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Duck Watch: The War Bundle

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Duck Watch

The War Bundle

In this time of war talk, it is appropriate to remember that Trickster too goes to war.

In the beginning of the Winnebago Trickster Cycle, Paul Radin recounts how a certain chief called all together for a feast of four large deer before going on the warpath. After the feast, the chief suddenly leaves the group, and later when the guests go to find him, they find him, in violation of the customs, cohabiting with a woman; so they all return home. A second time this chief calls all to a war feast, but this time it is two large deer and two large bears that make the meal, and again the chief leaves the feast, and after awhile is found in bed with a woman, and they all go home again since nothing can be done. A third time the chief calls them together for a feast of four large male bears, and sure enough after they had eaten, the chief left the group and a while later was found again in the arms of a woman, and all the guests went home even though they had expected to go on the warpath. But the fourth time when the chief called for a feast of four female bears, the guest knew it “was all talk” and decided just to go for the good food. But surprisingly this time the chief stayed and when the feast was over rose up picked up the war bundle and cried out “It is I who am going on the warpath to fight, I” But after saying this he turns and smashes his war boat. The people look on and see “Then those who had before thought he was a wicked person were convinced and returned home. Some, however, remained and accompanied him on foot.” And then when the few followed Trickster, they see him stamp the war bundle into the ground and throw away the arrow bundle all the while claiming, “It is I who am going on the warpath...but you, war bundle, cannot do this, you can do nothing of value.”

I don't really know if this trickster tale has the significance for today that I hear in my head, but as America has prepared to war, we have gone repeatedly to the war table to feast on sustenance of war. In our sorrow and anger at September 11th, we have made the feast of war and we have laid down with the goddess of war. I fear that like the chief we march to the good feelings of war, we make up our war bundles, and we gather our weapons, and even when we see Trickster smashing our own boats, some of us will still go off to a war. I fear we don't really see what Trickster does with and to the bundles, and we laugh at the egotism of his declaration of war – forgetting that is really true that we – only we – are the ones going to war. It is after all our choice to do this thing, and the consequences to it may not be laughable at all. Peace!

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