickster…embodies another experience of Reality: one in which humans feel themselves to be self-sufficient beings for whom the supernatural spirits are powers not to be worshipped, but ignored, to be overcome, or in the last analysis mocked.[45]

The trickster parodies the shaman, foolishly mocking the person and the powers that the shaman channels. Where the shaman looks to the heavens for knowledge and guidance, the trickster does not look beyond himself; the trickster depends only on his own wit and skill. The shaman has been accepted into the supernatural realm and sees it as a potential source of aid for humanity. The trickster has no friends in the heavens and sees the supernatural as utterly opposed to humanity. "All that humans have gained from the unseen powers beyond – fire, fish, game, fresh water, and so forth – have been obtained, by necessity, through trickery or theft."[46] The cleverness of the trickster represents human resourcefulness and his blundering episodes symbolize the limitations placed on humanity, limits that the shaman has the power to transcend. As well as being at odds with the shaman, the trickster has a rivalry with

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[42] Ibid, 336.
[43] Ibid, 347.
[44] Ibid, 346.
[45] Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The Shaman and the Trickster," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms. ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 87.
[46] Ibid, 92.

the youthful hero figure and a being that Ricketts calls the "pure transformer." "He [the pure transformer] is a cipher of ideal humankind: humans-as-we-might-be, rather than humans-as-we-are."[47] The trickster is the current, real human condition, the pure transformer the potential or imagined ideal.

The structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss has also been applied to the study of the trickster. His analysis of the trickster mainly utilizes Native American stories, but the implications of his approach are cross-cultural. Lévi-Strauss begins with the assertion that the study of myth is similar to linguistics. Just as the capacity for language is hard-wired in all humans as an innate universal potential, so too is the potential for myth making. "[M]yth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech,"[48] only functioning at a higher, more complex level. As well myths are timeless, the specific patterns described explain the past, present and the future.[49] As with "normal" language, myths are made up of constituent units that obtain their meaning via the complex relations that they form. These related units form bundles, which give the myth structure and recognizable character. It is possible to diagram these bundles in a synchronic and diachronic way, sequencing the story and categorizing the episodes into columns by theme.[50]

> Were we to *tell* the myth, we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to *understand* the myth, then we will have to disregard one half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column after column, each one being considered as a unit.[51]

Lévi-Strauss' method defines the myth as all it versions, thus producing a three or more dimensional diagram. This understanding eliminates the need for the earliest or true version and can be extended to include literary and scholarly treatises on the myth (such as Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus myth).[52] This, of course, does not completely solve the problem of authenticating sources, but it does allow the

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[47] Ibid, 101-102.
[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963) 209.
[49] Ibid, 209.
[50] Ibid, 212-213.
[51] Ibid, 214.
[52] Ibid, 217.

inclusion of material that might otherwise be problematic. "Every version belongs to the myth."[53]

When dealing with the trickster, Lévi-Strauss first looks to why the coyote and the raven are assigned roles as tricksters in so many Native American stories. Working from the idea that the mythic mind always seeks resolution to opposition, he states that as carrion eaters, the coyote and raven are the intermediate between herbivores and carnivores. They do not actively kill, yet they do eat meat, profiting from death. The trickster becomes the mediating tool, the resolution to polar extremes. "Thus, the mediating function of the trickster explains that since its position is halfway between two polar terms he must retain something of that duality, namely an ambiguous and equivocal character."[54] The trickster is ambiguous and contradictory, being good and bad; creative and destructive; lewd and sacred.

The theoretical approach that Robert Pelton terms "Neo-Durkheimian and Beyond,"[55] consisting of the theories of Laura Makarius and Mary Douglas, deals with the issues of the trickster's boundary crossing and taboo breaking, his lewdness and sacrality. Makarius develops an understanding of the trickster that addresses the problem of his sacrality in terms of ritual taboo breaking. "[T]he trickster-figure is the magician, the taboo-transgressor…[he] transforms nature and sometimes, playing the demiurge, appears as the creator, but at the same time he remains a clown, a buffoon, not to be taken seriously."[56] The character is illustrated by his contradictory attributes; he is bipolar as if, "each virtue or defect attributed to him automatically calls into being its opposite."[57] Yet always the trickster is seen as sacred. This issue has confounded many scholars, but Makarius finds a novel way to deal with it. She first focuses on that aspect of a culture's social life that expresses a reality that is strongly contradictory, that being, "the magical violation of prohibitions,"[58] the ritual

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[53] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," Myth: A Symposium, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1955) 58.
[54] Ibid, 63.
[55] Pelton, 243.
[56] Laura Makarius, "The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 67.
[57] Ibid, 68.
[58] Ibid, 68.

breaking of taboos. Makarius focuses on the taboos concerning blood. Blood's impurity can have a dual nature, depending on how it is utilized; it can be a destructive, polluting agent or a powerful magical healing agent. The trickster as magician comes to master the awesome powers of the blood by violating the taboos surrounding it. The breaking of the taboo is considered an antisocial act, disrupting the established order, yet it is sometimes in the service of the society. The magicians violate the law, separating themselves from the social order, becoming heroes and outcasts. "[T]he trickster is a mythic projection of the magician who in reality or in people's desire accomplishes the taboo violation on behalf of his group, thereby obtaining the medicines or talismans necessary to satisfy its needs and desires."[59] For Makarius, the transgressing and profaning character of the trickster *is* his essence and sole reason for existing in the mythic universe.[60]

Using Native American, Polynesian, and West African trickster tales, Makarius demonstrates the trickster's affiliation with both magic and blood. The trickster's birth, when such an episode is narrated, is often bloody or conceived of as a ritually impure situation. The trickster is often connected with death, introducing it or being the instigation of an important murder. The trickster is strongly marked by his impurity and ambivalence; he knows no law, check, or limit. The trickster is sinner and savior,

> [h]e incarnates lack of discipline, disobedience, and rebellion…defying simultaneously the rules of the society and those of the Supreme Being…[yet] the trickster incarnates embryonically the expiatory being who will take upon himself the sins of humanity and set humans free, by virtue of the familiar process of redemption.[61]

Through this description Makarius makes clear how the multiform figure of the trickster can be conceived of as a unified, unitary being. As well, the question of his sacredness is resolved.

> It is truly and uniquely because he accomplishes assorted profanantions and sacrileges that the trickster is a sacred being[,] for sacredness has nothing to do with virtue, intelligence, or dignity: it derives from his violations, which

[59] Ibid, 73.
[60] Ibid, 73.
[61] Ibid, 83.

make him the possessor of magical power – that which is identified with 'the sacred.'[62]

Mary Douglas also addresses the trickster in her work, Purity and Danger. Douglas deals with classification and categorization, those things that are acceptable and those that are not. Social life necessarily creates boundaries and as such it also designates those things which are outside or between the boundaries, those things which are anomalous. That which is anomalous is conceived of as dirt. This dirt, which is not only matter but actions and experience, "is essentially disorder…[it] offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment."[63] Dirt can be conceived of as that which is outside or between categories, that which does not fit. The trickster, through his contradictory actions and attitudes, falls outside and between the established categories of his culture. The trickster is dirt; he is impurity yet he helps complete the social picture just as, "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience."[64] The trickster's contradiction and taboo breaking/boundary crossing are viewed as a mythic attempt to deal with that which is out of place, to reconcile dirt and impurity with the established order.

It is perhaps best, before we continue, to address those points of view that are critical of the comparative approach and/or do not recognize the trickster typology as a useful or valid tool. These viewpoints see the comparative model as inherently biased and given to broad generalizations that become useless abstractions, adding nothing to the understanding of the context or the object of study.

Although anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard has written on the subject of tricksters,[65] he is nonetheless critical of the comparative method. Evans-Pritchard states that the comparative method has yielded striking results in the fields of comparative philology, jurisprudence, and mythology. However, this has been due to its use in the, "investigation of the institutions of peoples of common social and

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[62] Ibid, 84.
[63] Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (New York: Routledge, 1966) 2.
[64] Mary Douglas, As cited in Robert Pelton, The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) 249.
[65] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, The Zande Trickster (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

cultural origin, so that if the conclusions reached could not be proved, they had a much higher degree of probability."[66] As well, when these comparative hypotheses were used in the absence of historical data, they could not, with any high degree of probability, be declared either true or false. Evans-Pritchard seems to be saying that an enterprise trying to chart a widely cross-cultural category, such as the trickster, is doomed to generalizations that can be neither proved nor disproved. For example, the comparison of trickster characters from two related Native American cultures might produce some useful, valid results but to apply the same criteria to an African or European figure would become too abstract. "The wider their range, the more universal they aim at being, the more tenuous the abstractions become."[67] As a social anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard believes that the focus of study should be on the cultural differences, not on the similarities. The similarities are the province of an historical or psychological approach, things that can not be definitively proven.[68]

Another critic of the trickster typology, or more precisely the scholarly study and analysis of the trickster is Anne Doueihi. The scholarly study of the trickster is inherently biased where,

> [i]n their approaches to the trickster, Western scholars, both in anthropology and in the history of religions, have tended to impose their own terms on the trickster narratives instead of attending to the terms set by the narratives themselves. In this respect the discourse of Western scholarship on the trickster, as on so many other aspects of Native American culture, has become a discourse of domination…[69]

The trickster becomes a way of "proving" the primitive or degenerate nature of the Other or something quaint from "civilized" humanity's past. Doueihi sees the scholarship of the trickster as being decidedly ethnocentric. The Western scholar can not, or is unwilling to, deal with the trickster in his own cultural context, instead removing him from his milieu and exacting Western standards upon him. "The trickster is bounced back and forth, stretched and twisted, so as to fit within the

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[66] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology," The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays (New York: The Free Press, 1965) 15.
[67] Ibid, 25.
[68] Ibid, 25.
[69] Anne Doueihi, "Inhabiting the Space Between Discourse and Story in Trickster Narratives," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 195.

framework staked out by the discourse of domination by means which the Western world, scholars included, distorts and suppresses its Other."[70] The discourse turns from the trickster to one by Western culture about itself. The trickster becomes incidental in his own study. As such, I wish to only discuss Loki, the primary trickster figure under analysis here, as a European or specifically Germanic trickster and not one who can be extended to a more global or universal typology. Loki should not be viewed as some quaint phenomenon of a barbaric past, but as a vital part of a mythic tradition that is still somewhat vital and should be beyond any kind of colonialist judgment.

A further criticism of cross-cultural categorization of the trickster comes from T. O. Beidelman. As with Evans-Pritchard, Beidelman has written on specific trickster figures but always in the same, or similar, cultural context. Beidelman's contention is that the emphasis of anthropological study should be focussed on figures within their cultural contexts, not as examples of a cross-cultural phenomenon. It is only through the specific cultural lens that one can learn anything about the figure. Comparativist scholars are often not versed in the cultural context of the various figures and, "[u]nless we know particular tricksters in their contexts well, we cannot assume that they represent a valid analytical grouping."[71] It may be possible to say something about tricksters within a well defined cultural or geographic area but any extension of the formulated category runs into broad generalizations and useless abstractions. For Beidelman, the cultural context is the key to understanding. The mythic figures of a culture should be used as a tool to gain insight into the ways and mindset of the culture. "[P]erhaps broad questions of function are unprofitable; instead we may ask what texts suggest about particular society's mode of thought and form of organization."[72] Beidelman also cautions against the assumption of the category's parameters and existence before beginning an analysis, and the danger of mistranslation. "The category of *trickster* may be merely the product of a series of

[70] Ibid, 196.
[71] T. O. Beidelman, "The Moral Imagination of the Kaguru: Some Thoughts on Tricksters, Translation, and Comparative Analysis," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 175.
[72] Ibid, 176.

false translations, much as terms such as *family* and *witchcraft* seem incomparable cross-culturally when taken out of context."[73]

Beidelman, and to an extent Evans-Pritchard, represent the opposite end of the continuum as compared to Jung and Radin. Their nominalist perspective calls for, "the elimination of the term 'trickster' altogether because it implies that a global approach to such a figure is possible whereas they find it appropriate to focus only upon one tribal or national group at a time."[74] The criticisms presented are indeed valid, yet I feel that the trickster typology as a comparative category does have merit. Scholars must be cognizant of their own cultural biases and treat the cultural material of others with sensitivity and respect. It is important to gain an understanding of the cultural contexts of the trickster figures, but a lack of this information does not negate the usefulness of the category. It would seem that at least part of the debate could be seen as a matter of focus and emphasis. The various approaches do not invalidate each other; rather they can compliment, expanding our knowledge and understanding. One must exercise caution in extending these theoretical models too far. There is a very real danger of spinning off into useless abstraction. The trickster can be seen in a comparative way, the fact that we can critically assign a character to the typology should demonstrate and strengthen its usefulness. The typology is a way to begin a discussion of human similarities and differences, whether they be social, historical, religious, psychological, or the like.

The scholars and positions presented thus far give us an insight into how to view the trickster. To continue the development of what the trickster is, I will look at a number of defined characteristics and from those synthesize a theoretical outline that can be applied in a non-biased way to figures not yet critically defined as tricksters. The criteria, though initially created using specific cultural contexts, can be extended outside those cultural boundaries. Therefore, the characteristics and the subsequent definition must be broad and inclusive without being too abstract. The trickster exhibits an underlying character of liminality which is the root of his various

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[73] Ibid, 175.
[74] William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, "Introducing the Fascinating and Perplexing Trickster Figure," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 4-5.

attributes and attitudes. The characteristics previously described are in someway liminal, as are the ones yet to be discussed. We will use these characteristics as identifiers of the trickster and then demonstrate their liminal character. The trickster's creativity, trickiness, and ambivalence can all be traced to his marginality/liminality. To continue this discussion, I will first look at a number of defining characteristics proposed by Barbara Babcock-Abrahams and William Hynes. The discussion will then turn to Babcock-Abrahams idea of marginality leading into Victor Turner's liminality and communitas. The defining characteristics will then be linked to this idea of liminality.

In her essay, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," Babcock-Abrahams re-examines the Winnebago trickster cycle related by Radin. Her approach is basically Turnerian, focussing on the liminal or marginal character of the trickster. Babcock-Abrahams sees the Winnebago trickster cycle as being one of ritual separation, liminal initiation, and social reintegration. Based on her analysis of this cycle and other Native American materials, Babcock-Abrahams develops a list of characteristics for the trickster. To some degree, tricksters:

1. exhibit an independence from and an ignoring of temporal and spatial boundaries;
2. tend to inhabit crossroads, open public places (especially the marketplace), doorways, and thresholds. In one way or another they are usually situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos;
3. are frequently involved in scatological and coprophagous episodes which may be creative, destructive, or simply amusing;
4. may, similarly, in their deeds and character, partake of the attributes of Trickster-Transformer-Culture Hero;
5. frequently exhibit some mental and/or physical abnormality, especially exaggerated sexual characteristics;
6. have an enormous libido without procreative outcome;
7. have an ability to disperse and to disguise themselves and a tendency to be multiform, and ambiguous, single or multiple;
8. often have a two-fold physical nature and/or a "double" and are associated with mirrors. Most noticeably, the trickster tends to be of uncertain sexual status;
9. follow the "principle of motley" in dress;
10. are often indeterminant (in physical stature) and may be portrayed as both young and old, as perpetually young or perpetually aged;

11. exhibit an human/animal dualism and may appear as a human with animal characteristics or vice versa (even in those tales where the trickster is explicitly identified as an animal, he is anthropomorphically described and referred to in personal pronouns);
12. are generally amoral and asocial – aggressive, vindictive, vain, defiant of authority, etc.;
13. despite their endless propensity to copulate, find their most abiding form of relationship with the feminine in a mother or grandmother bond;
14. in keeping with their creative/destructive dualisms, tricksters tend to be ambiguously situated between life and death, and good and evil, as is summed up in the combined black and white symbolism frequently associated with them;
15. are often ascribed to roles (i.e., other than tricky behavior) in which an individual normally has privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code;
16. in all their behavior, tend to express a concomitant breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection.[75]

These characteristics, examples of the anomalous nature of the trickster, are interconnected. They represent the inherent dualisms of the character. "The most important characteristics of these related dualisms...is their expression of ambiguity and paradox, of confusion of all customary categories."[76]

William Hynes developed another set of common trickster characteristics. This list both expands on Babcock-Abrahams' list, introducing other characteristics common to tricksters, and summarizes and subsumes some of her criteria into more general categories. The first trait is, "the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster."[77] The trickster is the personification of binary opposites, his personality embodies both distinctions yet he can not be fully encapsulated by either side. "Anomalous, a-nomos, without normativity, the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories."[78] His behavior is contradictory; the trickster is the outlaw and the outrageous. For the trickster, "[n]o borders are sacrosanct...[he] moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all

[75] Babcock-Abrahams, 159-160.
[76] Ibid, 160.
[77] William J. Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 34.
[78] Ibid, 34.

borders with impunity."[79] Robert Pelton observes that the trickster, "pulverizes the univocal and gives voice to each of the surprises of the actual;"[80] he symbolizes the multivalence of life.

A second characteristic of the trickster is that which is obvious by his name, he is a deceiver and trick-player. The trickster may be a clever rouge or the unconscious dimwit, the one who tricks to achieve his aim or is the butt of his own joke. "In many cultures and religions, the trickster acts as the prima causa of disruptions and disorders, misfortune and improprieties. All semblances of truth and falsity are subject to his rapid alchemy."[81] The trickster's tricks can be both malevolent and beneficial. He tricks the innocent to satisfy his urges, as well as duping the gods and the greedy to secure the aspects of culture.

The third characteristic of the trickster is his ability to shape-shift. "As shape-shifter, the trickster can alter his shape or bodily appearance in order to facilitate deception. Not even the boundaries of species or sexuality are safe, for they can be readily dissolved by the trickster's disguises and transformations."[82] The trickster is the master of disguise, switching forms from animal, to vegetable, to mineral; from male to female and from young to old.

The fourth characteristic outlined by Hynes is that of situation-invertor[sic]. The trickster, "exhibits typically the ability to overturn any person, place, or belief, no matter how prestigious. There is no 'too much' for this figure. No order is too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high, no profanity too scatological that cannot be broached or inverted."[83] The trickster is the reverser of order, causing trouble and saving the day. He is the court jester and fool, the comic fellow who points out the foibles of the mighty and brings the powerful low. The trickster also ritually profanes, breaking the most esteemed taboos. These ritualized profanations bring, "into sharp relief just how much a society values these beliefs...the more sacred a

[79] Ibid, 34.
[80] Pelton, 224.
[81] Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," 35.
[82] Ibid, 36.
[83] Ibid, 37.

belief, the more likely is the trickster to be found profaning it."[84] His actions are a measure of a culture's beliefs.

The trickster often plays the role of messenger and/or imitator of the gods. Since the trickster is often of impure or uncertain heritage, at times being a mixture of humanity and divinity, he can more easily pass back and forth between realms.[85] The trickster is often associated with death, at times acting as a Psychopomp, the mediating figure between the living and the dead. The trickster acts as an intermediary and as such he, "is the unique mythic vehicle through which human culture may acquire sacred powers while avoiding the direct involvement in the necessary breaking of the taboo surrounding the possession of these powers."[86] An example of this might be Raven's stealing of the sun to "give" to humanity or Prometheus' theft of fire. Humanity benefits but is not directly involved in the transgression. The "betwixt and between" character of the trickster allows him to function as a cultural transformer. For all his mediation, the trickster is equally untrustworthy. "There are numerous examples of his [trickster's] attempting to imitate or to usurp the powers of the gods above him."[87]

The final trait or role of the trickster, according to Hynes' conception, is that of sacred and lewd bricoleur, a jack of all trades. "The bricoleur is a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution."[88] The trickster is sacred and lewd, finding the one within the other. He frequents the sacred, but often acts in rude and crude ways. "Yet, the bricoleur aspect...can cause any or all such lewd acts or objects to be transformed into occasions of insight, vitality, and new inventive creations."[89] The trickster is a creature of insatiable appetites yet it is not the actual object of his appetites that he craves. "Although the trickster is represented as being insatiably hungry, on those rare occasions when he does eat, little overt evidence of pleasure or enjoyment is

[84] Ibid, 37.
[85] Ibid, 39-40.
[86] Ibid, 40.
[87] Ibid, 41.
[88] Ibid, 42.
[89] Ibid, 42.

indicated: the process of the search and not its fulfillment is the rule."[90] The trickster, in order to solve a problem or obtain a forbidden yet beneficial object, can cross boundaries and break taboos. The trickster is the quick witted one who can fix a difficult situation, one that he may just have readily caused.

In addition to the lists of characteristics, both Babcock-Abrahams and Hynes provide collections of the various interpretations applied to the trickster and his tales. As noted earlier, some scholars have seen trickster tales simply as entertainment. That they are entertaining, there is no doubt, but this should not be used as a criteria for disregarding the seriousness of the tales and the very real role they play within a culture. As previously stated the tales represent a projection and sublimation of social frustrations. They are the social and psychological steam-valves of society. Tricksters, "seem to have an affinity for linking foolishness and play with wisdom and work,"[91] allowing a culture to discharge its antisocial and "foolish" energies.

Tricksters, by their actions, can be seen as reaffirming the belief system of a culture. "In breaking the rules, the trickster confirms the rules."[92] The blunders of the trickster serve as illustrations of what happens when the laws of nature and society are not followed. The narratives explain and validate the social order as well as providing a reason for why and how the world came to be as it is. The flip side of this interpretation sees the narratives as evaluating the social order, "as contributing to a reexamination of existing conditions and possibly leading to change."[93] The narratives are used as social criticism and satire. From this the trickster offers a new way of viewing the world, transcending the constrictions of monoculturality and demonstrating the arbitrary and artificial nature of social rules.[94] The trickster is the embodiment of limitless possibility and the enemy of socio-religious stagnation.

From a psychological point of view, the trickster can be seen as a "psychic explorer and adventurer."[95] The trickster represents the prototypical human and the

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[90] Ibid, 42.
[91] William J. Hynes, "Inconclusive Conclusions: Tricksters – Metaplayers and Revealers," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 206.
[92] Ibid, 207.
[93] Babcock-Abrahams, 183.
[94] Hynes, "Inconclusive Conclusions: Tricksters – Metaplayers and Revealers," 212.
[95] Ibid, 208.

maturing child. The trickster, as archetype, has been used as a guide in the personal quest for individuation. He is productive chaos as well as representing the continuous struggle between the Id and Superego, pleasure and reality.

A final interpretative model sees the trickster narratives as creating communitas. "It [communitas] is that modality of social relatedness which prevails in carnival and the marketplace, where hierarchies are leveled, distinctions dissolved, and roles reversed, *and* when trickster appears on the scene."[96] The trickster brings the mighty down and raises the low; he balances, allowing all to participate as equals.

The characteristics that have been discussed can be seen as extensions of the trickster character's fundamental liminality. This connection will be explained in more detail as part of the discussion of Turner's liminality. A related concept to this liminality is the idea of marginality as related by Babcock-Abrahams. Her thesis is argued from a Turnerian basis, making the case that the trickster's marginal status and nature come from his liminality. She uses, " 'marginal' as a generic term for all the interstitial and 'antistructural' states."[97] The marginal trickster possesses a multiform personality, dichotomous, ambiguous, and deviant. The trickster, "carries the threat and the possibility of chaos."[98] The trickster is peripheral; he is outside and between categories; in Mary Douglas' terms he is out of place. Babcock-Abrahams views the trickster's comic and tragic nature as well as his tendency to violate boundaries as functions of his marginality. Ultimately, this marginality can be equated with the liminality and communitas of Turner.

Victor Turner, in his book The Ritual Process, proposes the concept of liminality, a state of being that is outside or between the bounds of the "normal" everyday conditions of societal life. This state is observed in rites of passage, those initiatory rites within the confines of a culture. These rites, both those of status elevation and status reversal, "are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation."[99] The first phase, that of separation, involves the literal and symbolic detachment of the entity (individual or

[96] Babcock-Abrahams, 185.
[97] Ibid, 150.
[98] Ibid, 148.
[99] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969) 94.

collective) from its current social position. It is no longer considered what it was and is not yet what it will become. "During the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state."[100] In the third phase, the entity reemerges into society; it is reintegrated, its journey is over and the laws and conditions of its culture once more bind it. Babcock-Abrahams, in her reinterpretation of the Winnebago trickster cycle, uses this tripartite model to chart the progress of the trickster through his cycle. However, I will mainly focus on the in-between phase, the liminal phase, as the defining condition of the trickster.

The liminal persons defy easy categorization, "they elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[101] The figures are out of place, in-between. As such, their nature, their behavior and personalities are all necessarily ambiguous. This ambiguity, according to Turner, is often expressed symbolically within a culture, these symbols representing a transitional state. "Thus liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon."[102] These symbols are very often associated with the trickster, the mythic epitome of this liminal state. He is of ambiguous nature, not fitting neatly within social categories and not being bound by its rules. Since he is not so bound, he can cross boundaries and break taboos that would be impossible for someone situated within the confines of the social structure. His liminality allows him to act as a culture hero, obtaining objects that are otherwise socially out of reach.

The state of liminality, and thus the liminal entity, is a blend, "of lowliness and sacredness."[103] The liminal figures are often seen as a mixture of that which is base and that which is holy. As such they hold a special place in society, albeit not

[100] Ibid, 94.
[101] Ibid, 95.
[102] Ibid, 95.
[103] Ibid, 96.

within the established social structure, and are said to possess powers beyond what is considered normal; they are special figures. Within the liminal state, the attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic.[104] There is little differentiation between sexes within the transitory state. The trickster possesses these characteristics, being both lewd and sacred and while the trickster is not technically sexless, he is able to bend the line between genders, often switching sexes as much as he switches forms. As a master of disguise, the trickster can become anonymous, changing identities to suit his desires.

"[S]peech is not merely communication but also power and wisdom. The wisdom (mana) that is imparted in sacred liminality is not just an aggregation of words and sentences; it has ontological value."[105] The utterances of the liminal figure are powerful things, truths that can change the status quo. The trickster is often linked with speech. He is the fast talker, the swindler and humbler. He often knows more about a situation than anyone else yet delivers this knowledge in ridiculous ways.

The liminal phase gives rise to a social situation that Turner terms communitas. Communitas is, "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated...community."[106] The initiates in the liminal phase are of equal rank, the high are brought low and the underlings raised. They are considered the same in sex, attributes, and most importantly in social status. As well, communitas is spontaneous; "communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom."[107] The liminal members of this group are little concerned with matters of time; the present is the focus of their life. Thus the figure is an entity of the now, acting in ways that appear capricious or shortsighted as viewed from within the established structure. It is the grasshopper, not the ant. As a creature of his appetites, the trickster is often focussed on satisfying his wants and not on the consequences of his actions. He blunders because he chooses not to look at his past or think about the future. As well, he, and

[104] Ibid, 102.
[105] Ibid, 103.
[106] Ibid, 96.
[107] Ibid, 113.

the liminal communitas that he represents, "from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of 'structure,'...must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions."[108] The trickster is the threat of chaos; he is often too clever for his, and the establishment's, own good.

Turner sees some organizations and figures as extensions of an institutionalized liminality. Monastics are one example of this "structured" communitas. Other examples such as the court jester seem to parallel, in the real world, our notion of the trickster. "The court jester operated as a privileged arbiter of morals, given license to gibe at king and courtiers, or lord of the manor...a joker able to express feelings of outraged morality."[109] These institutionalized figures could humble the most high, attacking the established structure from outside and between. "Folk literature abounds in symbolic figures, such as 'holy beggars,' 'third sons,' 'little tailors,' and 'simpletons' who strip off the pretensions of holders of high rank and office and reduce them to the level of common humanity and mortality."[110] These figures abound in both written and oral literature and one can see the trickster as the mythic counterpart of these liminal entities. These figures, and the liminal state they represent, not only serve to humble the mighty. They "can be seen as potentially a…scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture."[111] The liminal entity, by being between categories and outside the established order, is perhaps better suited to comment on the failures of the social structure. The trickster comments on the structure of the world, correcting and creating, threatening the hegemony of the gods.

Turner does not speak directly about the trickster in The Ritual Process, but it should be evident how applicable his notion of liminality is to the trickster. It is my contention that the various characteristics and criteria described earlier are fundamentally extensions of the trickster's liminal nature. His roles as taboo breaker and culture hero extend from his status outside and between the categories within the

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[108] Ibid, 109.
[109] Max Gluckman, As cited in Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969) 109-110.
[110] Turner, 110.
[111] Ibid, 167.

social structure. He is not bound by the normal rules and thus he is a powerful and, at times, beneficial figure. His tricky and deceptive nature also comes from his liminality. Being outside the "normal" structure, the trickster is free to indulge in many behaviors that would otherwise be taboo. His behavior, when viewed from within the structure, can be seen as inappropriate and deviant. The trickster is not truly immoral, rather as a liminal being he is amoral.

The lists of characteristics created by Hynes and Babcock-Abrahams' can also be seen as "symptoms" of liminality. Babcock-Abrahams' list is generated from her Turnerian interpretation of the Winnebago cycle and thus these traits are more or less simply cultural examples of the liminal state. Indeed her defining characteristic of the trickster is his marginality, another way of defining his liminal status. As such, a lengthy discussion illustrating the obvious connections is not necessary. Hynes criteria may need a little explanation, but they too have liminal undercurrents. The trickster's ambiguous and anomalous personality is a liminal personality. Turner states that, "[t]he attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous[.]"[112] These figures are betwixt and between. The trickster is a shape-shifter, bending and breaking the limits of form and gender. As discussed by Turner, having an ambiguous sexuality is a clear example of liminality. Shape-shifting also reveals some of the liminality of the trickster. Being between categories allows him to shift back and forth from one polar extreme to the other. The trickster is, "sometimes part animal, and always part something else. The something else is what is so special."[113] His form is as ambiguous and protean as his character.

Being in-between, being liminal, the trickster has a special place between the gods and humanity. He is the go between, travelling from one realm to the other. As well he can humble the gods and raise up humanity, just as Turner's institutionalized liminal figures do. The trickster inverts situations, reverses the established order, and he usually does this in some ingenious way. His bricoleur aspect is a liminal one,

[112] Ibid, 95.
[113] Alan Garner, The Guizer (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1976) 9.

being a creature of present appetite and clever insight. He can cause and rectify a seemingly impossible situation because he is not bound by the conventional rules.

All of the characteristics described are useful identifiers and indicators of when we are in the presence of the trickster. They all are by no means universal, having been extracted from specific cultural contexts. What can be seen as universal is their underlying liminality. The characteristics are examples of liminal traits, which can be used as descriptive criteria. Now that these criteria have been established, one can begin to apply them to the mythic figure Loki. The next chapter will discuss the mythic exploits of the character, allowing one to draw a profile of his mythic nature. An examination of his myths will be undertaken, providing one the opportunity to analyze his character against the established criteria of the trickster typology. In this way I intend to show that the god Loki *is* a trickster figure.

Chapter Two

Flyting and Fetters: An Exploration of the Myths of Loki

As the previous chapter illustrates, the trickster is an ambiguous and contradictory figure within folklore and mythology. No less an enigmatic and complex character is the Germanic[1] god Loki. "The place which Loki occupies in the circle at Asgard[2] is as puzzling as that of Heimdall[3], although he is an even more prominent figure, and plays an important part in most of the well-known myths."[4] Loki has been characterized as tricky and destructive, a friend of the gods, a master thief, and the bringer of trouble. Numerous times he is the savior of the Aesir and yet he is the father of these same gods' doom. Loki plays an important role in the myth cycle of the North, yet, "[t]here is nothing to suggest that Loki was ever worshipped[5], and it would be hard to believe that he was ever the object of a cult."[6] This chapter explores the myths of Scandinavia, concentrating on those in which Loki appears. By doing this, I will illustrate the actions and nature of Loki, in essence compiling and summarizing a small body of Loki specific material from which his traits and personality will be made clear. This material can then be discussed against the trickster criteria formulated in Chapter One.

The body of Norse mythology is comprised of a relatively small amount of literary material. The Poetic Edda[7], The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson, The Gesta

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[1] Although the languages and cultures of Scandinavia (Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and parts of Finland) are Germanic, it is worth noting that there is little to no evidence of Loki outside this specific northern context. This singularity of context is why I will utilize only those myths from the Norse context.

[2] Asgard is the realm of the Aesir, the major gods of Norse mythology.

[3] Heimdall is the watchman or sentry of the Aesir. Heimdall is a mysterious and impressive god who does not fit neatly into any recognized category among the gods. He stands guard over Asgard and the Bifrost Bridge, the Rainbow Bridge that connects Asgard and Midgard (the realm of humanity). Heimdall is to be the adversary of Loki during the events of Ragnarok, the eschatological doom or fate of the gods.

[4] H. R. Ellis Davidson, Gods and Myths of Northern Europe (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1964) 176.

[5] The evidence for worship consists of literary allusions to ritual and place; physical, archeological evidence; and the proliferation of place names based upon the name or names of the deity.

[6] E. O. G. Turville-Petre, Myths and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964) 126.

[7] The term Edda has been translated in many different ways. The term was first applied to the prose collection of Snorri Sturluson and was later applied to the poetic collection. An early interpretation comes from the Lay of Rig where Edda is the name of the progenitress of the race of thralls. In the age

Danorum of Saxo Grammaticus, and a number of sagas and skaldic[8] poems make up the corpus of Norse mythology. From this modest amount of literary material comes an elaborate and intricately woven mythic tapestry. Each of these sources will be dealt with in turn, as they relate to the god Loki.

"What the Vedas are for India, and the Homeric poems for the Greek world, that the Edda signifies for the Teutonic race: it is a repository, in poetic form, of their mythology and much of their heroic lore, bodying forth the ethical views and the cultural life of the North during late heathen and early Christian times."[9] The Poetic Edda, also known as the Elder or Sæmundr's Edda,[10] is comprised of approximately thirty-nine poems divided roughly into two sections. The first is the poetic tales concerning the Aesir and their mythic exploits. The second group is comprised of the legendary poems concerning the heroes of the Teutonic people. The historian Bishop Brynjólfur discovered the codex, which would come to be The Poetic Edda, in 1643 in an Icelandic farmhouse. The dating of the various poems is a complicated process, "entirely dependent on internal evidence for the determination of age and the origin of the Eddic poems, individually and collectively."[11] The poems have a West Norse speech form, a language form spoken only during and after the Viking Age (ca. 800-1050 CE), and can be no older than about 700 CE as the insertion of this older Runic form of language would destroy the metric structure.[12] In addition, the origin of the poems is in question. The most popular theories set the poems in Norway, Iceland, or the British Isles.

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of Romanticism, she was understood as the ancestral mother of storytelling. Another interpretation is that Edda means poetics. A third interpretation is that Edda means "the book of Oddi," coming from the center of learning in Southwest Iceland founded by Sæmundr Sigfússon. For more information on this debate see The Poetic Edda trans. Lee Hollander (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1962) xii-xiii.

[8] Skaldic poetry is a literary form that was extremely popular in Scandinavia during the Middle Ages. It never truly died out in Iceland where it still enjoys a modicum of popularity. For more information on Skaldic poetry see: The Poetic Edda trans. Lee Hollander and Lee Hollander, The Skalds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945).

[9] Hollander, The Poetic Edda ix.

[10] Until modern times The Poetic Edda was believed to have been written or collected by Sæmundr Sigfússon, the eleventh century Icelandic historian. However, there is no documentary evidence to link Sæmundr with The Poetic Edda.

[11] Hollander, The Poetic Edda xviii.

[12] Ibid, xvii-xviii.

Loki appears in a number of the mythological poems, where he is a vague, powerful, and sinister figure with an ambivalent character, neither wholly good nor wholly bad.[13] Loki appears in the Voluspá, The Prophecy of the Seeress.[14] The Seeress is called from the dead by Óthin (Odin)[15] to speak to the assembly of gods about what has been and what is yet to be. The Seeress begins with the creation of universe and the birth of humanity. To the primal humans Ask and Embla, Ash and Vine, "soul gave Óthin, sense gave Hoenir,[16] being, Lóthur, and blooming hue."[17] The god Lóthur has been associated by some scholars with Loki, making him part of this creative trio. The next appearance of Loki in the Voluspá concerns Loki fettered with his mate Sigyn by his side. This specific scene and its implications are mentioned several times through the various stories that make up the Norse/Loki myth cycle. The final appearance of Loki in the Voluspá concerns the eschatological events of Ragnarok. Loki breaks his bonds and,

> Sails a ship from the east _____ with shades from Hel;[18]
> o'er the ocean stream _____ steers it Loki;
> in the wake of the Wolf _____ rush witless hordes
> who with baleful Byleist's _____brother[19] do force.[20]

The ship Loki steers is called Naglfar and is made of the nails of dead men. The poem closes with the death of the major gods; the fiery destruction of Asgard and Midgard; and the regeneration of the universe, humanity, and the peaceful reign of the surviving Aesir. Loki serves as the adversarial figure who heralds the events of Ragnarok and brings about a new balance through violence and disorder.

The next poem that Loki directly and prominently appears in is the Lokasenna, the Flyting[21] of Loki. In this poem Loki systematically attacks one deity

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[13] Davidson, 176.
[14] The myths here related are primarily from Lee Hollander's translation of The Poetic Edda.
[15] Odin is the "king of the Aesir." He is the high god, a war god, and a god of death, among other things.
[16] Little is known or written of the god Hoenir. He is known for his silence and is sometimes called the long legged god. He was given as hostage to make peace between the Aesir and the Vanir, a race of divinities concerned with wealth and fertility. Hoenir is said to survive the events of Ragnarok.
[17] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 3.
[18] Hel is the land of the dead named after its ruler. Hel is the daughter of Loki with the giantess Angrbotha. It should be noted that Hel is not a realm of punishment; it is conceived of as is the Greek Hades.
[19] Byleist's brother is a reference to Loki himself.
[20] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 10.

after another, revealing scandalous truths. The poem is set at a feast hosted by Aegir, a sea god, in which all the major deities are in attendance with the exception of Thór. The feast hall was declared sanctuary where no act of violence was permitted. The Aesir begin to praise Aegir's servants Fimafeng and Eldir. Loki can not stand to hear this praise and slays Fimafeng. The gods rise up against Loki and drive him from the feast. Loki returns to the hall and declares,

> In I shall, though, _____ into Aegir's hall –
> fain would I see that feast;
> brawls and bickering _____ I bring the gods,
> their ale I shall mix with evil.[22]

Loki sows discord and strife among the Aesir. He is the bringer of mischief, the ultimate party-crasher. It is only fitting that, as a trickster, Loki stirs up disorder during a party or feast. It is during such an anti-structural setting that communitas is created and the trickster levels the hierarchy and brings the mighty low.

Loki enters and calling himself by one of his other names, Lopt (airy, lofty one or skywalker) demands a seat and some mead. Bragi, the god of poetry, states that the Aesir will not allow Loki to join them and refuses him a place at the table. To this Loki replies,

> Art mindful, Óthin, _____how in olden days we
> blended our blood together?
> Thou said'st that not ever _____thou ale would'st drink
> but to us both it were borne.[23]

By right of blood brotherhood with Óthin is Loki allowed to rejoin the feast, "lest…[he] fling lewd words at us."[24] This is exactly what Loki begins to do. He claims that Bragi boasts well of his exploits but is actually a coward when it comes to battle. Bragi's wife Ithun (Idunn), goddesses of the apples of immortality, tries to soothe the situation, only to become Loki's next target. Loki questions Ithun's fidelity, calling her the most mad after men. This becomes the pattern for the rest of the poem; Loki attacks one deity, another attempts to aid his/her fellow only to

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[21] A flyting is a type of running dialogue that consists of insults and slanders normally of a bawdy and risqué nature.
[22] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 91.
[23] Ibid, 92.
[24] Ibid, 93.

become Loki's next victim. Loki is a loner and outsider. It is the trickster against the world, attacking companion and adversary alike similar to Coyote and Wakdjunkaga.

The virgin goddess Gefjon (Gefjun), to whom the dead virgins come, is called a whore by Loki. She supposedly purchased the Brísing's necklace from Heimdall, "the fair-haired swain,"[25] in return for throwing her thighs about him. At this point Óthin cautions Loki not to provoke Gefjon, who can tell the future. Again Loki attacks claiming that Óthin has never dispensed luck fairly on the battlefield, allowing unworthy men to win while causing true heroes to die. Óthin does not deny his bias and retorts,

> … thou winters eight _____ wast the earth beneath,
> milking the cows as a maid,
> and there gavest birth to a brood:
> were these womanish ways, I ween.[26]

Similar to other trickster's, Loki is reported to be able to change form and sex, giving birth and milking cows as would a woman. Loki responds to this statement of his bisexual or hermaphroditic nature by claiming that Óthin has cross-dressed and acted in womanish ways while weaving spells like a witch. Óthin's wife Frigg intervenes only to have Loki respond that she has taken Óthin's brothers Vili and Ve, Will and Holiness, to her bosom. Loki also states that he is the reason that Frigg's beloved son Baldr[27] is dead.[28] The goddess Freya, a fertility goddess and one of the Vanir, is the next target of Loki's scandalous tongue. She is called a whore having lured with lust, at one time or another, every Aesir and alf (elf/spirit) at the feast. Loki also accuses her of incest saying,

> Hush thee, Freya, _____a whore thou art,
> and ay wast bent on ill;
> in thy brother's bed _____the blessed gods caught thee,
> when, Freya, thou didst fart.[29]

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[25] Ibid, 94. To be fair-haired is to be effeminate.
[26] Ibid, 95.
[27] In the Eddas, Baldr is conceived of as a god of light who is fair of face. He is destined to return from Hell after Ragnarok.
[28] This responsibility has been the subject of much interpretation. The Lokasenna is the only lay in The Poetic Edda that links Loki with Baldr's death. The dating of the lay may reflect a later conception of Loki. This conception is similar to Snorri Sturluson's who portrays Loki as ultimately responsible for Baldr's demise. This version will be addressed later.
[29] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 97.

Freya's father, Njorth (Njord), is Loki's next victim. Recalling another myth in which Thór and Loki cross a river that turns out to be urine issuing from a giantess' bladder, Loki claims that Njorth's mouth, as a sea god, is a pot in which to piss. Njorth is also accused of incest having fathered Frey, a major fertility god, on his own sister and that it is a wonder that Frey did not turn out worse for it.

Týr, the one handed god of law and war, jumps to Frey's defense only to be reminded by Loki how he lost his hand in the maw of Loki's son, Fenris Wolf.[30] Loki goes on to say,

> Hush thee Týr, _____ with thy housewife I
> slept, so a son she bore;
> nor a penny didst get _____ to pay thee back
> for this wrong, thou wretch.[31]

Loki attacks Frey for giving away his sword to purchase his giantess bride. This act will spell his doom at Ragnarok. Without the sword, he will fall to Surtr, the fire giant and lord of Muspellheim (the realm of fire). Loki then slanders the giantess Skathi (Skaði), the goddess of winter, skiing, and hunting. She warns Loki,

> Thou art lusty, Loki, _____ but long wilt not
> a loose tail wag as thou list;
> for on a rock _____ with thy ice-cold son's
> guts will bind thee the gods.[32]

This allusion to Loki's future fate does not deter his venom. He boasts how he was first and foremost in the battle where the Aesir slain the giant Thjatsi (Thjazi), Skathi's father. Loki also reminds Skathi how she bade him share her bed. Several times throughout the Lokasenna, Loki attests to his heightened libido and exaggerated sexual prowess. He claims to have slept with Skathi, Týr's wife, and Sif among others. Of all the Aesir, Loki is the most promiscuous, which fits with his classification as a trickster figure.

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[30] Another source, The Prose Edda, gives an elaborate description of this scene. More will be related when that source is discussed.
[31] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 98.
[32] Ibid, 100.

At this point Sif, Thór's wife, tries to reconcile the situation only to be scandalized by Loki.

> That one thou wert, _____if thou wert indeed
> shy and didst shrink from men;
> but one I wot, _____whom well I know,
> made a whore of Hlórrithi's[33] wife:
> sly Loki, Laufey's[34] son.[35]

The mountains shake, the thunder rolls and in storms Thór ready to shatter Loki's head with his hammer, Mjolnir. Loki recalls a few episodes where the giant Skrymir humiliated the mighty Thór. After more threats of violence, Loki departs cursing the hall and the host. The poem ends with a prose section that most scholars do not believe is original to the poem. The events told in this prose epilogue are also found in the "Death of Baldr" story of The Prose Edda, and will be recounted later in this chapter.[36] The whole of the Lokasenna demonstrates the scandalous, liminal power of the trickster's speech. It is the province of the liminal trickster to attack and criticize the established hierarchy. This is done through the sacred power of liminal speech. Loki undermines the status quo by speaking the truth, a truth that only one outside the establishment can utter.

One of the best known myths from The Poetic Edda, in which Loki plays a prominent role, is the þrymskviða, the Lay of Thrym. The poem opens with Thór awakening to find his hammer Mjolnir, the crusher, missing. In a rage he calls Loki and explains the situation. They travel to Freya from whom Loki borrows the feather coat, a garment that allows him to change into the form of a bird.

> Flew then Loki _____ the feather coat whirred,
> left behind him _____ the halls of the gods.
> and winged his way _____ to the world of etins (giants).[37]

There Loki finds the giant lord Thrym, the noisy one. Thrym has hidden Mjolnir eight leagues beneath the ground and will only release it if the Aesir deliver Freya to

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[33] Another name for Thor.
[34] Laufey, the giantess, is Loki's mother. Her name is usually translated as green or leafy isle.
[35] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 101.
[36] I have chosen to recount the events of this epilogue when I discuss the Loki myths of The Prose Edda. I do this because most scholars believe that the prose epilogue of the Lokasenna is a later addition, one that fits best with the punishment theme of Snorri's version.
[37] Ibid, 105.

be his bride. Loki returns and tells of what he has learned. Enraged, Freya refuses and the Aesir are forced to convene a council to decide how to get the hammer back. Heimdall suggests that the gods dress Thór up in bridal linens so as to look like Freya. Thór refuses until Loki, either being practical or mischievous, reminds him that the giants will invade Asgard if Thór does not recover his hammer. He agrees and the Aesir dress Thór up in the bridal linens. Loki dresses up in woman's clothing as well to act as Thór's attendant.

On Thór's chariot the two travel to etin-world. Thrym, anticipating Freya's arrival, commands all his frost giants to spread straw on the benches, as is done on festal occasions. The disguised Aesir arrive and a huge feast is laid out to celebrate their arrival. At the feast the "dainty Freya" eats an ox, eight salmon, and drinks three measures of mead. In a style reminiscent of Little Red Riding Hood's questioning of the Big Bad Wolf,

> Said Thrym these words, _____ the thurses' lord:
> "Where sawest thou bride _____bite more sharply?
> Never saw I bride _____ bite more broudly,
> nor more mead _____ a maiden drink."
>
> The waiting maid wise _____ these words then found,
> to the etin thus _____ she answer made:
> "Naught ate Freya _____ for full eight nights,
> so eager was she _____ for etin-world."[38]

Satisfied with this answer, Thrym goes to kiss "Freya" moving aside her veil. He sees "her" fierce, fiery eyes and reels back. Loki quickly answers that "Freya" has not slept for eight nights, so eager was "she" to come to Thrym's home. At this point a giantess comes in, demanding a traditional gift from the bride "Freya." Thrym calls for Mjolnir to be brought, in order to hallow the union. The hammer is laid in Thór's lap. At once he takes it up and slays Thrym and all his giants and giantesses. In this way Loki helped Thór recover his hammer.

Loki is mentioned in the Voluspá hin skanna, The Short Seeress Prophecy. The poem, similar in style to the larger Voluspá begins after the death of Baldr. It is a cosmogonic poem that recounts the genealogy of a few of the major mythic entities.

[38] Ibid, 108.

Gat Loki the Wolf _____ with Angrbotha,
and Sleipnir he bore _____ to Svathilfari;
but of all ill wights _____ most awful by far
is Býleist's brother's _____ baleful offspring.[39]

Loki fathered Fenris Wolf on the giantess Angrbotha and gave birth himself to the eight-legged steed Sleipnir. Loki's most baleful offspring would be either Fenris Wolf, the slayer of Óthin during Ragnarok, or the Mithgarth (Midgard) Serpent, who will kill and be killed by Thór at Ragnarok. Loki's bisexual or hermaphroditic nature is further illustrated in the Short Voluspá.

A half-burnt heart _____ which he had found –
It was a woman's _____ ate wanton Loki;
With child he grew _____ from the guileful woman.
Thence are on earth _____ all ogres sprung.[40]

Through eating a witch's heart, Loki became the mother of all ogres.

Loki is referenced in two other poems within The Poetic Edda. The first is the Svipdagsmál, The Lay of Svipdag. This heroic poem recounts the adventures of Svipdag to rescue Mengloth from giants and secure her hand in marriage. Loki, under his other name Lopt, is mentioned as the craftsman who forged Lævatein, a sword called the Wand of Destruction. Loki forged the sword in Niflhel, the cold underworld in which is found Hel, the realm of the dead. In this Loki acts as a creator, partly demonstrating the culture hero aspect of the trickster.

Loki also appears in the prose and poetic prologue[41] of the Reginsmál, the Lay of Regin. The lay introduces Sigurth and the Niflung gold[42]. Loki's part involves the initial introduction of the gold and its becoming cursed. The poem relates that in mythic time, Óthin, Hoenir, and Loki were travelling together when they came to a waterfall. In this waterfall there was a dwarf named Andvari, who was in the form of a pike. Otr, a dwarf who could take the form of an otter, was also at the waterfall, eating a fish when the three Aesir arrived. Loki picked up a stone, threw it at Otr and killed him. The gods flayed the otter and set off, arriving at a lodge, which turned out

[39] Ibid, 138.
[40] Ibid, 139.
[41] The events of this prologue are also discussed in The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson. The events of the two versions are the same and thus Snorri's version need not be repeated.
[42] This poem is part of a larger story that is also found in the Volsung saga and Wagner's Ring Cycle.

to be owned by Otr's brothers. "Then we [Otr's brothers] bound them and laid on them a ransom to stuff the otter skin, and also to cover it on the outside, with red gold. Then they sent Loki to fetch the gold."[43] Loki returned to the waterfall and, using a net, caught the dwarf Andvari. Loki forced him to give up all his gold including a gold ring, which Andvari tried to keep. The dwarf cursed the ring, saying that it will bring only death and despair. The Aesir cover the otter skin with the gold, covering a final whisker with the cursed ring. Having paid the ransom and won their freedom, Loki said,

> The gold thou hast gotten, _____ but great has been
> the worth thou laid'st on my life;
> 'twill sorrow bring _____ to thy son and thee,
> it will work the bane of you both.[44]

In this way Loki was responsible for setting the curse of the Niflung in motion, leaving mischief and tragedy in his wake.

"[T]o a reader of Snorri Loki is perhaps the most outstanding character among the northern gods, the chief actor in the most amusing stories, and the motivating force in a large number of plots. It is he who brings comedy into the realm of the gods, and tragedy into the story of Balder."[45] Another major source of Norse mythology is The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson. This work was first written in the early thirteenth century in Iceland. The text is preserved in three primary manuscripts: the Codex Regius (early fourteenth century), the Codex Wormiamus (fourteenth century), and the Codex Upsaliensis (about 1300 CE), "perhaps a direct copy of Snorri's own text."[46] The stories related in The Prose Edda were drawn from oral traditions, poetry, both Eddic and Skaldic, and the legendary histories and genealogies of the Scandinavian people.

The Prose Edda is divided into three sections, each part having a different voice and purpose. "The first part, the Gylfaginning, or Beguiling of Gylfi, is an epitome of Odinic mythology, cast in the form of a dialogue between Gylfi, a

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[43] Hollander, The Poetic Edda 216.
[44] Ibid, 218.
[45] Davidson, 176.
[46] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, From the introduction of: Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916) xv.

legendary Swedish king, and the triune Odin."[47] The second is the Skáldskaparmál, the Posey of Skalds. Through a dialogue between Aegir and the god Bragi, Snorri relates several more adventures of the Aesir and then, "makes his work a treatise on the conventional vocabulary and phraseology of Skaldship, for the guidance of young Skalds."[48] The third section is the Háttatal, the Enumeration of Metres, a collection of songs that provide examples of metric types and subtypes. The work as a whole is seen as a textbook for apprentice poets; it supplies the mythic raw materials, the rules of composition, and models for poetic emulation.

"Snorri, though a Christian, tells the old pagan tales with obvious relish, and often, in the enthusiasm of the true antiquary, rises to magnificent heights."[49] By looking at the Prose Edda, it appears that Snorri was extremely proud of his pagan heritage, yet he was a Christian. This fact must be taken into account when discussing the stories that Snorri relates. He is working from an inherently dualistic worldview, seemingly alien to the ancient Germanic peoples; this dualism can be found in Snorri's Eddic material. In addition, Snorri provided an euhemeristic[50] prologue to The Prose Edda. He claims that the Aesir were humans originally from Asia (hence the name Aesir) that became deified by the ancient Germanic tribes. Troy was the site of Asgard and Thór, not Odin, was the first "god." This all occurred after most of humanity had forgotten the name and the worship of the Judeo-Christian god.

The first prominent reference to Loki in The Prose Edda[51] occurs as Snorri, through the characters Gylfi and the triune Odin (Hárr, Jafnhárr, and Thridi – High, Equally High, and Third), lists and describes the gods and goddesses.

> Also numbered among the Æsir is he whom some call the mischief-monger of the Aesir, and the first father of falsehoods, and blemish of all gods and men: he is named Loki or Loptr, son of Fárbauti the giant; his mother was Laufey or Nál; his brothers are Býleistr and Helblindi. Loki is beautiful and comely to

[47] Ibid, xv.
[48] Ibid, xvi.
[49] Ibid, xv.
[50] Euhemerism is the interpretation of mythology, which reduces deities to the level of deified, historic humans. It was a popular tool among Christians during the Middle Ages when dealing with pagan beliefs.
[51] The myths here presented are primarily from Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur's translation of The Prose Edda by Snorri Sturluson.

> look upon, evil in spirit, very fickle in habit. He surpassed other men in that wisdom which is called 'sleight,' and had artifices for all occasions; he would ever bring the Aesir into great hardships, and then get them out with crafty counsel. His wife was called Sigyn, their sons Nari and Narfi.[52]

In addition Loki's other children are also mentioned. Although they have their own personalities and roles to play, the children do speak to Loki's adversarial, anti-structural nature as well as reflecting his theriomorphism. With the giantess Angrboda (Angrbotha), Loki fathers Fenris Wolf, Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, and the goddess Hel. Through a loophole in Aesir law, these three are allowed to live, even though, "there was great prospect for ill – (first from the mother's blood, and yet worse from the father's)."[53] The gods do eventually deal with the children. Jörmungandr is cast into the sea, where it grows so large it encircles the land and bites its own tail. Hel, whose body is half blue-black or rotting corpse-like and half Caucasian flesh colored, is cast into Niflheim where she is given dominion over nine lower worlds and those who die of sickness or old age. Fenris Wolf was prophesized to be the Aesir's destruction, so the gods decide to bind him, telling him that it is a test of strength. He shatters two fetters before the Aesir find a leash strong enough to bind him.

> Then Allfather [Odin] sent him who is called Skírnir, Freyr's messenger, down into the region of the Black Elves, to certain dwarves, and caused to be made a fetter named Gleipnir. It was made of six things: the noise a cat makes in foot-fall, the beard of a woman, the roots of a rock, the sinews of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird.[54]

Fenris Wolf, fearing treachery, would not submit to this "test" unless one of the Aesir would place his hand in the wolf's mouth. Only the god Týr would do it. The fetter is placed on the wolf and, try as he might, he could not escape it. As retribution Fenris bites off Týr's right hand. And there Fenris Wolf will stay, bound until Ragnarok when he will slip his fetter and devour Odin.

Loki plays a prominent role in the myth involving the rebuilding of the walls of Asgard and the birth of Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged steed. In the early days of

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[52] Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916) 41-42.
[53] Ibid, 42.
[54] Ibid, 43.

Asgard, a man, who offered to build a citadel that would be strong enough to repel the Hill and Rime giants, visited the Aesir. He stated that it would be constructed in three seasons and for his wage he demanded possession of the goddess Freyja (Freya) as well as the sun and the moon. The Aesir agreed, adding that he would receive his reward only if could complete it in one winter without the help of any man. The builder asked that he be allowed to use his stallion Svadilfari. Loki advised that the Aesir agree to this request. With the help of the stallion, the builder nearly completed the citadel three days before the deadline. Fearing the loss of Freyja, the sun, and the moon, the Aesir called a council to determine a course of action and to assign blame for the situation. "The gods agreed that he must have counselled this who is wont to give evil advice, Loki Laufeyarson, and they declared him deserving of an ill death, if he could not hit upon a way of losing the wright his wages; and they threatened Loki with violence."[55] Loki swore to fix the trouble no matter the cost to himself. As the builder was working, a mare leaped out of the woods and whinnied at the stallion. The stallion became frantic with lust and vaulted off into the woods after the mare. Without Svaldifari the builder realized he could not finish the work. He fell into a giant's rage, showing himself to be a hill giant. Thór, with his hammer Mjolnir, quickly dispatched the giant. "But Loki had such dealings with Svadilfari, that somewhat later he gave birth to a foal, which was grey and had eight feet; and this horse is best among gods and men."[56] Sleipnir is its name and Loki is its mother. This myth demonstrates two defining aspects of Loki's trickster-ish nature. Loki, through cunning and "evil counsel," gets the Aesir into a bargain they will lose and through trickery and his ability to shape-change proves to be their savior.

Loki appears as the companion of Thór on one of his sojourns into Jotunheim, the realm of the giants.[57] The company journeys to the realm of the giant king, Útgarda-Loki. Upon reaching the abode of Útgarda-Loki, the Aesir are challenged to perform feats of craft or cunning. "Then spoke the one who came last, who was called Loki: 'I know such a trick, which I am ready to try: that there is no one within

[55] Ibid, 54-55.
[56] Ibid, 55.
[57] It is the events of this episode that Loki uses to taunt Thór in the Lokasenna.

here who shall eat his food more quickly than I.'"[58] A trough filled with meat is set upon the floor with Loki at one end and the entity known as Logi at the other. They begin to eat, meeting in the middle of the trough. While Loki had eaten all the meat from the bones, Logi had consumed the meat, bones, and the trough itself. Although Loki loses the competition, his enormous, trickster-ish appetite is demonstrated. Thjálfi and Thór are similarly challenged, only to lose, as did Loki. It turns out that Útgarda-Loki had used his powers of illusion and deception to trick the Aesir. Logi in actuality is the wild fire, burning the trough as well as the meat. Before Thór could smite Útgarda-Loki, the giant and his castle disappear.

Unlike most other sources, Snorri places the blame for the death of Baldr the Bright on Loki. Baldr had told the Aesir of nightmares concerning his death. Frigg, his mother, extracted oaths from all the elements and creatures of the world that they would not harm Baldr. Having obtained these promises, the Aesir would gather and, as a diversion, shoot, stone, and hew Baldr. Yet he remained unharmed.

> But when Loki Laufeyarson saw this, it pleased him ill that Baldr took no hurt. He went to Fensalir to Frigg, and made himself into the likeness of a woman… Then the woman asked: "Have all things taken oaths to spare Baldr?" and Frigg answered: "There grows a tree-sprout alone westward of Valhall: it is called Mistletoe; I thought it too young to ask the oath of."[59]

Loki then went and took the Mistletoe back to the Aesir's hall. Loki found there the blind god Hödr, Baldr's brother, standing outside the festivities. Loki convinced Hödr to take a shot at Baldr with a Mistletoe dart, Loki guiding his aim. The shaft passed through Baldr, killing him. The Aesir placed Baldr's body on the funeral pyre while dispatching Hermódr the Bold to Hel in order to ransom back the life of Baldr. Hel declared that Baldr would be returned if every thing would weep for him. The entire world wept for Baldr, except a certain giantess named Thökk. "And men deem that she who was there was Loki Laufeyarson, who hath wrought most ill among the Aesir."[60] Thus Baldr was doomed to remain in Hel until after Ragnarok.

[58] Snorri, 62.
[59] Ibid, 71.
[60] Ibid, 75.

Loki's actions did not go unpunished. Snorri relates the events surrounding the binding of Loki.[61] Loki was hiding from the wrath of the Aesir upon a mountaintop in a house with four doors, one looking in each of the cardinal directions. Loki spent the day in the form of a salmon, hiding in Fránangr Falls. While in the house, he knitted a net, the first that had been made. As the Aesir closed in, Loki threw the net into the fire and leaped into the falls in his salmon form. Again Loki demonstrates his ability to change form as well as his aspect as culture hero in the creation of the fishing net, a tool wholly important to a sea-faring people. The Aesir entered the house and the wisest, Kvasir, saw the remains of the net, devising for what it could be used. He made another and with it the Aesir eventually caught Loki, Thór tapering the salmon's tail in the process. The gods took Loki to a certain cave in order to bind him. They set three stones on their edges and drilled a hole in each. The Aesir then changed Loki's son Váli into a wolf, setting him upon his brother Nari or Narfi. Váli tore his brother to pieces. "And the Aesir took his entrails and bound Loki with them over the three stones… and those bonds were turned to iron. The Skaði took a venomous serpent and fastened it up over him, so that the venom should drip from the serpent into his face."[62] Sigyn, Loki's wife would catch the venom in a basin, emptying it when it was full. While she was away, the venom would strike Loki, causing him to writhe in agony. Loki will remain fettered there until Ragnarok.

Loki makes several prominent appearances in the Skáldskaparmál, the second section of The Prose Edda. The first myth begins with Odin, Hoenir, and Loki on a journey far from Asgard.[63] The trio came upon a herd of oxen, from which they selected one to roast. However the oxen would not cook; twice they set it upon the fire. From the tree above them, a huge eagle called down, claiming that the oxen would not cook unless the Aesir allowed him to take his fill of the meat. They agreed, but the eagle took the choicest portions, the two hams and both shoulders.

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[61] Snorri's narrative is a more detailed, expanded version of the events found in the prose epilogue of the Lokasenna. Scholars have been unable to establish which is the earliest version.
[62] Snorri, 77.
[63] The oldest reference to this myth comes from the Haustlong, a shield poem (a poem describing the illustrated panels of a shield) written by Thjóðolf of Hvin sometime in the early to mid tenth century. See Hollander, The Skalds 38-48. As well Snorri quotes this poem in The Prose Edda, 130-133.

> Then Loki was angered, snatched up a great pole, brandished it with all his strength, and drove it at the eagle's body. The eagle plunged violently at the blow and flew up, so that the pole was fast to the eagle's back, and Loki's hands to the other end of the pole. The eagle flew at such a height that Loki's feet down below knocked against stones and rock-heaps and trees, and he thought his arms would be torn from his shoulders.[64]

Loki pleaded to be released, but the eagle, who was the giant Thjazi in disguise, stated that he would only release Loki if he would induce the goddess Idunn to leave Asgard with her magic, golden apples. Loki agreed and was released. Upon his return Loki lured Idunn out of Asgard, saying that he had found apples of great virtue which Idunn should compare to her own. Thjazi, in his eagle form, snatched Idunn and her apples, flying off to his abode in Thrymheimr.

Without Idunn's apples the Aesir quickly began to age, becoming hoary and old. The Aesir discovered that Loki was the last one seen with Idunn as they were leaving Asgard. Loki was seized and threatened with torture and death. To save his life, Loki swore to rescue Idunn and her and her apples back to Asgard. He borrowed Freyja's falcon plumage and flew to Thjazi's abode in Jotunheim. Finding the giant gone, Loki turned Idunn into the shape of a nut and grasping her in his falcon claw, he flew back toward Asgard. Thjazi returned home to find Idunn and her apples gone. He donned his eagle form and gave chase. When the Aesir saw the two birds they gathered all the plane shavings and heaped them within the walls of Asgard. As soon as Loki entered the citadel, the Aesir struck the shavings into flame. Thjazi's eagle plumage caught fire and he was brought down. The Aesir then dispatched him.

Having learned of her father's death, the giantess Skaði prepared her weapons and set off to Asgard to avenge her father, Thjazi. To appease her, the Aesir allowed her to choose a husband from among their ranks. The stipulation was that she must choose by only looking at their feet. Skaði chose the most comely feet, believing they must belong to the fairest god, Baldr. However, they were Njördr's feet. Skaði had a stipulation of her own, that the Aesir must make her laugh. This she thought would be an impossible task. "Then Loki did this: he tied a cord to the beard of a goat, the other end being about his own genitals, and each gave way in turn, and each

[64] Snorri, 90.

of the two screeched loudly; then Loki let himself fall onto Skaði's knee, and she laughed."[65] Through Loki's wit, perverse sense of humor, and penchant for buffoonery, the situation is resolved.

Another myth in The Prose Edda that involves Loki concerns the kenning [66] why gold is called Sif's Hair. "Loki Laufeyarson, for mischief's sake, cut off all Sif's hair."[67] When Thór, Sif's husband, learned of this, he seized Loki and threatened to smash every bone in his body. To escape this fate, Loki swore to get the Black Elves[68] to craft Sif some hair of spun gold that would grow like natural hair. Loki went to the dwarves and convinced them to craft the hair for Sif. In addition, Loki had them craft Skídbladnir, Frey's ship that folds up and fits in his pocket, and Odin's spear Gungnir. Loki then made a wager with the dwarf Brokkr that Brokkr's brother Sindri could not create three items of greater worth. If Loki lost, he would lose his head. Sindri, with Brokkr's help on the bellows, forges a golden boar, the ring Draupnir, and Thór's hammer, Mjolnir. As each item was being forged, Loki, in the form of a fly, tried to distract Brokkr by biting him. He was only successful the final time, biting Brokkr's eyelid and blinding him with his own blood. The result was that Mjolnir's handle is somewhat short. The objects were distributed and judged. The Aesir concede that because of the value of Mjolnir, the dwarves win the wager. However, Loki escaped decapitation by relying on the letter of the agreement. Similar to Shylock's pound of flesh in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Brokkr could take Loki's head but not his neck. In order to gain some modicum of victory, Brokkr took his brother's awl and a leather thong and stitched Loki's lips together. Loki ripped out the thong, gaining the epithet Scarlip.

Another myth in which Loki plays a role involves another of Thór's travels to Jotunheim, the giant's home. Loki, while flying about in Frigg's hawk plumage, was captured by the giant Geirrödr. The giant realized that this was no mere hawk but a god in disguise. Because Loki refused to speak and reveal his identity, Geirrödr

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[65] Ibid, 92.
[66] A kenning is a phrase that stands for or symbolizes an object or person. The connection is usually derived from a myth.
[67] Snorri, 145. (emphasis mine).
[68] The term Black Elves is another name for the dwarves. They are creatures of darkness that normally dwell in the earth.

locked him in a chest and starved him for three months. Loki relented and ransomed his life by searing to deliver Thór, minus his hammer and girdle of might, into Geirrödr's domain. On their way Thór and Loki spent the night with the giantess Grídr. She revealed the truth about Geirrödr and gave Thór her own girdle of might, iron gloves, and staff. With these implements, Thór defeated the giant and his three daughters.[69]

Loki appears a few more times in The Prose Edda. In the section of the Skáldskaparmál concerning the kennings of the gods, Snorri recounts the battle between Heimdall and Loki over the necklace Brísinga-men. The two battle in the form of seals. Snorri cites this brief account of the myth from Úlfr Uggarson's skaldic poem Húsdrápa.[70] Snorri also recounts all the kennings of Loki. They are all derived from the myths described and illustrate his helpful, humorous, mischievous, and malevolent sides. In addition, there is a passage included that names Thór as the Trojan Hector and Loki as Ulysses. Although most scholars reject this passage as not original to The Prose Edda, it does fit with Snorri's euhemeristic system and does illustrate Loki's connection with cleverness and his opposition to the Trojan Aesir.

Another major source of Germanic myths is The Gesta Danorum (The First Nine Books of the Danish History) of Saxo Grammaticus. Like Snorri, Saxo was an historian who chronicled the lives of historic and legendary figures. Saxo wrote in the latter half of the twelfth century, during a time when Iceland was the mecca of Scandinavian literary production and Denmark was lingering behind. Saxo was also an euhemerist, stating that the gods and goddesses were a group of humans from Byzantium. However, unlike Snorri whose euhemerism was fairly benign, Saxo was violently opposed to the memory of the pre-Christian times. The Aesir and their legacy are cast in a very poor light; the gods are portrayed as devious, unwholesome, and not divine.

Loki appears a few times in Saxo's accounts, but always in a transformed guise and under a different name. His first alleged appearance is in the form of Mit-

[69] The Skald Eilífr Gudrúnarson, in his poem Thórsdrápa, also recounts this myth. Snorri quotes the directly relates the poem on pages 123-129.
[70] Ibid, 113.

Oðin.[71] This figure usurped Odin's throne while Odin is on a self-imposed exile because of his wife's sacrilege and infidelity.

> When he [Odin] had retired, one Mit-Othin, who was famous for his juggling tricks, was likewise quickened, as though by inspiration from on high, to seize the opportunity of feigning to be a god; and, wrapping the minds of the barbarians in fresh darkness, he led them by renown of his jugglings to pay holy observance to his name.[72]

The foolish, jester-like nature of Mit-Othin is emphasized, again setting Loki as a trickster-ish figure. When Odin returned Mit-Oðin fled to Finland, where he was killed. The figure seems to have had even more power in death as anyone who came near his barrow would die. A pestilence raged throughout the land. The only way to obtain relief was to remove his body from the ground, behead it, and impale the body upon a pike.

The other possible instance of Loki in Saxo's accounts is as Útgarda-Loki. In this myth, the hero Thorkillus, possibly the euhemerized Thór, travels to the underworld to challenge Útgarda-Loki and remove a hair from his chin. What links this venomous giant with the other sources depiction of Loki is that Útgarda-Loki is bound in chains. He is in a deep cave within the earth and is surrounded by poisonous snakes. These outward similarities connect Saxo's Útgarda-Loki with the Eddic Loki. It is as if Saxo collapsed the two Eddic figures of Loki and Útgarda-Loki into one composite entity.

The final myth of import in Saxo's history does not involve Loki at all. It is a version of the death of Baldr in which Loki is not present. It entails a fight between Baldr and Hother (Hödr) over the maiden Nanna. Hother slays Baldr not with Mistletoe but with a magic sword won from a satyr. In this version Baldr is portrayed as wicked and dishonorable; Hother is noble, clever, valiant, and not blind, as in Snorri's version. Although the version is highly euhemerized, it does seem that Saxo is relating an alternative tradition in which Loki is not responsible for Baldr's death. It may be that Saxo is relating a Danish version or it could mean that Snorri's

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[71] According to Frederick York Powell and others, Loki is the most likely candidate for the mysterious Mit-Oðin. This identification is derived from a general comparison of the character of the two figures and their relations to Odin. Mit-Oðin does not appear outside of Saxo's accounts.

[72] Saxo Grammaticus, The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus, trans. Oliver Elton (Lessing-Druckerei, Germany: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967) 31.

condemnation of Loki is not part of the original myth but a Christianized, dualistic addition.

The myths of Loki reveal his complex, ambiguous, and mischievous nature. He is the great trouble-maker, savior, thief, fool, and the harbinger of change all at the same time. By looking at the various myths one can begin to see how this mythic character defies easy classification yet does fit into the complex typology of the trickster. It is now possible to address the traits exhibited in the myths and compare the ambiguous figure of Loki to the larger Trickster typology. The final chapter will address the character of Loki as revealed in the presented myths and compare them to the Trickster criteria established in the first chapter. This analysis will show that Loki is best understood as a trickster, a boundary breaking and creative, liminal being. By demonstrating how Loki is a trickster figure we can better understand how he fits within a larger historical and mythic context, what role he may have played in the mytho-religious life of the ancient and medieval Norse people, under what context these myths were told, and the possible role that Loki plays in the contemporary revival of Norse paganism.

Chapter Three

Pranks, Bi-Polarity, and the In-Between: Analysis of Loki as a Trickster

Having explored the various Norse myths that involve the Germanic god Loki, one can begin to draw out aspects or traits of the mythic character which can be compared to the various Trickster criteria that I established in Chapter One. This chapter shall apply the various rubrics and theoretical interpretations of the Trickster to the myths and mythic persona of Loki, piecing together a descriptive and theoretical understanding of Loki as primarily a Trickster figure. I believe it will be more fruitful to systematically go through the criteria from Chapter One, applying and explaining the mythic material as appropriate rather than vice versa. I do this mainly for convenience sake, but also because there is no clearly defined cycle structure[1] to Loki's myths, even within Snorri's organized prose collection. The various criteria put forth in the first chapter will highlight the varied aspects of Loki's personality and behaviors, allowing one a multiplicity of theoretical and descriptive insights into the character as well as the possible roles he may have played within the myths for the cultures that created and told them. It is my assertion that the majority of the understandings of trickster can be seen as aspects of a liminal persona; Victor Turner's conception being the underpinning of my more elaborate analysis of Trickster and Loki.

On the most basic level of definition, a Trickster is one who plays tricks, one who deceives and is the butt of his own pranks. In nearly all the myths in which Loki takes part, he is mischievous, deceptive, thieving and is, in turn, made the fool. While Loki is mischievous in the tales of *Poetic Edda*, mainly through his words rather than his deeds, in the *Prose Edda*, he has elevated the act of pranking to an art. Snorri first relates his kennings as: "mischief-monger…father of falsehoods…fickle in habit… [surpassing] in that wisdom which is called 'sleight,'... [and giver of]

[1] Unlike the Winnebago trickster tales related and analyzed by Paul Radin, the Loki tales do not seem to have a clear beginning and ending. The fettering of Loki and the eschatological events of Ragnarok may be seen as an ending to the character, but the myths relating these events are typically not the final myths within the collections and, as such, can not really be seen as providing an ending to any organized Loki or Norse myth cycle.

crafty counsel."[2] Before any of his actions or events are related, Loki's personality is given as deceptive and mischievous, a creature who surpasses all others in trickery. In the episode involving the building of the walls of Asgard, Loki gives both crafty counsel in the accepting of the deal with the giant and in playing a trick on that same giant by turning himself into a mare to lure the giant's helpful stallion away. In the events surrounding the death of Baldr, Loki plays numerous tricks upon the Aesir. He changes into the guise of an old woman in order to trick Frigg into relating what plant might kill Baldr the Bright. Loki tricks the blind god Hödr into throwing the dart of mistletoe at Baldr. "Then said Loki: 'Do thou also after the manner of other men, and show Baldr honor as other men do. I will direct thee where he stands; shoot at him with this wand.'"[3] Lastly Loki plays a grand trick upon the whole world by assuming the guise of the giantess Thökk and refusing to weep in order to bring Baldr back from Hel.

In the Skáldskaparmál, the second section of the *Prose Edda*, Loki continues to ply his craft as well as playing the buffoon. In the events concerning the jotun Thjazi, Loki tries to be heroic, swatting the thieving eagle with his pole. However, his heroism turns into trouble for him as he becomes stuck fast to the eagle and will only be released if he can *trick* the goddess Idunn into leaving Asgard with her golden apples. This he does but again he finds himself in dire straits. The Aesir threaten him with torture and death unless he can retrieve the maiden goddess. He assumes the form of a bird, rescues Idunn, and tricks Thjazi into giving chase, which leads to his fiery demise. Loki also plays the fool, using his penchant for mischief and humor, to defuse the situation with Skaði, Thjazi's daughter. "Then Loki did this: he tied a cord to the beard of a goat, the other end being about his own genitals, and each gave way in turn, and each of the two screeched loudly; then Loki let himself fall onto Skaði's knee, and she laughed."[4]

In another mythic episode, Loki, "for mischief's sake," cuts off all of the goddess Sif's hair. To escape the inevitable punishment by Sif's husband Thor, Loki

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[2] Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916) 41.
[3] Ibid, 72.
[4] Ibid, 92.

has the black elves fashion golden hair for her as well as other useful objects. He also makes a wager with the same dwarves that they cannot create other items of such power and import. He tricks them into creating Thor's hammer and thus loses the bet. He escapes losing his head through trickery, but does get his mouth sewn shut for his troubles. Loki is also linked, in Snorri's *Prose Edda*, with the Greek hero Ulysses, one known for his craftiness and trickery. Saxo Grammaticus relates how Loki (who is the most likely candidate for the figure Mit-Othin), is renown for his juggling tricks and ability to wrap, "the minds of the barbarians in fresh darkness."[5]

Loki can also be seen as closely paralleling the Winnebago trickster, Wakdjunkaga, in several significant ways. As mentioned earlier, there is little to no organization of the Loki myths into a definable myth cycle, and, as such, one can not analyze the character in the same way as Paul Radin did Wakdjunkaga. It is questionable whether Loki matures throughout his various myths; there seems to be very little psycho-social/psycho-sexual growth of the character. Putting that theoretical conception aside, Loki does bear many of the same trickster markings as the Winnebago Trickster that Radin relates. Loki is a creature of gross appetites, particularly when it comes to eating and fornicating. In the realm of Útgarda-Loki, Loki indulges his gluttony in an attempt to win an eating contest. "Then spoke the one who came last, who was called Loki: 'I know such a trick, which I am ready to try: that there is no one within here who shall eat his food more quickly than I.'"[6] Although he loses the contest to the ettin Logi, the raging wild fire, the episode does speak to his exaggerated appetite. Loki's sexual appetite is also grossly exaggerated. Besides his three marriages, which all produce children of one sort or another, he has several explicit and implied dalliances with many of the goddesses and other creatures within the Norse pantheon. In the Lokasenna, it is explicitly stated or implicitly implied that Loki has fornicated with such goddesses as Freya; Týr's wife who bore a son to Loki; Skathi (Skaði); and Sif, the wife of Thór, of whom he made a whore. The cutting off of Sif's hair may have been a part of Loki's sexual escapades with the goddess, as the cutting off of hair may be seen as a punishment for a wife's

[5] Saxo Grammaticus, The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus, trans. Oliver Elton (Lessing-Druckerei, Germany: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967) 31.
[6] Snorri, 62.

infidelity. Moreover, one would have to be in a relatively intimate setting in order to affect such a drastic act. Similar to Wakdjunkaga, Loki also changes sex, in order to enact his many schemes. Óthin relates the tale in the Lokasenna how Loki milked cows as a maid and gave birth to a brood. Taking it a step further, Loki not only changes sex but species in the episode concerning the rebuilding of the walls of Asgard. He assumes the shapes of a mare, lures the helpful stallion from its master and then returns having birthed the incredible steed Sleipnir.

Karl Kerényi, in his addition to Radin's work, states that the Trickster is a spirit of disorder, a creature of change and flux that provides a taste of the forbidden within the narrowly bounded world of reality, both social and mythic. Loki demonstrates this disorder very well. He does what should not be done; he is the chaos bringer within the confines of the Aesir-ian world. Lewis Hyde, in his book Trickster Makes This World,[7] picks up this theme as it directly relates to Loki and the death of Baldr. Loki represents change and the natural disorder of the cosmos, a force that Frigg, Baldr's mother, has derailed by obtaining a pledge from every living thing, except Mistletoe, that they will not hurt Baldr. Baldr has been having dreams of his approaching death and Frigg disrupts the balance between order and disorder in the mythic universe as a way to protect her son. Loki, in his role as trickster, "slays" Baldr in the attempt to reassert the necessary balance between order and disorder, stagnation and flux. Baldr's death is necessary to start in motion the events of the eschatological Ragnarok, which while violent and destructive will eventually lead to Baldr's return from Hel heralding a new paradise. Loki's hand in Baldr's death is not motivated by evil intention but rather a trickster's need to reintroduce the creative and sustaining power of disorder into the universe, to start a change from the stagnant status quo to a new world. "Frigg's attempt to guard her son stands in the way of this necessary end, which is therefore more destructive than it needed to be. Just as violent upheavals increase where no political process allows for change, so here the sneakiness and shock of Loki's deed is proportional to Frigg's exaggerated attempt at

[7] Lewis Hyde, Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art (New York: North Point Press, 1998.)

control."[8] The gods do not understand the necessary motivation behind Loki's action and thus they bind him, making the coming events more violent and more tragic. "The Norse gods are *reginn*, 'organizing powers,' and by themselves cannot bring that world to life; they need the touch of disorder and vulnerability that Loki brings, a point we see in reverse: when Loki is suppressed, the world collapses; when he–and disorder–returns, the world is reborn."[9]

While it is beyond my purpose to argue whether or not Carl Jung's conception of the Trickster as Shadow archetype is valid, there is a descriptive aspect of his theory that one can apply to Loki. I am here speaking of the aspect of Shadow/Trickster as savior. While Loki is never portrayed as a savior of humanity (although by some estimations he does have a role in human creation[10]), he is called upon numerous times to save the Aesir from the Jotuns and from themselves. Granting that Loki is many times "cleaning up" after his own tricks, he is instrumental in fixing the major problems of the Aesir. Simply put, no one else is capable or qualified to act as savior. He uses his artifice and guile to put right the theft of Thor's hammer in the þrymskviða; he rescues Idunn from the giant Thjazi and Freya from the wall-building giant; and he saves Óthin and Hoenir in the Reginsmál. Most importantly, if Hyde's interpretation is accepted, Loki is savior to the world and its balance by "slaying" Baldr at the cost of his own freedom. Loki may be a more selfish savior than Jesus or others, yet he is the only one capable of setting events right by application of his trickster-ish ways. He is the proto-savior that Jung envisioned in his Shadow archetype.

Many definitions of Trickster, especially those of Radin and Mac Linscott Ricketts, link the figure with that of Culture Hero. Whether the trickster evolves into the Culture Hero, as Radin would have it, or if the figures are initially linked, as with Ricketts "trickster-fixer," is ultimately irrelevant for the discussion here. What is of utmost importance is the trickster's propensity for creative acts. Loki is a creative figure, producing items or causing them to be produced. He gives birth to Sleipnir; forges Lævatein, the wand of destruction; and causes many other items, such as

[8] Ibid, 107.
[9] Ibid, 106.
[10] see Chapter Two, page 40.

Thor's hammer Mjolnir, to be crafted. However, befitting a Trickster, Loki's creativity or Culture Hero aspect is largely unintentional. As Radin notes, many of the "benefactions…come to mankind incidentally and accidentally through Trickster's activities."[11] Loki's benefits are no exception, most being produced while he is trying to save his own skin. He is a breeder of trouble then the fixer who sets his own blunders to right. Unlike many of the other Culture Hero/Tricksters, Loki has little to no contact with humanity, other than his possible connection to human creation. Loki's "gifts" benefit human culture in a second hand way; he does service to the gods and in turn these gods protect and bestow their gifts upon humanity. The best example from the Loki myths is in the crafting of Thor's hammer. Thor uses this hammer to slay giants and generally protect and encourage human civilization, but it is Loki's wily tricks that bring about Mjolnir's creation. While he is not an active or direct Culture Hero/Trickster, Loki is creative and indirectly helpful toward humanity.

Ricketts also conceives of the trickster as humanity's attempt at being religious in a godless, humanistic sense. This "other way" of being religious is played out in the trickster's antagonism with the shaman and the hero/champion. The latter in the Norse pantheon can be seen as both being Baldr the Bright, whose death Loki is responsible for in Snorri's version, and the god Thor. While Loki is the sometime companion of the hero/war god, he is also the one who trickily subverts Thor's efforts. Loki is the one who shows Thor to be a slow-witted, lumbering oaf. In the þrymskviða it is Loki who gets Thor to dress as a woman, thus making a mockery of the proud warrior. It is implied in the Lokasenna that Loki has fornicated with Thor's wife, making a cuckold of the thunder god. Loki also cuts off Sif's hair, again vexing Thor and possibly implying Loki's intimate relationship with the goddess. Loki also tricks Thor into traveling to Jotunheim without his hammer and girdle of strength. Loki may be Thor's companion on many a journey, but also certainly has an antagonistic relationship with the hero god.

[11] Paul Radin, The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology (New York: Greenwood Press, 1956) 125.

According to Ricketts, in addition to vexing the hero, the trickster is also understood as being opposed to the religiosity of the shaman. In the Norse pantheon the most obvious shamanic figure is the supreme god Odin. Odin, in two different myths, sacrifices a part of himself or his very life in the pursuit of insight and knowledge. "But Mimir, who well knew the value of such a favour…refused the boon unless Odin would consent to give one of his eyes in exchange. The god did not hesitate, so highly did he prize the draught, but immediately plucked out one of his eyes…[d]rinking deeply of Mimir's fount, Odin gained the knowledge he coveted..."[12] In addition to the sacrifice of an eye for wisdom, Odin hung himself upon the world tree Yggdrasil for nine days and nights, impaled upon his own spear. In this way Odin learned the art of rune craft and developed the powers of magic. I interpret these episodes as implicitly shamanic in nature, part of the ecstatic transcending of bounded, "human" limitations in order to be initiated into shamanic mysteries.[13] In the myths, Loki is often at odds with Odin the Allfather. Whereas Odin calls upon his wisdom and rune magic in order to execute his plans, Loki, as trickster, has only his wit and skill to guide him. Loki takes great pleasure in degrading Odin in the Lokasenna and will actively oppose him and his progeny in the final battle. It will be one of Loki's children, Fenris Wolf, who will devour Odin during Ragnarok. Just as Loki has an antagonistic relationship with the hero god Thor, so to does he with the shaman god Odin. According to Ricketts' conception of the Trickster, this is only fitting. The shaman transcends the human condition, the trickster has only his exaggerated human qualities in which to survive and thrive.

In Claude Lévi-Strauss' discussion and structural analysis of myths, he makes the claim that when undertaking to understand the myths, the mythic characters, and the underlying socio-structural meaning, one must consider every version of the tales, including the literary and scholarly ones. In this way one can include all possible versions of the Loki myths without undo reservation or lengthy source critique.

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[12] H. A. Guerber, Myths of the Norsemen: From the Eddas and Sagas (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992 [1929]) 31.

[13] While much more could be said about Shamans and Shamanism, it is beyond the scope of this project to enter into a lengthy discussion. I wish to keep the understanding of shamanism at a very general, superficial level in order to better discuss the descriptive qualities of the two comparable deities.

While this does not factor out possible "foreign" or "anachronistic" material, I am fairly confident in my use of both Snorri's myths and Saxo's versions, as euhemeristic or Christian as they might be.[14]

In Lévi-Strauss' conception of the trickster, he focused upon the prevalence in Native North American myths of carrion eaters such as Coyote and Raven. Utilizing his oppositional, binary formulation, he concluded that these creatures function as mediating figures between the herbivorous and carnivorous kingdoms. Thus they embody facets of both, being halfway between polar opposites. This bipolarity and ambiguity is what marks them as tricksters. Loki exhibits this same bipolarity and ambiguity within the Norse body of myths. He is the mediating figure, not between herbivore and carnivore but between Aesir and Jotun/Giant. He was born a giant but became an accepted blood brother to the Aesir. He is both and neither at the same time, mediating the divide between the two realms. His very person mediates between these polar extremes. As well, his ability to change shape, both sex and species, makes him an ambiguous, in-between figure. He is the only Norse deity who is depicted as having the gift of flight, either by utilizing an artifact or simply through his own ability. Loki's kenning, Sky-Walker, speaks to his mediating position, neither bound to the ground nor of the heavens. In the Native American myths, Lévi-Strauss theorizes that the Trickster figure mediates between the powers of life and death, concepts that were the over-arching concerns of the cultures. This makes Coyote or Raven ideal for mediating between the polar extremes as they were seen to embody aspects of both poles. As to what concerns the mediation of Loki may have helped resolve I can hazard a guess; although to do a thorough, rather than descriptive, structural analysis one would need a greater knowledge of the specific culture. Loki (as both Aesir and Jotun) may straddle the divide between life and death as represented in the protectiveness of the gods versus the wanton destruction of the giants. I believe a better understanding of Loki's mediation concerns the order of Aesir-ian civilization and what that represents for humanity versus the chaos of the frozen wasteland that is symbolic of the realm of the giants. In a harsh environment

[14] For a lengthy critique of the "autheniticity" of Snorri's myths see: Eugen Mogk, "Lokis Anteil an Baldrs Tode," FF Communications. No. 57. (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1925). For a rebuttal to this discussion see: Georges Dumézil, Loki (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve, 1948).

such as ancient and medieval Germany/Scandinavia, the difference between social ordered life and the chaos of the winter landscape may have been one of life and death. In this way a creature that straddles both realms, of Aesir-ian order and Jotun chaos, would seem to be the ideal mediator. Loki represents both the poles and the difference between. As a bipolar character he expresses aspects of both, being both "good" and "bad;" creative and destructive; lewd and sacred.

The "Neo-Durkheimians," Laura Makarius and Mary Douglas also deal with the trickster by focusing on his ambiguous, bipolar, and contradictory nature. In particular they focus on his function as sacred taboo breaker and antisocial magician. Makarius sees the trickster as the sacred breaker of the highest taboos, ones dealing with the spilling and manipulation of blood. Loki is often depicted as breaking sacred, Aesir-ian taboos, although the association with blood taboos is not altogether great in the Norse myths. The breaking of taboos in the ordered world of the Aesir comes in many fashions. Loki is the arch thief, stealing from giant and god alike, sometimes to save his own skin or simply to have a bit of fun at the expense of the greater powers. He causes the golden apples to be stolen, thus robbing the Aesir of their youth and vitality; he is instrumental in the theft of Thor's hammer as well as in its retrieval. Loki also steals the honor of many of the gods by fornicating with their wives, breaking the cardinal, orderly taboo concerning marital fidelity. When it comes to blood, Loki does have some small association with the polluting and powerful agent. While no myth exists explicitly relating the events of Loki's birth, one can suppose that the event was impure or unclean. Unlike the rest of the Aesir, Loki is giant born; he is the spawn of the enemies of the gods and thus is one with chaos and impurity. In the Short Voluspá, it is related how Loki ate a woman's heart, connecting him with blood and its manipulation. In turn, the eating of this heart caused Loki to bear children in the way of a woman. The connection here with childbirth, as well as his birthing of Sleipnir in mare form, places Loki within the matrix of blood/birth taboos. Loki is the only male deity that makes this explicit transgender transformation. In Hindu religious law, childbirth and its consequential blood-shedding is both a polluting act and a sacred duty for women. In this way,

women can be seen as the "jokers" in the deck of social rules,[15] as can Loki. He also has other small connections to blood in the myths. He is the blood brother of Óthin, the supreme god. This blood bond makes him one of the Aesir, despite the fact that he was born of the giants. This bond also complicates matters, allowing Loki access to all aspects of Aesir-ian life, which enables him to break a multitude of other taboos. It also creates a loop-hole in the laws of the Aesir, allowing his monstrous children to live, thus enabling the destruction of many gods, including Óthin and Thor, during the events of Ragnarok. Lastly, Loki is part of the supreme transgression, the killing of Baldr. This act of bloodshed is devastating to the Aesir, but also prophesized and necessary. Baldr must die for the events of Ragnarok to occur, a catastrophe that will ultimately cleanse the heavens and the earth heralding a new paradise. It is by breaking the various taboos that Loki is seen as a powerful, magical, and sacred figure. He is a trickster by his ambiguity, contrariety, and his ritual crossing of boundaries.

Mary Douglas, in her work Purity and Danger, addresses the trickster in terms of boundaries and categories. The trickster is *dirt*, falling outside or between the categories of the established mythic/social order; he is impurity yet he helps complete the social picture just as, "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience."[16] The trickster is an anomaly in persona and deed. Loki's actions are often contrary or outside the established order of the Aesir. As well, his dual Jotun/Aesir nature places him outside and between the established categories and roles. He is both trouble maker and pseudo-savior. Loki's form and gender are also ambiguous; he is alternately humanoid and animal, male and female. He has several theriomorphic aspects and is hermaphroditic and dual gendered. He is outside and between the established categories of form, kingdom, and sexuality. Loki is the embodiment or disorder, as Kerényi and Hyde would define it. Being that *dirt* is disorder in Douglas' conception and the trickster is *dirt*, one can easily fit Loki into Douglas'

[15] While both Indian and Norse/Germanic culture are Indo-European civilizations, I do not wish to make any explicit connections between the cultures here other than as way of providing support and description to bolster the case of Loki's connection with blood taboo. Other theorists, such as George Dumézil explicitly make such connections, but I believe it is beyond the scope of this current project as well as ultimately fruitless to engage in a lengthy debate of the Indo-European connection.

[16] Mary Douglas, As cited in Robert Pelton, The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) 249.

understanding of what the trickster is and what it does. He is that which is out of place and through his trickster-ish acts tries to reconcile dirt and impurity with the established order of the gods.

Barbara Babcock-Abrahams' work with the trickster includes a re-examination of Radin's discussion and analysis of the Winnebago trickster cycle. Her approach is primarily Turnerian, looking at the Winnebago cycle as one of separation, liminality, and reintegration. As mentioned earlier, Loki's myths do not fit neatly into a cycle structure and, as such, the majority of Babcock-Abrahams' analysis is not truly compatible with the myths of Loki. However, she does also provide an extended list of descriptors for the trickster, ones that can be applied to Loki. These descriptors can be seen as symptomatic of the liminal condition that both Babcock-Abrahams and Turner speak to. Although these characteristics are primarily drawn from Native North American trickster myths, Loki does exhibits a number of these sixteen characteristics within the body of Norse myths. Loki is a consummate boundary crosser, whether they are spatial, as in traveling between the various realms of the Norse mythic cosmos, or social. Loki goes and does what he will; he "exhibit[s] an independence from and an ignoring of…boundaries."[17] Whereas most, if not all, of the other Norse deities have some sort of fixed abode or post, such as Odin's Valhalla, Loki is the vagabond of the pantheon. He wanders about the nine worlds with no fixed hall or home. This mobility also adds to his association with the road and the thresholds of journeys. His travels, as well as his dual Aesir/Jotun nature, place him between the order realms of the Aesir's hearths and the chaotic kingdoms of the giants.

Loki exhibits a number of other traits that Babcock-Abrahams lists as descriptors for a trickster. While Loki's actions and humor may not be specifically scatological or coprophagous, many of them are fundamentally embodied. The best example is Loki's attempt to make the giantess Skathi laugh, by tying a cord to between the beard of a goat and his genitals. His body humor resolves the rather precarious situation. Another characteristic that Babcock-Abrahams poses that can be

[17] Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," Journal of the Folklore Institute 11/3 (1975): 159.

applied to Loki is in his exaggerated sexual characteristics and appetite. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Loki has a large number of sexual partners among the Norse goddesses. He shares the bed of Freya, Týr's wife, Sif, and Skathi, as well as the bed of his three wives. As reported in the myths, Loki seems to be the most sexually active and promiscuous of the Aesir. Loki is also a master of disguise, taking on a multitude of forms, both humanoid and animal. In the myths he changes into a bird, a fly, a salmon, and a horse to name a few of his animal aspects. He also disguises himself as old women and giantesses in order to fool the Aesir. He certainly has a two-fold, ambiguous nature in the myths. He is god and giant as well as being both male and female. His femininity is not just a disguise, as he is reported to have given birth at least twice. He is also both young and old, appearing as a comely man and, at times, an aged woman. Loki is amoral and antisocial, going and doing what he pleases regardless of the established order or the consequences. He pokes fun at the hegemony of the gods; he steals often and he kills those that should not be slain. Loki is also associated with femininity and a feminine figure. Many of his kennings or epithets include the phrase Laufeyarson, the son of Laufey. What is strange in this is that Laufey is Loki's mother, not his father. He is unlike the other gods and most men in Norse culture, for no where is he called after his father, Fárbauti. Loki, when his familial relations are invoked is always associated with his mother's name. A final characteristic involves Loki's dualistic nature, embodying creation, both human creation and in the crafting of artifacts of culture, and destruction, by having a hand in the death of Baldr and siring the means of the Aesir's demise. Loki is helpful and harmful, "good" and "evil." He causes discord, stirs up trouble and works to save the Aesir from the giants and from themselves.

William Hynes developed a similar, though more concise, set of characteristics for identifying and describing the trickster. The first trait is, "the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster."[18] As stated earlier the trickster is a binary, bipolar, and ambiguous creature. He is a boundary crosser and social transgressor. The trickster is an outlaw and outsider. Loki's

[18] William J. Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 34.

actions and personality fit this category very well. He displays aspects of both an Aesir-ian god and a Jotun; he is tormentor and savior, hero and fiend. Loki wanders the mythic realms, traveling between Asgard, Mitgard, Jotunheim, and Hel. He also crosses all social boundaries, invading halls and breaking taboos without thought of the consequences. He cares not for the order and bounds set by the Aesir. He goes where he will and does what he wants.

The second characteristic comes directly from the trickster's very name; he is a deceiver and prankster. As I showed earlier, Loki is the arch-prankster, liar, and thief of the Norse pantheon. He steals, lies when it serves his purpose, and plays tricks upon god and giant alike. Just as often, he falls prey to his own tricks, becoming the fool and only escaping by his wits. The third descriptive category involves the trickster's ability to shape-shift. He is ambiguous and multiform. In the myths, Loki changes shape and sex a number of times. To accomplish his purposes and deceive his victims, Loki morphs into an old woman, a giantess, a mare and many other different types of animals.

The next category involves the trickster's propensity for situation inversion. The trickster "exhibits typically the ability to overturn any person, place, or belief, no matter how prestigious. There is no 'too much' for this figure. No order is too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high, no profanity too scatological that cannot be broached or inverted."[19] It has already been demonstrated how Loki acts as a ritual taboo breaker, in particular when it involves blood taboos and Baldr's death. As an anti-structure, situation inverter Loki makes fun of the gods, bringing the greater powers low. In the Lay Thyrm, Loki convinces the mighty Thor to dress as a bridal maiden, sleighting the thunder god and making a fool of the great hero. Loki's powers of slander and profanation are best exemplified in the Lokasenna. He invades Aegir's hall and systematically points out the foibles of each of the gods and goddesses in attendance. He shows each of the Aesir to be unworthy of acclaim; each is brought low by Loki's truthful slanders. He has turned a feast of the great gods on its head, making it a festival of discord and dissent.

[19] Ibid, 37.

The fifth characteristic for the trickster, as outlined by Hynes, is his role as messenger, imitator, or intermediary of the gods. This characteristic often hinges on the dual or mixed nature of the trickster figure, more easily allowing the figure to travel between realms or modes of reality. While Loki does not explicitly act as a Psychopomp, he does often fulfill the role of go-between for the gods. He travels back and forth between the gods and the giants, often acting as companion or herald to Thor. His mixed heritage allows him easy access to both Asgard and Jotunheim. He also parodies and imitates the gods, particularly under a cloak of disguise. He foils and usurps the powers of the gods, most noticeable in the Lokasenna and in the death of Baldr. He is the untrustworthy but necessary intermediary, going and doing what other powers cannot.

The final trait presented by Hynes is the trickster's role as bricoleur or jack of all trades. The trickster is a sacred and lewd transformer, creating chaos and transforming it into "occasions of insight, vitality, and new inventive creations."[20] This characteristic hinges on the trickster's quick wit and ability to cross boundaries and break taboos. As mentioned previously, Loki is the consummate traveler and transgressor. His wit and wanderlust cause chaotic upsurges in the Aesir world. These characteristics are also the tools for fixing an unfixable dilemma. The rest of the Aesir stand about casting blame and invoking torture and death; Thor can only smash and kill. It is Loki alone who can innovate and solve a difficult situation without resorting to the violence of the hero/war god. If the solution involves the transgression of taboos, that is fine with Loki.

As I have stated in Chapter One and previously in this chapter, I believe that most of these descriptive characteristics are fundamental symptoms or aspects of a liminal role/personality. Babcock-Abrahams explicitly invokes Victor Turner's conception of the *Ritual Process* and liminality in her discussion and analysis of the trickster. William Hynes' understanding can also be seen as implicitly invoking Turner's framework. The anomalous, contradictory nature of the trickster, the ability to shape-shift, his role as inverter of hierarchy, and his social/spatial/sacred mobility are all aspects of one in a liminal state. Loki, as trickster, is a liminal being by these

[20] Ibid, 42.

descriptive characteristics. He is a mythic representation of ritual liminality, acting as an adversary and creative force of flux and change.

Turner speaks of the liminal figure as an outsider to structured society, a figure who is ambiguous in social standing and nature. The liminal figure eludes classification, being betwixt and between the hierarchies of everyday social life. The trickster is the liminal persona within a culture's mythic world. Loki is the outsider of the Norse pantheon, a vagabond and outlaw within the mythic world of the Aesir. As with the liminal figure, Loki has no home and no fixed place within the social world. He is outside the physical and moral world of structured society. As a liminal figure, Loki can cross boundaries and break rules that would be impossible for other Aesir. As well Loki is bisexual or hermaphroditic, changing sex and giving birth on occasion. He is also linked with death, being the instigator of Baldr's demise and siring the goddess of death Hel. Having no fixed hall, Loki is associated with traveling and the wilderness. These connections are also symbolic associations of a liminal, trickster figure. Loki is base born, the son of giants, and also divine in his blood brotherhood with Odin, the supreme deity of the pantheon. The liminal figure is both lowly and divine in Turner's framework; a conception that describes many trickster figures including Loki.

Much of the power of the liminal figure comes through wisdom imparted through speech. "[S]peech is not merely communication but also power and wisdom. The wisdom (mana) that is imparted in sacred liminality is not just an aggregation of words and sentences; it has ontological value."[21] Particularly in the flyting of the Lokasenna, Loki "shares" his insights with the assembled Aesir. Like the Shakespearean fool, the court jester, or the innocent child who points out that the emperor indeed has no clothes; Loki speaks the truth when others cannot. He *truthfully* slanders the assembled powers, pointing out their foibles and bringing the mighty low. The speech of the liminal figure is a rare truth, one that undermines hegemony and inverts the status quo. No power structure is safe from a liminal figure such as a trickster.

[21] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969) 103.

The trickster is also a personage who appears in and creates the social situation known as communitas. It is, "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated...community."[22] The anti-structured "community" of the liminal is where all is made equal and the everyday social structure has no power. "It [communitas] is that modality of social relatedness which prevails in carnival and the marketplace, where hierarchies are leveled, distinctions dissolved, and roles reversed, *and* when trickster appears on the scene."[23] Aegir's feast in the Lokasenna is made into such a liminal gathering. Loki disrupts the ordered social fabric of the occasion by his truths and deeds. Of course the Aesir are unwilling to face these truths, being rooted in *Structure* as they are. Loki's insights are not pleasing to their ears and they foretell, and later execute, a most horrendous punishment. However, Loki is a creature of the moment and he cares little about any consequences. Turner states that the concern of the liminal figure is on the every changing present; "communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom."[24] Loki, as with other liminal trickster figures, is capricious, spontaneous, and short-sighted. He desires to appease his appetites and will attack, either physically, through force or prank, or verbally with scandal and truth, anyone who would deny him. This explains why so many of his tricks backfire and why he is constantly trying to rectify situations to save his own skin.

The problem with anti-structure, from the perspective of the established order, is that it is chaotic, unpredictable and dangerous. Loki is a threat to the ordered, stagnant world of the Aesir. He observes no law, respects no boundary or power. This is why he is in conflict with the powers that be. Eventually he must be bounded and prescribed, lest he topple the power structure of the gods. He is fettered with the guts of his own child and has painful venom dripping into his face so he cannot scheme. Loki is often considered an evil creature, an enemy of the gods. He is indeed an adversary, but when one looks through Turner's lens of liminality, Loki is better understood not as either good or evil but as amoral. He is outside the bounds of

[22] Ibid, 96.
[23] Babcock-Abrahams, 185.
[24] Turner, 113.

morality as the Aesir have established it. He sows discord and disorder but not out of any malevolence. Morality is an alien concept to one alien to the social order. Being outside, he can offer insight about the established order and illustrate other choices, providing truths and options that one within cannot recognize. Loki is not evil or immoral for doing this; he is amoral, he simply is.

By utilizing a number of descriptive and theoretical rubrics, I have attempted to illustrate how the figure of Loki is best understood as a trickster figure. He is tricky and opportunistic, ambiguous and contrary. Loki crosses every boundary in his anti-structural crusade to appease his enormous appetites and balance the ordered world of the Aesir with his own brand of disordered insight. Loki is the liminal figure in a bounded world. He does what he wants and goes where he will with no thought to the ramifications that must inevitably occur. He is the Aesir's savior and their adversary, a creative force and an instrument of destruction. He is that which is forbidden and represents *another path of reality*. By comparing the various myths in which Loki plays a role with the various theoretical and descriptive criteria that I have assembled, I assert that Loki is a Trickster figure. His personality and actions as a whole are best understood through this particular typological lens. A fair number of interpretations have been offered by numerous scholars for understanding the character,[25] but in my opinion most fall short of encompassing the whole of what

[25] For a discussion of the various "other" interpretations of Loki see:

De Vries, Jan. The Problem of Loki. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Kirjapainon, 1933. De Vries attempts a thorough analysis of the various scholarship concerning Loki, voicing the opinion that much of it is too focused on specific episodes within the myths and not on the whole of those myths. This leaves one with an incomplete understanding of the character. De Vries attempts a more complete, yet more basic, interpretation of Loki. He cites Loki's delight in mischief making and his cunning as defining traits on which to build one's understanding of the character. De Vries states that Loki is better understood as a trickster-ish being. I obvious owe much to de Vries and his work. However, I feel that de Vries utilizes too much comparison in developing his argument and does not focus enough on Loki's myths. I have attempted to expand de Vries fundamental premise with more description from with the Norse material as well as grounding the trickster typology theoretically.

Dumézil, Georges. Loki. Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve, 1948. The purpose of this work is two-fold. Dumézil attempts to rehabilitate Snorri's version of the death of Baldr in the face of criticism such as Mogk's. By doing this, Dumézil links Loki with other Indo-European thief and killer figures. He performs both of these tasks by comparing Snorri's version of events with a similar myth from an Indo-European group of the Caucasus region. Dumézil draws a connection between Loki and a figure known as Syrdon and between Baldr and Soslan. Ruling out any possible contact, Dumézil states that Snorri did not event his version of Baldr's death but rather drew upon a very old Indo-European myth. This would seem to imply that this version of Loki is the most "accurate" at least in Indo-European

Loki is and does. While these other opinions can give one insight into other aspects of the character, or possible roles that Loki might play in the larger cultural context, they tend to focus on only one myth or aspect of the character, leaving the greater complexity of Loki fairly untouched. The trickster typology allows one to deal with the most contradictory of attitudes and actions, giving the most complete understanding of Loki.

Particularly in Chapter One, I elaborated a number of theoretical understandings of what role the trickster and his myths may play within the larger mythic/cultural matrix. Most could be applied to Loki, each providing a valid way for defining what the trickster Loki may have represented within ancient/medieval Germanic culture. However, I feel that this kind of speculation is beyond the scope of my current, mainly descriptive or typological, analysis. One would need a greater

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terms. While I find the Indo-European connection fascinating, I do not hold with much of Dumézil's argument. It is the dependence on one episode and one version in the formation of an understanding of Loki that I take issue with. One cannot develop a complete understanding of the character based on incomplete data and limited texts.

Grimm, Jacob. Teutonic Mythology. James Steven Stallybrass, trans. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966 [1883]. Grimm's main purpose is to compare and thus link Loki with entities from other European literary, folkloric, and mythic bodies. He utilizes a philological approach to establish Loki as a fire deity and then goes on to compare his name and mythic traits with those of other mythos. In this way Loki is linked with the Greek entities Prometheus and Hephaestus, the Latin Saturn, the Anglo-Saxon Grendel, and the Judeo-Christian Satan. While many of these connections seem to make sense on the level of comparison of mythic traits, much of the philological work has been discredited. Grimm's work has served as a starting point for my own work, as I find similarities between Loki and many of the beings that Grimm links him with. I do, however; reject many of Grimm's implications, particularly Loki's link with evil via a demonic Satan (and not the adversarial Satan) and the philological link between these various characters.

Mogk, Eugen. "Lokis Anteil an Baldrs Tode." FF Communications. No. 57. Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1925. Mogk's main purpose in this work is to demonstrate that Snorri's version of the death of Baldr is not a "purely" Norse text. He utilizes a type of source criticism, drawing on the other, versions of the tale and his knowledge of Old Norse and its poetic stylings, in order to show that Snorri's version is heavily influenced by Christian and other Occidental texts. In this Mogk seems to rehabilitate Loki's image by demonstrating that the oldest Norse texts do not implicate him in Baldr's death. That position is a later Christian invention. I agree with Mogk's rehabilitation of Loki's character, separating him from the predominant image as murderous for malice's sake. However, I can not disregard Snorri's version with such certainty and instead have utilized it in an effort to change the understanding of Loki from images within the text itself.

Ström, Folke. Loki: ein Mythologisches Problem. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitets Ärsskrift, 1956. In this work Ström focuses on Snorri and Saxo's versions of the death of Baldr and how Loki is involved in this event. Ström seems to follow in the same vein as James Frazer, showing how Baldr and Hoðr are a dualistic pair caught in a ritual, cultic drama. Baldr is a dying/rising fertility god and Hoðr is his ritual killer. Loki is interjected into Snorri's account of the drama as the mastermind behind the ritual sacrifice. Ström claims that Loki is an integral part of the drama; he is the *scapegoat* figure. While I agree with Ström's image of Loki as not truly malicious but rather one caught up in a necessary drama, I am not convinced that the Baldr is a fertility god despite Frazer's assertion in The Golden Bough.

understanding of the intricacies of Norse religious, social, and performative life. Little of this specific knowledge, especially as it applies to Loki and his myths, remains. Conjecturing what the trickster tales may have done within the culture would be just that, conjecture. This is not my purpose, but it does open up an intriguing avenue of research, particularly in this age of pagan Norse religious and cultural revival. One may never know what function Loki might have played as trickster in ancient/medieval times, but one could discover how the trickster is utilized by modern practitioners.[26] Loki remains relevant and of much interest, both in revived religious practice and as a part of modern popular culture.[27] By interpreting Loki as the trickster he is, one can gain a better, more complete, understanding of the character, his myths, and the functions he may have served and does serve in modernity. Loki is a Trickster, one who can open up new insights and possibilities; he is a disordered look back at one European mythic past and a possible lens for understanding aspects of contemporary religious practice. "I am Loki Scar-Lip, Loki Skywalker, Loki Giant's Child, Loki Lie-Smith. I am Loki, who is Fire and Wit and Hate. I am Loki. And I will be under obligation to No One."[28]

[26] Unfortunately very little scholarly work has been done regarding contemporary Norse Pagans and their relationship to this ancient/medieval mythology. This work is intended as a "stepping-stone" toward an understanding of these practitioners' relationship with their claimed mythic heritage and particularly with the god Loki. However, much work on these related subjects is needed.
[27] I base this assertion mainly on the proliferation of Loki related material on the internet and in role-playing games, comic books and other contemporary outlets of popular culture. Much more could be made of Loki's link with these media, but it is beyond the current scope of this project to do so.
[28] Neil Gaiman, **"**Sandman: The Kindly Ones," The Sandman No. 61, (NY: Vertigo/DC Comics, July, 1994) 24.

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