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Miscellaneous
The Double

The double, at its most basic, is a duplicate of an individual or a part of a divided individual. Numerous versions of this complicated archetypal figure are found in dreams, mythologies, rituals of primitive peoples, ancient and medieval alchemists' narratives, folklore, and literature (including drama, poetry, stories and novels, and the scripts of radio, television, and film). A.E. Crawley suggests that the sources of the double, as a term, are the "mathematical ideas of multiplication and division," the "main connotation of the term" being the doppelgänger (the double-goer), visible or invisible, material or spiritual (1920, 853). The double-goer is variously designated: the Other, the alter ego, and the second self, among other names.

The source of the double as a phenomenon of duplication may be the "twin-cult," versions of which were discovered by anthropologists in primitive cultures in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, according to James Rendel Harris. Probably based on superstitious fears regarding the births of twins, the twin myth apparently evolved into the twin figures of mythology. For example, Romulus and Remus, their mother killed, are set adrift in a hollow oak trunk on the Tiber and saved, eventually, by a wolf and a woodpecker; eighteen twins sail aboard the Argo from Thessaly to Colchis, seeking the Golden Fleece; Jason, the captain of the Argo, is himself one of the twins, although his brother Triptolemus has remained ashore to farm the land. The stages in the evolution of the twin tabus were as follows: (1) the mother and the twins were killed; (2) one twin was killed; (3) the mother and the twins were banished to a twin-town; and (4) the twins were revered as children of the sky god of thunder and/or lightning—as benefactors, protectors, builders (Harris 1913, xxiii–xxiv, 226, 229, 412).

The second stage of the twin tabu may have evolved into the concept of the
mortal/immortal pairs (Harris 1913, 217). For example, it might have been eventually decided that one of the twins had been fathered by a human, the other by a god, a decision that may have generated those pairs in mythology that include one twin (or brother, or friend) who lives or succeeds, while the other dies or disappears. In the Thousand and One Nights, the evil Qasim and the good Ali Baba are brothers. Qasim learns from his brother about the cavern of riches, goes there, and is murdered by the forty thieves. Ali Baba survives, a wealthy man, into old age. In the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, when the primitive Enkidu dies, the civilized Gilgamesh, feeling that a part of him has died with Enkidu, sets out to seek immortality. As the animal is lost, the search for the angel begins; as the material body loses its power, the search for a spiritual self intensifies.

The source of the double as a concept of division is located by Freud in the idea of an immortal soul, an idea rising, according to Freud, from infantile narcissism or primitive superstition. When some impression revives in the psyches of civilized adults those infantile complexes or primitive beliefs, the double no longer appears to be an assurance of immortality, but rather appears as an "uncanny harbinger of death" ("The Uncanny"). Freud notwithstanding, peoples around the world believe that the "soul" is an invisible duplicate of each individual's body, constitutes the life of that body, is separated from that body at death, and afterward becomes visible only on rare occasions, when it is called a "ghost." This almost universal belief is found in all primitive societies and all ancient cultures. For example, in the Egypt of antiquity, the soul, the ka, was conceived of as a miniature duplicate of the person whose soul it was.

The source of the double as a concept of division was located, by Carl Jung, much further back than the infantile or primitive. Jung placed that source at the lowest depths of the collective unconscious, the level of the instinctual—or, even deeper, at that level where the World is "chemical substances." The psyche is, simply, the World (Jung 1959a, 21–22, 173). Consciousness, Jung claimed, is a "recent acquisition" and is therefore menaced by various dangers, one danger being a dissociation of consciousness, or a splitting in the psyche, which results in a loss of identity (Jung 1964, 6–7). Many primitive societies regarded an individual's shadow, reflection (as in water), or portrait as the individual's soul, or at least a vital part of the individual, that must be carefully protected (Frazer 1981, 141, 148). Divisibility of personality is suggested throughout Jung's writings on archetypes, "primordial types," "universal images," "patterns of instinctual behavior," which we project into the external world (Jung 1959a, 5, 44, 59).

Numerous archetypes exist, but it is the shadow, and the anima or animus, that "have the most frequent and the most disturbing influence on the ego," and the most accessible of these, and the easiest to experience, is the shadow, for its nature can "in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious—from a dream, for instance" (Jung 1959b, 8). The shadow is "a sort of second personality" to the primary or ego personality (Jung 1959a, 262). Odin and Loki, at the beginning of time, exchange vows of friendship, becoming blood brothers, but Loki grows malicious, ultimately bringing on the twilight of the gods, in which Odin, and Loki himself, are destroyed. In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818), the "creature" murders the brother, best friend, and bride of his creator, Dr. Frankenstein, who also dies, as does the "monster" himself. In the film King Kong (1933), a gigantic gorilla threatens human accomplishment, symbolized by the Empire State Building; the monster climbs the building, is shot dead by men in airplanes, and falls to the street below. The shadow can be positive, as well as negative. An animal in a fairy tale represents a shadow self, but the animal may help the hero or heroine in some essential way.

Another important doubling by division in mythology and literature is that of the male/female pair Jung called the "divine syzygy"—the god and goddess of mythology, like Apollo the sun god and his twin, Artemis the moon goddess. Or the king and queen in alchemists' symbolic descriptions of the opus: the "king" descends into the "waters" and is there wed to the "queen"; the two die, and an androgynous "child" ascends from their death. Jung related the "divine" pair to the anima and animus archetypes, the double configuration evolving into the modern concept of male consciousness and the female unconscious (Jung 1959a, 59, 173, 175–76). Jung adds two archetypes to the divine couple, Wise Old Man and Chthonic Mother, to form a quaternary, a scheme of the self (Jung 1959b, 21–22, 242). This configuration, applied to narratives, is often a familial one in which four characters are maternal, paternal, and sonoros types. King Cepheus is helpless when Queen Cassiopeia offends Poseidon, who sends a monster to harass the country. Cepheus's daughter Andromeda is offered as a sacrifice to the monster, but Perseus arrives, slays the monster, and marries Andromeda.

A quaternary may comprise two pairs of male/female couples, a "higher" and a "lower." Jung discusses a Grimm tale in which a hero and a princess are riding horses. Jung interprets the animals as the shadow selves, the "lower" selves, of the royal pair. At the end of the tale, the horses are transformed into a second hero and a second princess (Jung 1959a, 243–254). In Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Marble Faun (1861), two American art students in Rome, Kenyon and Hilda, meet Donatello, an innocent with a "wild, forest nature," and Miriam, a mysterious dark lady. Miriam is being stalked and harassed by a man who is likened to a reptile; Donatello kills the man, with Miriam's approval. Donatello's moral sense is born, he has committed a sin
and feels remorse, he has become human. He willingly enters a dungeon in a "sepulchral fortress" to pay for his crime. Miriam is seen by Kenyon and Hilda at a distance, lifting her hands toward them in a blessing and farewell, before disappearing.

Doublings other than self and shadow, and male and female, exist, of course. The good/evil opposition is one important example. The scapegoat may be considered the evil double of the entire tribe from which it is driven. The "ills" are expelled from the people or the village when they are "loaded" on the scapegoat (Frazer 1981, 182). During their annual spring festival, the American Mandan Indians appointed one man to paint his face black and frighten the women, acting the part of the Devil until they chased him out of the village (Frazer 1981, 183–184). Frazer wrote his influential work at the end of the nineteenth century. Early in the twentieth century, doubled characters in literary works began to appear. In Edgar Allan Poe’s "William Wilson" (1839), two men, one good and one evil, share the same name. In Robert Louis Stevenson’s tale "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1886), Jekyll and his other self, Hyde, are described as "polar twins." In Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), Dorian remains young and beautiful while the Dorian in his portrait grows old and hideous, a "misshapen shadow," as a result of years of crimes, cruelties, and corruption.

Doubleness is indicated in characters in fiction similarly to the way it is indicated in mythology and fairy tales—where the characterization is spontaneous, of course. The use of the reflection, as in water or a mirroring device of any kind, is common. Snow-White, the good princess, lies asleep in the glass coffin, while the evil queen gazes into her wonderful looking glass, the reflection suggested by the mirror and the coffin made of glass pointing to the double identity of queen and princess. In the film The Woman in the Window (1945), a man gazes at a portrait of a woman in a gallery window, sees her reflection in the window glass, and turns to find the living woman standing beside him. Other indications of doubleness are physical resemblance, disguises, impersonations, and effigies such as portraits, photographs, and statues. In the Pygmalion and Galatea tale in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Venus turns the statue executed by the sculptor Pygmalion into the living woman, Galatea.

Regarding doubling as duplication, at the end of the twentieth century the biological phenomenon of the vanishing twin was discovered through the use of fetoscopy and the ultrasound technique. It was found that a high percentage of twin gestations diagnosed earlier than ten weeks are delivered as singletons, one twin having disappeared or, at least, having degenerated into formless tissue. Hilde Schwartz discusses this new appearance of the "twin-cult," as well as other aspects of twinnship, in The Culture of the Copy (1996). Schwartz also discusses related topics as dummies and dolls, puppets

and parrots, forgeries, facsimiles, and déjà vu. In regard to doubling by division, the divided personalities of living persons began to be studied toward the end of the nineteenth century. Psychologists call the condition multiple (or dual) personality, or "alternating personality," as William James does, citing several well-documented cases (James 1891, X, 3 b).

A certain sense of division, however, is not necessarily pathological. Some of the most admired authors seem obsessed with doubleness: Shakespeare, Dickens, Faulkner, and numerous others. Samuel Clemens’s sense of division was such that for his pen name he chose "Mark Twain," a phrase used by steamboat pilots that means "two fathoms deep." (Clemens/Twain was a boat pilot on the Mississippi for several years.) Indeed, we all of us have two "minds" in our heads, left brain and right brain, each with abilities the other brain does not have. René Girard suggests that the "elementary phenomena" of weeping and laughing may be behind the process of catharsis, which begins with an expulsion and ends with a sense of reconciliation (1988, 123–24). Ultimately, the sources of doubling may be as elementary as the positive and negative charges in the atom.

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REFERENCES


Good and Evil

Various Motifs

The concept of good versus evil is often seen as an archetypal struggle, especially in mythology. El-Shamy cites good versus evil as an abstraction that is an archetype (El-Shamy 1997, 38). Jung includes it in a list of recurrent contrasts, along with spirit/body, east/west, living/dead, masculine/feminine, sun/moon, and so on, examples of the contiuatio oppositorum, or union of opposites (Jung 1970, 3).

While evil has been a philosophical and ethical concern throughout time, it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the concept in depth, but two definitions may be noted: “evil is simply the difference between the way one wishes the world to be and the way the world is” (Weidhorn 1988, 470) and “evil appears antithetical to the reverence for life, antagonistic to the development of human potential, and opposed to divinity or temporal principles of order” (Daemmrich and Daemmrich 1987, 101).

Virtually every culture has had a god or gods who personify evil, or destructive forces, and often they are in direct opposition to a counterpart who is creative and life-giving. As a few examples, there is Gaunab “the Destroyer, the supreme god of evil, with whom all evil omens (eclipses, meteors, whirlwinds) are associated [and who] causes illness and death and is the opponent of Tsuni-Goab” (Hottentots, South Africa); Zamb-i-am-bi, “the god and author of all evil, as opposed to Zambi, or Nsambi, the good deity” (the Baffoti, Gabon); Apophis, or Aep, “serpent demon personifying evil in conflict with Ra, the sun god” (Egyptians) (all quoted in Leach 1992).

MYTHOLOGY

The creation myths of many cultures address the problem of evil and how it came into the world. The section of mythological motifs in the Motif-Index contains a number of motifs illustrating the struggle between good and evil, for example, Motif A50, “Conflict of good and evil creators”; A106, “Opposition of good and evil gods”; A106.2, “Revolts of evil angels against god”; A107, “Gods of darkness and light: Darkness thought of as evil, light as good”; and A525, “Origin of good and bad culture heroes.”

The opposition between good and evil is the essence of the double, or doppelinganger, an archetype found in mythology and literature. Good and evil are often personified in mythology as twins. For example, in the ancient Persian (Iranian) religion of Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda, “Lord Wisdom,” the supreme god, fathered twins, Spenta Mainyu, “Holy Spirit,” and Angra Mainyu, god of lies and darkness. The struggles between these two gods are told in the hymns of the Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians, dating from the second millennium BCE (Knappert 1993, 19). The genealogy changes somewhat in later sources, when Zurvan (“Time”) becomes the father of the twins Ormazd (Ahura Mazda) and Ahriman (Angra Mainyu). After alternate periods of ruling the world, Ormazd (the principle of good) ultimately defeats Ahriman.

In Hinduism there are a number of representations of the conflict between good and evil. One important one is the conflict in which Indra, the supreme being, slays Vritra, identified with drought and darkness, the story of which is told in the Rig Veda, the oldest collection of Vedic hymns, dating to at least 1500 BCE (Klostermaier 1998, 207).

In the ancient Greek pantheon, the gods and goddesses were not monolithically good or bad. In a paper on “The Problem of Evil in Mythology,” Karl Kerényi singles out the Greek god Hermes and the Norse god Loki as “primordial rogues” (1967, 3–17), not quite the embodiments of evil, but tending in that direction. Loki and Hermes are, coincidentally, two of only a few examples of the trickster figure in European tradition. Esther Clinton, in her article on the trickster on page 472 in this volume, notes that when Christianity takes hold in areas where their stories are told, tricksters are often equated with the devil, an unequivocally evil character.

The supreme god, Zeus, gives both good and bad fortune to mortals. Homer writes in the Iliad, “There are two urns that stand on the door-sill of Zeus. They are unlike for the gifts they bestow: an urn of evils, an urn of blessings” (24, 527–528). Zeus distributes some of the contents of these two urns to each mortal, whose life will contain sorrow and happiness in proportion to how much Zeus gives from each urn.
One explanation for how illness and other evils originated is seen in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (seventh century BCE). In retribution for Prometheus having stolen fire and given it to mortals, Zeus says, “I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction” (11, 58–59). Zeus has Hephaestos fashion a beautiful woman, Pandora, whom he sends to earth, and she opens the lid of a jar from which escape all the evils that are now in the world (C321, “Tabu: Looking into box (Pandora)).

The Old Testament is explicit that one god is responsible for both good and evil, and that one god, Yahweh, is the only god. He says, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil” (Isaiah 45:7). The Old Testament addresses the problem of a world in which God allows suffering, injustice, and death, especially in the Book of Job. As Widengren remarks, “The cause of all Job’s sufferings is that God has given him—not his person but everything he possesses—into the hands of Satan. Thus on the one hand Satan is a source of the evil that strikes Job, but on the other he is one of the sons of God, wholly obedient to God, and can act only with Yahweh’s approval” (1967, 23–24). However, Gordon demonstrates that “the myth of the dualistic battle between forces of good and evil was deeply entrenched in Canaan from pre-Hebraic times” and “was absorbed by the Hebrews along with the language, literature, and lore of Canaan from the very start of Hebrew history in Canaan” (1961, 201).

Among the Ondjaga of the Iroquoian tribes in the American Northeast, there is a story of how good and evil people came into the world, again involving twins. The daughter of the first woman gave birth to two sons, the first males on earth. One was born the normal way and the other from her armpit. The armpit child, who would engender evil people, killed his mother and blamed it on his brother (Leeming and Leeming 1995, 216–217).

In the world view of the Hopi of the American Southwest, evil is personified by a crow who “had a power to influence those who did not possess strong hearts. He could project sickness into their bodies and evil thoughts into their hearts, and caused some of them to steal and gossip. . . . Good people were thus turned into evil under the influence of the crow, but the old people told them that there was a good power in the world striving to overcome evil” (Talayesva 1974, 431).

The frost giant Ymir (or Imir) is the source of creation in Icelandic myth. As Leeming and Leeming remark, “He is an unusual source because he is seen as evil. This is in keeping with the strangely pessimistic view of life contained in Norse myths” (1995, 97–98).

In the Watussi, the creation cycle of the Makiritare, or Yekuana, people of the Orinoco River in Venezuela, a spirit messenger named Seruhe buries his own placenta “which gives birth to an ugly human called Kahu (also called Odosha). He is evil and jealous of Wandi [a combination of god, hero, and shaman in Heaven who orders the earth]. Because of Kahu/Odosha there is hunger and sickness and war. He teaches people to kill.” He is also served by a hairy dwarf whom he created. (Jackson 1994, 607).

**FOLKTALES AND LITERATURE**

In folktales, scholars have stressed the simplistic polarity of good and evil on the level of both plot and character. For example, “Most folktales hinge on the struggle between good and evil” (von Franz 1967, 85); “The characters in the stories are . . . either altogether good or altogether bad, and there is no evolution of character” (Opie and Opie 1980, 18); “Within the hero himself we find no psychological conflicts” (von Franz 1967, 85). The characters are not only starkly good or evil, but also courageous or cowardly, jealous or innocent, kind or unkind, self-sacrificing or greedy, self-effacing or arrogant. In many folktales, the personification of evil is often a “wicked stepmother,” an ogre, a witch, a troll, or other such character who must be defeated in order for the hero or heroine to triumph and a happy ending to be achieved. Evil is almost always punished, or at least driven away by the hero with the help of a supernatural character (von Franz 1967, 85). A very widespread European folktales is “The Dragon Slayer” (AT 300), in which the hero rescues a princess from a wicked dragon. The story of the hero slaying the dragon or other monster derives from ancient myth. One of the most common medieval iconographic symbols of good vanquishing evil in Europe is Saint George, the Christian saint, killing the dragon.

Like folklore, the literature of Europe in the Middle Ages had for the most part a sharply drawn dichotomy between good and evil. The didactic genre of the exemplum drew clear contrasts, and epic narrative and poetry often employed the good versus evil contrast. For example, Weidhorn writes that in Beowulf (ca. eighth century), evil is an external agency, in the form of the monster Grendel, and in Chanson de Roland (ca. 1100), it is human, but “black and white, we and they” (1988, 475). In much literature of the medieval period, evil is simply personified as Satan, the devil.

The literary treatment of evil begins to evolve in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Daenmrich and Daenmrich (1887), noting that in Gothic literature “the fundamental contrast pattern of good and evil either diminishes or vanishes,” mention such works as Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *Tales of Terror* (1801) and Charles Robert Maturin’s *The Fatal Revenge* (1807). The Marquis de Sade’s writings probe depravity; in *Justine* (1791) he claims that God is evil and the source of the protagonist’s sufferings. Baudelaire published
a collection of poems meditating on evil, Les Fleurs du Mal (1857), in which evil triumphs over good. The ambiguous nature of evil is explored in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. For example, in the short story “Young Goodman Brown,” (1835) set in Puritan Massachusetts, a young man leaves home one evening for an “evil purpose.” After keeping his appointment with a man in the forest who appears to be the devil, Goodman Brown decides he would prefer to turn back, saying, “My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs” (1846, 167). His mysterious companion says that, on the contrary, he is well acquainted with Brown’s family: “I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip’s war” (1848). Goodman Brown then sees all the most pious people of the village, including the minister and the deacon, traveling to the meeting place in the forest. The realization that seemingly good people do evil (especially in the name of religion) turns Goodman Brown into “a stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man” (1848, 178).

Characters become more realistic and psychologically complex through the nineteenth century. Dostoevsky writes in The Brothers Karamazov (1880), that good and evil are monstrously mixed in man: “Man is broad, too broad, indeed. I’d have him narrower . . . god and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man” (Dostoevsky 1855, 127). Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) explores how good and evil coexist in one man: Dr. Jekyll creates a potion that isolates the evil tendencies in his personality, allowing a completely malevolent character, Mr. Hyde, to emerge. As Massey comments about Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), “Repeatedly, we are told that the source of evil is the good. It is not, in fact, a matter of the good being infected by the evil, though the superficial form which the process takes. Evil is inherent in good” (1976, 99).

Society—man’s creation—comes under scrutiny, and the evil it contains is explored. Some writers have focused on the industrial revolution (Blake, Dickens) and some on social injustice (Hugo, Zola) as sources of evil. Ironically, Huxley’s Brave New World (1932) depicts a society based on pleasure where “everyone has all needs promptly attended to in a society that, stratified and orderly, is built on creature comforts, labor saving devices, instant gratification, and evasion of painful truths like death and solitariness. Yet it is so dehumanized thereby that a heresy springs up in favor of old evils like suffering and tragedy” (Weidhorn 1988, 484).

Whether in folklore or elite literature, evil is a powerful force that drives plot and character. Daemmrich and Daemmrich state that “works that introduce evil as a causative agent (temptation, inspiration) . . . project through the mental anguish of the figures a polar vision of good and evil commanding intellectual reflection concerning the essence of a desirable existence” (1987, 101).

Jane Garry

See also: The Double; Fight of the Gods and Giants; Trickster.

REFERENCES


THE WORLD TREE AND THE TREE OF LIFE

Trees have had an important place and meaning in world cultures throughout time. A source of food, fuel, and shelter, trees are also symbolic of eternal life (the evergreen) or cyclical rebirth as they lose their leaves and sprout new ones every year (deciduous trees). The world tree, often regarded as the world axis, is a universal symbol. It is imagined to have roots that reach down to the underworld and branches that reach to heaven (A652.1, “Tree to heaven”; A652, “World-tree. Tree extending from lowest to highest world”). Trees, generally, can be seen as connecting the three primary realms: the underworld (through the roots), the earth (the trunk), and heaven (the top and upper branches).

Examples of the world tree include Yggdrasil, the mighty ash tree of the Norse, and Ceiba or Yaxche of the Mayans (Biddulph 2002, 55). Of Yggdrasil the Prose Edda states, “Its branches spread out over the whole world and reach up over heaven” (Leeming and Leeming 1995, 296). The world tree is also found in Malaysia, Polynesia, China, Japan, Egypt, North America, and India. In Arabic-speaking lands, the stars were thought to be the fruits on a world tree (Philpot 1897, 115–119). The Assyrians depicted the tree of life as the date tree, and since they artificially pollinated their date trees to produce a greater amount of fruit, the trees were also a symbol of conception.

In addition to the world tree, a celestial tree figures in the cosmologic myth of the Seneca of New York State (A652.3, “Tree in upper world”). The celestial tree is “so tall that not one of the beings . . . could see its top. On its branches flowers and fruit hung all the year round. The beings who lived on the island used to come to the tree and eat the fruit and smell the sweet perfume of the flowers.” Later, the tree is pulled up, and the sky mother falls through the hole in the sky to earth. She has two twins, dark and light. As there is yet no sun, the light twin creates a tree of light, “a great tree having at its topmost branch a great ball of light . . . [which] brought forth flowers from every branch” (Parker 1912, 610).

In the Hebrew Garden of Eden, there are two special trees among many: “And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9; Motif C621, “Forbidden tree. Fruit of all trees may be eaten, except one”; C621.1, “Tree of knowledge forbidden”). In Revelation 2:7, it is said, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

Stories of a great deluge are found in many cultures, and there are numerous stories of people surviving the deluge by clinging to a tree (A1021.0.4, “Deluge: Escape on floating tree”; A1023, “Escape from deluge on tree”) or sheltering in a hollow trunk (A1021.0.5, “Deluge: escape in hollow tree trunk”). These stories are known from Indian, American Indian (Paiute, Plains Cree, Catawba, Ackawoi, Seneca), Latin American (Caingang, Cuyuyaki, Maima), and Korean sources.

There is a more general motif, R311, “Tree refuge” in which animals or people climb trees to escape from danger or pursuers. Such tales are found around the world, including China, North and South America, Japan, and Africa.

PEOPLE FROM TREES

In the Norse Prose Edda, the gods come upon two trees which they fashion into the first man and woman, from whom all humans descended. The Mixtec of Mexico also believed that the first people were born from trees (Leeming and Leeming 1995, 195).

TREE WORSHIP

Many gods are associated with specific trees in various cultures. It would be impossible to list them all, but a representative sample follows. Illustrations in the Egyptian Book of the Dead portray the soul of a dead person traveling to the other world, stopping at a sycamore tree along the way and reaching out to receive what is offered by the goddess Nut, who stands within the tree: “O, sycamore of the Goddess Nut, let there be given to me the water which is in thee” (Philpot 1897, 23–26). In The Epic of Gilgamesh (standard version, seventh century BCE), Gilgamesh and Enkidu marvel at the great cedar forest:
They stood at the edge of the forest,
They gazed at the height of the cedars,
They saw the cedar mountain, dwelling of the gods, sacred to
The goddess Imana.
On the slopes of that mountain, the cedar bears its abundance,
Agreeable is its shade, full of pleasures. (1995, 3:1-8)

Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut down the great forest and go on to commit other infractions, and as punishment the gods decree that one of them (Enkidu) must die.

In the Aegean world, trees were a central part of religion from at least the Bronze Age (ca. 3000-ca. 1100 BCE), as we know from illustrations such as Dionysus before a tree sanctuary and Hermes sitting in a great tree on vases and other objects (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003). In classical times, certain gods became identified with specific trees. Athena was associated with the olive, Apollo with the laurel, Artemis with the myrtle. The oak tree was sacred to the mighty Zeus. Priests, and later priestesses, interpreted the god's pronouncements by listening to the rustling of the leaves (D1311.4, "Oracular tree"). Among the Ancient Greek nymphs, or lesser female divinities of nature, the dryads or hamadryads were the nymphs of trees who lived within them (Smith 1958, 202). Among the Romans, Silvanus was the god of the countryside, associated primarily with forests. Rumina, the goddess of nature, had a sanctuary in the Roman Forum, near which stood a sacred fig-tree (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003).

Ameratari is the spirit of immortality and guardian of all plants and trees in the Zorostarian religion (Rose 1998, 11). Aercio in Albanian folklore is a negative spirit who resides in an old cherry tree. Askafro is the well-known tree spirit of Nordic and Teutonic folklore and is also known as the Escherfrau; Bitaboh is believed to be the tree spirit of the Niam Niam people of Gabon; likewise, Co-Tinh and Co-Hon of Vietnamese folklore (Rose 1998, 3, 22, 41, 72). Benign tree spirits include Bariaba of the Melanesian culture and Bisan, the Malaysian camphor-guardian spirit. Frau Wachholder is the female goblin of the juniper tree known in Scandinavian folklore as Hylde-Moer (Rose 1998, 35, 41, 98).

In southern to central Europe, especially "among the Celts of Gaul the Druids esteemed nothing more sacred than mistletoe and the oak on which it grew" (Frazer 1960, 184-185). In the version of the ballad "Glassgerion" (Child 67) printed in Percy's Reliques (1765), the eponymous hero swears an oath "by oak and ash and thorn," which Child suggests is a relic of high antiquity (Child 1965, 2:137).

In Islamic hagiography, trees are believed to shelter the saints. Similarly, saints can come out of tree ashes and saints may grow trees (Göpflinardl 1958, 25, 36, 52).

In other tales, the soul of a man is kept within a tree; when the tree dies, the human being dies. This motif is known as the external soul (E710; AT 303), as in an ancient Egyptian story called "Tale of the Two Brothers." In this story, a man leaves his heart in the flower of an acacia tree and dies when the tree is cut down. Sometimes, however, the action is reversed and a tree will sicken or die as a person does.

In Shakespeare's The Tempest (1610-1611), the magician Prospero has rescued the spirit Ariel from inside "a cloven pine" where he was imprisoned by the witch Sycorax, and warns him, "If thou more murmurs, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till / Thou hast howled away twelve winters" (1.2. 274-276; Q435, "Magic imprisonment in cleft tree").

MAGIC TREE

Magic trees of all sorts figure in many tales from cultures all over the world, including Danish, Irish, German, Persian, Chinese, Indonesian, Latin American (Quiché), North American (numerous), and African (Zulu, Upoto). In Greek myth, the Hesperides, daughters of Night, have a garden at the western edge of the world. In the garden is a tree with golden apples guarded by a dragon. Hercules's penultimate labor is to fetch those apples, which he tricks Atlas into doing for him. Sometimes magic trees talk (D1610.2, "Speaking tree"); among North American Indian tales, a common motif is D1313.4, "Blinded trickster directed by trees." In the Cinderella cycle of tales, some feature a magic tree from which the heroine alone can pluck fruit (H31.12, "Only one man is able to pluck fruits from tree"). This motif, along with D1648.1.2, "Tree (forest) bows down to holy person (saint)," is exemplified in the ballad "The Cherry Tree Carol" (Child 54), on which the tallest boughs of a cherry tree bend down so that Mary alone may pluck cherries. Child states that it is derived from the Pseudo-Matthew's gospel and that the original story tells of a palm tree; in English versions the tree is a cherry tree and in versions from Catalan and Provençal it is an apple tree (Child 1965, 2:1).

Magic trees figure in the Grimm's tale "The Old Woman in the Wood" (KHM 23; AT 442, The Old Man in the Forest). A girl, left alone in the forest, sits beneath a tree and weeps. A white dove flies to her and drops a golden key in her hand, telling her it fits the lock on a great tree nearby, and if she opens it, she will find food. The dove also gives her keys to two other trees, one having clothing inside and the other containing a bed. (ES62.2, "Residence in a tree"). Thus, the girl has food, clothing, and shelter provided by the trees. The tale also contains the motif of a man transformed into a tree.
(D215, “Transformation: Man to tree”). After a time, the dove asks the girl to go to the house of an old woman and bring back a certain ring, and when she does,

she learnt against a tree and determined to wait for the dove, and, as she thus stood, it seemed just as if the tree was soft andpliant, and was letting its branches down. And suddenly the branches turned around her, and were two arms, and when she looked round, the tree was a handsome man, who embraced and kissed her heartily, and said, “Thou hast delivered me from the power of the old woman, who is a wicked witch. She had changed me into a tree, and every day for two hours I was a white dove. (1968)

Other tales that contain the motif of residence in a tree are Types 450 (Little Brother and Little Sister; KHM 11), 706, (The Maiden Without Hands; KHM 31) and 710 (Our Lady’s Child; KHM 3). Type 468, The Princess on the Sky-Tree, tells of a tree which reaches the sky and a princess living in its branches. These stories also contain the motif of a king or prince finding a maiden in the woods or actually inside a tree (N711.1). In India we find tales with the motif “Hollow tree as residence for hero” (P811.10.1).

In tales involving supernatural tasks (AT 460–462), the hero is sent on a quest by a king in order to thwart the prophecy that the penniless boy will marry the king’s daughter. In the course of his quest, the boy is asked a number of questions, including “Why does not a certain tree flourish?” (H1292.2, “Question (propounded on quest): Why does not a certain tree flourish?”). The answer is either that gold is hidden under it or a serpent is under its roots. In addition to European variants, these tale types are found in China and Japan.

TRANSFORMATION INTO A TREE

Numerous examples of dead lovers whose relationship is thwarted in life, but from whose graves arise plants or trees that twine together (E631, “Reincarnation in plant (tree) growing from grave”) occur in Chinese, Papuan, North American Indian (Zuñi, Kato), Latin American (Amazon), African (Kaffir, Eko), Indian, Indonesian, Polynesian (Easter Island, Marquesas, Hawaii), and European sources.

Child lists Scandinavian versions of the Scottish ballad “Kemp Owyme” (Child 34) in which a maid transformed into a tree by her stepmother is freed upon being kissed by a man (Child 1965, 1:307).

An unusual example of transformation into a tree is the motif Q338.1, “Request for immortality punished by transformation into tree.” Thompson gives numerous examples in his Tales of North American Indians (1929, 276).

One of the best-known transformation myths tells of the Greek nymph

“Suddenly the branches twined round her and turned into two arms.” The girl has freed the prince from the spell of a witch who had changed him into a tree (Motif D215, “Transformation: Man to tree”). From Little Brother and Little Sister, and Other Tales, by the Brothers Grimm, illustrated by Arthur Rackham (1917).

Daphne, who, while running away to escape Apollo’s importunities, calls upon her father, the river god Peneus, who turns her into a laurel tree (D215.1, “Transformation: man (woman) to laurel”). Throughout the world, there are stories of people being turned into specific trees: ash (D215.3), linden (D215.4), apple (D215.5), mulberry (D215.6), almond (D215.7), mango (D215.8).

The motif of a man transformed into a tree appears in Virgil’s Aeneid (19 BCE; 3:27–42), Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1516; 6:26–53), and Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (1596; Book I, ii). In these examples the protagonist of each story discovers that the tree is a transformed man by breaking a bough; it bleeds or the tree cries out.
OTHER LITERARY TREATMENTS OF TREES

In literature the forest often plays an important symbolic role. It is a mysterious, hidden place where magic or sensuality can prevail and where one can be free of the prying eyes of the court or village. The scenes set in the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare’s As You Like It (written about 1598) immediately come to mind in this context. The forest is also seen as immutable and eternal. Macbeth, in Shakespeare’s play of that name (1605–1606), is assured by the witches’ apparition that he shall rule until “Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill/Shall come against him.” Macbeth muses: “That will never be/Who can impress the forest, bid the tree/Unfix his earth-bound root?” (4.1:93–96)

In Hawthorne’s novel The Scarlet Letter (1850), the forest is a refuge where the pariah Hester Prynne can be at one with nature and where she and the minister Dimmesdale can speak frankly of their past and future.

A tree that bears witness to an unlawful love scene is rent by a stroke of lightning in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847). The Byronic Mr. Rochester asks Jane to marry him in the garden near a great chestnut tree. Not knowing that he cannot legally marry since he is already wed, she assents, and a violent storm comes up. “Before I left my bed in the morning, little Adele came running in to tell me that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away” (ch. 23).

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REFERENCES

The Trickster

Various Motifs

The term trickster, when used by social scientists, refers to more than simply a deceptive character. Tricksters are destroyers and creators, heroes and villains, often even both male and female (Motif K3098, “Trickster character composed of opposites”; Turner 1972). Many trickster figures, such as Coyote and Maui, are demiurges or culture heroes who provide human beings with necessities such as the sun (usually Motifs A728, “Sun caught in snare,” or A1411, “Theft of light”); fire (A1415, “Theft of fire”); and tools for procuring food, such as fishing nets (A1457.3, “Origin of net for fishing”) and fish hooks (A1457.1, “Origin of fish hook”). Maui even acts as earth diver (A812, “Earth-diver”), thereby creating the land, in some Oceanic traditions. Although the trickster does things that benefit people, he—most tricksters are male, but see “Female trickster” (Motif J11298)—is also an impulsive, selfish, even grotesque character who steals food, tricks women into sex, and casually profanes sacred rituals. This duality of character has troubled both scholars and those who tell and hear trickster tales (Radin 1956, 147).

THE TRICKSTER IN THE MOTIF-INDEX

Although the trickster is an important concept in The Motif-Index of Folk Literature, there is no specific trickster motif. Instead, there are many motifs that describe either who the trickster is or what he does.

Examples of motifs describing who the trickster is include “God as dupe or trickster” (A177.1); “Culture hero as dupe or trickster” (A521); and “Coyote as trickster” (J1117.1). Note that trickster and dupe are equated in two of these motifs; the trickster may be clever, but he also pays for his mischief by often playing the dupe to others’ deceptions. Examples of motifs that describe what the trickster does include “Trickster puts on buffalo skull; gets head caught” (J2131.5.1) and “Animals killed by trickster’s breaking wind” (F981.3). Both of these examples highlight trickster’s role as deceptive fool over his role as creator or culture hero.

The Motif-Index was compiled before Paul Radin wrote his important study The Trickster and therefore presents a fairly one-dimensional view of the trickster; in fact, when one looks up “trickster” in the index to the Motif-Index, one encounters the phrase “Trickster, see also clever person” (817). Although the trickster can be clever, the terms are not truly synonymous. In addition, while the Motif-Index admits that some tricksters have animal aspects, these are not generally focused on. Many of the trickster motifs, such as “Trickster masks as doctor and punishes his cheaters” (K1825.1.3), clearly refer to human tricksters.

However, tricksters are usually associated with an animal of some type, and later scholars such as Radin have tended to emphasize the trickster’s animal aspects. Among the Native Americans, Coyote (J1117.2, “Coyote as trickster”), Hare, Raven, and Spider are the primary trickster animals. Claude Lévi-Strauss points out that trickster animals are usually carrion eaters and suggests that they therefore mediate between carnivores and herbivores (Lévi-Strauss 1963). This is interesting and serves to remind us that tricksters (and the animals with which they are associated) refuse to fit into standard categories. However, not all trickster animals are carrion eaters; while coyotes and ravens do eat carrion (although not exclusively), spiders and hares do not. Clearly, Lévi-Strauss’s observation does not apply to all tricksters or to all trickster animals.

Thompson’s only motifs that specify particular animals as tricksters are “Coyote as trickster” (J1117.2) and “Jackal as trickster” (J1117.1), although new motifs specify “Fox as trickster” (J1117.1.1.§), “Ass as trickster” (J1117.2.§), “Camel as trickster” (J1117.3.§), and “Hedgehog [porcupine] as trickster” (J1117.4.§). Since Stith Thompson included tales from the northwest coast raven cycle in his Tales of the North American Indians, we would expect the Motif-Index to include at least “Raven as trickster,” but the closest we come is “Raven as culture hero” (A522.2.2).

The trickster’s sexual and bodily-based escapades are also inadequately described in the Motif-Index, which is notoriously prudish. For example, Wadjunkanka catches and kills some ducks and, worn out from his exertions, decides to take a nap. He asks his anus to keep watch to make sure no one steals his ducks, but when thieves come it is only able to pass gas. The thieves, undeterred, make off with the trickster’s ducks (Radin 1956, 16–17).
Motif-Index presents this motif as “Buttocks as magic watcher” (D1317.1), which rather sanitizes the story (and diminishes the humor). The trickster’s sexual adventures are similarly sanitized; consider “In darkness of night Trickster instead of her chosen lover elopes with girl” (T92.4.3). Although technically accurate (the trickster does accompany the girl instead of the person she intended to elope with), it is misleading; the term elope minimizes the deception and arrogance the trickster uses to essentially kidnap the girl. Later motif indexes (such as Hasan El-Shamy’s) have been more open about the trickster’s bodily and sexual adventures.

Tricksters primarily occur in belief tales such as myths (it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between myth and legend in Native American tales), so Aarne and Thompson’s Types of the Folktales, which categorizes Märchen and other fictitious folktales, includes few tales that could be considered true trickster tales. There are some Aarne-Thompson tale types that use the term trickster (see, for example, Type 1358, Trickster Surprises Adulteress and Lover) but in cases like this trickster means simply deceptive or clever person. There are, however, many trickster tale types defined in Remedios S. Wyccc’s “The Types of North-American Indian Tales (1951)”.

THE TRICKSTER’S PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Jung and others equate the trickster with the collective shadow, the dark part of a people’s (as opposed to an individual’s) psyche. Jung describes the shadow as the base and most animal-like part of the human psyche and believes that it consists of those feelings of guilt and fear that mature individuals repress (Jung 1956). The collective shadow reflects a specific culture’s tabus, guilt, and anxieties. Liliane Frey-Rohm notes that a collective shadow figure can be either good or evil (1967, 176), much like the trickster himself. Jung also equates the shadow with a base, animal nature, again like the trickster. This interpretation fits with Radin’s belief that the trickster is a primal figure (Radin 1956, xxiii).

Telling and listening to trickster tales therefore serves various social functions. First, telling a trickster tale or enjoying one is a safe outlet for criticizing one’s culture and the sacred (Radin 1956, 151ff). It is also cathartic to hear about someone breaking the social taboos that one must obey: in this sense, trickster tales are functionally similar to carnivals (Jung 1956). But these tales are not only subversive; the cultural norms and taboos that the trickster breaks are specifically stated in these tales, so the trickster’s punishment reminds the listener of the consequences of breaking taboos. Finally, trickster tales are quite humorous and are generally enjoyed by both the teller and the audience (Radin 1956, xxiv).

THE TRICKSTER AMONG NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

Radin’s The Trickster contains a Winnebago tale about the trickster Wakdjunka. Wakdjunka violates many tabus. First, he decides to go on the warpath, an option not open to the chief of the upper phratry. (Radin 1956, 114). Then, he ignores his sacred feast and has sex with multiple women, acts that are forbidden to someone about to go on the warpath (116). Finally, Wakdjunka avoids his entire responsibility to his tribe and, wandering off on his own, has various typical trickster encounters (described at length in The Trickster). Radin analyzes this tale according to its social context and then compares Wakdjunka to other Native American tricksters such as Coyote and Raven.

Coyote is the best-known Native American trickster, and tales are told about him by Native tribes located in the American West and Midwest. Coyote is more godlike than many trickster figures; in some traditions, he is instrumental in shaping the land by sending out another being as “Earth diver” (A812). But, in true trickster form, Coyote also often acts as marplot (A60, “Marplot at creation”), interfering with Creator’s plans (as in J218, “Trickster’s false creations fail him. A trickster creates man from his excrements”). It is significant that Coyote shapes man out of his excrements; trickster tales often focus on disgusting bodily-based humor, involving trickster’s excrements or phallices. There are many tales involving Coyote’s appetites, both for food and for sex (Thompson 1946, 319ff).

Among the northwest coast tribes such as the Tlingit, the trickster is Raven. Raven transforms himself into a hemlock needle so that he can both impregnate a chief’s wife and be born as her son (T511, “Conception from eating or drinking”). As a baby, he cries and cries until his parents let him play with the box that contains the sun (A721, “Sun kept in a box”), which he eventually steals to place in the sky. This is helpful for his people because it brings light and warmth (Thompson 1929, 19–22). But by choosing to turn himself into an ephemeral hemlock needle instead of something more durable, Raven also brings death to his people (A1335ff, “Origin of death”). Here we see Raven as both a creative and a destructive force in human lives.

THE TRICKSTER IN AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Dahomey trickster Legba (along with his Yoruban cognates Elegbara and Eshu) was brought to the Caribbean by African slaves and eventually became important in Haitian and New Orleans voodoo (Leach and Fried 1949,
“Legba”). Eshu teaches human beings how to do Ifa divination, thereby mediating between the divine world and the human world (Hyde 1998, 108f). Eshu brings cosmic information to humans and, in return, takes the human sacrifice that accompanies Ifa divination back to the gods. Of course, Eshu takes a portion of that sacrifice for himself. But within this system Eshu’s goals are subversive; he seeks to mislead people and even to refocus fate for his own designs. Eshu may be a mediator between humans and gods, but he is a self-interested and treacherous one.

Tales about Anansi, the other main African trickster, were also brought to the Caribbean and the new world by African slaves. Anansi is associated with the spider, as is the Native American Inktomi (one of the Siouan tricksters). Tricksters are probably associated with spiders because spiders appear to be clever and treacherous by spinning webs to catch their prey without having to fight. Spiders, like tricksters, are also good at hiding. Anansi tales began in West Africa, but are now a staple in the Caribbean, Surinam, and Curacao (Leach and Fried 1949, “Anansi” and “Anansesem”). In the Gullah islands he is called Aunt Nancy (clearly etymologically related to Anansi). Anansi does such positive things as steal the sun for mankind, but most of the tales told about him focus on his cleverness and his ability to get out of difficult or dangerous situations.

THE TRICKSTER IN OCEANIA

Maui is the trickster in Polynesia and parts of Melanesia. Born after his mother’s unusual conception (TS10, “Miraculous conception”), Maui is clearly more than human and less than divine (at the end of the Maui cycle, he actually dies). Maui is credited with fishing up the earth (at great cost to himself: he uses his own blood and the jawbone of an ancestor), snaring the sun, and stealing fire. Maui is fairly benevolent to human beings and generally saves his tricks for the divine world. He even tries to make man immortal, but dies in the attempt (Leach and Fried 1949, “Maui”).

THE TRICKSTER IN JAPAN

In Shinto mythology, the trickster Susa-nō-o is the brother of the sun goddess, Amaterasu. He is associated with storms and blamed when rice paddies are damaged or destroyed; he even defecates under his sister’s throne (Hyde 1998, 178). But he also helps people; he brings food to human beings by killing the food-goddess, from whose body come rice and grains. Lewis Hyde points out that this myth serves to remind us that life and death are interconnected (179).

THE TRICKSTER IN CHINA

Monkey, the hero of the sixteenth-century Chinese epic that bears his name (Waley 1943, 2, 6) is the primary Chinese trickster. The story relates how Monkey accompanies Triptaka (a historical person who lived in the seventh century CE), Pigsy (a constantly hungry buffoon), and Sandy on a pilgrimage to India (Waley 1943, 6). On the way they have various ribald, humorous, and sometimes dangerous adventures. In typical trickster fashion, Monkey often extricates them from trouble through cleverness and trickery.

THE TRICKSTER IN INDIA

The Hindu god Krishna, one of the avatars of Vishnu, is most often cited as the Indian trickster. Krishna is a primary character in the Indian epic The Mahabharata. Krishna is nicknamed “the butter eater” because, as a child, he refuses to eat the food his mother prepares for him and, after she leaves the house, he steals and eats the butter. There are two primary trickster ideas operating here: first, the desire for food, and second, the refusal to do what one is supposed to do. If Krishna were simply hungry, he could eat the food his mother offers, but, as a trickster, he prefers to eat the rich food he wants on his own terms. As an adult, Krishna is associated with war and with dishonesty, but he does save human beings from a flood sent by the angry god Indra (Leach and Fried 1949, “Krishna”). Generally Krishna is more mischievous than dangerous, although he can be both.

THE TRICKSTER IN EUROPE

Some scholars argue that pure trickster figures occur only in Native American tales, African and Caribbean tales, and Oceanic tales, seeing the typical trickster as more human than divine (Makarius 1993). Other scholars would admit that Monkey fits the trickster paradigm, but would resist including Krishna and Susa-nō-o because they are essentially divine beings. Also, Krishna and Susa-nō-o’s animal aspects are unimportant (if they are present at all). There is even more controversy about the main suggested tricksters from Europe.

The ancient Greeks had two primary trickster figures: Hermes and Prometheus, and some scholars see trickster elements in Odysseus. Hermes seems to fit the pattern better than Prometheus. Hermes is a charming figure who, in the “Hymn to Hermes,” first steals from Apollo and then convinces him to support Hermes’s bid for divinity. Hermes is also the god of luck, thieves, and fertility. Hermes is not divine in the same sense that Apollo or
Zeus are; instead, he acts as mediator between humans and the gods (as tricksters often do). But after he is granted divine recognition, Hermes becomes a representative of the Olympian establishment. Once his special status has been acknowledged, he no longer behaves as a subservient trickster; instead, he does what the other gods, particularly Zeus, want him to do (Leach and Fried 1949, "Hermes"). Motifs associated with Hermes include L.301, "Hermes distributes wit," and A1461.2, "Origin of lyre. Hermes makes it from a tortoise."

Prometheus is more problematic. He helps mankind by stealing fire for them (A1415, "Theft of fire"); but, like Raven, he also brings death. His creation of Pandora unleashes further ravages upon mankind (F34, "Pandora sent as temptress"); C321, "Tabu: Looking into box. Pandora"). Ultimately, Prometheus’s theft of fire so angers Zeus that he chains Prometheus to a mountain. Tricksters may often seem to deserve such eternal punishment, but only two trickster figures actually suffer it: Prometheus and his Norse cognate, Loki.

The Norse god Loki is half giant (giants are the eternal enemies of the Norse gods) and half brother to Odin, the Norse high god. In his creative aspect, Loki helps to create human beings. Loki also has the ability to change his shape, or shapeshift (a frequent trickster motif), becoming a seal, a salmon, and even a mare. As a mare he bears Sleipnir, Odin’s eight-legged horse (T.465.2, “Foal born of Loki and mythical stallion”). But then Loki takes a darker turn, orchestrating the murder of Balder, the only pure god (K.863, “Balder’s death”). As punishment for this murder, Loki is bound so that snakes drip poison in his face (Q.501.3, “Serpent above Loki continually drops venom in his face”). His patient wife, Sigyn, catches the poison in a bowl, but when she must empty the bowl the poison hits his face, making him writhe in pain and causing earthquakes (A.145, “Earthquakes from movements of subterranean monster”). Loki’s binding recalls Prometheus’s punishment, and in fact some Indo-European scholars believe that Loki is directly related to Prometheus (Simek 1993, 195). Unlike Prometheus, Loki eventually gets free and leads the giants against the gods at Ragnarok, the cosmic battle at the end of the world (A.1070, “Fettered monster’s escape at end of world”; A.1082.1, “Battle of gods and giants at end of world”). Tales of Loki’s evil and binding are clearly influenced by the later Christian identification of Loki and the Devil (tricksters, perhaps because of their profane character, are often equated with the Devil if their original culture is converted to Christianity). In Loki’s case, it is unclear how much of his evil was rewritten by Christians and how much was part of pagan Norse tradition.

THE TRICKSTER IN POPULAR CULTURE

Jung wrote that “[t]he trickster is a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually. Not always, of course, as a mythological figure” (Jung 1956, 209). So we find the trickster in modern literature and television.

In the 1960s, Hugo and Nebula award-winning science fiction writer Roger Zelazny wrote an intriguing short story, called "Love Is an Imaginary Num-
er," that equated Prometheus and Loki. The best-selling fantasy novel American Gods, by Neil Gaiman (2001), includes several trickster figures (often working at cross-purposes), including Anansi, Whiskey Jack (etymologically related to Wadjunjaka), and Loki. Television also offers many examples of tricksters. Bugs Bunny is perhaps the best example; he is a rabbit (or hare, one of the major Native American trickster animals) with considerable appetites (he is usually pictured with a carrot in his mouth, and he is willing to go to great lengths to find a woman) who often dresses as a woman, is very clever, and, at the same time, keeps getting himself into tight spots. Wily E. Coyote, with his elaborate (but ultimately unsuccessful) plans to catch the roadrunner in the Roadrunner cartoons, represents the trickster as irresistible dupe. Many American children and adults enjoy these cartoons without ever realizing that they are seeing into the mythic realm of the trickster.

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**Union of Opposites, or Coniunctio Oppositorum**

**Various Motifs**

Coniunctio oppositorum (hence, coniunctio) is a term C.G. Jung used to designate “union of opposites” (Jung 1970, 167). Jung’s own writings about the coniunctio were inspired largely by his copious researches into alchemy, a medieval school of speculative chemistry concerned with fusions and separation of different substances (including the possibility of liberating gold from base metals). His writings about alchemy illustrate one of the perennial problems of defining archetypes and motifs—specifically, that archetypes and motifs can be defined at different levels of abstraction. In his great synthesis about alchemy, *Mysterium Coniunctionis,* Jung sometimes speaks as if the general pattern of the coniunctio—the “union of opposites”—is itself an archetype.

What the union of opposites really “means” transcends human imagination. Therefore the worldly-wise can dismiss such a “fantasy” without further ado... But that doesn’t help us much, for we are dealing with an eternal image, an archetype, from which man can turn away his mind for a time but never permanently. (Jung 1970, 167)

At other moments, however, Jung speaks of coniunctio as a general psychic pattern or structure, as if reserving the term archetype for more specific images or motifs, such as hermaphroditism. Finally, Jung sometimes provides lists of recurrent contrasts that he treats less as archetypes in
themselves than as ingredients or associations typically drawn into specific motifs of contionctio.

However, we do not yet know enough to resolve the dilemmas posed by different orders of abstraction in defining archetypes. Emphasizing only the more general notion of contionctio could leave us lost in abstraction, while emphasizing only specific motifs could blind us to the possibility of a deeper metaphysics of contionctio—which is Jung’s big point. The best course for the present would seem to be to allow both possibilities, even though it implies the necessity of defining archetypes at very different levels of generality.

Although Thompson’s Motif-Index does not assign an independent motif for the general theme of “opposites,” numerous examples of the occurrence of the theme in the folk traditions of various national groups are found in that work. Among such motifs are “Opposition of good and evil gods” (A106); “Earlier universe opposite of present. Everything in the earlier world was the reverse of the present world” (A633); “Opposite of present. Everything on the earth—courses of rivers, height of mountains, human reproduction, etc.—are at first the reverse of the present condition” (A855).

Another term denoting opposites that frequently recurs in Thompson’s Motif-Index is contrasts. Thus, we find such motifs as “Two brothers as contrasts” (F251.5.4); “Peasant and his wife in hut near castle (palace) as contrasts to king and queen” (P411.1.1); “Wealth and poverty” (U60); “Justice and injustice” (U10); and “Contrasting qualities found in otherworld garden” (F162.1.2).

A critical facet of the concept of opposites is the perceived inherent interconnectedness or union between opposites (Motif U208). This union constitutes a new effective entity that is greater than mere elaboration of either component. For Jung, the “union of opposites” designates a general pattern found in many myths as well as other human mental products such as rituals, social structures, and philosophical and sociological treatises. In most general terms, contionctio refers to the idea that opposites attract and combine to make wholes greater than the sum of the opposing parts. But the connotations of contionctio as used by Jung and other scholars are frequently even stronger than this: contionctio sometimes implies, for example, that any given entity contains within itself its own opposite. It is interesting to note that while some myths do seem to assume that entities can contain their own opposites, other, more pragmatically inclined branches of folk wisdom insist on an antithetical principle—a discreteness of essences. For example, proverbs that tell us that we should not or cannot squeeze blood from turnips, make silk purses from sow’s ears, or make mountains from molehills seem to discourage thinking in terms of possible radical interpenetration of contrasive substances (Motif J2219.38), “Foolishness of seeking an object (service) at an illogical source” (El-Shamy 2004).

Jung provides a list of opposites at the very opening of Mysterium Coniunctionis: cold/warm, upper/lower, spirit/body, heaven/fire, water, bright/dark, active/passive, volatile/solid, precious/common, good/evil, open/hidden, east/west, living/dead, masculine/feminine, sun/moon. These opposites are expressed in such myths as “Material of which angels are created (fire, water, and snow)” (A52,3), from Jewish traditions; “Conflict of good and evil creators” (A50), from Jewish, Hindu, and Persian traditions; and “Opposition of good and evil gods” (A106), from Hindu, Mexican Indian, South American Indian, and Jewish traditions. Also, other major motif divisions with numerous submotifs reflect oppositions, as in the cases of “Nature of the upper world” (A660) and “Nature of the lower world” (A670); “Sweet and bitter fountain in otherworld garden” (F162.2.1); “Objects on one side of palisade in otherworld garden black, on other white” (F162.1.2.3); and “Soul leaves or enters the body” (E720) from Irish myths (Cross 1952).

Similarly, the notion that good and evil, truth and falsehood, and so on, are interdependent opposites is reported as part of the emergence of early religious systems. In ancient Egypt, for example, mythic accounts such as “The Blindfold of Truth by Falsehood” illustrate this point. According to this allegorical narrative dating back to the New Kingdom, Dynasties 18–20 (1554–1085 BC), Truth is presented as a male who is blinded by the gods at his brother Falsehood’s instigation. At the end of the story, Truth is rescued and vindicated by his son, and Falsehood is punished—but not destroyed. Referring to this text and other similar narratives, Egyptologist Edward F. Wente concludes:

In none of these myths or stories is the antagonist totally annihilated, but rather a resolution is effected so that a harmonious situation is achieved with the elimination of further strife. Such a resolution of conflicting opposites is typically Egyptian and reflects the application of the principle of Maat, which embraces the concepts of balance and harmony as well as truth. (Wente 1972, 127)

This principle has been designated as Motif A1100.1, “Balance and harmony as well as truth”: The Maat- (Mayat)- principle of world order”, Type 613B §, Council of Judges (Gods) Rules in Error (The Judgment of the Ennead): The Lost Or Damaged Item (El-Shamy 1995, 2004).

In Semitic religions, good and evil, truth and falsehood, the holy and the profane, are depicted in the concepts of God and Satan. It is virtually impossible to think of one without recalling the other. This mentafact is characteristic of the patterns of thinking of the typical believer. According to sacred religious dogma, God is eternal while Satan has existed as the embodiment of evil since his fall from grace and will continue to exist until the end of time (i.e., semi-eternally).
CONIUNCTIO IN LITERATURE AND THEATER

A literary verse in the Arabian Nights illustrates this archetypal trait of "union of opposites." As translated from the Arabic by Richard Burton the verse reads: "Two contraries and both occur in opposite charm. And charm so contrari is contrasted by contrast lover's show" (Burton 1894, 4:20). An alternate translation by El-Shamy reads: "Two opposites were united in diversity of glamour / An entity's beauty would be manifested [only] by its opposite" (El-Shamy 2004, 2:143). The motifs here are U103.8, "Contrasts are drawn to each other (Opposites attract)," and U103.0.18, "The beauty of an entity (object) is brought out by its opposite" (El-Shamy 2004).

In a more intricate context, Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream (written about 1595) may be seen as incorporating the coniunctio principle. The play, set in "a wood outside Athens," is a comedy in which forest spirits meddle in the love affairs of humans, and the setting itself is a player in the comedy. As Katherine B. Perrault in a recent study notes, "The symbolism of the coniunctio is in essence a transcendent, ideal view of the world. In Midsummer, it marries the natural with the spiritual (as well as pagan [i.e., Dionysian rites] and Christian [i.e., marriage rites]), integrating the physical microcosm and macrocosm, as well as the inner and outer psyche in a tenuous, synergistic balance of opposites" (Perrault 2003). Thus, we see several of Jung's pairs of united opposites animating the play's physical setting as well as its main protagonists from the two opposite worlds: humans and spirits (ct. AT 480, discussed below).

CONIUNCTIO IN FOLKLORE

In a North African folk tale, a virtuous wife comments on the attractiveness of a black object on a white one (dark henna on her white hand). Her statement triggers suspicion and jealousy in her husband, who accuses her of infidelity with a black lover and punishes her. This theme is designated as Motifs U103.18, "Black and white attract (each other); U103.11,8. "A female's casual remark that 'black on white' looks pleasing causes accusation of (inter racial) unchastity" (El-Shamy 2004). With reference to this theme, folktale (and elite literature) are replete with situations in which a crazed husband murders or disfigures his wife because of her involvement with a black paramour—for example, AT 1511, The Faithless Queen (Wife prefers loathsome paramour).

Another example of the interdependence of opposites may be found in the many tales in which kindness and unkindness are contrasted (Motif Q2, "Kind and unkind"; AT 480, The Spinning Women by the Spring; The Kind and Unkind Girls). An important variation on this tale-type depicting sibling rivalry among step sisters presents a "balanced view toward various objects in one's environment ... thus things that are typically viewed as evil are still accorded some positive value" (El-Shamy 1995, 255-262). The tale type also highlights the role such a realization of "balance" between opposites plays in the process of individuation. According to an oral text from the Western Desert of Egypt, a woman sends her own daughter, whom she pampers, and her stepdaughter, whom she maltreats, on an errand to acquire a household utensil from the ogress. The encounter with coniunctio occurs when the persecuted stepdaughter (the heroine) plays the role of "mediator between conflicting pairs. The tale goes as follows:

She went down the road to the house of Mother Ogress. On her way she saw two date palm trees, a male and a female, quarrelling; the female would say [narrator speaks in a tone denoting contention], "I am the female. I bear fruit!" Then the male would retort, "No, I am the male. I am better!" When they saw her, they asked her, "Who is better, I, the female, or he, the male?" She replied [narrator speaks in a conciliatory tone], "You are the female; you yield fruit that is good for us, and he is the male that yields pollen that we use to make you bear fruit. You can't do without him, and he would be worthless without you!" When the two palm trees heard that they said to her [in a tone denoting contentment], "Go, May God make our length in your hair and not in your legs!" So her hair became long.

After a while she met two birds—a [white] she - dove and a raven—quarrelling; the she - dove would say, "I am better than you are!" and the raven would say, "No! I am better than you are!" She said to them, "You, she - dove, are good, and he, the raven, is also good! White is fine, like milk; black is also fine; without the black [pupils] of the eye, we would not be able to see! You, [she - dove] give us baby chicks to eat, and you [raven] clean up the place [by eating rats and dead animals]. So, you are good and he is good." The she - dove said to her, "Go, May God make my whiteness in your face, not in your hair!" And the raven said, "Go, May God make my blackness in your hair, not in your face!" [Thus, her face became white and her hair black].

She continued [going] down the road. She met two—a rose and a bee arguing. The rose would say, "I am better!" and the bee would retort, "No, I am better." She said to them, "You, the rose, are red and fragrant, and you, the bee, give us sweet honey!" The rose said to her, "May God make my redness in your cheeks and not in your eyes!" And the bee said, "May God make my honey [5 sweetness] in your mouth [words], and my sting not in your tongue!"

Then she came to two threshing grounds; one was a sesame threshing ground, while the other was ... safflower! They also were quarreling. She reconciled the two of them. The sesame and the safflower said to her, "Take
some [sesame] from me.” “Take some of my safflower oil.” [She uses these objects later to appease the ogress.]
That was it, of course, she became beautiful, with long black hair, white complexion, black eyes, rosy cheeks and a honey-dripping tongue.
[She also marries the prince and moves away from her cruel stepmother.]
(El-Shamy 1999, 257-258)

By contrast, the pampered daughter fails to comprehend the merits of opposites and sees things in a limited way: either good or evil. She is punished for her social and spiritual immaturity, remaining unwed and attached to her mother. Consequently, it may be argued, the girl who recognizes the merits of the “union of opposites” undergoes the process of individuation successfully: she achieves beauty, recognition, and other social and personal rewards accorded prominent individuals. Conversely, her stepsister fails to be individuated and remains a burdensome dependent on her mother.

From this perspective, the key motifs in this account are U2808, “Balance between merits and demerits, advantages and disadvantages, good and evil”; U28018. “Everything found to have merit”; U28128. “Merits and demerits of gender (female, male)”; U28118. “Merits and demerits of color (black, white)” and H103018. “Maturity (growing up, independence, ‘individuation’) gained by leaving home” (El-Shamy 1999; 1999, 257-258).

CONCLUSION

In considering explanations of why the coniunctio pattern exists, one confronts a difference of emphasis between traditional religious accounts and those of modern secular thinkers. The religious traditions in which the symbolism of coniunctio figure prominently tend to offer top-down explanations: coniunctio patterns in the details of human life are seen as particular manifestations or emanations of those patterns as they exist in the character of the demiurge or as the deepest principles of the cosmos as a whole (for example, when the demiurge is of dual nature or perhaps a twin deity). Modern secular thinkers, by contrast, tend to offer a bottom-up approach, seeing the coniunctio patterns found in traditional, mythic cosmologies as projections of concrete human experiences.

For example, because human bodies are approximately symmetrical in form, perhaps we project this immediate experience of dualism—or, more precisely, of dualism within unity—onto the cosmos as a whole (see especially Hertz 1978). The Durkheimian school of sociology has particularly enlivened this theme of cosmological projection: in addition to Hertz’s arguments about the body, Durkheim and Mauss (1972) focus on the cosmological projection of social structures based on paired moieties (see also Ortiz 1969), while gender dualism figures importantly in Mauss’s (1967) analysis of the ways in which gender oppositions in ritual and economic exchange shape social custom and cosmological speculation.

Moreover, in psychoanalytic literature on ambivalence, in the structuralist focus on oppositions and their mediation, and in Marxist interest in Hegelian metaphysics, one encounters statements as much imbued with the idea of the union of opposites as anything found in traditional mythology—for example, the claim of Marx and Engels (1970, 131): “Production is thus at the same time consumption, and consumption is at the same time production. Each is simultaneously its opposite.” The fervent archetypalist thus might regard it as ultimately arbitrary, even though practically necessary, to limit the study of the coniunctio theme to traditional folk narratives.

These seemingly esoteric Marxian and similar theses are not unique to elite academic circles. They do have older counterparts in folk cultures based on folkloric behavior. As argued: “There are indications that such psychological (and sociological) concepts . . . do appear in folk expressions as a matter of empirical observation, and that they can be of significant classificatory (indexing) usefulness” (El-Shamy 1995, xiii-xiv; emphasis added). A folk truism from Egypt reveals that the folk view consumption and production as constituting a “union of opposites”: “Were it not for breakage, kilns (pottery-making) would not exist” (designated as Motif P775,3.0.1§ under the economic institution of “Consumption: an economic necessity” (P775,3).§)

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See also: Good and Evil; Hermaphroditism; Individuation.

REFERENCES


The vast role of water in the world’s stories is reflected in the very large number of motifs devoted to it. These motifs are found throughout various chapters of the Motif-Index.

The symbolism of water is ambivalent: on the one hand, it animates and creates; on the other hand, it functions as a symbol of destruction (E82, “Water of life and death. One water kills, the other restores to life”). While water is perceived as the source of life on earth and necessary for its sustenance, it is also where the sun sets down in order to give warmth during the night to the realm of the dead. A common motif in the journey to the underworld is the crossing of a body of water. In Greek myth, the dead are ferried across the river Styx to reach Hades. The gods sometimes take oaths by the river Styx, pouring out the water from a cup as they do. Wayland Hand notes that the idea of the dead crossing a river or a body of water is perceived as a safe way to keep them from coming back to plague the living (Hand 1983, 7).

In Gilgamesh, originally a Sumerian story and reworked over 2,000 years, the hero undertakes a journey to the otherworld, actually an earthly paradise at the confluence of two rivers, which involves crossing a body of water—“the waters of death”—with the help of a boatman. Gilgamesh is warned by the possibly divine tavern keeper Siduri that “none from the beginning of days has been able to cross the sea. . . . / Paintful is the crossing, troublesome the road, / And everywhere the waters of death stream across its face” (10.2.24–25).

Beautiful rivers, fountains, and streams are prominent fixtures in descriptions of earthly paradises. Four rivers flow from the Garden of Eden. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah speaks of the need to bring water to the barren lands
Beautiful rivers, fountains, and streams are prominent fixtures in descriptions of earthly paradises. From Hyperotomachia Poliphili (1499).

of Israel: “I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water” 41:18–20.

CREATION MYTHS

Creation myths universally describe how various bodies of water came into being. In the Mythological Motifs section of the Motif-Index, under Cosmogony and Cosmology, Creation of the Earth, there is a section devoted to water features, A910–949. What we now know as scientific fact—that life started in the oceans—the ancients seemed to know intuitively. The Greeks considered Oceanus—water—as the great cosmic power through which all life grows, represented in mythology as a benign old god. Oceanus is a primal river encircling the globe, giving rise to all other rivers.

Creation myths of cultures around the globe contain a story of a deluge as a world calamity (A1010, “Deluge. Inundation of whole world or section”). The myths of many cultures have gods and goddesses devoted to water realms, for example A421, “Sea-god” A427.1, “Goddesses of springs and wells”; A421.1, “Sea-goddess.” Both the Greeks and the Romans attributed a prophetic power to springs, such as the ancient one at Delphi. In Norse mythology, the spring of Mimir at the base of Yggdrasil, the world tree, is an example of holy water. (Lindahl, McNamara, and Lindow 2000, 2:1029).

THE WATER OF LIFE

Water of life (E80, “Water of Life. Resuscitation by water”) is a well-known motif around the world. The water, generally believed to be found in a far-off lake, spring, or well, has the power to restore youth. The search for this water is a motif in numerous stories (H1321.1, “Quest for healing water”), and the tale type in which it occurs is AT 551, The Sons on a Quest for a Wonderful Remedy for Their Father. In the version which the Grimms collected, “The Water of Life” (Das Wasser des Lebens, KHM 97), a sick king can be cured only by the water of life, and his three sons set out one at a time to find it. The story encompasses the motif of the kind and unkind (Q2), since the two older brothers are rude to a dwarf along the way, who then enchants them, but the youngest son is kind to him, and the dwarf directs him to the water. After a series of adventures, the youngest brother obtains the water of life, cures his father, and marries an enchanted princess.

In the Babylonian tradition, the goddess Ishtar descends to the underworld, searching for Tammuz in order to restore him with the water of life. However, she, too, has to be given fresh living water before her ascent to the upper world (Van der Toorn et al. 1999, 867).

In folktales, people often enter a lower world through a hole, spring, or cavern (F92), or a well (F93.0.2.1). In the Grimms’ tale “Frau Holle” (AT 480, The Spinners by the Well), a mistreated stepdaughter who is made to spin every day by a well drops her shuttle in when she is washing her blood from it, and “in the sorrow of her heart she jumped into the well to get the shuttle. She lost her senses; and when she awoke and came to herself again, she was in a lovely meadow where the sun was shining and many thousands of flowers were growing” (Grimms’ Household Tales 1968, 79).

An analogous tale told by the Chaga of Africa also has the motif of entering the underworld through water. A girl, in despair of her parents’ anger, jumps into a pool. She too sinks down until she comes to the underworld.

There are magic wells (D926), magic springs (D927), and magic fountains (D925) in folklore throughout the world. Wells may also be the portal to fairyland (F212.1, “Fairyland entered through well”) or provide a channel of communication between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Mysterious helpers and the shades of the departed may be met at wells. In the Chinese
tale, “Husband and Wife in This Life and the Life to Come,” a man who sets out to find his dead wife is told he must wait for her by a well (Eberhard 1965, 31). In another Chinese tale, “The Water Mother,” a poor woman is compelled to work day and night and fetch water several times a day from a distant well. She sits down at the edge of the well and speaks aloud about throwing herself down into it. “Suddenly an old white-haired woman appeared, who motioned her back, saying, ‘Why do you want to die?’ The old woman gives her a magic wand and tells her that all she needs do is have water is strike the pail once, and only once, with the rod, and never tell anyone else about it” (Eberhard 1965, 112-113).

**IN LITERATURE**

The historical and belief legend of Alexander is rich in motifs related to water. El-Shamy notes these motifs as the following: D1338.1.2. “Water of youth”; H1376.7, “Quest for immortality”; H1321.3, “Quest for the water of youth.” An example is the legend of Iskendername, in the Ottoman court literature. El-Shamy notes that this legend shows similarities to the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*, including the hero’s invincibility, his search for immortality, the discovery of precious stones in the dark part of the earth, the plant (or water) of immortality, the acquisition of the plant (or water) of immortality by an animal or person who was not originally interested in it, and the hero’s inevitable death and the perpetual life of the creature who got the plant or water” (El-Shamy 1980, 272).

In the *hikaye* (oral tale performance) tradition in Anatolia (Turkey), the quest for the water of life motif appears in the Köröglü epic from the fourteenth century. Köröglü (son of the blind) is a victorious bandit who rebels against the feudal authority. Köröglü’s horse drinks from a spring, which happens to be the fountain of youth. Once the fountain of youth is not a secret anymore, it disappears (Boratav 1984, 68–69). Köröglü’s father describes such a fountain and recites a chapter from the Qur’an, and then one star from the east and one from the west conjoin. Köröglü sets off in that direction in order to find the fountain and get the curing water to open the eyes of the old blind man (D1505.5, “Magic water restores sight”) (Boratav 1984, 81).

Plunging the sick into water (E80.1, “Resuscitation by bathing”) has been a widely known cultural practice in the world in order to obtain a kind of a blessing or cure from water. In Islam, too, the ritual washing is also a symbolically purifying ritual. For ablation, where water is missing (in the desert), one may use sand instead. In a ritual reminiscent of the symbolic value of baptism in Christianity, the bodies of the deceased are washed according to religious rules in both Islam and Judaism, in order to cleanse the dead from their sins. In ancient Greece, in the so-called ‘Orphic’ texts . . . the soul is ‘parched with thirst’ and wants to drink the water of Memory; in the eschatological myths of Plato and Virgil, the souls drink the water of Oblivion’ (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003).

**REFERENCES**


