

Hermēs Dolios: Performances of Hermes as trickster in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Greek god Hermes' representation in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* to establish the extent to which he partakes in Hynes' defined set of characteristics associated with mythological 'trickster' figures. Hermes is an unorthodox figure as although he embodies many aspects of the trickster, he willingly relinquishes some of these aspects within his hymn. I first outline and explore the trickster phenomenon and the complex methodological issue concerning global comparison. Hynes' criteria are first applied to three other tricksters the Amerindian (Winnebago) trickster Wakdjunkaga, the central African (Azande) trickster Ture and the northern European (Norse) trickster Loki, which establishes a baseline that will help determine how Hermes conforms to this typology. All three figures' cultural contexts are first addressed, as the cultural context is key in understanding a figure's potential inclusion in the trickster category. I then explore Hermes' performances within his hymn and other genres to formulate how his patron powers and actions relate to his designation as a trickster. I argue, in conclusion, that Hynes' typology is a useful tool in determining any figure's degree of 'tricksterness' and show that Hermes and the other three figures do embody Hynes' characteristics. Each, however, embodies them differently and in a specific manner. I argue that the manner in which they relate to the criteria is dictated by their respective cultural contexts, and what their narrators intended to illustrate through the stories wherein tricksters reside. I further argue that narrative intent, genre and cultural context appear to be the main factors that mould each respective figure.

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university

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Preface

I want to thank my supervisor Daniel Malamis sincerely, his support, kindness and advice have been integral to this endeavor. He has been a devoted ally who has dedicated an excessive amount of time to provide me with necessary edits and enlightening comments that have enhanced and clarified this work throughout. His kindness and support are not limited to this thesis; he has been my advocate since the beginning of my dive into Classical Studies. He has been my shepherd, guiding my ideas and arguments to the right sources and conclusions. Always there and always patient, thank you.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to explore the representation of the Greek god Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, to establish the extent to which he partakes in Hynes' defined set of characteristics associated with mythological 'trickster' figures.¹ Tricksters are the embodiment of ambiguity; they reside on the edge of socio-cultural boundaries and delight in breaking their societies' taboos through deceit and clever tricks. These figures have been found in the mythologies of a wide range of different world cultures.² Tricksters are characterised by their ambivalence, by an insatiable appetite that is both sexual and gastric, by their trick-playing, their ability to breach boundaries, their roles as herald and intermediary between humans and gods and as inventor of new tools for humanity, and by their shape-shifting.³ That so complex a figure, encompassing several opposing positive and negative characteristics, should appear in numerous mythic narratives, has provoked much interest within the academic community.

Hermes, who is the focal point of this study, is the Olympian god of travel, domestic animals and herdsmen, commerce, language, lies, lots, theft and deceit, luck, the messenger of the gods and 'psychopomp' who guides the souls of the dead to Hades: contradictory traits of good and bad that make him an outsider in a very rigid society.⁴ Hermes' sphere of authority is complicated due to the often opposing positive and negative values under his control. This disparity has led scholars such as Vernant to suggest "that in the beginning there must have been several different Hermes gods, which later merged into one".⁵ Hermes resides on society's boundaries; it is this aspect that allows him to function as a guide to Hades and the reason why the stone 'herms' were used to establish territorial boundaries.⁶ Several areas under Hermes' patronage conform to our understanding of the trickster figure: his position on social-cultural boundaries, his friendship with mortals, and the trickery, lies, and deceptions that he acts out within his respective narratives. However, although tricksters

¹ Hynes & Doty 1997: 34.

² America: Radin, Kerényi, Jung 1956; Ricketts 1966; Africa: Pelton 1980; Evans-Pritchard 1967; Scandinavia: Frakes 1987; Rooth 1961.

³ Doueïhi 1984: 285.

⁴ Guirand 1977: 123-4.

⁵ Vernant 2006: 160.

⁶ Burkert (2013: 156) suggests that Hermes' name derives from a single term: *herma*, a heap of stones, a monument set up as an elementary form of demarcation.

are the embodiment of ambiguity and unpredictability, Hermes is still an Olympian god who, in Greek mythological narratives, has to conform to a strict hierarchy under the authority of Zeus.⁷ There seems to be an inherent contradiction between Hermes' status as a trickster and as an Olympian. This is particularly clear in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* depicts Hermes as a thief, liar and mischief-maker. He plays tricks on his brother Apollo, stealing his sacred cattle and employs deceptive wordplay against Zeus to avoid perjuring himself.⁸ As with all Homeric hymns, the *Hymn to Hermes* sets out to express the quintessential nature of the chosen divinity through the character's words and actions and to explain how they acquired the necessary status to be admitted into the Olympian hierarchy.⁹ The questions that this thesis aims to answer are: Where did this figure originate? In what ways has the figure of Hermes developed throughout its history? How can Hermes function as an outsider within such a rigid hierarchy? What are the similarities and differences, if any, between descriptions of tricksters in comparative studies and representations of Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*? To what extent is Hermes different from our traditional understanding of trickster figures? Should he be considered a trickster in this light? These questions have prompted this investigation into the legitimacy of including Hermes in the trickster category. Through understanding his functionality, I intend to determine the extent to which Hermes conforms to the trickster category outlined by Hynes & Doty.

The first chapter addresses the trickster phenomenon and outlines the complex methodological issues attached to comparative studies of this figure. Chapter two introduces and analyses the three other trickster figures discussed in terms of Hynes' typology.¹⁰ Chapters three and four focus on Hermes and discuss his origins, functions, and consider the extent to which he relates to the trickster figure within his *Homeric Hymn*. Chapter five compares and analyses these findings, bringing together Hermes and the other three figures for analytical comparison. This discussion aims to determine how Hermes

⁷ Clay 2006: 96.

⁸ Vergados 2011: 22-5.

⁹ Clay 2006: 96.

¹⁰ Hynes' six criteria are: 1) The fundamentally ambiguous personality of the trickster; 2) The trickster as deceivers or trick players; 3) The trickster as shape-shifter; 4) The trickster as situation-inverter; 5) The trickster as messenger or imitator of the gods; 6) The trickster as sacred bricoleur (Hynes & Doty 1997: 34).

relates to and differs from the trickster category and to address the possible reasons why he may or may not differ.

The first chapter includes a review of how scholars have attempted to engage with and study the trickster figure. The oldest of these perspectives is the 'universalist' one, which presents arguments for describing this figure as a universal category. Scholars such as Radin, Ricketts and Jung suggest that tricksters are a universal archetype found within all cultural narratives and, in terms of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, within all individuals.¹¹ This group of scholars argues for the trickster's universality as an undisputed archetype. In contrast there are 'nominalist' scholars such as Evans-Pritchard and Beidelman, who reject the idea that tricksters are a universal category and have called for the elimination of the term trickster all together, believing that a global approach to any figure is impossible and will only diminish the complexity of the figure to a set of arbitrary similarities.¹² Instead, these scholars locate each cultural narrative within the relevant social-structural information and emphasise that audiences understand trickster narratives' details according to their specific cultural background.

These scholars, moreover, warn of the dangers of imposing a Westernised set of cultural categories onto non-Western cultures, as, they argue, is the case in Radin and Jung's analysis of Amerindian folklore. These critics note that application of the trickster category tends to be more reductive than constructive, restricting these figures to a specific character type even if they are not perceived in such a way within the local cultural context.¹³ The study of tricksters therefore faces a critical methodological issue: can we describe a general category or only attain knowledge of a particular case? W. J. Hynes & W. G Doty, in their 1997 publication *Mythical Trickster Figures: contours, context, and criticisms* address this question and attempt to find a middle ground between the two extreme approaches to the trickster study. They believe that by transitioning back and forth between the peculiarities of a specific trickster discussed within their respective religious contexts on the one hand,

¹¹ Radin, Kerényi & Jung 1956: 210; Mac Linscott Ricketts 1966: 334.

¹² Evans-Pritchard 1963: 16; Basso 1987 & Beidelman 1980.

¹³ Wessels 2008: 22.

and engaging in interconnections between relevant particulars and generalisations on the other hand, the two perspectives will balance each other.¹⁴

By understanding the various ways of analysing and comparing tricksters, this study will be better equipped to engage with and analyse Hermes. In light of criticisms levelled against the comparative method, this thesis will employ Hynes & Doty's methodological approach to compare Hermes with other trickster figures. Hynes & Doty do acknowledge critics that oppose comparison but argue that the fact that these trickster figures embody similar features across numerous societies should encourage scholars to explore comparative social functions, psychological mechanisms, literary traces, relationships to religious systems and ritual performances.¹⁵ In acknowledging those that oppose the comparative framework, Hynes & Doty approach every trickster account on two levels. Firstly, they argue, one must examine the specific, local, tribal, historically bounded context understood by the historian of a specific religious tradition. The second level is to examine the larger context of what appears to be a broader phenomenon of generalised human cultural behaviour.¹⁶ I intend to use Hynes & Doty's two-level approach throughout this thesis in an attempt to engage in the comparative method while still respecting the individuality and unique context of each respective figure.

The second chapter outlines the trickster phenomenon and addresses the elements that characterise tricksters focusing on Hynes' six characteristics. These characteristics will be used as a guiding tool to help navigate the comparative work and address the methodological issues concerning comparison with other trickster figures. The three other trickster figures treated here are the Amerindian (Winnebago) trickster Wakdjunkaga,¹⁷ the central African (Azande) trickster Ture¹⁸ and the northern European (Norse) trickster Loki.¹⁹ Each figure is analysed and discussed within its cultural context before being compared to others. Hynes' model of six characteristics that are common to all trickster myths, which he argues may serve as a map or guide to understanding the trickster figure within its specific

¹⁴ Hynes & Doty 1997: 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁷ Radin 1956; Green 2009; The Winnebago trickster's name can be spelt either as Wakdjunkaga or Wakdjunga. I follow Radin's spelling Wakdjunkaga throughout this thesis.

¹⁸ Barker and Sinclair 1970; Evans-Pritchard 1967; Beidelman 1980: 27-42.

¹⁹ Hollander 2011; Byock 2005; Thorpe 2006; Rooth 1961.

cultural background, are applied to these three tricksters to establish a comprehensive picture of what elements characterise a trickster figure. This study's findings thus establish reference points for the analysis of Hermes within his hymn. I conclude that there is indeed merit in applying Hynes' typology, as it helps illustrate some general characteristics that appear common to all three figures. However, although each trickster conforms to the category in all six criteria, each figure still manifests in a unique way that is informed by their context, immediate motivations and culture's narrative intent.

The third chapter focuses on Hermes, outlining his possible origins and the disparate set of divine functions attributed to him, discussing possible reasons why he may have acquired these and considering how these functions inform his potential role as a trickster. An examination of Hermes' various representations in ancient Greek literature is undertaken to assess how ancient Greek audiences perceived and understood this figure. Hermes' role within Homeric Epic, Old Comedy and Fable is discussed together with a brief analysis of what each genre entails and how generic concerns may have informed how Hermes is depicted in each. I argue that Hermes' various divine powers agree to some extent with elements of the trickster category. In all aspects, they illustrate the intangible liminal facets of human culture, such as death, trade and movement, and perhaps most importantly his profoundly human connection. Hermes' ties to humanity appear to be one of the most vital indicators of his status as an outsider to his divine context and, potentially, his role as a trickster. Through analysing his performances within other literary genres, it appears evident that Hermes embodies many of the trickster criteria, particularly regarding his penchant for greed, his liminality, his willingness to both engage in comedic self-abasement and his unique relationship with mortals. This analysis, furthermore, shows how important consideration of genre is when dealing with potential trickster figures: although Hermes observes aspects of tricksters, he relates to it differently according to the genre in which he appears, with each exemplifying different aspects.

Chapter four addresses the most extensive and significant Greek mythic narrative concerning the god: the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, composed in the late sixth or early fifth

century BCE.²⁰ The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* outlines the god's origins and the actions he takes to acquire a position within the Olympian hierarchy. This analysis of the hymn helps to illustrate the extent to which Hermes performs as a trickster, how he acquires his divine patronage and, importantly, why he submits to Zeus' authority at the end of the hymn. Hermes' performances within his hymn are assessed in light of Hynes' six criteria to determine the extent to which Hermes agrees with and departs from the trickster category. I conclude that Hermes does conform to all six of Hynes' criteria within his hymn. Like the three other trickster figures, Hermes follows Hynes' criteria in his own specific ways. He is motivated by base desires such as hunger and employs clever tricks and subverted language in order to attain his desires. It is, however, evident that Hermes differs in one crucial respect: he relinquishes aspects of his trickster plasticity and liminality and submits to Olympus at the end of the hymn.

The fifth and final chapter compares the findings derived from applying Hynes' criteria to Hermes and the other three tricksters. This comparison highlights how these figures differ and agree with the trickster concept and helps to identify the typology's usefulness. The answers found through this analysis will be used to determine the extent to which Hermes is different from tricksters and why this may or may not be the case. Furthermore, a discussion regarding the importance of narrative context and the question of how narratives are created and recorded within cultures will help to formulate an answer as to why Hermes may be perceived as different regarding the trickster category. I conclude that Hynes' six criteria are indeed a useful tool in identifying a trickster figure. I argue, however, that the trickster label is not a universal category but rather a convenient description for a specific type of liminal and amoral narrative creature found through many cultures' myths, legends and folktales. I also propose that what makes Hermes so different is that he derives from a culture that recorded several different and often contradicting narratives regarding him, as opposed to the other three figures, each of whom originates essentially from a single oral tradition introduced to Western thought by an outsider to their culture. These marked differences in narrative, I argue, have led to a different depiction of Hermes. Hermes

²⁰ Kirk 1985: 74; Janko 1982: 133-50; Radermacher 1931:216, 222; Eitrem 1906: 282; Allen, Halliday, and Sikes: 1936: 275-76.

appears 'tamed' in his hymn because the *Homeric Hymns'* fundamental function is to introduce various deities into the rigid hierarchy of Olympus.

Throughout this thesis, all references to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* are abbreviated to *HHH* and all references to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* are abbreviated to *HHA*. Although numerous sources regarding the *Homeric Hymns* have been considered during this study, this thesis quotes both the Greek text and the English translation from Martin L. West's 2003 Loeb edition of '*Homeric Hymns Homeric Apocrypha Lives Of Homer*'.²¹

²¹ West, M. (2003). *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer (Loeb Classical Library 496)*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Chapter 1: Understanding Tricksters

Tricksters are the embodiment of ambiguity, whether moral or in terms of social norms and customs. If we are to assume that all myths and stories of any variety require specific types of characters in order to make the narrative function, then tricksters are the convenient jack of all trades. Take, for example, the traditional character types of the hero and villain: two clearly defined categories that work in balanced opposition and play on each other in predictable ways. Villains embrace what is socially condemned, while heroes uphold customs and beliefs that are, in some way, integral to the narrative of their respective cultures. Tricksters are amoral, wholly neutral and embraces both the good and the bad. Change is persistent and unrelenting, which poses issues for a rigid and codified belief system: tricksters, who are the embodiment of ambiguity, has the flexibility to inhabit a variety of often paradoxical roles that other more defined figures cannot. It is their ambiguity that allows tricksters to be both a cultural hero and buffoon at the same time, for they are the mind and consciousness of a human in the body of a powerful god; they inhabit the grey and create bridges between different cosmic and social spaces. This unique positioning allows

*tricksters [to] cross lines, breaking or blurring connections and distinctions between right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead.*²²

Many are drawn to the study of trickster figures because it appears to be a universal category or archetype. There is, however, much debate concerning the validity of the trickster archetype and the dangers of imposing a Westernised set of cultural categories onto non-Western cultures, as has occurred within the study of Amerindian and African folklore. Those in support of this idea argue that the act of labelling non-Western cultural figures as tricksters is reductive and in no way a constructive or meaningful process, as it confines the figure to a fixed character type, even if within the local context they are not understood in this way.²³

²² Hyde 2010: 11.

²³ Wessels 2008: 3, 22.

Issues concerning comparative methodology

Given the ambiguous nature of tricksters, it is, perhaps, not surprising to discover that those who attempt to study them are faced with a methodological problem presented in a duality of extremes. On the one side of this divide are scholars who belong to what we might call the universalist school, follow Jungian psychology and see tricksters as a universal archetype that can be met within each individual and most systems of belief. On the other side are the nominalist scholars²⁴ who have called for the elimination of the term 'trickster' altogether, as it implies that a global approach to such figures is possible, and believe it is more appropriate to study only one cultural group at a time.²⁵ By focusing on only one cultural figure at a time, these scholars aim to avoid the dangers of reducing these culturally sophisticated figures into two-dimensional beings that easily fit into the universal category of tricksters, with all other culturally specific functions thrown to the wayside. The study of tricksters, therefore, faces a critical methodological issue: can we describe a general category or only attain knowledge of a particular case? By analysing the two extreme positions and how scholars have attempted to resolve the methodological issue that concerns trickster figures, we will garner a better understanding of how to study this figure appropriately.

To understand tricksters, one must first understand the various arguments and theories of how they are perceived. Section 1 will address the historical debate of tricksters and will articulate the theories of those who see them as a universal category or archetype that can be located within the myths and legends of almost all global cultures. Section 2 will address the theories of scholars who belong to the nominalist perspective, which rejects the universalist approach, arguing that any attempts at cross-comparing figures from highly different socio-cultural backgrounds are reductive. Section 3 will address scholars seeking a middle approach to this subject. These scholars acknowledge the reductive elements of the universal approach. They argue however that the term trickster is a critical, descriptive category, as it displays a cluster of shared characteristics found in a variety of global cultures. Such scholars have attempted to construct typologies or set criteria to help

²⁴ Hynes & Doty 1997: 10; Utz 1990: The nominalist approach denies the existence of universals and abstract objects, but affirms the existence of general or abstract terms and predicates.

²⁵ Hynes & Doty 1997: 4-5.

identify possible candidates for the trickster category. This section will, in particular, address William Hynes' model of six characteristics that are common to all trickster myths. An in-depth analysis of these six criteria will be presented in chapter two.

Section 1: Universalist theories

Section 1.1: Radin, Kerényi & Jung: the universalist approach

The first comprehensive study on tricksters was the 1956 publication of *The Trickster: A Study in Native American Mythology* by Paul Radin with commentaries by Karl Kerényi, a classical philologist most noted for his foundational work on Greek mythology, and C. G. Jung, a founder of analytical psychology, which he employed in his argument for the existence of an archetypal trickster figure. The publication was the first to attempt a comparative study of trickster figures, focusing on the Amerindian Winnebago trickster Wakdjunkaga and other Amerindian tricksters. Kerényi compares the figure of Hermes to Radin's trickster, and Jung outlines his theory of the trickster as an archetype found in humanity's 'collective unconsciousness'.²⁶

Radin recounts and analyses the myth cycle of the Winnebago trickster Wakdjunkaga, whose name means 'tricky one', as well as the Winnebago Hare cycle. Radin sees the Wakdjunkaga narratives as a well-formed mythic cycle that starts with the trickster's intentional separation from human society and finishes after a cyclical repetition of successes and failures, with his eventual retirement from the earth and ascension into the heavens after he has finally accomplished the task given to him by Earthmaker, to make the world more habitable for humans. He is subsequently placed in charge of a world beneath the world of Earthmaker.²⁷

For Radin, within their narratives, tricksters function as "a transcendental or 'archetypal' characteristic of the human psyche stemming from its most archaic strata."²⁸ Radin is clearly influenced by Jung and his idea of the archetype, which he sees as a "primitive

²⁶ Jung in Radin 1956: 210.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 3-53.

²⁸ Hynes & Doty 1997: 15.

developmental level that is common to all humanity.”²⁹ He sees trickster cycles as a representation of one’s psychosexual or psychosocial journey from a being foreshadowing the shape of humanity, to a fully developed human.³⁰ Tricksters are: “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”.³¹ Radin argues that it is only by analysing tricksters as humanity’s effort to explain its problems, from within and without, that the contradictory asocial figure becomes understandable and meaningful.³²

Following Jung’s evolutionary psychology, Radin sees trickster narratives as the evolution from a ‘subhuman’ or childlike creature into a fully functioning and active member of its society.

*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.*³³

Radin sees this development as a dual process, which happens to both individuals as they develop into fully functioning adults and to the culture as it develops from “primitivism” to “sophistication”. Radin believes that the Wakdjunkaga cycle illustrates this development and sees Wakdjunkaga as initially having the mental disposition of a child. He points to Wakdjunkaga’s grotesque bodily arrangement, that over the course of the narratives becomes altered to resemble the human form. For example, he loses large parts of his intestines which restrict his appetite to a more human level and also loses the massive detachable phallus which he carries in a box on his back. He even changes his sex in order to get married and secure a steady supply of food from his gullible husband.³⁴ Over time, a trickster develops an understanding of himself, his body and others just as a child does.

The trickster is represented as the creator of the world and the establisher of culture. However, the benefits that he bestows on humanity are not deliberate. Radin sees these benefits as the result of the trickster’s evolution. The trickster is a slave to his appetite and

²⁹ Hynes & Doty 1997: 15.

³⁰ Radin 1956: 133.

³¹ *Ibid.* x.

³² *Ibid.* x.

³³ *Ibid.* 133.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 142.

thus, for Radin, illustrates a proto-human or animal figure. Radin sees this figure as the oldest character in all myths, not just among the Amerindians. For Radin the phenomena of the archetype are universal and the developmental model is fundamental. They represent both human development and variation as well as a religiously maturing figure. The trickster thus developed from cultural buffoon to a cultural hero who is an active agent in humanity's welfare.

Radin, who asserts that duality is a mark of those 'spoiled by civilisation', attempts to justify the perceived duality of the Winnebago trickster by arguing that the figure is the result of the merging of two distinct figures, "a deity with two sides to his nature, one constructive, one destructive, one spiritual, one material".³⁵ In order to keep his theory of psychological evolutionism, Radin argues that the Winnebago myth is not more 'developed' and able to appreciate duality, but instead that the narrative shows "the intrusion of one distinct group of culture-hero narratives upon another purely trickster-centred cycle".³⁶ Here we see one example of the reductive dangers of the universal comparative approach, which quickly disregards important culturally specific information in order to maintain the image of the trickster as a universal category. Wessels notes the issue of Western scholars attempting to forcefully merge two similar figures, who within the specific cultural context do not have this value.³⁷

Kerényi looks for classical parallels to the Winnebago trickster and finds them in combinational characters such as Prometheus-Epimetheus and a 'Herculean Hermes'.³⁸ He sees the latter figure as specifically ithyphallic in nature, demonstrated by Hermes' association with phallic road markers called herms. The main point of his analysis rests on concepts of disorder and boundary crossing. Hermes is a

*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.*³⁹

³⁵ Radin 1956: 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 124.

³⁷ Wessels 2008: 22-3.

³⁸ Kerényi in Radin 1956: 186.

³⁹ Kerényi in Radin 1956: 185.

Essentially, a tricksters' ability to transcend all types of socio-cultural boundaries allows the audience of their narratives to vicariously breach taboo without actually doing so.

Jung's theory of the archetype is the cornerstone of Radin's arguments, but his theory has also been criticised for its reliance on Radin's study of the Winnebago cycle. According to Pelton, 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.*⁴⁰

Despite such criticism, Jung's theory has been highly influential in regards to the study of tricksters.

*Jungian psychotherapists consider the Trickster Archetype to be the guide of the journey of individuation and of psychotherapy, much as alchemists saw Mercurius as the guide of the opus, and the Greeks saw Hermes as the guide of souls.*⁴¹

For Jung, "all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them."⁴² He believes that tricksters are a type of mythical figure that is predominately found within what he calls 'primitive' societies, as members of these societies, as yet unspoiled by civilisation, are able to experience a kind of spiritual enlightenment that more 'advanced' groups now repress.⁴³ Tricksters represent a part of the individual and the collective society; they reflect base and instinctual desires. In this respect, tricksters are a non-conscious figure, a pre-rational being. Initially, tricksters developed as a collective figure, what Jung terms the 'collective shadow figure'.⁴⁴ Over time, as a consequence of being spoiled by civilisation, this figure becomes personalised and individualised, as society develops a more rational and enlightened level of awareness. The collective shadow does not disappear, however, but is merely repressed and prone to manifesting pathologically, as "countertendencies in the unconscious, and in certain cases by a sort of secondary

⁴⁰ Pelton 1980: 228.

⁴¹ McNeely 1996: 9.

⁴² Jung in Radin 1956: 195.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 198; Jung employs the term 'primitive' without irony. He admires the primitive for having consigned less to the unconscious than has the modern man. However, he does not doubt that the primitive is lower on the rung of evolution. The higher archetypes appear in only rudimentary form in primitive cultures.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 202.

personality, of a puerile and inferior character...".⁴⁵ Practically, this manifests in the form of a social *faux pas* or a Freudian slip. Jung argues that remnants of this collective shadow can be found in carnival customs of fools and clowns, which he believes is proof enough that the personal shadow is partially descended from this collective.⁴⁶ Tricksters also represent positive growth and help guide the development of individualised awareness.

The arguments for the universalism of tricksters derive from these psychological interpretations. These interpretations have, however, been criticised for their insensitive treatment of cultural narratives, which they reduce to a throwback from the 'primitive past'. Furthermore, these psychological interpretations appear to be unwilling or unable to address 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.⁴⁷

In this respect, trickster narratives are a socially sanctioned means of criticising social restrictions without actually engaging in the prohibited activity. They are a way of diverting the consequences of society while remaining a part of it.

In short, the trickster tale becomes little more than a functional steam-valve, be it social or psychological.⁴⁸

Section 1.2: Ricketts

Radin and Jung's theory was developed by Tyler, who argued that the evolutionary sequence of tricksters ends with figures such as Hermes (a Western construct).⁴⁹ The theories psychological implications were further explored in Mac Linscott Ricketts' 1966 article on the North American trickster. Ricketts works with Amerindian sources, and sees an inherent duality (and in some cases a threefold aspect) in trickster figures. For Ricketts tricksters have multiple functions.

⁴⁵ Jung in Radin 1956: 202.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Babcock-Abrahams 1975: 183.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Tyler 1964: 196.

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.⁵⁰

Ricketts focuses on addressing the contradictory nature of trickster figures. He rejects Radin's concept of tricksters evolving into cultural heroes and argues that the trickster-transformer-cultural hero is, in fact, an original unified figure that also happens to be contradictory.

Ricketts sees tricksters as representing humanity as well as the human condition. "The trickster-fixer is the embodiment of a certain mythic apprehension of the nature of man and his place in the cosmos."⁵¹ Tricksters are the embodiment of the human or natural way of affecting change, as opposed to the supernatural way. They can therefore be best understood as the epitome of all the characteristics of humanity elevated to the highest degree.⁵² For this reason, tricksters tend to possess a gross appetite as they reflect humanity's base drives and desires, exaggerated to mythic and fictitious proportions. Ricketts, moreover, sees trickster narratives as a way for human societies to be religious in a manner that either ignores or does not pay homage to supernatural forces. He argues that the trickster-fixer represents humanity being religious in the 'other way': a humanist, as opposed to a priestly or shamanistic approach which seeks guidance and submits to the divine;⁵³ hence the basic antagonism that he sees between shamans and tricksters, who illustrate 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.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ricketts 1966: 327.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 336. Ricketts uses the label 'trickster-fixer' to refer to the trickster's function as creative transformer and cultural hero (1966: 327).

⁵² *Ibid.* 347.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 346.

⁵⁴ Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 87.

Ricketts notes that many trickster narratives resemble comic parodies of shamanistic rituals wherein tricksters actively mock the supernatural powers that shamans embody. Their balanced opposition is clear: shamans look up to the heavens for knowledge and guidance while tricksters look down upon their own hands, an extension of their capabilities. Shamans are accepted by the supernatural realm and respected by their community, acting as a go-between who can ask for aid on behalf of humankind. In contrast, tricksters are antisocial creatures with few to no friends in the heavens who sees the supernatural as humanity's opposition.

*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.*⁵⁵

The trickster's deceptive cunning represents humanity's resourcefulness, while his buffoonery and mistakes illustrate humanity's limitations: limits that shamans can transcend or overcome. Ricketts also notes that tricksters tend to have an oppositional role, or a rivalry with a youthful hero figure that Ricketts calls the 'pure transformer'.⁵⁶ In this respect, Ricketts sees tricksters as the current representation of the human condition while the youthful pure transformer represents the potential or ideal image of humanity.

Section 1.3: Structuralism

Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach to myth has been applied to the study of tricksters. Like Jung, Kerényi and Radin, his analysis of tricksters mainly focuses on Amerindian narratives, although it is implied that this approach can be used cross-culturally. His analysis rests on the assertion that the study of myth is similar to linguistics. The capacity for language is hard-wired in all humans and therefore has universal potential, this same potential he argues, rests in myth-making also. "Myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech" but working at a higher and more complex level.⁵⁷ Like 'normal' language, myths are organised by their essential aspects or units that are defined (and find meaning) through the complex relations that they form. These related aspects form a bundle that gives the myth a recognisable character and structure. Strauss

⁵⁵ Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 92.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 101-2. "He [the pure transformer] is a cipher of ideal humankind: humans-as-we-might-be, rather than humans-as-we-are."

⁵⁷ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 209.

notes that one can diagram these bundles in a synchronic and a diachronic way, sequencing the story and categorising the episodes into columns by theme.⁵⁸

*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.*⁵⁹

The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss defines the myth as all its possible versions, producing a multi-dimensional diagram. This method and understanding, therefore, does not have to rely on the earliest or most authentic version of the myth and can be extended to include literary and scholarly analyses, such as Freud's study of Oedipus.⁶⁰ This approach does not solve the problem of authenticating sources, but does allow for the inclusion of sources that otherwise may be seen as problematic. "Every version belongs to the myth".⁶¹

Lévi-Strauss, when addressing tricksters, first looks at the question of why solitary figures like the Coyote and Raven are assigned as tricksters in many Amerindian narratives. He argues that the myth-maker is always seeking resolution in opposition, which he notes is evident in the carrion eaters who are intermediate between herbivores and carnivores: they are not active killers but creatures who exploit death when possible. In this way, tricksters' function as a mediating figure that finds resolution between binary 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.*⁶²

For Lévi-Strauss such attributes make tricksters ambiguous and contradictory, both good and bad; creative and destructive; lewd and sacred.

Section 1.4: Conclusions: the universalist approach

It has been over half a century since Radin and Jung first published their theories concerning trickster figures. Their theory of the trickster as a universal archetype is seminal but also

⁵⁸ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 212-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 214.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 217.

⁶¹ Lévi-Strauss 1955: 58.

⁶² *Ibid.* 63.

controversial: particularly regarding Jung and Radin's idea of cultural evolution and their notion that certain cultures are 'primitive', or still functioning at a 'childhood' stage of development. Although their ideas have been advanced by the likes of Ricketts and Lévi-Strauss, the majority of contemporary scholarship has focused on separating the useful comparative category they established from the psychoanalytical context that they use to describe it.

Section 2: The Nominalist approaches

Tricksters appear in a wide range of world cultures, and this diversity has led many to doubt that it can be considered a single phenomenon.⁶³ Following the nominalist perspective,⁶⁴ these scholars reject the universal trickster category and warn others of the dangers of imposing a Westernised set of cultural categories onto non-Western cultures, as was the case in Radin and Jung's analysis of Amerindian folklore. These scholars also find the generalised typologies employed by those seeking some common ground between the two approaches, such as Hynes, to be reductive and unhelpful.⁶⁵

Section 2.1: Evans-Pritchard

In his study *The Zande Trickster* Edward Evans-Pritchard argues against the idea of the trickster 'archetype' and locates each cultural narrative within the relevant social-structural information, emphasising that audiences understand details of trickster narratives with reference to their specific cultural background.

*any claim to universality demands in the nature of things a historical or psychological explanation, and thereby defeats the sociological purpose, which is to explain differences rather than similarities.*⁶⁶

With regard to trickster narratives, Evans-Pritchard argues that "there is nothing buried. All is on the surface and there are no repressed symbols to interpret".⁶⁷ He believes that these comparative theories are often deployed in the absence of historical data and cannot

⁶³ Beidelman 1980: 175-6; Evans-Pritchard: 1967: 29; Wessels, 2008: 8-10.

⁶⁴ Hynes & Doty 1997: 10; Utz 1990.

⁶⁵ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 18, 176. On Hynes, see below, section 3.1.

⁶⁶ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 175.

therefore be declared as true or false with any acceptable degree of probability. Evans-Pritchard argues that any attempt at charting a widely cross-cultural category like the trickster involves gross generalisations that cannot be proven or disproven. For example, he suggests that a comparison of trickster characters from two related Amerindian cultures might produce useful insights, but to apply the same method and 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."⁶⁸ Arguing from the standpoint of a social anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard believes that the focus of study should be on cultural differences rather than similarities, since similarities are the province of an abstract historical or psychological approach, elements that cannot be definitively proven.⁶⁹ This has not, however, prevented Western scholars from undermining traditional cultural interpretations by "going beneath the surface" of a culturally specific narrative in the hopes of discovering an all-encompassing universal pattern and the motifs that inspire it.⁷⁰

Section 2.2: Beidelman

In 'the moral imagination of the Kaguru: some thoughts on tricksters, translation and comparative analysis', Beidelman doubts the usefulness of the trickster as a general analytical category, and the comparative method itself.⁷¹ He cautions scholars against starting their analysis by "assuming the obviousness of the category they are about to examine".⁷² Beidelman efficiently summarises the theories of those who have left a distinct mark on the discussion of trickster figures and believes that there is little to nothing of value to be gained from the "general, global approach".⁷³ Instead, like Evans-Pritchard, he suggests that scholars should focus on only one particular society at a time as it would be better to study "particular tricksters and their contexts well".⁷⁴ He criticises scholars who employ broad typologies that attempt to categorise the potential tricksters' functions and suggests that scholars should ask "what the texts suggest about a particular society's mode

⁶⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 175.

⁶⁹ Evans-Pritchard 1966: 25.

⁷⁰ Wessels 2008: 18.

⁷¹ Beidelman 1980 reprinted in Hynes & Doty 1997: 174.

⁷² Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 175.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

of thought and form of organization, rather than raising questions about tricksters in general".⁷⁵ Beidelman notes the tendency of scholars to locate disparate and ambiguous figures under the universal category of the trickster. He criticises the term as "the product of the analysts' ethnocentric evaluations of deviance and disorder and does not always derive squarely from the evaluations held by the members of the cultures in which they appear".⁷⁶ Context is key, and, since aspects of ambiguity and disorder potentially mean different things to different cultures, these elements may characterise moral concerns rather than deviancy or subversion. Beidelman cites Geoffrey Kirk's criticism of the West's inclination to place a comprehensive and disparate range of texts under the title of myth and sees the universal category of tricksters as equally reductive.⁷⁷ Beidelman argues that "the category trickster may be merely the product of a series of false translations, much as terms such as family and witchcraft seem incomparable cross-culturally when taken out of context".⁷⁸ He goes on to illustrate this point by giving examples of local and particular analysis of specific Kaguru figures and is acutely aware of the paradox he is about to engage in, since in "presenting material in order to criticize a global definition, one is drawn into using the very terms and references which one is subjecting to question".⁷⁹

Through this process of engaging only in the local and particular sphere of a narrative, Beidelman emphasises that cultural context is key to understanding the nuances of a society's narrative traditions. He notes that what draws many mythological characters into the universal category of trickster figures are their ambiguous and paradoxical role as a social benefactor and malicious deceiver or destroyer figure. Beidelman argues, however, that contrast and conflict characterise every society and suggest that scholars should thus be asking "[h]ow these vary cross-culturally, from society to society".⁸⁰ He admits that if such tales do examine basic social questions within a society, then it is more than likely that these same basic questions are being asked by other societies as well. For Beidelman this mindset leans far too close to the functionalist approach that attempts to find some common ground between the two approaches of the comparative method and asks his

⁷⁵ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 176.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 189.

⁷⁷ Kirk 1974: 18-21.

⁷⁸ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 175.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 176.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 188.

readers: “How may we discern what constitutes a genuine correspondence between two institutions or two societies”?⁸¹

Beidelman outlines three critical elements that must be considered before attempting a cross-cultural comparison of apparent trickster figures. Firstly, he notes that not all societies perceive deviant, ambiguous or disorderly characteristic in the same manner. In some cases, the trickster, as the embodiment of disorder and deviance, is a crucial element to the function of the belief system, such as gods reorganising social customs at a cosmological level.⁸² In some cases, however, the figure only performs in anecdotal spaces, such as in children’s fables, which are intended to instruct listeners on how to navigate complex social relations, modes of custom and critical social values.

Secondly, Beidelman takes issue with the concept of liminality that distorts and confuses characterising tricksters. He notes that analysis and understanding of how cohesion and disorder relate to one another depends entirely on the cultural perspective from which the narrative derives.⁸³ Aspects that represent disorder and conflict within one social space (e.g. public spaces) may represent order in another (e.g. private spaces). For Beidelman, “order and disorder, even when culturally defined, are evaluations to be considered as refracted through various levels and segments of a society, interculturally as well as cross-culturally problematical”.⁸⁴ He points out, moreover, that even the term disorder may symbolise order if systematically, in which it is a restricted system of symbolic references grounded in socio-psychological, predetermined perceptions.⁸⁵

Thirdly, Beidelman criticises Western scholars for having

*an implicit assumption that somehow reality involves a myriad of continuously related phenomena, whereas culture is a more limited, discretely constructed assemblage, and that the application of culture to reality creates problems of ambiguity and dissonance.*⁸⁶

⁸¹ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 188.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.* 189.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 189-90.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 190.

He acknowledges that this position has some limited value and admits to employing such assumptions in his previous works, but states that he now believes that this perspective has the potential to blind one to the other important issues outlined above.⁸⁷

Section 2.3: Doueih

Anne Doueih also contributes an essay to Hynes & Doty's collection, titled 'inhabiting the space between discourse and story in trickster narratives'. Doueih similarly argues against the use of the term trickster and begins her essay by claiming that the "Trickster has been an embarrassment to Western scholars, particularly scholars of religion".⁸⁸ She suggests that this embarrassment is the result of a failure to distinguish between stories and discourse, a failure that has lead trickster narratives to be taken "only at their referential (face) value".⁸⁹ Doueih sees the approach as a dangerous one, which, by assuming that language is a "transparent medium for the communication of some meaning or another, consequently leads to the search for some univocal meaning to which the trickster and his stories might be reduced".⁹⁰ By taking trickster narratives at their "referential value", Western scholars create underlying meaning so that "they figure in the great story of human civilization, or in the great story which is the history of religion".⁹¹ Doueih criticizes scholars such as Brinton and Boas who try and establish the tricksters' origins and meaning in terms of a story of human religious and cultural history. By trying to locate the origins of tricksters, its history thus manifests as either a fall away from the present or as "an increasing revelation of (sacred) meaning".⁹² In both situations it highlights a "moment that is conceived as the ultimate origin of the world that exists in history and as the origin of history itself".⁹³

For Doueih, trickster analysis is strongly tied to the "ideology of presence", in that much of the tricksters' meaning is derived from speculation about their origins which is structurally imposed onto the narratives.⁹⁴ By imposing Western concepts and terms onto a figure,

⁸⁷ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 190.

⁸⁸ Doueih in Hynes & Doty 1997: 193.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 194.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 195.

while actively neglecting the terms set by the society that the narrative comes from, a discourse of domination takes effect. Such domination results when "Western conceptions of the sacred and profane, of myth and literature, and of origin, evolution, and degeneration, are used to frame the trickster".⁹⁵ By disregarding culturally specific terms and meanings, Western scholars either locate tricksters near to the origins of all things or see them as a representation of the chaotic 'primitive's' gradual ascent to order and civilisation.⁹⁶ She suggests that analysis should be focused on the terms set by the specific society, instead of making tricksters into "a hypothetical figure invented to fit a theory".⁹⁷ This process, she argues, will show how trickster narratives undermine the reductive and singular meaning that Western scholars derive through their discourse of domination. Instead, she suggests that "texts open into a plurality of meanings, none of which is exclusively correct".⁹⁸

Section 3: New Approaches

Although Radin and Jung's theory of the trickster as a manifestation of a universal psychological experience has fallen out of favour with contemporary scholars, certain aspects of their theory have persisted. There is a group of scholars who, while rejecting the idea of the trickster as a transcendental archetype located within the human psyche, sees the term as an essential descriptive category for figures which, they argue, display sufficient shared characteristics across a wide range of cultures.⁹⁹

Section 3.1: Hynes & Doty

William Hynes and William Doty, in their 1997 publication *Mythical Trickster Figures: contours, context, and criticisms*, attempt to find a middle ground between the two extreme approaches to the study of the trickster. Within their collection of essays are scholars such as Ricketts who support the universal category of the trickster and the comparative

⁹⁵ Doueihy in Hynes & Doty 1997: 195.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 196. "a fall away into history, and is represented as a primitive, chaotic, and underdeveloped period, which gradually leads to order and civilization".

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Hynes & Doty 1997: 2.

approach to mythology, and scholars such as Beidelman, who has called for the elimination of the term altogether.¹⁰⁰

Hynes & Doty acknowledge critics that oppose comparison but argue that the fact that these trickster figures embody similar features across numerous societies should encourage scholars to explore comparative social functions, psychological mechanisms, literary traces, relationships to religious systems and ritual performances.¹⁰¹ In acknowledgment of those that oppose the comparative framework, Hynes & Doty approach every trickster account on two levels. Firstly, they argue, one must examine the specific, local, tribal, historically-bounded context that is understood by historians of a specific religious tradition. The second stage of analysis is to examine the larger context of what appears to be a phenomenon of generalised human cultural behaviour.¹⁰² Hynes & Doty thus attempt to find a middle ground between the universalist and nominalist approaches to the study of tricksters. They believe that by transitioning back and forth between the peculiarities of a specific trickster, discussed within their respective religious context, on the one hand, and engaging in interconnections between relevant particulars and generalisations on the other, ideally these two perspectives will balance each other.¹⁰³ Through this dual approach Hynes & Doty aim to distance themselves from those who

*see the trickster as so universal a figure that all tricksters speak with essentially the same voice and those who counsel that the tricksters belonging to different societies are so culture-specific that no two of them articulate similar messages.*¹⁰⁴

In their attempt to bridge the divide between these two approaches, Hynes & Doty pose a question that is intrinsic to not only this work but to all works that attempt any cross-cultural comparison: can we describe a general category or only attain knowledge of a particular case?

Although Hynes & Doty distance themselves from Radin and Jung's theory concerning the trickster, they still subscribe to Radin's suggestion that trickster narratives provide a form of conservative social teaching. They note that a trickster narrative is "a fertile source of

¹⁰⁰ Beidelman in Hynes & Doty 1997: 174; Beidelman 1980: 28.

¹⁰¹ Hynes & Doty 1997: 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 2.

cultural reflection and critical reflexivity that leaves one thoughtful yet laughing".¹⁰⁵ They acknowledge, however, that aspects of trickster narratives can be easily misunderstood by Western scholars who do not resolve the comic with the serious.¹⁰⁶ In this regard, they suggest that such narratives "are often entertainments involving play or laughter, but they are entertainments that are instructive".¹⁰⁷ Like the moralistic instructions found in Western fables, in some societies trickster narratives map out how individuals "ought to act".¹⁰⁸ They note Brian Street's observation in his essays concerning Ture, the Zande trickster, that in contemporary Western cultures, trickster-type characters are self-motivated deviants, while within the tricksters' specific cultural context they are "socially sanctioned performers".¹⁰⁹ As such, tricksters can breach every social code or taboo, but in doing so, they also reaffirm them. Street argues that tricksters "serve as a model for these rules, demonstrating what happens if the prescriptions laid down by society are not observed".¹¹⁰ By simultaneously destroying and reinforcing social boundaries, trickster narratives functionally preserve the delicate balance between the potential anarchy that could occur from excessive questioning of social practices and the inflexible danger of stagnation that develops with dogmatic obedience to them.¹¹¹ Through a complicated juggling of the comic and the serious upon the boundary, tricksters confirm the social importance of the boundary by illustrating what happens once it is breached: "by acting at the boundaries of order the trickster gives definition to that order".¹¹²

Section 3.2: Vecsey & Pelton

Hynes & Doty are not alone in their search for a middle ground to the comparative approaches to trickster figures. Among the contributions to their collection is Christopher Vecsey's essay 'The Exception Who Proves the Rules: Ananse The Akan Trickster', as well as Robert Pelton's essay 'West African Tricksters: Web of Purpose, Dance of Delight'. Robert Pelton advocates a theoretical approach that he calls "Neo-Durkheimian and beyond".¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁰⁶ Hynes & Doty 1997: 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Singer & Street 1972: 85.

¹¹¹ Hynes & Doty 1997: 19.

¹¹² Singer & Street 1972: 101.

¹¹³ Pelton 1980: 243.

This approach is based on the theories of Laura Makarius and Mary Douglas and deals with the issues of the trickster as a boundary crosser, as a breaker of taboos, and his lewdness and sacrality.

Vecsey agrees with both Street's and Hynes & Doty's assertion that trickster narratives illustrate, for some cultures, the importance of social codes.¹¹⁴ He notes that the West African trickster of the Akan, Ananse, does not directly help the Akan people as the cultural hero does. However, for the Akan, the social importance of these narratives comes through reflecting upon the morals of the stories and drawing "ethical conclusions" from Ananse's mistakes and failures.¹¹⁵

Pelton argues that the "trickster exists not as an archetypal idea but as a symbolic pattern embracing a wide range of individual figures".¹¹⁶ He takes a slightly different stance from other writers who have attempted to find some middle ground between the two approaches to the comparative method. Pelton attributes a creative function to trickster narratives rather than one which tries to preserve social codes through acts of violation.¹¹⁷ He sees West African tricksters as "a symbol of the liminal state itself and of its permanent accessibility as a source of recreative power".¹¹⁸ For Pelton, tricksters are the religious transformer and symbolizes the ultimate source of creativity. Through the religious powers of divination, they can restructure all boundaries and in doing so reveal the sacred embedded in daily life.¹¹⁹

Section 3.3: Makarius & Douglas

Laura Makarius addresses the issue of the trickster's sacrality in terms of ritual taboo-breaking, defined by their contradictory attributes: "each virtue or defect attributed to him automatically calls into being its opposite."¹²⁰ She argues that one must first focus on aspects of a culture's social practices that express a contradictory reality, that is, "the

¹¹⁴ Vecsey in Hynes & Doty 1997: 106.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 118.

¹¹⁶ Pelton in Hynes & Doty 1997: 123.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 124.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 123, 130.

¹²⁰ Makarius in Hynes & Doty 1997: 68.

magical violation of prohibitions”, or the ritual breaking of social taboos.¹²¹ In her work on trickster taboo-breaking, Makarius focuses on taboos concerning blood. She argues that blood can have a dual nature depending on context: it can be a polluting, destructive agent or a powerful ingredient in magical healing. Tricksters, performing as magicians, come to master the powers of blood by violating the taboos around it. By breaking the taboo, tricksters are seen as antisocial as they have disrupted the established order, yet in some cases a consequence of this is a benefit to human society.¹²² Makarius sees the transgressing and profaning character of tricksters as their quintessential essence and the only reason for existing in the mythic universe.¹²³ Makarius uses Amerindian, Polynesian, and West African trickster tales to illustrate the trickster’s association with blood magic. She notes that the trickster’s birth is often the result of impure or violent action and this consequent impurity and ambivalence frees them from the laws and limits of reality.

Mary Douglas also addresses tricksters in her work, *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas is mostly concerned with the classification and categorization of what is considered socially acceptable and what is not. Societies create boundaries to regulate and control social practices; they designate what is outside or between the boundaries, or anomalous, and term these anomalous aspects as ‘dirt’. This dirt reflects not only a matter of actions and experiences, it “is essentially disorder...[it] offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.”¹²⁴

This ‘dirt’ is essentially everything that is outside or between categories, which does not fit. Tricksters illustrate this aspect of dirt as their different personas and actions locate them outside and between classified social categories. As dirt, the tricksters' impurity helps complement society just as "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience.”¹²⁵ For Douglas, the contradictory actions and taboo-breaking of tricksters are seen as a mythic attempt to resolve elements that are out of place, and reconcile dirt within the established order.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 68.

¹²² Makarius in Hynes & Doty 1997: 73.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Douglas 1966: 2.

¹²⁵ Douglas as cited in Robert Pelton 1980: 249.

Section 3.4: Babcock-Abrahams

The middle-ground approach of these scholars is indebted to the work of Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, who employed Victor Turner's theory of liminality to establish the first typology, or set of characteristics, for trickster figures. Babcock-Abrahams examines Radin's Winnebago trickster cycle, with an approach that has been termed Turnerian (see section 3.5) and focuses on the liminal and marginal aspects of tricksters. For Babcock-Abrahams, the Winnebago trickster cycle is a process of ritual separation, liminal initiation and social integration. Emphasising aspects of liminality, Babcock-Abrahams has developed a typology of sixteen characteristics to help define the figure based on this cycle and other Amerindian material.¹²⁶

In Babcock-Abrahams' view, the underlying element that connects all of the trickster's various attributes is that they are fundamentally liminal figures. Babcock-Abrahams uses 'marginal' as a generic term for the anti-structural, ambiguous, dichotomous and deviant personality of the trickster. She emphasises that tricksters are peripheral in their comic and tragic natures as well as in their tendency to violate boundaries. All of these aspects are derivatives of their marginality.

Section 3.5: Victor Turner

Victor Turner never directly writes about tricksters, and it is due to the work of Babcock-Abrahams that his theories have entered this discourse.¹²⁷ However, his concept of the liminal figure is a vital tool for understanding tricksters. In his book *The Ritual Process* Turner outlines his theory of liminality: a state of being that is outside or between the confines of the 'normal' everyday social life.¹²⁸ This 'state' occurs during initiatory rites of a given culture, e.g. from boyhood to adulthood. Such rites can involve both status reversal and elevation and "are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Babcock-Abrahams 1975: 159-160. For Babcock-Abrahams' typology, see Appendix 2 to this thesis.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 150.

¹²⁸ Turner 1991.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 94.

In phase one of this sequence (separation) the participant (either an individual or a collective) is both literally and symbolically detached or removed from their social position. Once the separation is instigated, the participant is no longer considered as who or what they were, nor what they will become. In phase two (*limen*), the participant becomes ambiguous: “he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state”.¹³⁰ Finally, in phase three (aggregation), the participant leaves the ambiguous liminal state and reemerges into a society where they are reintegrated and made unambiguous. Now that the passage is over, societal laws and taboos once more apply to them.¹³¹

As outsiders, the initiates’ inherent nature, behaviour and personality are ambiguous. Turner argues that cultures express this ambiguity symbolically often represented as transitional states.

*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.*¹³²

These representations of liminality are similarly attributed to the activities of tricksters. This ambiguous figure can easily transition between various socio-cultural boundaries which those confined to the system cannot cross. Turner sees the liminal participant as a mixture of “lowliness and sacredness.”¹³³ They possess a duality of base and sacred aspects. They tend to hold a place of social importance within their community. However, this position may not be within the established social structure; they are extraordinary figures thought to have special powers. As the liminal participant is inherently ambiguous, there is little or no differentiation between sexes during this stage.¹³⁴ Again, tricksters embody these aspects, they are simultaneously sacred and lewd, and although not sexless, the tricksters’ shape-shifting abilities allow them to perform as anomalous figures in terms of sex or gender.

The liminal phase, Turner argues, gives rise to the social situation he terms *communitas*. *Communitas* is “society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively

¹³⁰ Turner 1991: 94.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 94.

¹³² *Ibid.* 95.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 96.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 102.

undifferentiated ...community.”¹³⁵ The participants of the liminal phase are all equals: social statuses are discarded. The participants are viewed as the same in regards to sex, attributes and social status. *Communitas* is spontaneous: “*communitas* is of the now; the structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom.”¹³⁶

Time is meaningless for those participating in the liminal phase. They only focus on the here and now, and therefore can be seen as short-sighted from the perspective of those still within the confines of the social structure. Tricksters embody this aspect: they tend to focus only on fulfilling their base desires, regardless of the consequences. Often, they make a fool of themselves because they did not plan nor learn from their past actions. Turner’s liminal figure, “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.”¹³⁷ This reflects tricksters as a ‘chaos instigator’ who has the ability to reorganise and scramble socio-cultural boundaries.¹³⁸

Turner provides examples of groups and figures that embody this type of liminality. Monastics are one example of this “structured” *communitas*. Another is the court jester that in many ways mimics our understanding of the trickster.¹³⁹ Like the mythic trickster, these figures have free license to mock and scrutinise the established order from the outside.¹⁴⁰ They “can be seen as potentially a...scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture.”¹⁴¹ Betwixt and between established categories, the liminal figure can comment on failures of the social order. Tricksters act in a similar manner, they comment on how the world happens to be as it is, by correcting, stealing and creating, they threaten the established order, whether human or divine. Turner’s liminal figure has parallels with the trickster. The concept of liminality is a useful means of understanding the connections between many of the attributes they display, such as the concept of *communitas*.

¹³⁵ Turner 1991: 96.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 113.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 109.

¹³⁸ Hyde 2010: 42.

¹³⁹ “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.” Max Gluckman as cited in Turner 1991: 109-110.

¹⁴⁰ “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.” Turner 1991: 110.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 196.

Section 3.6: Conclusions

There are multiple ways to approach the study of the trickster. The study was popularized by supporters of the psychoanalytical universalist approach, which over the last half a century has mostly fallen out of favour. The idea of cultural evolution, the notion that certain cultures are 'primitive' or still functioning at a 'childhood' stage of development, and the idea that trickster figures can be located within the narratives of most global cultures have, in particular, drawn criticism. Lévi-Strauss' suggestion that one does not have to rely on the earliest or most authentic version of the myth and that analyses can be extended to include literary and scholarly studies of myths, shows a disregard for understanding the socio-cultural specific contexts from which the narratives originated. The nominalists see myths as embedded in their cultural contexts, and argue that it is better to study particular tricksters and their contexts well. They caution against the dangers of Western scholars imposing their cultural values onto these non-Western figures, and, through this process, reducing these culturally sophisticated characters into two-dimensional beings that easily fit into their arguments. Where the universalists seek a universal pattern, the nominalists call for the elimination of the term trickster all together. Between these poles of discourse, a more moderate set of academic positions has developed. Scholars such as Hynes & Doty acknowledge the problems associated with the universalist approach. Unlike the nominalists, however, who call for the termination of the term trickster, the moderates argue that because these tricksters embody similar features across a wide range of cultures, scholars should study their potentially similar functions. These scholars have suggested a compromise approach to their study of the trickster, which involves studying potential figures within their specific context before comparing them with other figures from across the globe.

Moderate scholars such Hynes & Doty and Babcock-Abrams have, moreover, developed typologies or guides to help locate and identify potential trickster figures. While the following chapter will discuss both typologies, Hynes & Doty's six criteria will be explored in-depth as these will form the essential criteria for establishing the extent to which Hermes adheres to the trickster category.

Chapter 2: Defining the trickster phenomenon

Michael Carroll writes; “More has probably been written about ‘tricksters’ than about any other single category of character that appears in the myths and folktales of the world”.¹⁴² The paradoxical nature of tricksters and the fact that they are identified within various mythic narratives has motivated many to attempt to answer the fundamental question: What characterises a trickster figure as such? William Hynes, in his attempts to help better understand trickster figures, has suggested six characteristics that he sees as common to all trickster narratives. Hynes is, however, quick to stress that his criteria are not absolute or a unified theory and admits that more criteria could be chosen: “but these six serve as a modest map, heuristic guide, and common language for the more complex individual studies of particular tricksters within specific belief systems”.¹⁴³ Hynes acknowledges the paradox that concerns any attempts at presenting a generalised definition regarding tricksters in particular: “to define (de-finis) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture; they are notorious border breakers”.¹⁴⁴ Hynes, furthermore, stresses the importance of not being overly specific and cautions scholars to focus upon the particularities of a trickster within their belief system, which may result in the impossibility of any cross-comparative study with other manifestations of the trickster figure. By navigating between absolute definitions on the one hand and unshared traits on the other, Hynes suggests that a cluster of shared characteristics can be identified to construct a preliminary guide or typology.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Carroll 1984: 105.

¹⁴³ Hynes & Doty 1997: 33.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Section 1: Typologies and Criteria

The sixteen characteristics outlined by Babcock-Abrahams could be used as an alternative model to Hynes' set of six criteria and are interconnected examples of the anomalous and ambiguous nature of tricksters. This typology is intended to highlight the dualism of the character: "The most important characteristics of these related dualisms...is their expression of ambiguity and paradox, of confusion of all customary categories."¹⁴⁶ The set of six common characteristics established by William Hynes expands upon Babcock-Abrahams list by introducing other characteristics and streamlines her set of sixteen criteria down to six. I have chosen to focus on Hynes' six characteristics as opposed to Babcock-Abrahams' sixteen, because the majority of Babcock-Abrahams criteria are essentially examples of the liminal or marginal performer. At the same time, Hynes' six criteria provide a more concise yet broader spectrum for discussion as this set of characteristics address other aspects of tricksters aside from their liminal or marginal status. Moreover, Hynes outlines a two-stage process to the study of the trickster that takes into consideration the two extreme perspectives of the universalists and the nominalists: firstly, one must examine a trickster within its specific cultural context, and secondly, explore how this figure relates to the broader trickster phenomenon. It is for these reasons that Hynes' typology will be used exclusively throughout the rest of this study.

In order to ascertain the extent to which Hermes conforms to the trickster categories, he and other global trickster figures will each be compared to Hynes' six criteria. Through this process, we shall learn what aspects of the figure conform to Hynes' typology and more importantly, what aspects do not. The tricksters that have been selected for comparison with Hermes are: from North America, the Winnebago Wakdjunkaga;¹⁴⁷ from Central Africa, Ture of the Azande.¹⁴⁸ Hermes will also be compared with the Northern European Norse trickster Loki.¹⁴⁹ The trickster figures selected for comparison with Hermes have been chosen based on the amount of literature written about them.

¹⁴⁶ Babcock-Abrahams 1975: 160.

¹⁴⁷ Radin 1956; Green 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Barker & Sinclair 1970; Evans-Pritchard 1967; Beidelman 1980: 27-42.

¹⁴⁹ Hollander 2011; Byock 2005; Thorpe 2006; Rooth 1961.

Each trickster will be analysed and discussed initially within in its own cultural context before being compared to the others, employing Hynes' model of six characteristics.

Hynes six characteristics are:¹⁵⁰

1. The fundamentally ambiguous personality of the trickster
2. The trickster as deceiver and trick player
3. The trickster as shape-shifter
4. The trickster as situation-inverter
5. The trickster as messenger or imitator of the gods
6. The trickster as sacred & lewd bricoleur¹⁵¹

Not every trickster will have all six characteristics. However, a specific trickster will have at the very least some of them. Laura Makarius proposes using the characteristics as a matrix to determine a specific trickster's degree of tricksterness.¹⁵² Although this method would be beneficial in testing the degree of commonality of such traits, one must be cautious about imposing a perceived commonality onto a culturally specific figure when they do not belong to the culture.

The subsequent section will explain what each respective criterion entails. In the following analysis of each of our potential trickster figures, Wokdjunkaga, Ture and Loki, specific cultural contexts will be briefly discussed, as Hynes' two-stage approach demands. This examination will not only show how all these figures relate to one another in regards to Hynes criteria but also how these figures differ from society to society.

¹⁵⁰ Hynes & Doty 1997: 34.

¹⁵¹ Bricoleur: a person who engages in the construction of something using whatever is available at the time.

¹⁵² Makarius in Hynes & Doty 1997: 84.

Section 2: The comparative trickster figures in context

Section 2.1: The Winnebago Trickster: Wakdjunkaga

*I came to this earth to rearrange it...The people call me the Foolish One.*¹⁵³

The Winnebago First Nations people have a cycle of tales concerning a figure called Wakdjunkaga, which means 'tricky one' in their language. The Amerindians of North America have a rich corpus of what scholars have termed trickster myths, and it is precisely the stories told by the Siouan-speaking Winnebago that have put the figure of the trickster on the academic map. Radin provides a brief but essential look into the workings of Winnebago culture and life in 1912.¹⁵⁴ This is important because of how much this has changed within the last century.¹⁵⁵ Radin notes how many Winnebago Amerindians were troubled by the erosion of their culture by an ever-imposing Western American set of values, particularly in the form of the encroaching peyote church which was leading members away from their traditional beliefs and practices.¹⁵⁶

In 1912 Radin gained access to the Winnebago cycle from a local informant called Sam Blowsnake, who acted as a middle man between Radin and an older member of the tribe, who was both versed in the cycle's lore and had the traditional right to narrate it. Radin never met this narrator, however he believes the source to be reliable as Blowsnake obtained it under the proper conditions.¹⁵⁷ Radin approached Blowsnake as a potential informant because he was highly literate in both English and the Winnebago language and because he was taught the 'old ways', such as fasting at the proper times, being initiated into the ancient rites and hearing the old stories both sacred and profane.¹⁵⁸ Aside from

¹⁵³ Radin 1956: 52, 114.

¹⁵⁴ In the early 20th century, anthropologist Paul Radin began his attempt to collect, analyze, and cross-compound the cycle of trickster stories of the Winnebago, which he published in 1956. Radin's theory has already been discussed thoroughly in chapter one, section 1.1.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 113. Presently, the Winnebago people reside within the state of Nebraska and Iowa, yet when Radin was with them, they resided from the lower Mississippi through to Wisconsin, Iowa and western Nebraska.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 115; Peyotism is a belief system that originated in the Oklahoma territory in the late 19th century (1890-1907) which combines traditional plains Indian beliefs with elements of Christianity. By the mid-20th century, the religion had spread to every tribal group and is now considered the dominant religious system among Amerindians in North America except for Indigenous peoples from Alaska and the Polynesians of Hawaii.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 112; These 'proper conditions' consisted of Sam Blowsnake presenting offerings of tobacco and other gifts to the narrator as Winnebago custom prescribes.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 111.

Sam Blowsnake, Radin received help in translating the cycle from two Amerindian men, John Baptiste and Oliver Lamere.

Radin interviewed the Winnebago to learn what their attitudes were to Wakdjunkaga, and found both sympathetic and unsympathetic advocates for the figure. The sympathisers tended to be part of the older tradition who saw him as a good-natured being that was given a specific task by Earthmaker (the Winnebago creator) but lost his way. They acknowledged Wakdjunkaga's foolishness and sins and saw him as the cause of humanity's laziness and deceptive nature. However, although "he is responsible for all this. Yet one thing he never did: he never went on the warpath, he never waged war."¹⁵⁹ In contrast to this was the view of the Winnebago who had joined the peyote church. They equated the antics of the trickster to the Christian devil, and perceived his tales as representing moral lessons of how not to act. "We, the Winnebago, are the birds and Wakdjunkaga is Satan".¹⁶⁰

The Winnebago divide their oral narratives into two types: the *waikan*, 'what-is-sacred' and the *worak*, 'what-is-recounted'.¹⁶¹ The *waikan* were only told during the summertime and deal with the mythic past, and feats and actions no longer possible by either men or spirits. They could not end in death or tragedy, as the protagonist was considered to be divine and therefore immortal.¹⁶² The *worak* deal with actions of the present-day, were told at any time of the year and had to end tragically. The protagonists of *worak* are humans or, occasionally, divine beings that have sided with humanity.¹⁶³

Radin gives a summary of the aspects of Winnebago culture that directly relate to their cycle of trickster myths. The Winnebago were organised into two phratries, the upper (the Thunderbird clan) and the lower (the Bear clan). The Thunderbird Chief held the most authority, presiding over all legal issues. No acts of violence were permitted in their lodge and they were the only Winnebago not allowed to instigate the warpath. The Bear Chief was in charge of maintaining law and order, acting as a police force, and took complete control

¹⁵⁹ Radin 1956: 147.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 149.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 118.

¹⁶² The protagonists of *waikan* tended to be deities or great spirits such as the Sun, Hare, Bear and our Trickster Wakdjunkaga. Although they are represented as animals in their narratives, they are seen as influential figures that preside over their respective animal and other elements of the cosmos. The protagonist of a *waikan* may experience death temporarily but is always revived by its end.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 118-9.

of the group during times of war and communal hunting. Their lodge functioned as a prison, where the sacred warbundle was kept and guarded.¹⁶⁴

The Winnebago believe in many spirits, and the majority are depicted in animal form. The central aspect of these spirits is their ability to take on any form they wish, be it animal, human or object. Among them, the deity called Earthmaker was considered supreme. In practices, the Winnebago had an intimate relationship with these spirits¹⁶⁵ and would present offerings to obtain specific boons and protections.¹⁶⁶ For example, a person could not go on the warpath without first making the proper offerings to a deity controlling success in war.

The Winnebago performed several rituals,¹⁶⁷ in regards to Wakdjunkaga, however, only the warbundle ritual is significant. This ritual was divided into two feasts, each dedicated to a great spirit, usually the Thunderbird and the Night-Spirit respectively.¹⁶⁸ The ritual was dedicated to the glorification of victory in battle against evil. The warbundle was tangible and consisted of various sacred objects meant to increase one's battle prowess.¹⁶⁹ There was only one bundle among the entire group and its location was guarded and kept secret.¹⁷⁰ The only thing that could destroy the power of the bundle was contact with menstrual blood. Radin notes that the Winnebago trickster cycle is unique among Amerindian trickster cycles in that it is the only one that parodies this sacred warbundle ritual.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ Radin 1956: 115.

¹⁶⁵ Between the ages of nine and eleven, children would ritually fast to attain their guardian spirit, which they could call upon during times of crisis. From the standpoint of the Winnebago, not acquiring a guardian spirit would leave a person at the mercy of natural and social disasters.

¹⁶⁶ These offerings always consisted of tobacco, but other gifts such as painted objects, feathers and bones were also used.

¹⁶⁷ Other types of rituals enacted by the Winnebago include: rituals wherein members of the same clan all participated, rituals that included individuals that had all experienced visions from the same spirit, and the Medicine Rite, where membership was based on one's achievements other than war.

¹⁶⁸ However, all the great spirits of the pantheon could be called upon and Radin notes that even Wakdjunkaga and Hare have been invoked during this ritual.

¹⁶⁹ For example, the warbundle of the Thunderbird clan contained, among other things, the tail of a wolf and medicine paints. The wolf's tail gave the holder enhanced running abilities, and the medicine paints made him invisible to his enemies.

¹⁷⁰ The Winnebago guarded its location as they believed this sacred object radiated dangerous powers that could destroy those who approached it.

¹⁷¹ Radin 1956: 116-7.

Section 2.1A: Who is Wakdjunkaga?

The Winnebago word for trickster is Wakdjunkaga, the 'tricky one'. Radin notes that among their linguistic relatives such as the Ponac and Dakota-Sioux the word for trickster is Ishtinike and Ikto-mi respectively: the latter means spider and the meaning of the former is unknown. The name Wakdjunkaga appears to have no connection to these terms, and its meaning remains unknown.¹⁷² Wakdjunkaga appears to be genuinely amorphous and is not associated with any specific animal.¹⁷³ He carries his phallus upon his back in a large box, has an autonomous anus and at one point accidentally removes a large portion of his intestines. He refers to everything as his little brother, as he was the first being created by Earthmaker, and is sometimes referred to as the old man. Wakdjunkaga was placed on earth by Earthmaker to make the world more habitable for humanity.¹⁷⁴ Wakdjunkaga forgets his purpose, however, only remembering it near the end of his story, after experiencing different adventures and disasters.¹⁷⁵ After raising his children, he sets off to complete his true purpose, removing all obstacles from the Mississippi for humanity, vanquishing its evil water-spirits, pushing a waterfall flat and killing all the things on earth that abuse humanity. After rearranging the earth, Wakdjunkaga has one last meal before embarking on his final trip to a new realm, where he is put in charge by Earthmaker. As the first being he entered a world that was still fluid and plastic, ready to be molded and manipulated. Like the world which he entered, Wakdjunkaga is also fluid and plastic, and as he changes the world from fluid to solid, he too changes from an ambiguous figure to a definable actor.

¹⁷² Radin 1956: 132.

¹⁷³ Carroll 1984: 108.

¹⁷⁴ Radin 1956: 52-4.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 125, 150. Radin notes that among the close relatives of the Winnebago, the Hare figure is often both the trickster and cultural hero. However, within the Winnebago cycle, the two are distinguished, and the Hare performs more as the cultural hero and Wakdjunkaga as an ambivalent creator and destroyer. The two are sometimes merged into one being, but for the most part they are separate. Among the Winnebago, the justification for having the two is due to Wakdjunkaga, who initially forgot his purpose on earth, so Earthmaker had to send Hare to do what the trickster forgot.

Section 2.2: The Zande Trickster: Ture

*I am Ture the son of Ture's father, who tricks people all the time.*¹⁷⁶

The Azande, located in Central Africa,¹⁷⁷ have a collection of folktales centered around a figure called Ture.¹⁷⁸ These narratives were told within a specific context: only after sunset, as it was bad luck to tell them during daylight. They were only told to children by an adult, usually the familial patriarch.¹⁷⁹ Evans-Pritchard stresses that the collection of Ture narratives cannot be called a cycle of tales, as there is no predictable order in their telling and rarely does one story connect with another: "Each tale is complete in itself".¹⁸⁰

As an oral tradition, there is no definitive way of knowing when these tales originated or if they belong to the same period. Evans-Pritchard argues that the only thing he is confident of is that the tales, as recorded, are about 50 years old, but change little over time and are likely much older.¹⁸¹ Ture means 'spider' in Pa-Zande. However, among the Azande peoples, he is conceived of as a person, not a spider.¹⁸² According to the Azande, Ture has this name because he is so clever, like the spider which can make a web out of itself.¹⁸³ Evans-Pritchard traces the etymology to a West African cultural area and suggests that the mischievous spider narrative may have spread from the West to the Azande via cultural diffusion.¹⁸⁴

Mekana Ongosi informs us how late 20th-century Azande perceive Ture. He stresses that these are tales meant for children and that although no one has ever seen Ture, many believe that he once roamed the earth because there are so many stories about him across Zandeland. No one is certain where Ture went to, but some people believe that he moved

¹⁷⁶ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 28, 124.

¹⁷⁷ Primarily in north-eastern Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 16. Immense credit must be given to the social anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard, who throughout the early 20th century collected and with the help of local Azande scholars Reuben Rikita, Richard Mambia, Mekana Ongosi and Angelo Beda, was able to translate and compile a robust English translation of all the narratives in which Ture figures as a central character.

¹⁷⁹ However, this does not mean that women were prohibited from telling them, just that it occurred less often.

¹⁸⁰ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 20.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 20.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 26; The language itself illustrates this; Pa-Zande has five pronominal genders: masculine (*ko*), feminine (*ri*), animal (*u*), impersonal (*ni*) and neuter (*si*). In all his narratives, Ture has the Pa-Zande personal pronoun *ko* and never the animal pronoun *u*.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 21.

to Europe, and that is why Europeans possess the technology and skills that they have; because Ture taught them. The Azande do not speak Ture's name in front of Europeans, because when they do, they become angry and interrogate them as to where they have seen this creature. It is this hostility that has led many to believe that the Europeans are hiding Ture somewhere, keeping his secrets for themselves.¹⁸⁵ Evans-Pritchard stresses that this belief should not be generalized to all Azande, however. For many, Ture is only real when situated within the context of story-telling:

*If you ask them, they reply, 'we Azande think that he must have lived because our fathers told us so'... One can only say that Ture lives in the stories told about him.*¹⁸⁶

Although Evans-Pritchard's book *The Zande Trickster* has been credited for introducing both West African narratives and the trickster figure Ture to a broader audience, he cautions scholars against using the cross-comparative method, not only for the likes of Ture but in regards to all potential trickster figures. Evans-Pritchard does agree that Radin's general description of the trickster fits Ture, hence his title *The Zande Trickster*. Where, however, Radin sees a repressed psychoanalytical explanation in the Winnebago trickster cycle, for Evans-Pritchard "there is nothing buried. All is on the surface, and there are no repressed symbols to interpret".¹⁸⁷

Despite Evans-Pritchard's suggestion against employing the comparative method, one of his students, Brian Street, has attempted such an endeavor. In a collection of essays dedicated to his teacher, Street provides an in-depth analysis of the Zande narratives and compares them to Radin's trickster. He argues that the primary function of Ture as a trickster is to mediate the opposing elements of chaos and order, which help delineate and reaffirm socio-cultural boundaries and categories.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 23-4.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 24; Evans-Pritchard 1936: 37-8.

¹⁸⁷ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 29.

¹⁸⁸ Singer & Street 1972: 88.

Section 2.2A: Who is the son of Ture's father?

Evans-Pritchard describes Ture as “a monster of depravity” who possesses an “enduring innocence”.¹⁸⁹ In all his narratives, Ture lies, cheats and commits murders to further his ends. He is ungrateful to his friends, greedy, treacherous and vain. Entirely selfish, his actions go against everything which the Azande encourage in their children. In many ways, he is the ideal vehicle to teach the youth about social conventions. His narratives are full of horrid acts of deceit and trickery, yet there is a sympathetic aspect to him. His whimsical foolery and recklessness illustrate his childish need to show the world how clever he is. More often than not he expertly fails at showing this, and his trickery and attempts at ignoring social conventions tend to backfire and only shepherd him into more trouble.

Ture is connected to the spider, but is depicted as a man and is further identified by his iconic feathered hat and elephant hide bag. He is a parody of the Zande *bakumba*, a middle-aged man of substance.¹⁹⁰ Ture is in charge of his homestead and has three wives, something not uncommon in the highly patriarchal and polygamous culture of the Azande. Wives were essentially servants to their husbands, but, as the Ture tales illustrate, this does not imply that all Azande wives were passive and subservient. Ture has three wives: Nanzagbe his senior wife, Nangbafudo, his second, and a third wife, who is less prominent and is named either Nawondiga or Natagbinda. Nanzagbe, and especially Nangbafudo, are the only characters aside from Ture who possess some semblance of a personality. They often act as either the dupes or the foil to Ture's acts of trickery and deception. However, when Ture's trickery goes too far and enrages his wives to the point of no return, he becomes afraid of them and always runs away into the wilderness in fear, only returning once his wives' anger has subsided. The typical Zande *bakumba* is supposed to embody authority, control and prestige: he is the master of the house, its protector and provider, yet Ture embodies none of these aspects. He attempts to murder not only his wife but his children too, and in several of his narratives he burns down his homestead and granary, thinking that he has figured out a way to live without them. Ture is unreliable, selfish and cowardly. Put another way, Ture is the antithesis of the *bakumba*, and his narratives are meant as a cautionary tale on how best to avoid breaching social norms and conventions.

¹⁸⁹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 29.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 5-6.

Section 2.3: The Norse Trickster: Loki

Then spoke the one who came last, who was called Loki: 'I know such a trick, which I am ready to try'.¹⁹¹

The corpus of Norse mythic material is relatively small, consisting of the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and The *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus.¹⁹² This study will focus on the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* as they concisely present the narratives of Loki. The *Poetic Edda*, also called the *Elder* or *Sæmundr's Edda*, consists of about thirty-nine poems divided into two sections.¹⁹³ The *Prose Edda* is also divided, into three sections: the *Gylfaginning* (the delusion of Gylfi), the *Skáldskaparmál* (poetic diction) and the *Háttatal* (Tally of Metres).¹⁹⁴ Snorri Sturluson is considered to be the first to establish a specific, albeit ambiguous, contextual relationship between the individual myths about Loki.¹⁹⁵ Sturluson was a 13th-century Icelandic scholar, author and politician who wrote the *Prose Edda* as a textbook on the art of skaldic verses. Writing in a post-Christianised Iceland, he intended to preserve the Norse oral tradition in a written form before it was lost to the ever-encroaching Christian doctrine. Given the religious context that Sturluson was writing in, however, many scholars debate the value of the *Snorra Edda* as a source of pagan myths.¹⁹⁶ We cannot be certain what impact over 300 years of Christianity may have had on these oral traditions before they were eventually recorded. Indeed, Sturluson's depiction of Loki has been scrutinised for its malevolence and association with the Christian devil, which may have altered an otherwise amoral figure into one that is inherently evil, for evil's sake.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 306.

¹⁹² Krause-Loner 2003: 30-1.

¹⁹³ With the first dealing with the *Æsir* and their exploits and the second consisting of the legendary hero poems.

¹⁹⁴ Schnurbein 2000: 110. the *Gylfaginning* narrates Norse pagan creation of the world up to its demise and Ragnarök; the *Skáldskaparmál* refers to other myths necessary to understand the meaning of kennings; the *Háttatal* is a collection of songs that provide examples of metric style.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ For instance, Sturluson was a euhemerist who argues in the prologue of the *Prose Edda* that the *Æsir* are humans originally from Asia (hence their name) who became deified by Germanic tribes. He believed that Troy was Asgard's location and that Thor was the first god, not Odin. Furthermore, Sturluson suggests that all of this took place after the majority of humanity had forgotten the name and worship of Christ.

¹⁹⁷ Rooth 1961: 85.

Section 2.3A: What was Loki's original function?

Over the years, scholars have suggested various theories as answers to this question. Jacob Grimm was the first to present a theory, arguing that Loki is a fire god on the basis of an onomastic analogy drawn from the German *Lohe*, 'flame'.¹⁹⁸ Although never proven, Grimm's theory has persisted within popular culture. Bugge attempted to trace the origins of the Norse gods and myths to Christian prototypes and believed Loki to be a version of the Christian Lucifer.¹⁹⁹ Ström highlights the similarities between the figure of Loki and Odin and surmises that Loki was a hypostatization of this chief god.²⁰⁰ Jan de Vries was the first to argue for viewing Loki as a trickster figure. His idea has become prominent and is considered the most plausible theory by contemporary scholars.²⁰¹

Anna Birgitta Rooth provides an in-depth analysis of the various possible functions of Loki within the Scandinavian myths. She attempts to discover Loki's original character by excluding all mythic parallels from non-Scandinavian sources and sees his primary function as being a provider and re-provider for the gods. Rooth argues that Loki is etymologically derived from Spider or *Locke*, the popular name of the spider in Southern parts of Sweden.²⁰² She challenges scholars that see no linguistic connection between *Locke* and Loki because these forms cannot be traced to each other via the aid of sound laws. Rooth illustrates how the *Torsvisa* (The Song of Thor) uses the term *Locke* when referring to Loki and notes that Snorri's description of Loki as the inventor of the first net corresponds to the linguistic meaning of *Locke* as spider, i.e., the spinner, who makes nets.²⁰³ Rooth argues that Loki's other title *Loptur* connects to the spiders' perceived ability to walk on air.

Section 2.3B: His name is Loki or Loptur

In the *Prose Edda*, Har tells Gangler that "there is another deity, reckoned in the number of the Æsir, whom some call the calumniator of the gods, the contriver of all fraud and mischief, and the disgrace of gods and men. His name is Loki or Loptur."²⁰⁴ His father is the

¹⁹⁸ Grimm 1875: 199.

¹⁹⁹ Bugge 1889: 10, 70-9.

²⁰⁰ Ström 1956.

²⁰¹ De Vries 1933.

²⁰² Rooth 1961: 195.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 206.

²⁰⁴ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 284.

giant Farbauti, his mother is Layfey or Nal and his brothers are Byleist and Helblindi. He is comely to look upon yet possesses a very fickle nature and an evil disposition. Loki exceeds all creatures in the arts of cunning and treachery, and on many occasions has exposed the gods to great dangers, often saving them again by his trickery. He is married to Siguna and their son is Nari.²⁰⁵ Although there is no denying Loki's fundamental role within the Norse mythic cycle, the figure has puzzled scholars as "there is nothing to suggest that Loki was ever worshipped, and it would be hard to believe that he was ever the object of a cult."²⁰⁶ Scholars note a lack of evidence of place names that can be traced back to Loki in Scandinavia, as well as the fact that there are no literary allusions to rituals concerning Loki in particular.

Section 2.4: Contextual conclusions

Each potential trickster figure has been described within its cultural context as Hynes & Doty's two-level approach demands. This contextual discussion illustrates how their respective culture perceived each figure, articulates any culturally specific rituals or beliefs that directly relate to them and considers what conditions, if any, were required to tell their stories. With this information at hand, we can now engage in the second level of Hynes & Doty's approach, comparing each potential trickster figure to Hynes' typology. Within this analysis, Hynes' criteria will be applied to the figures individually and the figures compared to each other in regards to each respective criterion. This process will articulate how they conform to generalised conceptions of the trickster and significantly, how they differ and why. It will help to determine the usefulness of such typologies and, going forward, to clarify a question essential to this study: is Hermes different from our understanding of the trickster?

²⁰⁵ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 284; Davidson (1964: 176) comments that "The place which Loki occupies in the circle at Asgard is as puzzling as that of Heimdall, although he is an even more prominent figure, and plays an important part in most of the well-known myths".

²⁰⁶ Turville-Petre 1964: 126.

Section 3: Hynes' criteria applied to the three comparative figures

Section 3.1: Ambiguous & Anomalous

Tricksters are fundamentally ambiguous, anomalous and polyvalent. Lévi-Strauss sees tricksters as the epitome of binary oppositions, an intrinsic anomaly encompassing every set of extremes.²⁰⁷ Tricksters engage with oppositions: the sacred and the profane, life and death, culture and nature, order and chaos and fertility and impotence. They are not defined by either side of a binary distinction, nor by both sides at once or by a series of oppositions. Revelling in their ambiguity, tricksters sit right on the edge or just beyond defined borders, classifications and categories. Indeed, no border is sacred to such a figure, be it religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical.²⁰⁸ Tricksters are often seen as a socio-cultural outsider, whose acts are out-of-bounds or taboo. They do not conform to socio-cultural borders, in fact they delight in breaking them, almost impulsively transitioning back and forth between them with little consequence. For those confined by these boundaries, tricksters appear to have no fixed position. They seem to continuously transition between the spheres of the liminal and the marginal.²⁰⁹ Robert Pelton states that tricksters “pulverizes the univocal” and embodies the multivalence of life.²¹⁰ The fundamental ambiguity of tricksters allow them to escape any restrictive definition.

Section 3.1A: Wakdjunkaga

In the beginning Wakdjunkaga defies definition. He has no fixed physical presence: as he experiences new things, his body develops from pure ambiguity into the body of a man. He violates socio-cultural taboos at every opportunity; he eats a laxative despite being warned of its consequences and profanes one of the Winnebago's most sacred rituals, that of the warbundle.²¹¹ He is as yet unaware of his full capacities, as ambiguous to himself as he is to us. He was placed on earth with a specific goal, but only remembers it near the end of his adventures; in the meantime, however, he unintentionally bestows essential gifts on humanity.

²⁰⁷ Lévi-Strauss 1963: 224-6.

²⁰⁸ Hynes & Doty 1997: 34.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 35.

²¹⁰ Pelton 1980: 224.

²¹¹ Radin 1956: 4-7, 25-7.

Section 3.1B: Ture

Brian Street argues that Ture mediates between the opposing forces of creativeness and destructiveness.

*To question everything in society would lead to anarchy; to preserve everything would lead to stagnation.*²¹²

Ture possesses an anomalous personality; he eagerly breaches every taboo that he comes across regardless of its sacredness. He lies and steals from those who trust him, he attempts to murder his wife and children.²¹³ Through these continual violations of sacred categories, tricksters disassemble them and reaffirm them.

Section 3.1C: Loki

Loki possesses an ambivalent duality, he is both an essential helpmate to the gods, and a herald of the apocalypse. He is cast as an outsider from the beginning as the progeny of a goddess and a giant. Although he is accepted among the Æsir, this is only begrudgingly. He is both the tormentor of the gods and their savior. Loki transgresses socio-cultural borders with no thought of the consequence.

Loki possesses a sexual and magical ambivalence that relegates him to the liminal and allows his character to explore self-abasement. His general ambivalence allows him to perform degrading tasks that no other figure would do, but which are necessary to maintain the delicate hierarchy of the Norse pantheon. In the story 'How Njord got Skathi to wife' Loki employs humorous self-abasement in order to mediate a tense situation. The giantess Skathi seeks compensation for her father Thjazi's death and makes two demands, to marry an Æsir²¹⁴ and that the gods make her laugh. Loki is instrumental in fulfilling the second request; he ties one end of a rope to his testicles and the other end to a she-goat's beard. A comical yet grotesque tug of war ensues, and Skathi bursts out laughing when Loki falls on her lap in pain. Lindow notes within old Norse literature, the goat's beard, a male attribute attached to a female creature, illustrates male sexual ambivalence.²¹⁵ Loki is also associated

²¹² Singer & Street 1972: 97.

²¹³ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 108, 111, 135-6.

²¹⁴ The Æsir tricks her out of marrying the beautiful Æsir Baldur in favour of the Vanir Njord by making her choose her husband based solely on their feet, thus maintaining the strict hierarchy of marriage within the pantheon.

²¹⁵ Lindow 1992: 135.

with the magical technique of *Seidr*, which was associated with femininity and the effeminate man.²¹⁶ In Norse society, masculinity was best represented by figures such as Thor, who rely on their strength and skills as a fighter. Loki, however, embodies the opposite, he embraces the feminine magical arts and relies on his wits rather than his brawn. Schnurbein suggests that Loki's effeminacy is the reason why the gods distrust him.

*It might even be entirely plausible to deduce from this episode that Loki's eloquence and his ability to give sound advice is the very thing that the gods find so unsettling and consider unmanly.*²¹⁷

Section 3.1D: Conclusions

All three figures are ambiguous and anomalous creatures. They conform to neither side of their respective culture's socio-cultural boundaries and evade definition through the paradoxical actions they orchestrate within their narratives. Perceived as outsiders, they breach socio-cultural taboos whenever possible.

Section 3.2: Deceiver and Trick-Player

As their name suggests, Tricksters are the supreme trick player and deceiver within their respective narratives. Often Tricksters are the prime cause of disruption, disorder, misfortune and impropriety. For tricksters, truth is something to be stretched and moulded to suit their needs. In line with their ambiguous nature, their motivations for lying, cheating and trickery may be impulsive, those of a buffoon wishing to appease their appetites, whether gastric or sexual; or rational and aimed at orchestrating a malicious plan. The trickster's tricks often get out of hand, however, and can backfire on them: the trickster is tricked by the trickster.

Section 3.2A: Wakdjunkaga

Wakdjunkaga meets a paddling of ducks and asks them if they would like to dance to his songs.²¹⁸ They agree and build a dancing lodge and musical instruments, but are told by Wakdjunkaga that they can only dance if their eyes are closed, otherwise they will turn red. While dancing, they begin to hear choking and gasping noises, so one of them opens their

²¹⁶ Schnurbein 2000: 121.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* 122.

²¹⁸ Radin 1956: 14-7.

eyes. They see trickster wringing the neck of a duck, and all the ducks flee. Wakdjunkaga manages to keep hold of two of them and decides to cook the ducks and slow roast them under ashes while he sleeps. He tells his anus to keep guard, but while he is resting a fox finds his food. Initially hesitant because the trickster's anus keeps farting whenever they approach, the fox sees through the trick and eats all of the trickster's food, while his alarmed anus defecates all over him. He thus loses his hard-earned meal and awakens covered in excrement: an example of how the deceptions of tricksters often backfire.

Section 3.2B: Ture

Evans-Pritchard describes Ture as “the monster of depravity: liar, cheat, lecher, murderer; vain, greedy, treacherous, ungrateful, a poltroon, a braggart.”²¹⁹ He is motivated to cheat because he becomes distracted and fails to accomplish his duties, or because he is lazy and wishes to appease his hunger. Often Ture's deceptions backfire because he is tricked by those he is attempting to deceive. Recurring characters such as the Red Duiker and Orphan begin as Ture's marks, yet, in the end, they get the better of him. Ture tricks Duiker into acting as game to trade for a bag of termites and promises to help him escape afterwards. Ture abandons Duiker and takes the termites to a man who processes them in exchange for work. Duiker escapes, finds Ture, eats all the termites and defecates in the bag while Ture works. After finishing, Ture eats up Duiker's waste, only realising afterwards what he has done.²²⁰ In the case of Orphan, when he and Ture go on a journey to Ture's in-laws, on three separate occasions Ture instructs Orphan to collect firewood, water and grass, but only after they have reached their destination. Orphan, however, stealthily collects all the materials during their journey. At the home of the in-laws, when Ture tells the boy to get what he asks for, he is shocked to discover Orphan has everything at hand. Ture intended to eat Orphan's portion of food while he was supposed to be out and having failed at this bit of deception refuses to eat anything, leaving all the food for Orphan.²²¹

²¹⁹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 28.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* 97-8.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 99-100.

Section 3.2C: Loki

Loki's trickery is both coveted and despised by the gods. He often orchestrates his acts of trickery for his own sake and as a service for the gods. He steals the goddess Sif's hair for nothing more than "mischief's sake". The consequences of this trick leads to Loki procuring valuable treasures for the gods such as Thor's hammer, but Loki also pays the price for his actions: his mouth is sewn shut. Loki engages in more malevolent acts of trickery in the narrative of Baldur's death, and Rooth argues that the inherent animosity that the Æsir have against him can be traced back to the death of Baldur.²²² Loki displays discontent in this narrative and, motivated by jealousy and spite, topples Baldur. When Baldur tells the gods about his dreams concerning his death, his mother Frigg approaches all the elements and creatures of the world and persuades them to pledge that they will never harm him. The gods then decide to have some fun: they shoot arrows, hurl stones and other things at Baldur, and no matter what hits him he is never harmed. Baldur's newfound immunity annoys Loki. He transforms into an elderly woman, and questions Frigg about her son's immunity to harm.

'Ay,' said Frigga, 'neither metal nor wood can hurt Baldur, for I have exacted an oath from all of them. 'What!' exclaimed the woman, 'have all things sworn to spare Baldur?' 'All things, replied Frigga, 'except one little shrub that grows on the eastern side of Valhalla, and is called Mistletoe, and which I thought too young and feeble to crave an oath from'.²²³

Loki finds the mistletoe and takes it to Baldur's blind brother Hödr, the god of winter and darkness. Being blind and unable to aim, Loki convinces Hödr to throw a mistletoe dart at Baldur, with Loki guiding his aim. The dart kills Baldur, and the gods send Hermódr to Hel to negotiate Baldur's release. Hel agrees on the condition that everything should first weep for him. Everything weeps, everything except a giantess named Thökk: "It was strongly suspected that this hag was no other than Loki himself who never ceased to work evil among the Æsir".²²⁴ The orchestration of the death of Baldur is Loki's ultimate act of deception. As is the case with the trickster, this deception backfires upon him in the most extreme sense: he is bound in chains made from the intestines of his son, where he must

²²² Rooth 1961: 189.

²²³ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 316.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 320.

stay until his final adventure, Ragnarök. Here “Loki serves as the adversarial figure who heralds the events of Ragnarök and brings about a new balance through violence and disorder.”²²⁵

Section 3.2D: Conclusions

All three tricksters engage in trickery to achieve their goals, yet, their motivations vary. Carroll sees two distinct types of trickster figures, each with different motivations; the selfish-buffoon and the clever hero.²²⁶ While the clever hero uses their intelligence to outwit their opponents, the selfish-buffoon fixates on gratifying their enormous appetites for food and sex, and the tricks they enact to appease their appetite often backfire.²²⁷ Despite these differing motivations, however, both types of tricksters can act as a culture hero who transforms the conditions of the world for the betterment of humanity.

Wakdjunkaga embodies the selfish-buffoon: he is consistently motivated by his hunger and libido. Through his impulsiveness, Wakdjunkaga unwittingly distributes vital benefits to humankind but also experiences the brunt of humiliation by getting tricked by himself and others. Ture also represents the selfish-buffoon, yet there is no consistency with Ture’s deception, like the character it is ambiguous. Sometimes Ture is the gullible dupe that gets tricked, sometimes he utterly fails, making a fool of himself, but often his trickery results in him getting what he wants with no negative consequences. Like Wakdjunkaga, Ture is motivated by both hunger and libido, but food is paramount for Ture, and aside from one narrative concerning his mother-in-law, this is his sole motivator.²²⁸

Loki possesses an incredible appetite, but this is not what motivates his trickery. He embodies the clever hero, who appears to implement his deception to outwit his opponent. As the clever hero, Loki offers his trickery as a service to the gods. In the ‘building of the wall’ narrative and his confrontation with the giantess Skathi, Loki implements his trickery against a specific opponent because the gods desire him to. His role as the clever hero does not explain why Loki kills Baldur, however, nor why he shaves Sif's hair for nothing more

²²⁵ Krause-Loner 2003: 32.

²²⁶ Carroll 1984: 106.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 144.

than “mischief’s sake”. According to Krause-Loner, within Norse society shaving a women’s hair was a punishment for infidelity,²²⁹ and given the intimacy required to accomplish this act, the implication is that Loki is motivated by a need to appease his sexual appetite. Perceptions of Loki are tainted by Christian writers such as Snorri who have conflated him with conceptions of the Christian devil. This has resulted in Loki being depicted as a more malevolent figure than he may have been seen as in pagan Norse society.²³⁰ Lewis Hyde argues that Loki does not kill Baldur out of spite but following the trickster's function as a change agent who keeps the cosmos from falling into stagnation.²³¹ By securing Baldur’s immunity, Frigg derails the natural order of life and death within the cosmos; by killing Baldur, Loki reasserts the necessary balance between order and disorder within the cosmos. Loki is not a malicious actor; he ensures fluidity in the system. For those within the system, however, his actions appear malicious and he is punished for his restoration of the cosmos.

*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.*²³²

All three figures experience the consequences of their actions, and their tricks tend to backfire in some way. Wakdjunkaga faces bodily mutilation and at one point almost drowns in his own excrement. Ture comes close to death on several occasions due to his tricks and habitually is forced to roam the wilderness waiting for his wives to forgive his actions. Loki is also punished: his lips are sewn shut by the dwarven brothers and, for the death of Baldur, he is imprisoned in the bowels of the earth where he awaits Ragnarök.

Section 3.3: Shape-Shifter

In regard to their trick-playing, an important aspect that distinguishes tricksters are their use of shape-shifting. Tricksters can easily manipulate their shape to facilitate their desired deception, transitioning between different sexes and, more often, different species.²³³

²²⁹ Krause-Loner 2003: 52-3.

²³⁰ Rooth 1961: 85.

²³¹ Hyde 2010: 107.

²³² *Ibid.* 106. In Icelandic, the gods are called *reginn*, which means “organizing powers.”

²³³ Hynes & Doty 1997: 35.

Section 3.3A: Wakdjunkaga

In his cycle, Wakdjunkaga develops from an anomalous creature, with an autonomous anus and a detachable phallus that he carries upon his back, to a being that resembles humans. He also employs other forms of shape-shifting to further his acts of deception. Wakdjunkaga dresses up as a woman and gets married to a local chief so that he and his friends will not have to work for food in the winter.²³⁴ He uses an elk's liver to create a vulva and its kidneys to form breasts and after putting on women's dress passes as a woman. Wakdjunkaga then marries the chief and has three children with him. While joking with his mother-in-law, however, Wakdjunkaga jumps over a fire and loses his now rotting elk's liver. He is exposed as the trickster and must flee retribution. When Wakdjunkaga meets some mother racoons, he tells them where to get plums and promises to babysit their children until they return.²³⁵ Wakdjunkaga kills and eats the babies, and, when he sees the mothers returning, he goes behind a hill and disguises himself by painting his face black.²³⁶ Now unrecognizable, he approaches the mothers and promises to help them catch the trickster, they agree and are led to another fatal act of deception by him.

Section 3.3B: Ture

On two occasions, when Ture's antics have resulted in his banishment from a particular area, Ture uses what he has at hand to help disguise himself as an older woman. There is nothing supernatural about this transformation: Ture dresses in women's attire, rubs flowers into his hair, making it appear white, rubs ash on his face and leans on a staff in a stooping manner. In both cases, Ture's disguise initially works, but his identity is revealed when his testicles poke out of his skirt.²³⁷ Ture employs a more complex form of shape-shifting when eaten by a man called Bangbangate. After spending three days trapped inside his belly, Ture transforms into a Kpikoro²³⁸ insect, passes through Bangbangate's digestive system, and once free reverts to his original form.²³⁹ Ture also manipulates aspects of his body to alter his identity. When captured by Eye-bee, Ture takes a pair of wild apples and

²³⁴ Radin 1956: 21-24.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* 29-31.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* 117. Within Winnebago culture, magical paint was applied to one's face for invisibility and perhaps this is what Wakdjunkaga is doing here.

²³⁷ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 93, 123.

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 75; According to Evans-Pritchard, it is an insect that feigns death when disturbed. It is wingless, has a rigid body, and is black.

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 181-3.

puts them into his eye sockets. Eye-bee does not recognize Ture, who now calls himself Tanga.²⁴⁰

Section 3.3C: Loki

Schjødt argues that Loki's unique magical capacities, such as his ability to shape-shift, relegate him to a liminal position between fundamental opposites.²⁴¹ Loki utilizes different types of shape-shifting to further his goals. He transforms into a fly to prevent the dwarven brothers Brokkr and Sindri from winning their wager. In the death of Baldur, Loki transforms on two separate occasions, taking on the guise of an older woman to question Frigg about Baldur and transforming into the giantess Thökk to prevent Baldur's resurrection. In the capture and punishment of Loki, while evading the gods, Loki turns into a salmon and hides in a river. Loki's shape-shifting abilities also illustrate his ambivalence with regard to his gender and sexuality. In the building of the wall narrative, Loki transforms into a mare to entice the giant's horse Svadilfare and conceives Odin's eight-legged horse Sleipnir by him.²⁴²

Section 3.3D: Conclusions

All three figures employ forms of shape-shifting to achieve their goals. Wakdjunkaga's body develops as his cycle does. Ture and Wakdjunkaga utilize both complex and rudimentary forms of shape-shifting, while Loki only uses the former. Both Ture and Wakdjunkaga shift gender by using what is at hand. For Ture this is accomplished through a rudimentary but well-formed disguise, but for Wakdjunkaga, something more is at work. With the organs of an elk, he manages to transform into a woman and gives birth to three children: this transformation is more than a simple changing of clothes. For Loki, shape-shifting is second nature and is often intrinsic to his acts of deception. Like Wakdjunkaga, Loki gives birth while transformed, blurring the boundaries of gender and sexuality.

²⁴⁰ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 135.

²⁴¹ Schjødt 1981: 55.

²⁴² Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 296-9.

Section 3.4: Situation-Inverter

As the situation-inverter, tricksters can overturn any person, place or belief regardless of their importance. This has no limits: there is no god or sacred custom that cannot be violated and upturned by tricksters; what is below ascends to the top and vice versa. In this manner, they can make traditionally safe spaces into dangerous ones and then revert things again. An aspect of the situation-inverter is the parody of ritual. Tricksters imitate or parody sacred rituals, and through this process re-affirm the socio-cultural importance of the boundaries. Street argues that tricksters "can be seen 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".²⁴³ By imitating and parodying sacred rituals within their narratives, tricksters serve as examples of how not to act within their society, as well as showing the consequences of violating sacred taboos. Hynes notes that such "profanations seem to exhibit a clear pattern of proportionality: the more sacred a belief, the more likely is the trickster to be found profaning it".²⁴⁴

Section 3.4A: Wakdjunkaga

Wakdjunkaga's role as a situation-inverter is best illustrated in his first narrative where he acts as the chief of a tribe.²⁴⁵ As chief he decides to go on the warpath and orders a great feast. Everyone attends but halfway through the festivities Wakdjunkaga leaves to sleep with a woman. Everyone then leaves, as it is against Winnebago custom for the chief to have sex while preparing to go on the warpath. This pattern is repeated two more times, and on the fourth declaration, the majority of the people do not even attend the festivities, though on this occasion the chief does go on the warpath. They begin their expedition on a boat, but almost immediately Wakdjunkaga orders them to turn around and destroys their boat, claiming it is useless for the warpath. He then destroys his warbundle and his bundle of arrows, making the majority of his followers leave.

*Here is Wakdjunkaga pretending to be thoroughly socialized and about to embark on a warparty. But let me tell you what he really is: an utter fool, a breaker of the most holy taboos, a destroyer of the most sacred objects!*²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Singer & Street 1972: 85.

²⁴⁴ Hynes & Doty 1997: 37.

²⁴⁵ Radin 1956: 4-6.

²⁴⁶ Radin 1956: 133.

Wakdjunkaga thus parodies and mocks one of the Winnebago's most sacred ritual, that of the warbundle.²⁴⁷ He violates the sacred feast by sleeping with a woman and keeps on repeating a ritual that is only supposed to be performed during times of strife and crisis. Furthermore, as the chief he is not supposed to instigate acts of war and in so doing mocks the functions of the chiefs of his culture.²⁴⁸ Even more reprehensible is his destruction of the tribe's warbundle, a sacred object that is prized and guarded more than any other item in the community.

Ricketts argues that the of parody of sacred ritual is intended to contrast a purely religious way of thinking with a secular humanist perspective. This religious mode is embodied by religious specialists like shamans, while the parodies of tricksters represent a humanist way of thinking.²⁴⁹

Shamans are spiritual practitioners who have undergone a transcendental experience that adheres to Victor Turner's theory of liminality and initiation.²⁵⁰ They are mediators between humans and the divine and can communicate with animals and plants to help enrich their community. Wakdjunkaga can communicate with animals like a shaman; he does not however understand what they are saying. After humiliating himself while trying to skin a buffalo, a flock of birds begin to tease Wakdjunkaga, and he responds "Ah, you naughty little birds! I wonder what they are saying?"²⁵¹ Shamans seeks aid from the supernatural while tricksters ignore it, even when it is shouting directly at them. Ricketts argues that Wakdjunkaga's various attempts at imitating other animals are a direct parody of the shaman's role as mediator between the supernatural and humanity.

*Blundering efforts to do what the animals do may be viewed as mockery of shamans and all others who think they can get higher powers from the animal spirits.*²⁵²

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 116-7. Radin notes that the Winnebago trickster cycle is unique among Amerindian trickster cycles as it is the only one that parodies this sacred warbundle ritual.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 115.

²⁴⁹ Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 87-8.; Although Ricketts suggests that this is true for all global tricksters, his analysis focuses on the various Amerindian versions of the trickster figure, and at no point does he illustrate how non-Amerindian figures conform to this antithesis of a pure religious performer.

²⁵⁰ Turner 1991: 94.

²⁵¹ Radin 1956: 8.

²⁵² Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 95.

Section 3.4B: Ture

A recurring motif found in Zande trickster narratives concerns Ture observing another character using magical practices to obtain necessary materials. These magical rituals allow their users to uncover secret underground homes, kill game without effort and to move immovable objects with ease. Once Ture has discovered a new trick, his first action is always to burn down his homestead, as he genuinely believes that it will no longer be of use to him or his family. Ture can never enact the ritual correctly, however, leaving him and his family with nothing. Ture thus inverts what is considered safe into something else.²⁵³

Section 3.4C: Loki

Loki often craftily inverts the situation he is in, for example in the *Lokasenna*. Set at a feast hosted by the sea god Aegir, all the major Æsir, Vanir and Alfs except for Thor, are in attendance. The banquet is declared a sanctuary where no outbreaks of violence are permitted. Loki begins to abuse one deity after the other verbally, and in the process uncovers shameful truths. The poem illustrates a series of socio-cultural boundary violations, such as breaching the rules of peace granted for the feast. Aegir's servants Fimafeng and Eldir are highly praised by the gods and, acting out of jealousy, Loki kills Fimafeng and is removed from the feast. However, he returns:

*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.*²⁵⁴

His return is in violation of custom: he is the party crasher who disrupts the *status quo* through his mischief. Krause-Loner notes aspects of the trickster as a situation-inverter within this narrative.

*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.*²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 43-4.

²⁵⁴ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 107.

²⁵⁵ Krause-Loner 2003: 33.

The god of poetry, Bragi, tells Loki to leave and warns him that none of the guests will give him a seat at the table. Loki parries this threat by reminding Odin that they are blood brothers and by custom Odin must share his mead with him.²⁵⁶ Observing custom, Odin allows Loki to re-join the feast “lest...[he] fling lewd words at us”.²⁵⁷ However, this is exactly what Loki starts doing. He accuses Bragi, the god who refused him a seat at the table, of being a loudmouthed coward on the battlefield. Bragi’s wife Ithun tries to mediate, but this only attracts Loki’s ire and he begins to question Ithun’s fidelity, calling her the “most mad” after men. The rest of the narrative is structured around this pattern: Loki verbally attacks one deity, only to have another come to their aid who in turn becomes Loki’s next target.

*Loki is a loner and outsider. It is the trickster against the world, attacking companion and adversary similar to Coyote and Wakdjunkaga.*²⁵⁸

The *Lokasenna* narrative illustrates the shocking, liminal quality of the tricksters' speech. Here Loki functions as the situation-inverter *par excellence*. His verbal scrutiny disrupts the established hierarchy. What was intended to be a joyous feast, at a sanctuary where violence is not permitted, is turned upside down into a barrage of shameful insults by Loki. This is a feat that can only be accomplished by an outsider to the system.

*Loki undermines the status quo by speaking the truth, a truth that only one outside the establishment can utter.*²⁵⁹

Section 3.4D: Conclusions

All three figures illustrate elements of the situation-inverter. Through profaning and inverting social belief systems, tricksters define the importance of the system for the narrative’s audience. Ricketts maintains that an essential feature of this category is the presence of a religious figure who upholds the values of the system that tricksters are mocking: shamans, whose spiritual way contrasts with the trickster’s humanist one. This argument is debatable, however, with regard to our three figures.

²⁵⁶ Hollander notes that this is the only reference to Loki and Odin being blood brothers.

²⁵⁷ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 108.

²⁵⁸ Krause-Loner 2003: 34.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 36.

While there is no arguing that Wakdjunkaga parodies aspects of Winnebago culture throughout his cycle of narratives, he only has limited space in Ricketts' discussion of this subject. It is only through comparing similar stories from other Amerindian cultures that Ricketts can bring shamans into the realm of Wakdjunkaga.²⁶⁰

Street argues that Ture's narratives "can be seen 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".²⁶¹ Ture habitually fails to perform magical rituals and suffers for it, yet, there is nothing specifically sacred about these rituals; they are magical formulas with efficient intention, used to heal, create food from nothing and make private homes underground. Although Ture parodies these rituals, in that he incorrectly performs them or humorously muddles the process up, he is not contrasted with a purely religious figure such as shamans that Jung, Radin and Ricketts see as the antithesis to trickster figures.²⁶² Ture never battles his wits against a socially sanctioned religious performer such as the witch doctor, who was a vital part of the Azande community.²⁶³

Loki embodies the situation-inverter, through his ability to upturn any situation, such as Aegir's feast in the *Lokasenna*. Loki is pitted against characters who may be viewed as representing the pure religious way, represented by either shamans or hero/champions, such as Odin, Thor and Baldur. Baldur may be said to personify the pure spiritual hero/champion who negates the natural order of the cosmos and is summarily brought down by Loki, the humanist seeking balance within the universe. Loki's love-hate relationship with Thor may also illustrate antagonism between the religious and humanist way. Loki often subverts Thor, the protector of both gods and men, and leads him into situations where Loki shows him to be a lumbering oaf, slow of thought. Krause-Loner, moreover, suggests that Odin represents the shamanistic figure within the Norse pantheon. In two separate myths, Odin sacrifices parts of himself in the pursuit of divine wisdom. He exchanges one of his eyes for knowledge and hangs himself from the world tree Yggdrasil

²⁶⁰ Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 94-9; Carroll 1984: 111-13.

²⁶¹ Singer & Street 1972: 85.

²⁶² Hynes & Doty 1997: 10-11.

²⁶³ Evans-Pritchard 1964: 31; The Azande have a collection of narratives dedicated to the legendary exploits of two witchdoctors and the fact that such figures never appear in the Ture narratives suggest that the rituals parodied by Ture are not religious but fall within the secular sphere.

for nine days and nights to learn the art of rune magic. Krause-Loner sees these episodes as “implicitly shamanic in nature, part of the ecstatic transcending of bounded, ‘human’ limitations in order to be initiated into shamanic mysteries.”²⁶⁴ Loki is often at odds with Odin, who utilises his wisdom and rune magic to enact his plans, while Loki, the humanist, uses his wit and skills to do battle. Although Loki never parodies any specific Norse rituals, he does directly mock and subvert the religious representatives that define and maintain the system. Loki’s critical role in the events of Ragnarök also reflects his role as a situation inverter. Loki upturns the whole Norse religious system; he and his progeny eliminate almost all of its representatives and pave the way for an entirely new system.

Section 3.5: Messenger and Imitator of the Gods

Tricksters are often of uncertain or impure birth, which locates them in-between the realms of the natural and supernatural, as they possess both divine and mundane traits. This admixture allows tricksters to transition back and forth between the two spheres, carrying information such as a divine message, a supplicant’s prayers or cultural wisdom from one side to the other. As the imitator and messenger of the gods, tricksters also perform as cultural heroes or cultural transformers, who convey essential cultural wisdom or benefits to humankind. Makarius notes that the “trickster 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”.²⁶⁵ Since tricksters are the ones who break taboos, while gifting humanity in the process, the necessary punishments are deflected from human society onto tricksters. This process allows for crucial powers to be made available for human use without disrupting cosmic boundaries. Acting as a midpoint between gods and humans, tricksters thus function as cultural transformers. This function is often subject to parody and mockery, however, more often than not, the gifts of tricksters come to humans accidentally and not intentionally, allowing valuable wisdom to trickle down to humans through imperfect imitations or parodies of sacred rituals. As a medium between worlds, tricksters may also perform the

²⁶⁴ Krause-Loner 2003: 56.

²⁶⁵ Makarius in Hynes & Doty 1997: 85.

role of a psychopomp: a guide that helps souls' transition from the realm of the living to the dead.

Section 3.5A: Wakdjunkaga

There is no uncertainty or impurity concerning Wakdjunkaga's origins: he is the firstborn of Earthmaker. There is nothing else like him, and there will never be another. Yet, left alone and unsocialized, he is similar to other tricksters of uncertain or impure origins: all begin life as outsiders.

Wakdjunkaga conforms to the category of cultural hero/transformer strongly in his narratives. When he gets his head stuck inside an elk's skull, he tricks villagers into thinking he is a water spirit that will grant them special medical equipment if they break the skull.²⁶⁶ They do so and Wakdjunkaga reveals himself, laughing at their gullibility. He keeps his promise, however, and from the skull the villagers create all sorts of medical instruments. This gift was not Wakdjunkaga's original intention: the episode unfolds because Wakdjunkaga wanted to dance with ants and got his head stuck in a skull. In another narrative, while hiding in a tree, Chipmunk makes fun of Wakdjunkaga's absurd genital organization (he carries his phallus in a box upon his back and his testicles on his head).²⁶⁷ In retaliation, Wakdjunkaga probes his detachable phallus into the tree's hollow to deal with Chipmunk. Chipmunk gnaws down the massive phallus until it resembles a human one. Although he mourns the loss of his appendage, Wakdjunkaga takes the leftover pieces and throws them across the world, declaring what they will now become necessary food for humans, including potatoes, lily of the lake, rice, turnips and artichokes. Again, there is no initial altruism in Wakdjunkaga actions; he makes lemonade out of lemons, so to speak, and turns an embarrassing experience into one full of benefits for humanity.

Section 3.5B: Ture

Ture's infancy does reflect the motif of an impure or uncertain origin. Soon after his birth Ture can talk and starts stealing food from his mother's kitchen when she is not looking. Once his parents realize that it is Ture who has been taking all their food, they abandon him

²⁶⁶ Radin 1956: 34-5.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 39-40.

and his twin sister, believing Ture is a monster, as no child should possess the mental capacities he exhibits. The two are left alone, and it is up to the infant Ture to provide for himself and his sister.²⁶⁸

A recurring theme in the Ture narratives is failed imitation. Often Ture meets characters that possess particular types of magic. This magic has two general components: a magical paste, formed by combining certain oils and the ash of magical herb, and a song or incantation that must be uttered during the ritual. Although Ture observes others utilizing this magic, he never succeeds in performing it himself, either because he gets bored and never finishes or because he forgets and omits elements of the process. Street argues that Ture's failed imitations relate to the tricksters' liminal character.

*For the 'meaningful', the 'differentiated' is implied in the action which Ture copies; he defines the boundaries of that action, as it is defined by his society, by representing what happens when that action is not carried out precisely.*²⁶⁹

Street sees Ture's failed attempts at imitation as models that help society develop meaning from the meaningless: "By acting at the boundaries of order the trickster gives definition to that order".²⁷⁰

In his first three narratives, Ture functions as a cultural hero/transformer who employs his wits to acquire water, agriculture and fire for humanity.²⁷¹ Ture gives humans access to water. Initially, humans could get water only from rain, but one elderly woman possessed a dam of water.²⁷² People would offer their labour for food and water, and the woman would let them do her work, then feed them yams until they choked, craving water, whereupon she would slit their throats. Ture thinks he can out-trick her. Hiding a gourd of water under his arm, he secretly drinks while eating the yams without choking. The woman realises what he is doing and tries to kill him, but Ture manages to evade her and flees towards her outhouse. She warns him not to go there, but running ahead he accidentally crashes into

²⁶⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 141.

²⁶⁹ Singer & Street 1972: 100.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 101.

²⁷¹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 37, 39.

²⁷² Evans-Pritchard 1967: 38.

the dam she has made. He breaks through it, and the escaping water becomes the world's rivers, lakes and streams.

Ture evades consequences: he is easily forgiven for past crimes and this is also evident in a recurring theme among Ture's tales, his death and resurrection. Ture is not a psychopomp, but his relationship with death is noteworthy. Ture steals a man's fish hidden in a tree hollow and the basket of fish gets stuck to his head.²⁷³ His wives try to knock it off, but this hurts Ture, who dies from the consecutive blows. His wives send for the man whose fish Ture stole, who arrives with magic paste that he rubs on Ture's head, resurrecting him. In another tale, Ture observes Mbiangu stopping a bush fire through a magical ritual that involves dipping one's hat in sesame oil.²⁷⁴ Ture tries the ritual, but not using sesame oil, is burnt to death. Mbiangu hears about this, rushes to Ture's homestead and rubs magic ash on his upper lip, resurrecting him.

Section 3.5C: Loki

Loki's birth is uncertain: he is the progeny of a goddess and a giant. The Norse gods and giants have a strict hierarchy concerning marriage. The Æsir gods can marry anyone, be it another Æsir goddess, a Vanir or giantess. Æsir women, however, can only marry Æsir men, making Loki's very existence taboo within the context of the Norse pantheon.²⁷⁵ Possessing both Æsir and giant heritage, Loki is relegated to the liminal and functions as an intermediary figure between the two opposing groups. Loki often functions as a helpmate and companion to another god, such as Odin or Thor, and sometimes delivers messages on their behalf, acting as a mediator.

Loki has little or no contact with humanity, but indirectly transfers significant cultural benefits via those he bestows upon the Æsir. In the *Skáldskaparmál*, Loki cuts off Sif's hair, enraging Thor, and Loki pledges to acquire even better hair for Sif.²⁷⁶ Loki finds the famous dwarven craftsmen, the sons of Ivaldi, who agree to make Sif a head of golden hair, Frey's foldable ship, the *Skidbladnir*, and Odin's spear *Gungnir*. Loki then approaches the dwarven

²⁷³ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 111.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 91-2.

²⁷⁵ Schnurbein 2000: 118.

²⁷⁶ Byock (*Prose Edda*): 68.

brothers Brokkr and Sindri and bets his head that they cannot create better treasures than the sons of Ivaldi. The brothers agree to Loki's wager and with Brokkr on the bellows and Sindri at the forge they first create Frey's golden boar Gullinbursti. During the process Brokkr's hand is stung by a fly. The fly is Loki in disguise, trying to hedge his bet. Next, they forge Odin's multiplying ring Draupnir, and Brokkr is stung on the neck. Last is Thor's hammer Mjolnir, and Brokkr is stung on his eyes, causing him to stop the blows momentarily, which results in Mjolnir's shaft being smaller than intended. The brothers take their creations to the gods to be judged against those of the sons of Ivaldi. The gods agree that all the treasures are exquisite but see Mjolnir as the finest of them, despite its size, because in the hands of Thor it will secure Asgard's defense against the Giants. The brothers win the bet, but Loki avoids losing his head, arguing that the brothers are only entitled to his head and not his neck, thus averting decapitation. The brothers decide to stitch Loki's lips closed instead. Although the treasures Loki has made do not go directly to humanity, in the hands of the gods they can be used to protect the realm of Midgard from the giants, thus ensuring their safety.

In 'the capture of Loki', he invents the first fishing net. After angering the gods, he turns into a salmon and he spends his days trying to answer a single question: How would Loki capture himself? Sitting in his four doored home, Loki "took flax and yarn, and worked them into meshes in the manner that nets have since been made by fishermen."²⁷⁷ Soon after finishing, he hears the gods approaching, throws his new invention into his fire and conceals himself in the river as a salmon. Kvasir, the wisest of the gods, notices the remnants of Loki's net in the fire. From what little remains, he constructs a new net that the gods can use to capture Loki.

Section 3.5D: Conclusions

Although only Loki possesses the 'impure' origins that place him between two cultural categories,²⁷⁸ all three begin life under uncertain circumstances that cast them as social outsiders. Embodying an admixture of both mundane and divine attributes, tricksters perform as culture heroes or cultural transformers for their society. All three conform to this

²⁷⁷ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 321.

²⁷⁸ The Æsir and Giants.

criterion, with each unintentionally conveying necessary benefits to humanity. Wakdjunkaga provides foods, medicines and rearranges the world for humanity, Ture grants access to agriculture, water and fire, and Loki organizes the creation of the gods' powerful treasures and invents the fishing net.

Tricksters may suffer consequences for transferring cultural benefits from the divine to humanity. Characteristically, all three figures evade full punishment for their acts of trickery, but this does vary. Ture appears to evade the consequences altogether. After being ostracized for a time, he is forgiven for actions such as destroying his family home or beating his wife in anger.²⁷⁹ Ture evades death with ease: when he dies as a consequence of his trickery, he is revived by magic rituals that he failed to imitate. The fact that Wakdjunkaga never dies and evades the wrath of the chief he cohabits with suggests that he too can avoid certain consequences. Loki escapes decapitation when he loses to the dwarves, suffering the lesser punishment of having his lips sewn shut instead. Loki cannot escape the consequences of killing Baldur, but his imprisonment is only temporary, he will be freed at Ragnarök.

Tricksters may act as a psychopomp, but none of the three figures considered here observe this aspect of the category. Wakdjunkaga has little to do with death, Ture evades death and even mocks it, but his relationship with death does not go beyond this. In the Norse pantheon, the role of psychopomp is ascribed to the Valkyries, rather than Loki.²⁸⁰ Loki does, however, travel back and forth between different realms, and it is perhaps noteworthy that he is the father of Hel, the goddess of the underworld who guards the gates between life and death.²⁸¹

Section 3.6: Sacred & Lewd Bricoleur

Lévi-Strauss defines the bricoleur as “a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution”.²⁸² To the bricoleur, anything and everything can be employed as an innovative tool to achieve their purposes.

²⁷⁹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 153.

²⁸⁰ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 35, 85.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* 32-3.

²⁸² Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16-18.

As a figure that thrives in paradoxical opposition, tricksters can function as either the 'sacred' bricoleur or as the 'lewd' bricoleur.²⁸³ This creativity is motivated by the tricksters' urge to satisfy their urges, whether sexual, gastric or scatological. They are often associated with both phallic imagery and heightened libido. In the hands of the bricoleur, 'lewd' gastronomic, flatulent, sexual, phallic, and faecal acts can be transformed into moments of enlightenment, creativity and new technology. Tricksters do not usually get to eat what they desire within their narrative, however, and on the few occasions when they are successful, they tend to find little pleasure in the act: such narratives are focussed on the search process rather than its fulfilment.

Section 3.6A: Wakdjunkaga

As discussed in the previous section (3.5A), Wakdjunkaga transforms his phallic remains into vital foodstuffs for humanity: he takes an element of the lewd and reimagines it as something sacred. This process is echoed when he uses an elk's liver and kidneys to transform into a woman and produce children.

Hunger is paramount, although tricksters often do not get to eat what they desire. After killing the ducks, Wakdjunkaga falls asleep and loses his meal to a fox. Wakdjunkaga is also prone to violating scatological and sexual taboos. He meets a plant that tells him whoever eats it will experience extreme diarrhea.²⁸⁴ Wakdjunkaga ignores this warning, believing he is immune, and is buried alive in his own excrement. He sends his autonomous phallus across a river so it can have sex with a woman on the other side, only to have it thrown back.²⁸⁵ Wakdjunkaga also acts as a simple bricoleur who uses what is at hand to achieve his goals, creating a method for hunting buffalo and a trap for catching racoons.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Hynes & Doty 1997: 42. "[H]e can find the lewd in the sacred and the sacred in the lewd, and new life from both."

²⁸⁴ Radin 1956: 25-7.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 19-20.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 7, 30-1.

Section 3.6B: Ture

Ture is also inventive. In the story recounted in section 3.5B, Ture invents a straw out of a hollow reed, so he can secretly drink water without the old women noticing.²⁸⁷ When Man-killer is chasing Ture and his family due to his mischief, Ture orchestrates a distraction while he creates tunnels so his family can escape.²⁸⁸ Hunger propels Ture to his deceptions and he goes to great lengths for food, putting his family in peril to steal a snack when no one is looking. He even kills his father, hoping that his death will magically bless him with food.²⁸⁹ There are aspects of the lewd in Ture. He sleeps with his mother-in-law, and when he tries to cover up this adultery with lies, his phallus begins to speak: "Oh dear! Ture, are you eating termites when, while you were sleeping with your mother-in-law, the termites escaped?" Ture's mother-in-law's privates also speak up: "Do you say it is a lie?"²⁹⁰.

Section 3.6C: Loki

Loki's ability as a craftsman is briefly mentioned in the 'lay of Svipdag'. Under his other name, Loptur, he is credited with forging Lævatein, a magical sword called the Wand of Destruction.²⁹¹ As described in the previous section (3.5C), he invents the fishing net.

In terms of his sexual appetite, Loki takes every opportunity he can to boast about his promiscuity in the *Lokasenna*, and even brags that he has cuckolded Thor and Tyr.

Heimdall's cautionary words to Loki here reflect tricksters' inability to control their appetite.

*Ale-crazed art__ and out of thy mind:
Why let not, Loki, be?
O'ermuch of mead__ aye maketh one
Known not what twaddle he talks²⁹²*

Loki's monstrous progeny also reflect both his heightened sexuality and his abilities as a bricoleur. In the *Short Voluspá*, through consuming a witch's heart, Loki becomes the mother of ogres.

²⁸⁷ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 38.

²⁸⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 52-3.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 139-40.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 146.

²⁹¹ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 173.

²⁹² *Ibid.* 116.

*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.²⁹³*

The Bricoleur can make the lewd sacred and vice versa: Loki consumes a witches' heart and creates new life. He is both a father and mother and his children are just as unique and ambiguous as him.

Loki possesses a monstrous appetite, as is illustrated during his and Thor's confrontation with the giant king Útgarda-Loki.²⁹⁴ The giants ask the gods to perform a feat of skill and cunning and Loki suggests his trick of eating faster than any other. The giants agree and present the figure of Logi as their representative. A broad trough is filled with food and Loki is set on one end with Logi at the other. Loki quickly consumes all the meat from the bones in the trough but loses to Logi who eats the meat, bones and the trough itself. It is revealed that Logi is fire personified and is actually burning away the trough and its contents. The giants vanish before Thor and Loki can get their revenge. Despite losing, the fact that Loki could still contend with Logi in an eating contest illustrates his trickster-like appetite.

Section 3.6D: Conclusions

All three figures conform to the category of the bricoleur, but they differ with regard to its sacred and lewd aspects. Wakdjunkaga conforms to all aspects of the category. He transforms the lewd into the sacred, and also performs more basic bricoleur acts, such as creating a method to hunt buffalo. Ture never engages with the lewd and sacred aspects of the bricoleur, but is depicted using what is at hand to formulate inventive solutions. Loki's abilities as a craftsman are notable, and his encounter with the dwarven craftsmen Brokk and Sindri also connects him with the bricoleur. Although Loki does not create the dwarven treasures himself, without his attempts at trickery they would not have been created at all. Loki is also linked with the lewd and sacred aspects of the category: he consumes a witch's heart and gives birth to the races of Ogres.

²⁹³ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 139.

²⁹⁴ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 41.

Tricksters seem impelled to violate all taboos, especially gastric, sexual or scatological ones. Often it is these base drives that motivate tricksters to deception. Wokdjungka is exemplary in this sense: he has an autonomous phallus that he uses to have sex with a woman remotely, he implements his tricks to get food and gets buried in his own excrement more than once. Wokdjungka sometimes gets to appease his appetite, but the act of appeasement often results in him losing out on other desires. Ture does to some extent, exhibit the trickster's phallic nature and heightened libido, but this desire is secondary to his hunger for food. Although some of his tricks leave him starving, in the majority of his narratives Ture successfully gets the food he desires.

Loki's appetite for food and sex is implied within his narratives, but they are never depicted as his primary motive for his acts of deception. Loki is unique as he encompasses aspects of both the clever hero and selfish-buffoon, but belongs more to the former, orchestrating his tricks to thwart a specific individual rather than to satisfy his appetite. His sexual desires are noted in his encounter with Sif and he continually boasts about his promiscuity throughout the *Lokasenna*. A closer analysis of his actions in the *Lokasenna*, moreover, reveals that his appetite may affect his motives more than is initially evident. Heimdall cautions Loki for drinking excessively, calling him "Ale-crazed and out of thy mind".²⁹⁵ An aspect of the selfish-buffoon is an inability to moderate one's appetite, which is what often leads to their deceptions backfiring upon themselves. Is this what inspires Loki to begin his barrage of shameful truths during the feast? Initially, there are no indications as to why Loki turns on the guests, and it is only near the end when Heimdall speaks that we learn the real causes of Loki's behaviour: he is motivated by his appetite and pays the price for this desire. Loki is thus both a slave to his appetite and a cunning individual that provides services to those around him. What motivates his trickery is circumstantial: when the gods require his skills, he functions as the clever hero who cleverly deals with the gods' opponents. When he acts alone, however, he cannot help but violate gastric and sexual taboos and, like the selfish-buffoon, he both pays and evades the consequences for this.

²⁹⁵ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 116.

Section 3.7: Conclusions

Characteristically ambiguous and anomalous, the three comparative figures presented here both conform to and depart from Hynes' typology. All three belong to the generalized criteria of each category, but they also differ significantly with regard to their motivations and functions within their narratives. What motivates Ture and Wakdjunkaga in their trickery seems to differ significantly from how Loki functions. Ture and Wakdjunkaga's trickery are singularly motivated by appeasement of their appetite, while Loki's motivations differ depending on the context. When Loki is alone, he is motivated by appetite, yet, when with the gods, he acts as a clever hero who provides services to them. This analysis has illustrated how generalized these criteria can be and provides a baseline that will help determine how Hermes conforms to this typology and how he compares with these three figures. In chapter four, Hynes & Doty's two-level approach will be applied to Hermes, with the analysis focused on how he functions within the *Homeric hymn to Hermes*. His cultural context will first be addressed however in chapter three. These findings will help to answer the essential question of this investigation, addressed in the final chapter: to what extent does Hermes differ from our understanding of the trickster?

Chapter 3: Hermes

Introduction

The following chapter will concentrate on Hermes. Section 1 presents an overview of the evidence, drawing on both primary and secondary sources to offer a composite picture of the god. It outlines his potential origins and the etymology of his name and articulates how he possibly acquired his diverse set of functions and attributes. As the god of the boundary and exchange, guide to the dead and friend to humanity, Hermes has a very varied set of associations and powers, but these are conceptually linked and seem to stem from a fundamental connection with boundaries and the herm. Section 2 explores Hermes' depiction in literature, focusing on specific portraits of the god over time and within different literary genres, including Homeric epic, fable and Old Comedy. By analysing how Hermes was depicted and discussed in the Ancient Greek world, we can understand the ancient Greeks' attitudes and opinions towards this ambiguous god. The two sections of this chapter will, it is hoped, present complementary views of Hermes: the former providing an overview based on a variety of sources, and the latter a view 'from the inside', in that it presents portraits of the god in popular literature of the Archaic and Classical periods. The discussion of Hermes' roles and attributes given here will provide a contextual basis for the analysis of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* which follows in chapter 4.

Section 1: Name, origins and functions of Hermes

Section 1.1: Etymology and origins

Hermes encompasses a variety of often contradicting and disconnected areas of control, a disparity that has led scholars such as Vernant to suggest "that in the beginning there must have been several different Hermes gods, which later merged into one".²⁹⁶ Hermes is the god of the boundary, thieves, craftsmen, heralds, lots, musicians, athletes, herdsman, merchants, travel and movement, and guide to the underworld.²⁹⁷ Hermes also functions as a culture hero and is credited with discovering how to kindle fire using fire sticks,

²⁹⁶ Vernant 2006: 160.

²⁹⁷ Brown 1969: 3.

establishing the institution of sacrifice, protecting and maintaining roads, and inventing writing, libraries and astronomy, as well as being the god of lucky finds.²⁹⁸

Several etymologies have been suggested for the name Hermes, such as connecting it with the Vedic Saramaya, derived from *Sarama*, god of the storm or of the dawn,²⁹⁹ or deriving it from the word *heruma* ('shelter'), itself a derivation from the verb *heruô* ('protect').³⁰⁰ Frothingham detects a connection between the figure of Hermes and the Mesopotamian snake god Ningishzida.³⁰¹ Welcker links his name with *hormê* ('movement'), from the verb *hormaô* ('set in motion').³⁰² Wilamowitz and Nilsson see the name originating from *herma*, a theory which has been widely accepted: Wilamowitz suggests Hermes would be named after the pillars that depict him. In contrast, Nilsson suggests Hermes was named after a cairn of stones, as the pillars appear to have developed later than the name itself. Frisk does not dismiss the possibility of an Aegean origin for the word *herma*, as it also lacks a clear etymology.³⁰³ Bosshardt argues that the name derives from *hermeneus* (interpreter) and sees Hermes as essentially “the intermediary between gods and men, the interpreter”. He also suggests that the word may have an ultimately Aegean origin.³⁰⁴ The earliest evidence of Hermes’ name appears in the Mycenaean Greek linear B tablets, written as *e-ma-ha* or *e-ma-a2*.³⁰⁵

Robert Beekes³⁰⁶ suggests the name is pre-Olympian and rejects contemporary consensus that the name Hermes derives from the single term: *herma*, a ‘heap of stones’, or a monument set up as an elementary form of demarcation.³⁰⁷ Every traveller who passed by a herm added a stone to these piles, which were located on territorial or socio-cultural boundary lines, such the boundaries of homes, markets and villages. Over time, the stone

²⁹⁸ Hynes & Doty 1997: 54.

²⁹⁹ Maury 1857: 270; Preller and Robert 1894: 385.

³⁰⁰ Maury 1857: 437.

³⁰¹ Frothingham 1916: 175-7. This god functioned as a mediator between humans and the divine, specifically to the great mother goddess Ishtar, and notably in early manifestations was depicted in art as a Caduceus. Frothingham argues that Proto-Hermes was initially depicted as two intertwining snakes, acted as a god of spring and fertility. Over time, the twin snakes were anthropomorphized into the Olympian recognizable today.

³⁰² Welcker 1957: 342.

³⁰³ Wilamowitz (Glaube I 159,285) and Nilsson (Gr. Rel. I 503) cited by Frisk 1960: 563-564.

³⁰⁴ Cited by Frisk 1960: 563-64.

³⁰⁵ Hägg 1997: 165; Gulizio 2000: 106.

³⁰⁶ Beekes and Beek 2010: 461-2.

³⁰⁷ Burkert 2013: 156 For visual representations of ithyphallic herms see: Beazley ARV (2) 367; Heilmeyer 1988 118: no. 2; Fischer-Hansen 1924: 1-3 pl. 141; Fuchs 1959: 8-12 pl. 1a; Boardman 2016: 195 Abb. 364.

cairns were personified as *Herman* in Dorian and in Ionian-Attic as *Hermes*. They developed initially into wooden pillars with a bust resembling the early depictions of Hermes as an older man with a pointy goatee and an erect phallic display.³⁰⁸ Another theory suggests that Hermes originated from an early version of the god Pan, identified with the Proto-Indo-European pastoral god *Péh2usōn; specifically in terms of his function as god of the boundary marker, protector and increaser of herds, guardian of the road and their shared pastoral origins.³⁰⁹ Hermes was later identified with the Egyptian deity Thoth.³¹⁰

Section 1.2: God of boundaries

Hermes' connection with the phallus may link to his role as protector and increaser of herds, since the phallus is thought to symbolise fertility. However, within the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, this is never referenced or connected to his function as the protector of herds.³¹¹ Hermes' phallic connection is unlike that of Demeter or Dionysus, in whose cults it is a symbol of vegetable fertility.³¹² Representations of Hermes' phallus were found on herms at mountain tops, roadways, state boundaries, doorways, libraries, gymnasiums and graves,³¹³ and the diverse locations of ithyphallic herms, unconnected with agricultural and sexual fertility, suggests a different meaning. Both Greeks and Romans employed phallic symbols as an apotropaic amulet to bring about good luck and avert evil.³¹⁴ As such they were placed on certain boundaries to designate safe spaces, such as one's home or village community, and in the unknown outer spaces beyond territorial boundaries.³¹⁵ When craftsmen hung

³⁰⁸ Burkert 2013: 156. The actual establishment of the stone *hermai* came around 520-514 BCE, by the Athenian tyrant Hipparchus, to serve as milestones along Attic roads towards the Athenian agora. See Brown 1969: 107.

³⁰⁹ Brown 1977: 57; Collitz 1924: 574–587; Smith (1870: 412) suggests that Hermes developed from an ancient Pelasgian or Arcadian divinity of nature that over time lost this primary function to the figure of Pan.

³¹⁰ Hart 2005: 158. Associated explicitly with Hermes 'Trismegistus' three-times-great, an epithet he shares with Thoth in the temple of Esna: 'Thoth the great, the great, the great'. Thoth's major cult centre, now modern el-Ashmunein, was called 'Hermopolis' ('Hermes-town') by Greek visitors because Thoth shared so much in common with their Olympian Hermes. Angelo (1997: 12-14) argues that Hermes is actually modelled on Egyptian Thoth, but bases this argument on Jung's theory of the archetype. Angelo is more interested in psychological functions than historical development.

³¹¹ Chittenden 1947: 24.

³¹² For Demeter: Hes. *Erga*. 32-3, 295-7; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 256-7, 287-94. For Dionysus: Hes. *Erga*. 603-4; *Eur. Bacch.* 274-283; *Orphic Hymn* 52 to Amphietes.

³¹³ *Paus.* 1.17.2, 2.38.7, 4.26.3; Plato *Hipp.* 228d.

³¹⁴ *Thuc.* 6.27; Brown 1969: 39.

³¹⁵ Horace. *Satire* 1.8; Horace describes the ithyphallic Roman Priapus whose statue protected garden doors as "quelling thieves with his right hand and with his crimson stick stretching from his obscene groin".

up phallic representations of Hermes outside their stores, they were not inviting fertility but the good luck and magical skill attributed to Hermes.³¹⁶

Brown suggests that, initially, Hermes functioned as a protector figure of territorial boundaries, being ritually evoked when people ventured outside the protective limits of the community, engaging in travel, trade or the gathering of essential resources.³¹⁷ Hermes' patronage of travel, roads, trade and lucky finds are all thought to have originated from these early practices of ritual protection.³¹⁸ As the god of what is beyond the boundaries, Hermes was credited with the discovery of natural resources in liminal spaces.³¹⁹

Section 1.3: God of exchange

Hermes is the god of exchanges of all kinds: his patronship over boundary transgressions, travel, commerce, and thieves illustrates the god's ability to transfer persons and goods from one sphere to another. Merchants and thieves are not that different in essence, they similarly utilize their cunning, intelligence and charm to acquire resources that they desire by breaching known boundaries. The thief defies the boundaries of one's home during the night while the merchant engages in boundary transgressions as they travel between communities to trade.³²⁰

Scholars have suggested that Hermes acquired patronship over theft through his function as the protector of herdsmen, arguing that Hermes developed contradicting functions and simultaneously became both the protector and the taker of herds, as is the case in the *Homeric Hymn*.³²¹ However, neither the protection of herdsmen or of shepherds is mentioned in the list of attributes given at the beginning of the hymn.³²² Brown sees this as

³¹⁶ For visual evidence of ithyphallic Hermes as a symbol of good luck, see: Lullies 1931: 15, Nr. 3, 55; Greifenhagen 1935: 164.

³¹⁷ Brown 1969: 34.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* 35-6.

³¹⁹ For example, silver discovered at Mt Laurium in Attica was credited as a lucky boon from Hermes: Pind. *Pyth.* IV. 177-81; Aesch. *Eum.* 946-8.

³²⁰ Hermes is considered a "friend of dark night" or as "furtive Hermes, the night-time chieftain", and considered to be most active at twilight or dawn; i.e. periods of liminality. *HHH.* 290: μελαίνης νυκτὸς ἑταῖρε; Nonnos *Dion.* 35.234-8: καὶ φυλάκων στοιχηδὸν ἀκοιμήτοισιν ὀπωπαῖς νήδυμον ὕπνον ἔχευεν ἔη πανθελγεί ῥάβδω φώριος Ἑρμείας, πρόμος ἔννουχος.

³²¹ Burkert 2013: 158; Richardson 1977: 153.

³²² *HHH.* 15-16.

a misinterpretation of Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle in the hymn, arguing that cattle raiding implies an act of robbery and not of cunning, silent thievery.³²³

As the god of exchange, Hermes is deeply connected to the agora and was commonly known as *Hermes Agoraios*: Hermes of the market place.³²⁴ Ancient communities would gather and commence peaceful trade at territorial boundary herms.³²⁵ Due to urbanization, these contact points moved away from the boundary, developing into public market places like the agora. Its underlying principle and relation to Hermes remained: a safe space for transactions of all kind. This shift of economic power is reflected in the polar depictions of Hermes, who is simultaneously represented as the stereotypical rural Arcadian shepherd, with his wide-brimmed floppy hat and goatee, and as the fast-talking youthful city-slicker who can comfortably banter with merchants and orators in the agora.³²⁶ Hermes' connection to communal spaces developed into a patronship over contests and athletes.³²⁷ During Greek festivals known as amphictyonies, neighbouring communities would gather to participate in religious and economic activities.³²⁸ Such gatherings were ideal for athletic competitions between neighbours.

³²³ Thucydides (*Thuc.* 1.5.) writes that cattle raiding in archaic Greece was widespread and still practised in the 'backward' parts of Greece such as rural Arcadia, where the Hymn takes place. During the Homeric period, cattle raiding was a public endeavour organised by a king or chief and considered an aspect of war (cf. Nestor's speech in *Il.* 11. 670-707). Indeed, the Sanskrit word for war '*gavisti*' means 'to desire more cows' (Brown 1969: 5). Forced appropriation was not considered theft but robbery within Greek law, and the two terms were distinguished by the time of Plato (*Laws.* 941B). Hermes is the patron of thieves, who employ not their physical strength but their wit to acquire goods. They differed significantly from Homeric ideas of cattle raiding, which early scholars suggested were the original inspiration for Hermes' patronship over theft. However, these conclusions do not minimise Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle in the slightest. The Hymn still emphasises and celebrates Hermes' function as patron of cunning thievery. At its core, the *Hymn to Hermes* is a story of how a seemingly helpless newborn can manipulate and trick his elder sibling into essentially giving him what he desires; recognition of his legitimacy as an Olympian and the consolidation of his divine powers. Burkert 2013: 158; Richardson 1977: 153.

³²⁴ *Ar. Kn.* 297: Ερμῆς Ἀγοραῖος; *Paus.* 1.15.1.

³²⁵ Sir Henry Maine notes that such meeting spaces were probably the only places where members of different communities would meet for any purpose except for war; Maine 1861: 192.

³²⁶ *Od.* 10. 153; *Ovid. Met.* 2. 730; For bearded representations of Hermes: Attributed to the Berlin Painter, n.d. *K11.7 Hermes*. [Attic Red Figure]; Attributed to the Persephone Painter, 440 B.C. *K14.9 Persephone & Hermes*. [Attic Red Figure]; Fischer-Hansen 1924: 86 pl. 110, 108.1A, 108.1B; Cerchiai 1997: 129-34; Gebauer 2002: 74; Van Straten 1995: 268 V. 402 Abb.128; For visual depictions of youthful Hermes: Trendall and Webster 1971: 3, 21; Kron 1976: 162-163; Rückert 1998: 255 Nr. 103; Van Straten 1995: 219 V143.

³²⁷ Cited from Burkert 2013: 157; *Ath.* 561 d; H. Siska, *De Mercurio ceterisque deis ad artem gymnasticam pertinentibus*, Dissertation, Halle 1933; J. Delorme *Gymnasion* 1960.

³²⁸ Rose 1925: 228.

Section 1.4: Patron of servants and heralds

Hermes, the god of the boundary and commercial intercourse, became the god of the *thetai*, free men, who sold their labour for a wage and of craftsmen, both of whom would travel the roads seeking work and resources. Hermes, became the god who “grants joy and glory to the workers of all mankind”.³²⁹ These professional boundary crossers under the patronship of Hermes developed into the third social class of Greek history.³³⁰ Hermes is the patron of cooks, artisans, teachers, servants and heralds. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus claims Hermes’ patronage, boasting of his skills at domestic chores such as tending to fire, cooking and carving meat and the art of pouring wine.³³¹ Hermes’ skill as a servant is illustrated in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, where he establishes ritual sacrifice to the Olympians through carving and apportioning the meat by casting lots which randomly and fairly distribute honours among the gods without causing offence.³³² Hermes’ ritual sacrifice represents the redistribution of honours first established by Prometheus at Mekone, who, hoping to secure benefits for humankind, allocated the portions unequally. The trick failed, and humanity suffered until Hermes established a genuinely equal distribution that included both Olympians and humankind. Basing appointment on chance rather than social status establishes a sense of *communitas*, putting all participants on the same level.³³³ Hermes becomes the cosmic redistributor through his patronship over lottery and chance.³³⁴

Hermes’ act of ritual reappointment conforms to the herald’s function as both mediator and messenger between gods and humans. Hermes is the herald of Olympus, and mortal heralds were considered the sons of Hermes.³³⁵ Herald’s were more than a town-crier, belonging to the staff of the king, who they assisted in administrative duties such as going on embassies and maintaining order in the assembly.³³⁶ Providing personal services to the king, they also

³²⁹ *Od.* 15.319-20; Glotz, 1996: 29-31, 42-3.

³³⁰ The rise of the professional working class is thus closely linked to the development of Hermes and the development of the Greek democratic process. Brown 1969: 47-50.

³³¹ *Od.* 15.319-24.

³³² *HHH.* 123-9.

³³³ Burkert 2013: 157. Here we see the beginnings of what will become the democratic process that Athens was famed for.

³³⁴ Apollo grants Hermes control over the three Bee Maidens, who represent the art of cleromancy: the oracular practice consisting of the prophetic interpretation of randomly thrown stones. Hermes is the god of luck and the working class, and shrines to the Bee Maidens could be found in almost every agora within ancient Greece. Cf Reggiani 2015: 266; Jaillard 2012: 94, 96-9; Scheinberg 1979: 17.

³³⁵ Brown 1969: 25.

³³⁶ *Il.* 1.232-41, 18.497-508.

organised royal banquets, cleaning tables and bathing the monarch.³³⁷ The herald's job was sacred: they were considered to be "dear to Zeus" and "the messengers of Zeus and men", and were thought to have secret knowledge and organised religious ceremonies such as ritual sacrifice or ritual divination by lottery.³³⁸

Possessing secret knowledge, the primary function of heralds was conducting religious ceremonies. Brown argues that, initially, heralds functioned as a purely religious expert for the king and acquired their role as town crier and messenger due to the secularization of the city-state.³³⁹ For instance, the herald's role as an attendant to the king derived from the secularization of his ceremonial position: Homeric kings were in charge of conducting public religious ceremonies. If the king needed to perform a sacrifice, heralds would organize and prepare everything; when the king presided over religious gatherings, heralds kept order on their behalf. It would seem that many of the services ascribed to heralds derived from the secularisation of Homeric religious ceremonies.

Section 1.5: The Kerykeion

Hermes could be identified by his magical staff known as the *kerykeion*. Made from solid gold and the length of a man's arm, it had two intertwining snakes that created a circle at the top resembling horns.³⁴⁰ The *kerykeion* was known as the 'heralds thing', symbolizing peace and authority. All oaths and judgments were sworn while holding the staff and were magically binding. Heralds could give or take away the power of speech in assemblies by choosing who held the staff.³⁴¹ Hermes' *kerykeion* was known to "bring and banish sleep"

³³⁷ Reggiani 2015: 101-3. Although such tasks may appear demeaning, heralds were considered public workers, a term applied to other socially approved jobs such as seers, healers, artisans and bards.

³³⁸ Buchholz 1885: 49-58. Indeed, the royal banquets they were in charge of organizing are in essence sacred meals for their respective leaders.

³³⁹ Brown 1969: 30. Initially, Homeric religion was not organized around temples, as was religious ritual in the classical period but centred on the king's sacred authority. Heralds functioned as the ceremonial expert or priest to the ruling monarchs, and their role as town crier and messenger derives from this new institution. Monarchs base their authority on the principle of divine right to rule and therefore required a religious expert to establish authority by making royal (i.e. political) ceremonies religious ones. Over time, as the need to establish a connection between political authority and religious authority diminished, certain herald functions were secularized. The religious expert who ran about town gaining support for their king turned into the personal messenger and town crier. The Eleusinian mysteries were conducted by an Attic clan known as 'the Heralds' who claimed descendants from Hermes, and throughout their existence, they never functioned as town criers. They may represent the original functions of the Homeric herald untouched by the secularization of the state. cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1893: 202.

³⁴⁰ *Il.* 24. 343; *Od.* 5. 87, 10. 277, 24. 3; Hynes & Doty 1997: 50; Brown 1969: 16.

³⁴¹ Jacobsen 2009: 146. It could also be used to impose an armistice on fighters when placed in between them. cf. *Il.* 2. 185.

and was the “blameless peace the rod, kerykeion, blessed”.³⁴² A pacifying symbol during times of war, the *kerykeion's* ability to put people to sleep appears to follow the idea of the heraldic staff's power to take away one's speech when used for controlling and mediating among large groups. Heralds facilitated cooperation between the ruling elite and the peasantry, in the same way that Hermes facilitates cosmic mediation between gods and men and between life and death.

Section 1.6: Friend to humanity

As a cosmic mediator, Hermes was viewed as the peacemaker among the gods, which speaks to his patronship over travel, commerce and messengers, all areas that hinge on the idea of peaceful contact with outsiders to facilitate trade.³⁴³ Hermes, among all the Olympians, is depicted as incredibly close to humankind. He aides Priam in retrieving Hector's body despite being allied with the Achaeans, because he greatly enjoys being a friend to man.³⁴⁴ Especially close to humanity, Hermes acts both as a personal and spiritual guide to mortals during their heroic trials.³⁴⁵ In *The Libation Bearers*, both Orestes and Electra invoke Hermes' aid to guide them on their quest to avenge their father: “Hermes of the Underworld, watching over paternal powers! I ask you, be my saviour and my ally; for my coming to this land is my return from exile”.³⁴⁶ Orestes invokes the aid of Hermes so that he and his allies can murder his father's killers through deception and trickery, just as they did to Agamemnon: “killing a man of high honour by trickery, they may be caught by trickery too”.³⁴⁷ Orestes' plan involves multiple levels of deception, and thus Hermes is invoked as the god of liminality; Orestes admits that he is an exile entering dangerous territory. Invoking Hermes as his guide will not only help him achieve his goals unnoticed, but will also grant him protection during his journey through this liminal space.

³⁴² Ovid. *Met.* 2. 730; *Orphic Hymn* 28 to Hermes.

³⁴³ In the *Protagoras*, Plato tells the story of Hermes bringing peace to primitive man: “For they had not the art of politics...Zeus sent Hermes to impart to men the qualities of respect for others and a sense of justice, so as, to bring order into our cities and create a bond of friendship and union”. Cf. *Plato.* 322 b. c.

³⁴⁴ *Il.* 24.347-8.

³⁴⁵ He helps guide Herakles through Hades during his trial to capture the monstrous dog Cerberus without weapons. Indeed, Herakles tells Odysseus that only “under the guiding hands of Hermes... I did succeed in capturing him and leading him out of Hades' realm”. τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ἀνένεικα καὶ ἤγαγον ἐξ Αἴδου: / Ἑρμείας δὲ μ' ἔπεμψεν (*Od.* 11. 625-6).

³⁴⁶ Aesch. *Lib.* 1-5, 123-6, 725-6. Ἑρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῶ' ἐποπτεύων κράτη, / σωτήρ γενοῦ μοι ξύμμαχος τ' αἰτουμένω: / ἦκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι. / τύμβου δ' ἐπ' ὄχθω τῶδε κηρύσσω πατρί / κλύειν, ἀκούσαι ...

³⁴⁷ Aesch. *Lib.* 555-7: αἰνῶ δὲ κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς, / ὡς ἂν δόλω κτείναντες ἄνδρα τίμιον / δόλοισι καὶ ληφθῶσιν ἐν ταύτῳ βρόχῳ.

Section 1.7: Guide of death and dreams

At the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Apollo declares that: “that he [Hermes] alone should be empowered as envoy to Hades, who without receiving offerings will yet confer not the smallest of boons”.³⁴⁸ One of Hermes’ most important functions is his role as psychopomp, in charge of escorting the souls of the recently deceased down to Hades. Burkert suggests that Hermes’ role as psychopomp is connected to the landmark stone cairns known as herms.

*libations are made at stone cairns as well as at the grave. From this, there arises the worship of the Chthonic Hermes, which was elaborated in the myth of the escort of souls, Psychopomp.*³⁴⁹

The ancient Greeks considered travelling to Hades to be the most dangerous journey a person could take.³⁵⁰ As the god of liminality, boundary-crossing, travel, a helpmate to humanity and messenger and herald to the gods, Hermes is perfectly positioned for guiding travellers through such a perilous realm. Death is an unavoidable fear, and transitioning between the bounds of life and death can easily fill one with anxiety. Such anxieties resulted in numerous narratives concerning journeys into the underworld known as *katabases*. All who undertook such journeys concerned themselves with the appropriate actions and rituals needed to pass through the journey unharmed. As Herrero notes, “any poem depicting a real or figured trip to Hades contains elements typical of initiation (e.g. landmarks separating one side from the other)”.³⁵¹ These landmarks came in many forms, such as temple entrances, rivers and darkness, all of which represent the boundaries between life and death and fall well within Hermes’ sphere of influence.³⁵²

As psychopomp Hermes is the shepherd of dreams. Guiding souls across the threshold of life and death and functioning as peacemaker and friend to humanity, he helps ease the cacophony of fears and anxieties that accompany such journeys. Thus, Hermes also functions as the bringer and taker of dreams; he can “charm men’s eyes to sleep”, and

³⁴⁸ *HHH*. 572-3: οἷον δ’ εἰς Αἴδην τετελεσμένον ἄγγελον εἶναι, / ὅς τ’ ἄδοτός περ ἔων δώσει γέρας οὐκ ἐλάχιστον.

³⁴⁹ Burkert 2013: 158.

³⁵⁰ Herrero De Jáuregui 2011: 41.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.* 42.

³⁵² Clark 2017: 3.

during Priam's *katabasis*, Hermes uses this power against Achilles' guards.³⁵³ Death and dreams were strongly associated by the ancient Greeks, and were considered twins, for "Sleep [is] the brother of Death",³⁵⁴ although sleep is "gentle and mild towards men" death has "a pitiless spirit of bronze in his breast. That man is his whom he once catches, and he is hateful even to the immortal gods".³⁵⁵ Hesiod depicts Thanatos (death) as cold-hearted and pitiless; however, Thanatos personifies peaceful death, while his sisters the Keres embody violent death.³⁵⁶ Together, Sleep and Death reflect Hermes' role as peacemaker and guide to souls. Dying of old age, Gorgias of Leontini begins falling asleep and tells his friends "Hypnos (Sleep) is now beginning to hand me over to his brother (Thanatos, Death)".³⁵⁷ The Ancient Greeks considered sleep to be the ultimate escape from the pains of reality, functioning as the peaceful mediator between life and inescapable death.³⁵⁸ Thanatos (peaceful death) is only vilified by Hesiod because it is an inescapable reality, and the only escape from such a reality is the realm of dreams, of which Hermes is master.

Section 1.8: Magic, binding and seduction

In book 5 of the *Iliad*, the Olympians employ Hermes to free Ares from the jar which imprisons him.³⁵⁹ Hermes is the ideal prison-breaker, as his abilities for stealth and thievery are attributed to magic. This is illustrated when Hermes charms men's eyes to sleep as depicted within the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.³⁶⁰ In the hymn, Hermes employs his magical skills to achieve his goals: he transforms himself into a mist to pass through the keyhole and hides his footprints by inventing the first pair of sandals, which are described as "beyond description or imagination, a wondrous work".³⁶¹ Merchants and craftsmen would offer

³⁵³ *Il.* 24.343.

³⁵⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 756. In book 16 of the *Iliad*, the brothers resemble Hermes in his role as psychopomp, tasked with delivering Sarpedon's body to Lycia in order to receive the proper funeral rites: "And he gave him into the hands of the swift messengers, Sleep and Death, twin brothers, to carry him with them, and they quickly set him down in the rich land of broad Lycia" (*Il.* 16.681-3: πέμπτε δέ μιν πομποῖσιν ἄμα κραιπνοῖσι φέρεσθαι, / ὕπνῳ καὶ θανάτῳ διδυμάοσιν, οἳ ῥά μιν ὤκα / κάτθεσαν ἐν Λυκίῃς εὐρέϊς πίονι δήμῳ.)

³⁵⁵ Hes. *Theog.* 764-66.

³⁵⁶ Hes. *Theog.* 211; Hes. *Sh.* 248-57.

³⁵⁷ Wilson 1997: 2.35, 107.

³⁵⁸ He is the "vanquisher of woes, rest of the soul, the better part of human life' who 'mingles false with true' and who is the 'day's respite and night's comrade, who comest alike to king and slave, who doest compel the human race, trembling at death, to prepare for the unending night--sweetly and gently soothe his weary spirit". Seneca, *Hercules Furens* 1063-1082.

³⁵⁹ *Il.* 5.390.

³⁶⁰ *HHH.* 145. In the hymn Hermes makes the dogs fall asleep, not men, but the effect is the same.

³⁶¹ *HHH.* 142-3, 79-84.

sacrifice to Hermes to obtain his protection and aid during their work: there is no reason why thieves would not do the same.³⁶²

When confronted with the unexplainable, such as death and disease, the Greeks turned to superstitious magical practices for answers. Plato condemns those proclaiming the ability to summon the dead and coerce the gods through the magical powers of sacrifices, prayers, and spells, with the intent to destroy individuals, whole families, and towns.³⁶³ Such spells have been found on leaden tablets known as *tabellae defixionis*, inscribed with oaths directed against the named person and buried in tombs to bind the cursed person to a god of the netherworld.³⁶⁴ The ‘gods of the netherworld’ refer to the chthonic deities Hecate and Hermes, and Plato notes that both were invoked to bind the soul, the intellect, the tongue, and the limbs of those cursed.³⁶⁵ Within these curse tablets Hermes is referenced several times as ‘the one who holds down’ or ‘spellbinder’: as guide to the dead, Hermes had the power to prevent the souls of the dead from leaving their tombs.³⁶⁶ This power of binding relates to Hermes’ ability to manipulate oaths, which he demonstrates in his hymn when confronted by the Olympians.³⁶⁷ Hermes’ role as master of oaths connects him to magical formulas and various magical practices. His mastership of oaths is not confined to the sphere of magic alone, however. In this role, Hermes is also the master of speech, orators and rhetoric, which is how Hermes came to be the patron of libraries and writing.³⁶⁸

As patron of magic and deception, Hermes, alongside Aphrodite, was considered the god of magical seduction. The Ancient Greeks believed that seduction was a magical art and used love charms to force a person to fall in love with them.³⁶⁹ In the Pandora myth, Hermes “put

³⁶² Bloomfield (1923: 118-20) illustrates that in ancient India, thieves employed three kinds of charms to supplement their skills: charms that put guards to sleep, charms to break locks and charms to make oneself invisible. Hermes conforms to all aspects of these charms as he could turn invisible, put men to sleep and easily slip through keyholes. Cf. *HHH*. 146-8, 343; *Il*. 24.343, 5.390; *Hippon.* fr. 4, 26, 32,34, 37 (*IEG*).

³⁶³ Plato. *Laws*. 909b, 908d; Nilsson 1940: 114.

³⁶⁴ Nilsson 1940: 114-5.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 116.

³⁶⁶ For this reason, Hermes presided over the Greek All-souls festival, the Anthesteria, where ghosts of the dead would return for one night to share a meal with their loved ones under Hermes’ observance. Brown 1969: 13.

³⁶⁷ *HHH*. 252-68, 353-72.

³⁶⁸ Brown (1969: 18) suggests that during the Homeric period, Hermes was very close to magical practices, which may relate to his role as Herald and his subsequent magical abilities. By the Classical period, Greek intellectuals began to reject superstition and re-focused Hermes from master of oaths to the master of rhetoric.

³⁶⁹ In the *Iliad* (*Il*. 14.216-7), Aphrodite gives Hera her girdle to seduce Zeus with “the sweet allurements of whispered talk, which seduces the heart even in those of good sense.” (ἐνθ’ ἔνι μὲν φιλότῃς, ἐν δ’ ἡμέροσ, ἐν δ’ ὀαριστύς / πάρφασις, ἢ τ’ ἔκλεψε νόον πύκα περ φρονεόντων.)

in a bitch's mind and a knavish nature". This knavish nature is the magical practice of seduction, which Hesiod implies brings about ruin for the minds of men.³⁷⁰ As patron of language, lies, deception and trickery, Hermes' connection to the art of seduction is well founded, as you cannot have seduction without the ability to charm and deceive. Hermes and Aphrodite were frequently associated together in rituals. They were combined into the figure of Hermaphroditos, the original hermaphrodite, who, like their father, embodies liminality and different roles as they are simultaneously male and female.

Section 1.9: Conclusion

Hermes' assorted set of powers and attributes seem to concentrate around his function as the protector of the boundary. His ambiguous set of abilities all have a relationship with liminality and the boundary, expressed either as a violation of the boundary (his role as patron of thieves, exchange and travel) or as it's maintainer (his role as a friend to humanity and patron of heralds, servants and magical oaths). Hermes acts as a connecting figure that unites, maintains, and disrupts the unknown that resides beyond the boundaries of culture and society.

Section 2: A survey of Hermes in literature

Section 2.1: Hermes in literature

How was the god who so enjoys being a friend to humankind perceived by the everyday person in Ancient Greece? For such an understanding, in this section I will consider the depiction of Hermes in several literary contexts, including epic poetry, fable and comic drama. Literature aimed at a popular audience articulates and emphasizes the common and noteworthy attributes of Hermes and helps us to identify how he was perceived within ancient Greek society. It is but one type of evidence among many which can help us define the figure of Hermes,³⁷¹ but it is by far the most substantial form of evidence we have access to. Any study of literary sources must be aware, however, of potential inherent bias, dictated by the intrinsic properties and aims of each respective genre and its various

³⁷⁰ Hes. *Erga*. 66-7.

³⁷¹ Other fundamental sources that can help articulate the figure are archeological findings, his representation in visual art, inscriptions devoted to the god, and evidences of cultic practices focused on the figure of Hermes. Several of these have contributed to the description of Hermes presented in the previous section.

authors. All must err on the side of caution when using any specific literary source for a religious phenomenon that deals with the conceptions and perceptions of a particular deity. Nevertheless, it helps to illustrate the themes that are common to all genres concerning Hermes, helping to overcome the possibly distorting effects of focusing on any single author or genre. Homeric epic provides our earliest concise representation of Hermes, illustrating both his function as an Olympian and characteristic mannerisms. In comparison, his role in fable and Old Comedy will illustrate how he was perceived within a more broadly popular context. This perspective will deepen our understanding of Hermes' nature as well as provide information about the type of audience interested in the figure.³⁷² Hermes is humanity's best friend and in literature interacts with mortals to a greater extent than any other Olympian.³⁷³ While the *Homeric Hymn* and Homeric epic make allusions to this aspect,³⁷⁴ it is not shown as explicitly as it is within fable and comedy. The hymn and epic illustrate Hermes within a purely mythological context. Fable on the other hand depicts Hermes making mischief among mortals, where he embodies the trickster as comical buffoon, a portrayal largely lacking in the mythical Homeric poetry.³⁷⁵ The same is true of Hermes' representation in comedy, where he is depicted as a comical helpmate to humanity.³⁷⁶ The *Homeric Hymn* establishes how he attained his respective powers and his position within the Olympian Pantheon. However, given the hymn's significance in this study, an analysis of Hermes within the *Homeric Hymn* will be discussed and examined in the following chapter.

Section 2.2: Hermes in Epic

Homeric epic outlines the essential mannerisms and characteristics of the society's most memorable heroes and gods.³⁷⁷ Hermes' role in Homer's monumental works the *Iliad* and

³⁷² Brown 1969: 77-8.

³⁷³ Versnel 2011: 388. Hermes appears in 21 fables and in most of them he is the principal actor, which is not the case with the other gods who only make a brief appearance near the end to pass moral judgment. Zeus appears 37 times though he is never a principal actor as is the case with the other gods: Aphrodite (6), Apollo (10), Athena (6), Demeter (3), Dionysus (2), Hera (3) and Herakles (6).

³⁷⁴ E.g. *Il.* 24.334-5; *HHH.* 556-9.

³⁷⁵ Hynes & Doty 1997: 65; Carroll 1984: 110.

³⁷⁶ Roche 2005. Hermes and the trickster type are strongly connected to wit and humour and analysing his representation in classical comedy will help us understand how Hermes was perceived in this context.

³⁷⁷ Although we speak of 'Homeric epic' there is of course little concrete evidence that the legendary bard actually existed (Foley 1999: 51-62). The late 19th and early 20th century a group of scholars known as the Analysts argued for one or more master-editors who created the epics from a collection of shorter narratives, while the Unitarians argued that the works

the *Odyssey* will be discussed in this section to assess how this figure was perceived within the earliest surviving texts concerning Greek society.

Lauri Honko defines epic as

*great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as superstories which excel in length, power of expression and significance of content over other narratives and function as a source of identity representations in the traditional community or group receiving the epic.*³⁷⁸

Epics are identified and characterised as an ‘omnibus genre’, meaning that they tend to incorporate other poetic genres of their culture when necessary. Within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, scholars have identified prayers, laments, proverbs, catalogues and inset stories.³⁷⁹ Another marker of epic is the central importance of national character and group identity, although the treatment of these themes is to some extent dependent on the subject matter of each poem. The *Iliad* is focused on heroism, praising war and winning glory on the battlefield irrespective of whether one lives or dies, while the *Odyssey* emphasises and praises the art of cunning, survival and returning home. Epic embraces heroism in whatever form its culture needs to express. It may praise warfare and honour in one work, and celebrate cunning trickery in another; both highlight the deeds of famous individuals, but what is considered heroic changes as the poetry’s context and audience change.

Section 2.2A: The Iliad

Hermes plays a relatively minor role within the *Iliad*, only making a significant appearance near the poem's end, when he helps Priam in book 24. However, his earlier appearances offer insights into the mannerisms and motivations of this ambiguous god. Hermes is first mentioned in book 5, where we are informed that he freed Ares from a magical jar he was imprisoned in. Here Hermes’ roles as a body-snatcher and stealthy actor are highlighted.³⁸⁰ In book 16, we are told of Hermes secretly impregnating a maiden named Polymele after

originated from the mind of a single genius author (Foley in Fowler 2004: 185). Foley comments that throughout Western history, thanks to writers such as Herodotus, Plutarch and Proclus, the figure of Homer has become more legend than a historical figure. Foley (in Fowler 2004: 186) suggests that it is better “to understand Homer as an anthropomorphisation of the epic tradition, a name for the art and practice of epic poetry”. The term epic according to Foley derives from the ancient Greek word ἔπος, which can variously mean ‘word’ or ‘tale’ in Homer (Foley in Fowler 2004: 172).

³⁷⁸ Honko 1998: 28, cited by Foley in Fowler 2004: 181.

³⁷⁹ Foley in Fowler 2004:182.

³⁸⁰ *Il.* 5.390.

spying her in the chorus of Artemis.³⁸¹ Again, Hermes' stealthiness is highlighted as well as his promiscuity. Hermes is also tied to notions of peace and mediation. In book 21, during the mock theomachy, Hermes is pitted against Leto in battle, but refuses to fight her.³⁸²

Λητώ δὲ προσέειπε διάκτορος ἀργεῖφόντης·
‘Λητοῖ ἐγὼ δέ τοι οὐ τι μαχήσομαι· ἀργαλέον δὲ
πληκτίζεσθ’ ἀλόχοισι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο·
ἀλλὰ μάλα πρόφρασσα μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν
εὐχεσθαι ἐμὲ νικῆσαι κρατερῆφι βίηφιν’.

And now Hermes the guide, the slayer of Argos, spoke to Leto: ‘Leto, I will not fight with you - it is a dangerous business to come to blows with the wives of Zeus the cloud-gatherer. No, you are fully welcome to boast among the immortal gods that you overpowered me with your strength and beat me.’

Hermes is associated with humorous antics and is one of the few Olympian figures who may be openly mocked by mortals. Hermes' conversation with Leto illustrates this: as the god of mediation and peace, Hermes willingly engages in self-abasement to ensure that this peace is maintained.

Hermes plays a significant role in the final book of the *Iliad*. At the beginning of the book, Hermes is recommended by the gods to retrieve Hector's body from Achilles' camp, but this never happens as Hera vetoes the plan.³⁸³ Halfway through the episode Hermes comes to Priam's aid in disguise as a herald and tells him a Cretan tale of his family, noting that he is the seventh son and an attendant of Achilles.³⁸⁴ Hermes only reveals his identity once he has successfully guided Priam to Achilles camp. Clay notes the startling lack of awe, respect and fear from Priam when Hermes does this.³⁸⁵ Throughout their journey, Hermes performs rather mundane tasks; he yokes the horses and donkeys and drives the cart on its journey.³⁸⁶ From the beginning of this scene Hermes enacts several of his characteristic functions; he promises to help and escort Priam and mentions lots, which are of special interest to this god.³⁸⁷

³⁸¹ *Il.* 16.181-6.

³⁸² *Il.* 21.497-8.

³⁸³ *Il.* 24.23.

³⁸⁴ *Il.* 24.460-4.

³⁸⁵ Clay (2019: 69), notes that in contrast to Hermes' lack of epiphany is the very epiphanic arrival of Priam himself, marked by θάμβος (24.482-3).

³⁸⁶ *Il.* 24.690-1.

³⁸⁷ Clay 2019: 69-70; cf. πομπός, *Il.* 24.437-9; 24.400.

Hermes' journey with Priam recalls one of Hermes' most vital functions, his role as guide and psychopomp on the *katabasis* journey. Book 24 of the *Iliad* depicts Troy's patriarch Priam embarking on a dangerous journey from the Trojan citadel to Achilles' camp among the Greeks to plead for the return of his son Hector's body. Although not a literal descent into the underworld, the symbolism used to describe Priam's journey is reminiscent of the imagery of a *katabasis*. Priam crosses the threshold of certainty from his city into the Greeks' unknown encampment. Symbolically, this conveys the idea of the uncertainty of death, representing the unknown fate of both his kingdom and his son's soul for Priam. Hermes is depicted as joining Priam's quest at the edge of liminality in order to help guide him.

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν μέγα σῆμα παρέξ' Ἴλοιο ἔλασσαν,
 στῆσαν ἄρ' ἡμιόνους τε καὶ ἵππους ὄφρα πίοιεν
 ἐν ποταμῷ· δὴ γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ κνέφας ἦλυθε γαῖαν.
 τὸν δ' ἐξ ἀγχιμόλοιο ἰδὼν ἐφράσσατο κῆρυξ
 Ἑρμείαν

*Now when the two men had driven alongside the great tomb of Ilos, they halted the mules and the horses at the river so that they could drink. By now, darkness had come over the earth. The herald looked out and saw Hermes when he was close on them.*³⁸⁸

Interestingly, Hermes' entrance is marked by three references to boundary landmarks: the tomb of Ilos, the river that they stop by and the oncoming darkness. Furthermore, after the journey, when Hermes is about to leave Priam at the same threshold, his return is marked by the oncoming Dawn, another state of transition.³⁸⁹ Hermes protects Priam during the journey by putting the guards to sleep, and after magically opening the huge gates of Achilles' camp, he reveals his identity to Priam and leaves.³⁹⁰ Hermes is the god of transitions here: once the transition is accomplished, Priam is no longer within Hermes' realm. After Priam has successfully negotiated with Achilles, Hermes appears again to guide Priam on the transition back across "the lovely stream of the swirling river Xanthos, whose

³⁸⁸ *Il.* 24.349-53.

³⁸⁹ Herrero De Jáuregui 2011: 42-3.

³⁹⁰ *Il.* 24.445, 453-7.

father is immortal Zeus, Hermes then went away to high Olympus, and Dawn in her yellow robe was spreading over the earth".³⁹¹

Section 2.2B: The Odyssey

Within the *Odyssey* Hermes again conforms to his characteristic functions as a guide, messenger and helpmate to humanity, who has a penchant for comedic self-abasement. At the very beginning of book 1 Hermes' failure to warn Aegisthus not to kill Agamemnon is briefly mentioned. Athena tells Zeus that Hermes should be sent to Calypso's island to convince her to let Odysseus continue his journey.³⁹² Through these passing references, we understand what Hermes' role will be within this epic: he will function as a messenger and helpmate for both Odysseus and the other gods. In book 5 when Hermes is tasked by Zeus to deliver a message to Calypso, he puts on his winged sandals and flies across the seas with his wand, which he would use to "cast a spell upon men's eyes or waken them from sleep".³⁹³ Hermes arrives at the island and meets Calypso while Odysseus is crying on the beach. He proceeds to convince Calypso that it is in her best interest to let his great-grandson go.³⁹⁴ Although Hermes functions as the typical divine messenger here, his words to Calypso illustrate the god's all-too human aspects.³⁹⁵

Ζεὺς ἐμέ γ' ἠνώγει δεῦρ' ἐλθέμεν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα·
τίς δ' ἂν ἐκὼν τοσσόνδε διαδράμοι ἀλμυρὸν ὕδωρ
ἄσπετον; οὐδέ τις ἄγχι βροτῶν πόλις, οἳ τε θεοῖσιν
ἱερά τε ῥέζουσι καὶ ἐξαίτους ἐκατόμβας.
ἀλλὰ μάλ' οὐ πως ἔστι Διὸς νόον αἰγιόχοιο
οὔτε παρεξελθεῖν ἄλλον θεὸν οὔθ' ἀλιῶσαι.

It was Zeus who sent me; it was no wish of mine to come. For who would choose to race across that vast expanse of salt water? It seemed unending. And not a city on the way, not a mortal soul to offer a choice sacrifice to the god. But when Zeus, who bears the aegis, makes up his mind, it is impossible for any other god to thwart him or evade his will.

³⁹¹ *Il.* 24.692-4: ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πόρον ἶξον εὐρρεῖος ποταμοῖο / Ξάνθου δινήεντος, ὃν ἀθάνατος τέκετο Ζεὺς, / Ἑρμείας μὲν ἔπειτ' ἀπέβη πρὸς μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον, / Ἥως δὲ κροκόπεπλος ἐκίδνατο πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἴαν.

³⁹² *Od.* 1.38-42, 1.84.

³⁹³ *Od.* 5.48-9.

³⁹⁴ *Od.* 5.75-184. For Hermes' and Odysseus' familial connection through Autolykos, cf. *Od.* 19.395-8 and Hesiod fr. 64 M-W.

³⁹⁵ *Od.* 5.99-104.

Hermes does not appear as a divine messenger here but resembles a disgruntled employee frustrated with his boss and the tedium of the job he is doing. Hermes acts in a very human manner: he complains at the lack of food he received by traveling overseas and not by land where the mortals offer a choice sacrifice to the god. This is not the only instance in the *Odyssey* where Hermes breaks the façade of a divine immortal. In book 8 when Odysseus hears the song of how Ares and Aphrodite were trapped in a net by Hephaestus, Apollo and Hermes have a jovial conversation about whether they would suffer the same fate as Ares if they could.³⁹⁶ The shameless and promiscuous Hermes says he would happily switch positions with Ares without a care for who would see them. Here Hermes embraces his comical and shameless side, willing to face ridicule for a night with the goddess of love.

In book 10, Hermes meets Odysseus disguised as a handsome youth, informs him that Circe has turned his men into pigs and gives him the magical herb moly to protect him from her magic.³⁹⁷ As when he reveals himself to Priam, there is a notable lack of awe or respect from Odysseus at the sight of his great-grandfather. Indeed, Hermes speaks to him not in august words but rather candidly says “where are you going, you wretch, all alone through the glens, ignorant of where you are?” (πῆ δὲ αὖτ’, ὦ δύστηνε, δι’ ἄκριας ἔρχεαι οἶος, χώρου ἄϊδρις ἐών).³⁹⁸ Clay notes that Hermes’ gift of the drug moly resembles a *hermaion* (Ἑρμαῖον), a lucky and unexpected find attributed to Hermes and one of his divine powers.³⁹⁹ Clay suggests that Hermes’ and Odysseus’ close familial relationship, through Hermes’ son and Odysseus’ grandfather Autolykos, maybe why there is a lack of a formal epiphany here. Their interaction is, however, remarkably similar to Hermes’ encounter with Priam, which suggests that this unique type of relationship with the god is potentially common to all humankind and not just those with blood ties to him.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ *Od.* 8.336–42: ἢ ῥά κεν ἐν δεσμοῖσ’ ἐθέλοις κρατεροῖσι πιεσθεῖς / εὔδειν ἐν λέκτροισι παρὰ χρυσοῖ Ἀφροδίτῃ; / αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο γένοιτο, ἄναξ ἑκατηβόλ’ Ἀπολλων. / δεσμοὶ μὲν τρεῖς τόσσοι ἀπείρονες ἀμφὶς ἔχοιεν, / ὑμεῖς δ’ εἰσορόωτε θεοὶ πᾶσαι τε θείαιναί, / αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν εὐδοίμι παρὰ χρυσοῖ Ἀφροδίτῃ. Ἄπολλο: Would you be willing, even though squeezed in mighty chains, to sleep in bed next to golden Aphrodite? Hermes: If only this could happen, far-thrusting Apollo! If three times as many chains of infinite length would bind us, and you gods would observe us, as well as all the goddesses, nevertheless, I would sleep with golden Aphrodite!

³⁹⁷ *Od.* 10.277–330.

³⁹⁸ *Od.* 10.281–5.

³⁹⁹ Clay 2019: 70–1.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 70.

In book 11 Heracles tells Odysseus in the underworld of how Hermes helped guide him through and in book 14 the slave Eumaios puts food aside for Hermes.⁴⁰¹ Finally, in book 24, Hermes appears one last time to guide the souls of the suitors down to the underworld. As with Priam's 'katabasis', this transition is framed by liminal markers.⁴⁰²

ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν
Ἑρμείας ἀκάκητα κατ' εὐρώεντα κέλευθα.
παρ δ' ἴσαν Ὠκεανοῦ τε ῥοὰς καὶ Λευκάδα πέτρην,
ἦ δὲ παρ' Ἥελίοιο πύλας καὶ δῆμον ὀνείρων
ἦἴσαν· αἶψα δ' ἴκοντο κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα,
ἔνθα τε ναίουσι ψυχαί, εἶδωλα καμόντων.

Following Hermes, the Deliverer down the dark paths of decay. Past Ocean's stream, past the White Rock, past the Gates of the Sun and the region of dreams they went and before long they reached the meadow of asphodel, which is the dwelling-place of souls, the disembodied wraiths of men.

In both Homeric epics, Hermes primarily functions as a supporting character who provides guidance and aid to the central protagonists. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, Hermes expresses his characteristic mannerisms: a hungry and comedic traveller who has a special relationship with mortals.

Section 2.3: Fable in context

Robert Temple comments that "of all the names of authors from Greek antiquity, Aesop is probably the best known, more so even than Homer".⁴⁰³ Indeed, these moralistic children's stories, populated with animal characters, are arguably, for many, their first introduction to the ancient past.⁴⁰⁴ Yet, despite his notoriety, very little is known for certain about the ancient figure called Aesop and much of what we do know appears to be more legend than truth.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ *Od.* 11.626, 14.435.

⁴⁰² *Od.* 24.9-14.

⁴⁰³ Temple 2003: 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Ancient grammarians and rhetoricians utilised fable for educational purposes, such as the fables of Aesop which date to the 4th century CE (Gibbs 2008: 16). However, they were not intended for children as they are today: for the ancients, fables were told by adults for adults and their connection to children only developed after Roger L'Estrange's English translation of Aesop in 1692, which was meant to help educate children in their moral duties (Gibbs 2008: 16). Yet both ancient and modern Fable share a characteristic educational element that defines the genre as a whole: they provide a moral to be learned.

⁴⁰⁵ Although rather difficult to date, it is believed that Aesop lived in the early sixth century BCE. This is suggested by Herodotus, who informs us that Aesop was originally from Thrace and was enslaved alongside the famous courtesan

By the late 5th century, Aesop was embedded within the cultural matrix of the Greeks. The playwright Aristophanes references the fables of Aesop in the *Birds*, *Wasps* and *Peace*.⁴⁰⁶ Aesop is mentioned in passing both within *Peace* and *Wasps*, but his inclusion in *Birds* is revealing.⁴⁰⁷

Πισθέταιρος
ἀμαθῆς γὰρ ἔφυς κού πολυπράγμων, οὐδ' Αἴσωπον πεπάτηκας

Pisthetaerus
That's because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop.

The term πεπάτηκας literally means to 'have walked through' or 'gone over' and Liddell and Scott suggests the term translates as 'to thumb through', or 'to be always thumbing'.⁴⁰⁸ However, Gibbs argues that editors have mistranslated the verb here, as it implies that the people of Athens were reading the works of Aesop in book form, yet the tales of Aesop did not exist in a written form yet. It seems that by the late 5th century the tales of Aesop were so well known as part of an oral tradition that many Athenians assumed that one could recall the numerous occasions that the tales had been told in public or private spaces. Thus, Gibbs suggests that πεπάτηκας, 'to go over' or 'to go through' the works of Aesop means to recall or remember what you have heard of Aesop, and Aristophanes' assumption that his audience would readily understand this implies that the fables of Aesop were commonly held knowledge among the populace. Over time, fables were written down, and the earliest

Rhodopis. Rhodopis was known throughout the Mediterranean for her charms and beauty, and was eventually freed by Charaxus of Mytilene in Lesbos, brother of the poetess Sappho, who went on to write a poem criticising his purchase (Hdt. 2.134-5). These events help ground Aesop in time yet how exactly he was enslaved or how he ended up on the island of Samos is difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, there are other fabulist tales of how Aesop was enslaved and of how his skill in storytelling propelled him to fame among the islanders of Samos. The improbably eventful *Life of Aesop* reports that he was an incredibly ugly man who was born a mute, who gained the power of speech after helping a priestess of Isis, after which he denounced his slave master and was sold to the philosopher Xanthus on the island of Samos, where he was eventually freed, became an advisor to the king of Babylon and met his demise later at Delphi. Aesop apparently provoked and insulted the priesthood at Delphi and was framed for theft and executed as a result. See Temple 2003: 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Ar. *Vesp.* 1446; Ar. *Pax.* 130.

⁴⁰⁷ Ar. *Av.* 470-5:

Πισθέταιρος: ἀμαθῆς γὰρ ἔφυς κού πολυπράγμων, οὐδ' Αἴσωπον πεπάτηκας,
ὃς ἔφασκε λέγων κορυδὸν πάντων πρώτην ὄρνιθα γενέσθαι,
προτέραν τῆς γῆς, κάπειτα νόσω τὸν πατέρ' αὐτῆς ἀποθνήσκειν·
γῆν δ' οὐκ εἶναι, τὸν δὲ προκεῖσθαι πεμπαῖον: τὴν δ' ἀποροῦσαν
ὑπ' ἀμηχανίας τὸν πατέρ' αὐτῆς ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ κατορύξει.

'Pisthetaerus: That's because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop. He is the one who tells us that the lark was born before all other creatures, indeed before the Earth; his father died of sickness, but the Earth did not exist then; he remained unburied for five days, when the bird in its dilemma decided, for want of a better place, to entomb its father in its own head'.

⁴⁰⁸ Gibbs 2008: 15.

extent corpus we know of is the collection of Demetrius of Phalerum. The survival of the fables is also indebted to Phaedrus, a Roman freedman poet who composed his fables during the early 1st century CE. Soon after, the poet Babrius set down the fables in Greek verse, with both authors helping to lay the foundations of the collection that many of us are familiar with today. According to Plato, while awaiting execution Socrates passed the time by versifying Aesop's fables, suggesting that the versification of fables was a common practice before they were recorded in the written word.⁴⁰⁹

Although fables are littered with humorous anecdotes and jokes, what distinguishes them from other tales is their moralistic message. Gibbs notes that the base pattern of fable comprises a character speaking aloud the moral that corrects some mistaken judgment, whether it be their own or an observation of another character in the tale.⁴¹⁰ The morals of a fable can either be a positive example that others should imitate or a negative one that should be avoided at all costs.

Aesop fascinated the ancient world. His life and fables were studied by Aristotle and although we have a contemporary corpus of moralistic fables attributed to the figure of Aesop, it is likely that less than half of them can be traced back to this figure.⁴¹¹ From the works of Aristotle it seems that many of the fables actually derive from the Near East.⁴¹² B. E. Perry suggests that the fables most likely derived from Aesop were the ones that contained mythological elements. He argues that over time, these fables became secularised and the religious elements were dropped as Greek culture shifted away from its Olympian identity.⁴¹³ Thus fable became more mundane, yet still carried morally important messages that appear to owe their survival to their constant citations in rhetorical speeches and more importantly to their popularity among the greater populace of the ancient world. The ancient fables presented a much starker world, which Temple describes as

⁴⁰⁹ Plato. *Phaedo* 60b.

⁴¹⁰ Gibbs 2008: 17.

⁴¹¹ Arist. *Rhet.* 2.20.1393b8–94a.

⁴¹² This is supported by the fact that many of the actors within the fables are non-Greek animals such as the jackal, the onager and the camel: see Temple 2003: 23.

⁴¹³ Temple 2003: 23.

*a world of brutal, heartless men – and of cunning, of wickedness, of murder, of treachery and deceit, of laughter at the misfortune of others, of mockery and contempt.*⁴¹⁴

It is however a world rich with clever humour. Aside from their humour and morals, fables provide a glimpse into what life was like for the laymen of Ancient Greece.⁴¹⁵ Whether or not they were created by Aesop, fables offer us great insight into the lives of everyday people that is not found in more literary works.

*Here we are face to face with peasants, tradesmen and ordinary folk, not mixing with the educated classes. Coarse peasant humour is found throughout the Aesop material, and some of the jokes would not be out of place in rough country localities round the globe at the present day.*⁴¹⁶

Indeed, many of the fables have a satirical tinge to them, and Adrados argues that many of the humorous mythological fables can be attributed to Cynics attempting to subtly mock and critique popular religion in the 4th or 3rd century BCE.⁴¹⁷ The fables concerning Hermes definitely represent this type of satire yet they still contain a moralistic message that was at the time of importance to those writing and swapping the fables of Aesop.⁴¹⁸

Section 2.3A: How is Hermes portrayed in fable?

Versnel comments that as a literary genre, fable has generally been ignored as a source for Greek culture, society and religion, and has been characterized since antiquity as a “mendacious narrative counterfeiting truth”.⁴¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Hermes appears in 21 fables and in the majority of them he is the principal actor, which is not the case with the other gods who only make a brief appearance near the end to pass moral judgment.⁴²⁰ Versnel has summarized and compiled thirteen noteworthy fables concerning Hermes, in which he stands out for his characteristic demeanor, in that he is the only god consistently

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

⁴¹⁵ The fables inform us what ancient homes were like, how pets were fed and treated, what common superstitions were, how children were treated and how merchants and tradesmen were perceived to act. Temple 2003: 19.

⁴¹⁶ Temple 2003: 19.

⁴¹⁷ Adrados 1999: 284.

⁴¹⁸ Although Adrados is likely correct in his interpretations, the significant connections between the Hermes of fables and that of comedy suggests that this cynical and satirical treatment of Hermes was not uncommon. If the Cynics aimed at satirizing religion, then Hermes was the clear choice of subject as he is the god who is traditionally mocked and openly disrespected by the people.

⁴¹⁹ Versnel 2011: 327: λόγος ψευδῆς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, *Theon. Progymn.* 3.

⁴²⁰ Versnel 2011: 388; Zeus appears 37 times though he is never a principal actor as is the case with the other gods: Aphrodite (6), Apollo (10), Athena (6), Demeter (3), Dionysus (2), Hera (3) and Herakles (6).

depicted humorously or ludicrously and is represented empathetically socializing with mortals in a very human way.⁴²¹

In the first five fables Hermes is depicted in the form of stone herms, which are often the target of maltreatment, abuse and mockery. There is a definite lack of awe or respect between these representations of Hermes and the devotees that interact with him. In fable 5 his herm is urinated on by a devoted dog, in fable 3 he is called ungrateful by his devotees who experience the inverse of the fortune they sought through worshipping Hermes.⁴²²

Another common theme, seen in fables 3, 11 and 12, is that Hermes tends to adopt a mortal disguise when meeting with humans, regardless of whether he has been ordered to send a message from Zeus or of his own accord. As with his representations in epic,⁴²³ Hermes never enters as a god, he always appears initially in mortal form and only reveals himself just before he departs. As in the *Homeric Hymn*, Hermes is consistently portrayed in these fables as close to humankind and is marked by his tendency to distribute things equally.⁴²⁴

In fable, however, this closeness to humanity is reflected in his fallibility; fables 6-9 depict Hermes falling short in his role as cultural-distributor, when he fails to distribute qualities to humankind equitably. Hermes' failure tends to be his fault, but there are instances where he is shown to be clumsy.⁴²⁵ This fallibility does have a purpose as these mistakes inform the audience of the faults in the system.⁴²⁶ In fable 10 Hermes is himself tricked: a devoted

⁴²¹ For a full text of the thirteen Fables summarized by Versnel concerning humanistic representations of Hermes, see Appendix 1 to this thesis.

⁴²² A devotee of Hermes offers libations every day to the god's statue and experiences poverty. Out of frustration he destroys the herm and shouts insults at the God; however, gold begins to pour out of the broken statue and the man says: "Hermes, you are a pig-headed fellow and ungrateful to your friends. When I was serving you with adoration you gave me no help at all, and now that I have insulted you, you have repaid me with many blessings. I did not understand the strange kind of worship that you require" (τὴν εἰς σὲ καινὴν εὐσέβειαν οὐκ ᾔδειν). Babrius 119, 30, 48; Perry. 88 & 99 = H. 2 & 137. P. denotes Perry's translations and refers to the numbers in the survey of all other fables in his edition and H. refers to Halm's edition Versnel (2011: 328).

⁴²³ This is illustrated in *Iliad* 24.334: when Zeus orders Hermes to guide Priam to Achilles camp, he joins Priam disguised as a young prince.

⁴²⁴ In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Hermes functions as a distributor of equal portions during the ritual sacrifice episode where "Hermes happily drew off the rich cooking from the spits onto a smooth slab, and split it into twelve portions determined by lot, and assigned a fixed rank to each one". (αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα/Ερμῆς χαρμόφρων εἰρύσσατο πίονα ἔργα/λείω ἐπὶ πλαταμῶνι καὶ ἔσχισε δώδεκα μοίρας/κληροπαλεῖς: τέλεον δὲ γέρας προσέθηκεν ἐκάστη. *HHH*. 125-9).

⁴²⁵ In his failed acts of distribution and his clumsiness Hermes is very human. He fails because of his equipment (fable 7 where his chariot breaks down) or because he gets lazy (fable 8 where he pours the excess of lies on cobblers instead of distributing the rest equally between all the types of artisans as one would expect from the god of equitable distribution).

⁴²⁶ In fable 9 Zeus orders Hermes to inscribe on *ostraka* the faults of men and deposit them in a box next to Zeus so that he could judge each. However, Hermes accidentally mixes up the *ostraca*, and thus some come to Zeus sooner than intended and others later. From the audience's perspective, this fable attempts to explain the faults within the Olympian system: why do some people appear to escape Zeus' justice while others experience it too harshly? The answer is that Hermes made a mistake and jumbled up the proper order, reflecting the realistically random experience of divine justice.

traveller promises to share half of whatever he finds with Hermes, he finds a wallet full of dates and nuts, eats all its contents and then proclaims "Here you have, Hermes, the payment of my vow; for I have shared with you half of the outsides and half of the insides of what I have found."⁴²⁷

One important fable not considered by Versnel is documented by the sophist Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius*, wherein Hermes and Aesop are the central characters. The fable conforms to Hermes' role as a disruptor of knowledge where he promises to bestow a great gift on a poor but devoted shepherd named Aesop. However, in line with Hermes' role in such tales, he completely forgets to bestow any wisdom upon Aesop and only realizes his mistake after all the knowledge has been allocated to those that gave more extravagant gifts than the humble shepherd. However, recalling Apollo's gift of prophecy in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the god remembers a form of storytelling that he enjoyed while still a baby in swaddling clothes. Thus Hermes "bestowed upon Aesop the art of fable called mythology, for that was all that was left in the house of wisdom".⁴²⁸ It is noteworthy that we have a fable here regarding the origins of fable itself, and Hermes, the most popular divine figure within this genre, appears as a central character. For the ancient Greeks, fable was full of stark and crass humour, where fast wit and deception are celebrated, and thus the genre is strongly associated with Hermes.

This fable also provides a glimpse into how the ancient Greeks perceived the genre. It was not associated with those who offered extravagant offerings to the god, but those at the barrel's bottom, like the humble shepherd that embraced them. This narrative form is foremost a type of storytelling for the common populace. In a way, the ancient fables of Aesop provide a picture into contemporary Greek thought, but not that of the upper crust. They paint a view of how the ordinary people perceived and spoke about the world around them.

Hermes possesses a very human disposition in this genre and indeed no other Olympian embodies so many human foibles and traits as Hermes does. He does not inspire awe or fear

⁴²⁷ Versnel 2011: 332; P. 178 = H. 315.

⁴²⁸ Adrados 1999: 817. Cf. Philostr. VA 5.15.

but facilitates a friendly and joking relationship with both gods and humans.⁴²⁹ In fable, Hermes appears very accident-prone, a victim of misfortune and the willing target of mockery. Yet despite this, Hermes is never depicted as truly offended and appears to relish his very human connection to humanity: he is the paragon of human weakness.

*In many respects Hermes is pictured as a fellow creature and companion, who may temporarily be the dupe, but who will re-emerge and survive through ingenious manoeuvres and clever tricks.*⁴³⁰

Section 2.4: Hermes in Old Comedy

In Classical Athens, the term *kōmōidia* (κωμῳδία) referred to a specific type of theatre, intentionally planned for production at a well-known place and context, such as the state-sponsored festival of the Great Dionysia, where other types of drama were performed alongside other religious rituals and public events.⁴³¹ In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes' earliest surviving play, the chorus at one point says that Aristophanes "has been slandered by his enemies on the grounds that he slandered (κωμῳδεῖ) our city and insults the people".⁴³² Here Aristophanes uses the verbal form of *kōmōidia*, *kōmōidei*, which Konstan suggests means something akin to 'satirize' or 'ridicule', underscoring the centrality of mockery and parody in *kōmōidia*.⁴³³

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle provides a classification of literature and the other arts according to the virtue that the characters exemplify within them: namely, whether they act better than we do, like we do, or worse than we do.⁴³⁴ In this regard, Aristotle suggests that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* represent characters as better and anticipate tragedy, while the *Μαργίτης*, a parody epic that utilized iambic meter and was also attributed to Homer, led to

⁴²⁹ This relationship manifests in the bantering mistreatment and comfortable disrespect of his sacred herms. Cf the encounter with Leto in book 21 of the *Iliad*, cited above (*Il.* 21. 498.ff).

⁴³⁰ Versnel 2011: 334.

⁴³¹ Konstan in Revermann 2014: 27. They were performed together with other *kōmōidia* in a public competition with the winner getting a prize from a panel of judges. These types of competition, held at the festivals of the Great Dionysia and the Lenaia, also included other performative competitions in tragedy and choral singing of dithyrambs.

⁴³² *Ar. Ach.* 630-1; διαβαλλόμενος δ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐν Ἀθηναίοις ταχυβούλοισι, / ὡς κωμῳδεῖ τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν δῆμον καθυβρίζει.

⁴³³ Konstan in Revermann 2014: 28. Konstan notes that a few lines later the chorus defends Aristophanes, arguing that he only *kōmōidei* what is just: ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς τοι μή ποτ' ἀφῆσθ': ὡς κωμῳδήσει τὰ δίκαια (*Ar. Ach.* 655).

⁴³⁴ *Arist. Poet.* 1447b17–18.

kōmōidia.⁴³⁵ Aristotle determines that *kōmōidia* represents characters who are base and worse than us.⁴³⁶ Thus, generally, *kōmōidia* illustrates a protagonist who engages in base and crude actions, and also entails a positive resolution for the protagonist by the end.⁴³⁷

As in other forms of drama, such as tragedy and saytr plays, the actors of *kōmōidia* spoke in verse, which varied in its metre, yet what defines *kōmōidia* is the looseness of these metrical rules.⁴³⁸ Aside from metre, ancient audiences would expect a highly varied linguistic register, packed full of vulgar language, colloquialisms, excessive multisyllabic terms and imitations of non-Attic dialects or even nonsensical expressions ascribed to barbarians or non-Greeks.⁴³⁹ Another aspect unique to *kōmōidia* (especially Aristophanes) is the parabasis, wherein the actors leave the stage and the chorus or just its leader breaks the fourth wall, addressing the audience directly and acknowledging the context of the theatre.⁴⁴⁰ In this regard, the plots of *kōmōidia* often concentrated on contemporary matters such as politics and many politicians such as Cleon were directly targeted and mocked during the performance. Indeed, Aristophanes' plays concentrate on themes of war with the Spartans, corrupt politicians and the influences of sophists on the community, and it seems that writers of *kōmōidia* had special licence to critically comment on their government. Although these aspects are not dogmatically consistent in all the works of *kōmōidia*, on a general level they are characteristic of the broad features of the genre as it was understood by an ancient Greek audience.

⁴³⁵ Arist. *Poet.* 1448a11–12. Hermes is strongly associated with the iambic meter, embraced by comic poets, playwrights and writers. The fragments of the iambic poet Hipponax often focus on Hermes, mainly in the form of requests for food and money (cf. fr. 79 Dg. = 79 W2 1–11, trans. Gerber 1999; fr. 42 Dg. = 32 W2). Interestingly, conforming to a common theme concerning Hermes, Hipponax writes to and speaks about Hermes in a very candid fashion. There is no awe or respect granted to Hermes and Hipponax treats him more like an old friend than the god he is praying to. For more on Hermes' connection to iambic meter and Hipponax, see Capra & Nobili *Hermes Iambicus* in Miller and Clay 2019: 80-92.

⁴³⁶ Arist. *Poet.* 1449a32–3; Konstan (in Revermann 2014: 33) illustrates aspects of the base nature of comedy, noting how both actors and chorus were dressed in bizarre padded costumes, with many of them being equipped with a large erect leather phallus. Furthermore, many of them, especially the chorus, would be dressed as animals or other abstract things such as clouds. Aristotle admits that elements of the *Odyssey* adhere to the enjoyments of *kōmōidia*, specifically the reversal of fortunes, where the protagonists end the narrative happy and the antagonists end up failing, Arist. *Poet.* 1453a30–6.

⁴³⁷ Konstan argues, however, that this definition is too generalised and notes that other genres follow many of these elements (Konstan in Revermann 2014: 32), e.g. Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Euripides' *Ion* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

⁴³⁸ Konstan (in Revermann 2014: 33) notes how ancient audiences could recognise allusions to parodies of tragedy in the meter itself, as writers of *kōmōidia* would often mimic the metrical constraints of the genre they intended to parody and mock.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.* 34.

⁴⁴⁰ Konstan in Revermann 2014: 36.

The gods are a somewhat familiar presence within Greek comedy; indeed, Aristophanes' *Frogs* would not be what it is without its lead divinity, Dionysus. Unlike Dionysus, Hermes is never depicted as the lead protagonist but plays a significant role as a supporting character that helps develop the plot and furnishes the comedy of several plays. In Aristophanes' *Peace*, Hermes plays an integral role in assisting the protagonist to achieve their goals, while in *Wealth*, Hermes makes a brief appearance at the end where he tries to defect from the Olympians.

Section 2.4A: Peace

Aristophanes' *Peace* was produced in 421 BCE at the City Dionysia, ten days before the conclusion of Callias' peace, and is thus focused on the negativity of warfare, war-hungry politics and the need for peace and communication.⁴⁴¹ The central theme of *Peace* is the protagonist Trygaios' quest to find and save Peace personified. The Olympians have given up on humanity because of their constant warfare and have left their fate in the hands of War personified, who is intent on destroying humanity if they don't find a compromise. Hermes first comes on stage in the second half of the prologue when the protagonist Trygaios lands on Olympus.⁴⁴² Throughout his appearance in *Peace*, Hermes functions in his characteristic manner as comedic, and hungry, friend to humanity. Hermes' first words to Trygaios echo Hermes' first encounter with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, where Hermes throws a barrage of insults, and their dialogue evokes a sense of familiarity rather the relationship between a suppliant and deity.⁴⁴³

ὦ βδελυρὲ καὶ τολμηρὲ κἀναίσχυντε σὺ
καὶ μιὰρὲ καὶ παμμίαρε καὶ μιὰρώτατε,
πῶς δεῦρ' ἀνήλθες ὦ μιὰρῶν μιὰρώτατε;
τί σοί ποτ' ἔστ' ὄνομ'; οὐκ ἔρεϊς;

*You disgusting, reckless, shameless creature! You scoundrel, you consummate rascal,
the worst rogue there is! How did you get here, you most villainous of all the villains?
What's your name? Speak up, won't you?*

⁴⁴¹ Beta in Miller and Clay 2019: 96.

⁴⁴² Ar. *Pax*. 180.

⁴⁴³ Ar. *Pax*. 183-4; *Od.* 10.281-5; Cf. Ar. *Pax*. 382; "No, don't shout. O my dear little Hermes, I'm begging you!" (μὴ νυν λακίσης, λίσσομαί σ' ὤρμηδιον). Indeed, Trygaios speaks to Hermes in a candid and familiar tone, which lacks the assumed respect and awe reserved for communication between mortals and immortals.

Hermes is the only Olympian left on Olympus and, observing his general character, has been ordered by Zeus to stay and guard the furniture from robbers, a task he takes a bit too seriously.⁴⁴⁴ He is initially reluctant to speak to Trygaios, but the ambiguous god who has a penchant for human desires eagerly changes tone with Trygaios once offered a steak.⁴⁴⁵ This is one of two instances in the play where Trygaios and the chorus have to persuade Hermes to do something for them and, conforming to Hermes' fundamental characteristics, the god is convinced through extremely human desires. Once Hermes has been presented with the meat, his very tone changes from hostile to that of someone meeting an old friend after a long time.

The second instance comes when Trygaios and the chorus need to persuade Hermes to help them free Peace. Initially, Hermes rejects their request, citing Zeus's wrath as his reason.⁴⁴⁶ However Trygaios and the chorus begin to praise Hermes, emphasising his special relationship with man and all the libation gifts he will miss out on if humans are not saved.⁴⁴⁷ Through this blatant praise and the offer of a golden cup, Trygaios eventually wins Hermes over to their cause.⁴⁴⁸ Hermes' function now shifts from gluttonous guardian to mediator and helpmate. Hermes helps Trygaios and the chorus pull Peace out of her cave; the scene evokes comedy mainly from Hermes and Trygaios' initial sluggishness, which irritates the chorus throughout. However, it is not just the fact that Hermes is willing to engage in mundane labour that illustrates his characteristic manner, Hermes also unifies the chorus of farmers from different nations of Greece in their efforts to free Peace.⁴⁴⁹ The chorus is made up of middle-aged Athenian, Boeotian, Spartan, Megarian, and Argive farmers, who initially cannot coordinate their efforts. They begin to blame each other for not working together and it is only through Hermes' words of support that these dispirited

⁴⁴⁴ Ar. *Pax*. 201-2. Hermes appears to be taking his new job as guard of the doorway rather earnestly. He eagerly lists for Trygaios the various items he has been left to guard. "I'm keeping an eye on the furniture, what's left of it—some little pots and pans, boards, some wine jugs". (τὰ λοιπὰ τηρῶ σκευάρια τὰ τῶν θεῶν, / χυτρίδια καὶ σανίδια κάμφορείδια).

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 190-3.

⁴⁴⁶ Ar. *Pax*. 380-1. "My dear chap, I'll be destroyed by Zeus if I don't shout and make a real commotion over this". (ἀλλ' ὦ μέλ' ὑπὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἀμαλδυνθήσομαι, / εἰ μὴ τετορήσω ταῦτα καὶ λακήσομαι).

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 390-97. "Do not reject the prayers we say and let us dig up Peace today. Of all the gods you love men best and give them gifts, so bless our quest, if you dislike Pisander's plume, his spiteful pride, we will resume our constant offerings to you, my lord, with great processions, too". († μὴ γένη παλίγκτος / ἀντιβολοῦσιν ἡμῖν, † / ὥστε τήνδε μὴ λαβεῖν: / ἀλλὰ χάρισ' ὦ φιλανθρωπότετε καὶ μεγαλοδωρότατε δαιμόνων, / εἴ τι Πεισάνδρου βδελύττει τοὺς λόφους καὶ τὰς ὀφρῦς. / καὶ σε θυσίαισιν ἱε/ραῖσι προσόδοις τε μεγά/λαισι διὰ παντός ὦ / δέσποτ' ἀγαλοῦμεν ἡμεῖς ἀεὶ).

⁴⁴⁸ Ar. *Pax*. 420-5.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 428-31.

national groups shake off their prejudice and work together to bring about Peace.⁴⁵⁰

Hermes' last significant role in *Peace* illustrates his function as messenger and herald between gods and men. He acts as the mouthpiece of the silent goddess and conveys a somewhat serious message on the folly of the Greeks, mentioning the numerous opportunities they had to establish peace but rejected it.⁴⁵¹

In all his appearances in *Peace* Hermes keeps to his characteristic mannerisms: he functions as a guardian of the threshold, mediator and a gluttonous helpmate to humanity who has a penchant for humour and human desires. Hermes' strong connection to notions of peace and communication make him an ideal figure for a play focused on bringing about a new era of peace between states. Indeed, not only does Hermes help save *Peace* by unifying the chorus, he also acts as a moral voice who conveys Aristophanes' sombre and contextually contemporary message in a play buffered by playful humour.

Hermes' words of farewell to Trygaios reflect this god's special relationship with mortals and perhaps explain why he has helped them.⁴⁵²

καὶ σὺ γε ὦνθρωπε χαίρων ἄπιθι καὶ μέμνησό μου.

And farewell to you, too, human mortal. May you live happy, and remember me.

Section 2.4B: Wealth

Aristophanes *Wealth* is the playwright's last surviving comedy and was produced in 388 BCE for an unknown festival, more than thirty years after *Peace*.⁴⁵³ In *Peace* Hermes appears only in the first half of the play, where, aside from his comedic antics, he functions as the moral dispenser of the severe message Aristophanes intended to convey regarding peace and unification of Greek society. Hermes does not appear in the second half, which is concerned with the humorous consequences of Trygaios' quest. In *Wealth* however, Hermes only appears in the second half, after the plot has dealt with the serious matter of healing the god Wealth's blindness. As in *Peace*, the second half is devoted to the comedic consequences of the first: now that Wealth has been healed, mortals no longer feel the

⁴⁵⁰ Ar. *Pax*. 459-520.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.* 603-710.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.* 719.

⁴⁵³ Beta in Miller and Clay 2019: 97.

need to sacrifice to the gods as they now have everything. The gods are starving, and a hungry Hermes appears outside of Chremylos' house as a defector from Olympus desperately looking for a new job.⁴⁵⁴ Beta notes that if Hermes now truly wishes to live among men, then he must work with them and like them, and the witty dialogue between Hermes and the slave Carion represents the heart of the comedy in this episode.⁴⁵⁵ Regardless of what Aristophanes intended with this scene, contemporary audiences can appreciate the comedic similarities between Hermes and Carion's conversation with a modern day job interview. Hermes acts as a desperate job applicant who provides a long list of the jobs, he is willing to accept. Hermes' list of jobs parodies his divine patronships, suggesting that he can be a door-keeper, a tradesman, a deceiver, a guide or a judge of the games.⁴⁵⁶ However, he is denied by Carion at each suggestion and is eventually given the job of scullery-boy and sent indoors to wash the entrails of the sacrificial animals. Despite not suggesting the position, Hermes' new work still adheres to his fundamental character, in this case his role as herald and organiser of ritual sacrifice, as illustrated in his *Homeric Hymn*.⁴⁵⁷

As in *Peace*, Hermes is depicted as gluttonous and greedy, as he complains to Carion of how little food he now gets.⁴⁵⁸

πρότερον γὰρ εἶχον μὲν παρὰ ταῖς καπηλίαις
 πάντ' ἀγάθ' ἔωθεν εὐθύς, οἰνοῦτταν μέλι
 ἰσχάδας, ὅσ' εἰκός ἐστιν Ἑρμῆν ἐσθίειν·
 νυνὶ δὲ πεινῶν ἀναβάδην ἀναπαύομαι.

Before, the female tavern-keepers spoilt me. At dawn I'd get wine-flavoured cakes and honey, And figs as well—the perfect diet for Hermes. But now I sit upstairs, all famished and idle.

⁴⁵⁴ Ar. *Pl.* 1097–1170.

⁴⁵⁵ Beta in Miller and Clay 2019: 98.

⁴⁵⁶ Ar. *Pl.* 1151–1170.

⁴⁵⁷ *HHH.* 115–39.

⁴⁵⁸ Ar. *Pl.* 1120–3. The motif of hungry Hermes is apparent throughout his depictions in literature, perhaps most significantly in the *Homeric Hymn* where it is a driving motivator in the first half of the hymn and represents his ambiguous status in between the divine and mortal spheres.

As in *Peace*, Hermes is depicted as an outsider to his Olympian society. In *Peace*, Hermes is left alone to guard Olympus, while in *Wealth* he informs us that he has defected from the gods to humanity, as that is where the food is.⁴⁵⁹

μὰ Δί' οὐδέ γε
θύσει. κακῶς γὰρ ἐπεμελεῖσθ' ἡμῶν τότε.

The other gods don't matter so much to me. But I myself am wasting away.

Another noteworthy aspect seen here that seems to be a common trait of Hermes in literature is the lack of awe and respect from the mortals he meets. Indeed, the slave Carion never shows any reverence when he sees Hermes and treats him more like a slave of equal or lower status than a god.⁴⁶⁰ This may, however, be the result of a pre-existing relationship between the two, as Hermes notes how he used to bless Carion's various acts of petty theft in the past after Carion initially rejects his job application.⁴⁶¹

In *Peace*, Hermes plays a central role in the plot's development, while in *Wealth*, Beta suggests that Hermes acts more as a caricature of himself, whose main function is to comedically end the list of people who have been harmed by *Wealth*'s recovery (such as tradesmen, sycophants and other types of profiteurs close to Hermes).⁴⁶² Hermes' incredibly close relationship with humanity may be what allowed Aristophanes to portray the god in such a ludicrous way without causing outrage from the audience. Beta notes that aside from Hermes, the only two other deities so openly mocked in comedy were Dionysus and Heracles. He suggests that Dionysus may have been amenable to this type of portrayal because the comic performances took places during his festival. However, what unifies these three targets of comedy is the uncertain births that locate them in between the

⁴⁵⁹ Ar. *Pl.* 1116-17.

⁴⁶⁰ Aristophanes here utilises what is an established theme yet pushes it to the most absurd degree. From his presence in epic onwards, Hermes is depicted as a god, but close to humanity. He does not expect or demand the same degree of reverence as the other gods. He is neither jealous nor vindictive concerning humanity's lack of awe: as the divine outsider, he is one of us.

⁴⁶¹ Ar. *Pl.* 1139-47. HERMES: But when you used to filch your master's food, I always helped to save you from detection. KARION: But only since you took a share, you cheat! A well-baked pastry always came your way. HERMES: But even that you usually ate yourself! KARION: Well I was the one who had to take the whipping whenever my mischief got me into trouble. HERMES: Don't bear a grudge—accept an amnesty. I beg you, by the gods, please give me a home. (Ἑρμῆς: καὶ μὴν ὅποτε τι σκευάριον τοῦ δεσπότη / ὑφέλοι', ἐγὼ σε λανθάνειν ἐποίουν αἰεὶ. / Καρίων: ἐφ' ᾧ τε μετέχειν καὶ τὸς ᾧ τοιχωρῶχε. / ἦκεν γὰρ ἂν σοι ναστὸς εὖ πεπεμμένος. / Ἑρμῆς: ἔπειτα τοῦτόν γ' αὐτὸς ἂν κατήσθεις. / Καρίων: οὐ γὰρ μετεῖχες τὰς ἴσας πληγὰς ἐμοί, / ὅποτε τι ληφθεῖν πανουργήσας ἐγώ. / Ἑρμῆς: μὴ μνησικακήσης, εἰ σὺ Φυλὴν κατέλαβες. / ἀλλὰ ξύνοικον πρὸς θεῶν δέξασθέ με).

⁴⁶² Beta in Miller and Clay 2019: 98.

mortal and immortal realms.⁴⁶³ Both Dionysus and Heracles are originally demi-gods born of a union between Zeus and mortal women; Hermes is born from the secretive union between the nymph Maia and Zeus. Hermes' ambiguous origins and his special relationship with mortals, emphasised throughout his appearance in both plays, may be what invited such playful ridicule from Greek playwrights and audiences. Betwixt and between "Tricksters and comic heroes often behave similarly, embracing adaptation, transgressive behaviour, and a low social status or a stance of abjection".⁴⁶⁴

Section 2.5: Conclusion

In all the literary (and sub-literary) examples considered in this chapter there is a marked consistency in Hermes' depiction. He is cast as humanity's closest friend and helpmate, acting as an advisor and guide during perilous adventures. His affinity to humanity is felt within all the discussed genres and is illustrated through a special kind of relationship: Hermes' appearances never evoke awe or amazement from mortals. He is often the target of mockery and shamelessly embraces emphatically human traits, most notably his insatiable hunger. Hermes is the boundary crosser par excellence; he is ambiguous, the ultimate outsider, patron of travel and movement. He calls neither Olympus nor earth his home but resides somewhere in between.

In Homeric epic Hermes observes his characteristic functions as messenger, guide and helpmate to humanity with a fondness for humour that is often self-deprecating. In epic we see the foundations of what the Greeks saw as integral to this character. An advocate of peace, occasionally hungry and willing to help both mortals and immortals alike.

There is no denying that most ancient Greek fables are not by Aesop. They are a collection of humorous and moralistic stories that all have similar elements yet could have originated in Libya or Egypt and not just within the Greek world. However, they offer great insight into the minds of the people listening to and telling them, and in this respect, they illustrate how Hermes was thought of and perceived by the greater Greek populace. In him, they saw an

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.* 99.

⁴⁶⁴ Moodie in Miller and Clay 2019: 108.

old friend, one they could simultaneously respect and make fun of like any other member of their community.

In both *Peace* and *Wealth*, Aristophanes depicts Hermes as a gluttonous outsider with a fondness for human desires, who eagerly aids anyone who can offer him some advantage. Hermes' depiction in comedy must be taken with a grain of salt as Hermes appears as a hyperbolic caricature of himself within Aristophanes' works, yet the foundations of this caricature are noteworthy. Hermes is depicted as a hungry comedic outsider willing to do the mundane tasks of mortals to get food. Despite the overemphasis on these comic attributes, Aristophanes' depiction of Hermes must have reflected a common understanding of the god in Athens of the late 5th century BCE.

In all the literary sources considered here, Hermes is consistently depicted in a comic light and a very human manner, as should be expected from the god closest to mortals. Like many tricksters, Hermes embraces aspects of the human condition often shunned in representations of the divine. He is depicted as a crass comedic buffoon who lacks the noble air and mannerisms of the traditional Olympian figure; he is forever complaining about his hunger. In fable Hermes is depicted as making mistakes and is the target of mockery and trickery at mortal hands. Hermes does not shy away from failure; he engages in self-abasement. He is a god between categories, a necessary feat for the ultimate outsider, functioning as both a mediator and messenger to all. Finally, bound to Zeus, Hermes is fundamentally neutral: all are equal and can receive either aid or mockery and mistreatment from him.

Section 3: Conclusion

Hermes is foremost the god of the boundary, transitions, exchange, binding oaths and advocate of the downtrodden, be it humanity in general or the struggling working class in particular. He encompasses multiple functions that may appear disconnected at first glance. However, this is not the case. Hermes lies between spheres and helps connect these disparate spaces. He connects merchants with resources and buyers with goods; he connects the souls of the dead with their final resting place, and he guides humanity through the ambiguous world of death, life and dreams. His patronship over speech,

deception and cunning thievery all reflect his role as a mediator and connecting figure, as speech is one of the best ways to bring disparate groups together and is fundamental to all those who engage in travel and commerce. All these aspects also fall into the realm of ambiguity: commerce, mediation, language, guiding and spellbinding are all open to interpretation. Unlike concepts such as truth or war, there are multiple ways to perceive and enact them, with each possible interpretation being unique and different. Hermes presides over all that is uncertain: lottery, exchange, travel and even magic can go worse or better than expected. There is no way of truly knowing the outcome: they are all ambiguous areas of activity. Hermes creates a web that brings together all of these ambiguous elements into one figure who is just as murky as the functions he presides over. Tricksters are fundamentally ambiguous, and whatever else there is to say about Hermes on this subject, we can be confident that he is too.

Now that Hermes' possible origins, functions and literary depictions have been discussed, a concise analysis of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* will be presented, followed by an assessment of how this figure confirms to Hynes' typology of the trickster in the poem. A comparative analysis of Hermes and the three comparative tricksters, based on Hynes' typology, will follow in the final chapter, to provide an understanding of their respective individualities and of the various aspects that connect them.

Chapter 4: the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and Hynes' typology of the trickster

Now that Hermes has been described within his cultural context as Hynes & Doty's two-level approach demands, his actions within his *Homeric Hymn* will be analysed and will then be applied to Hynes' typology of the trickster. These findings will then be discussed alongside the conclusions made from our other three trickster figures. This process will not only illustrate the effectiveness of Hynes' typology as a model of defining the potential of a character as a trickster but will help us understand how these global figures differ and relate to each other, and hopefully show exactly how Hermes adheres to the category.

Section 1: The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*

Section 1.1: Context of the *Homeric Hymns*

The *Homeric Hymns*⁴⁶⁵ are an assortment of 33 hexameter poems devoted to various divinities. They vary in length, some only a few lines long while others exceed 500 lines, and are difficult to date, ranging from the 8th to 2nd century BCE and perhaps even later.⁴⁶⁶ The rich and scattered diversity of this collection has led many scholars to question assigning it to its own genre, as it is challenging to define a generic baseline that unites the poems. Attempts have been made to connect individual hymns with specific cults or festivals.⁴⁶⁷ Clay notes that multiple performance contexts have been suggested for the hymns: rhapsodic, contests at festivals, symposia, and entertainments in royal or aristocratic courts.⁴⁶⁸ They aim at celebrating divinities and are united in subject-matter with cultic hymns but differ in language, diction and, importantly, their Panhellenism, as they cannot

⁴⁶⁵ Although called *Homeric Hymns*, the collection is not by Homer nor are they technically all hymns, as in the archaic period ὕμνος only means song. Cf. Ford 2002: 12, 27 for a discussion of the term 'hymnos', with examples.

⁴⁶⁶ Faulkner 2012: 7-16.

⁴⁶⁷ E.g. West 2003: 6-20. However, these findings have been questioned, as there are hymns dedicated to figures that do not have cults, such as the sun and moon, and others dedicated to heroes such as Hercules and the Dioscuri. Cf. Richardson and Chappell in Faulkner 2012: 50-3; 64-7. For example, Apollo's hymn includes descriptions of the Delian festival but also devotes time to describe the establishment of the god's Delphic sanctuary. Indeed, there is no telling if the hymn was meant to be performed at either, neither or both.

⁴⁶⁸ Clay in Faulkner 2012: 233; Clay mentions Nobili (2008) who argues for a Panathenaic setting and suggests that other hymns may have been performed at this venue also. However, Clay comments that if Athens was a focal point of hexameter hymn performances, then why is there a lack of long hymns to Athena within the collection?

be ascribed to any specific location or occasion. Thus, for Clay, they form a subgroup of hexameter epos.⁴⁶⁹

*We should surely wonder, at the least, whether the Hymns, works designed to entertain and needing no pious devotion to render them palatable, were necessarily any more occasional or context-bound than was epic itself.*⁴⁷⁰

The *Homeric Hymns* share some characteristics, both formal and thematic, such as the opening and closing formulae, relative predication, and description or narrative.⁴⁷¹ Clay proposes that the variety in length suggests an evolving flexibility in the hymns, which could change depending on the context of the performance.⁴⁷² With the popularization of Homeric epic, these disparate narratives concerning the feats of the gods could be incorporated at the poet's discretion within the greater epic performance. Thus, these highly adaptive pieces could form the first in a series of songs, a *prooimion*.⁴⁷³ Detached from any specific cultic or festive performance, the hymns can engage in both serious and comedic material, which allows for lighthearted moments of entertainment and somber religious conjecture.⁴⁷⁴ Regardless of the contexts that led to their development, the *Homeric Hymns* are united in their distinct Panhellenic flavour, suggesting a large degree

⁴⁶⁹ Clay in Faulkner 2012: 234.

⁴⁷⁰ Clay in Faulkner 2012: 234, citing Parker, 1991: 1–2.

⁴⁷¹ Both Faulkner and Clay suggest that these similarities may be what led to them being compiled and transmitted together, most likely during the Hellenistic period. Clay in Faulkner 2012: 233; Faulkner 2012: 175–80.

⁴⁷² Clay in Faulkner 2012: 234. Clay argues that some of the shorter hymns are possibly abbreviations of the longer ones and that some of the longer hymns have in effect become rhapsodic expansions of the shorter ones. For evidence concerning the longer hymns, cf Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1936: xcv; Richardson 1977 xii–xxi; Koller 1956; for shorter hymns, see Parker 1991. The longer hymns are distinguished from the shorter hymns by their central focus on mythological narratives. They depict a fully developed narrative, where the main actor is one of the Olympian gods and the storyline functions to define and dramatically frame the characters' mannerisms, privileges and attributes to be praised. The plot may involve the founding of certain cults or other blessings/innovations specific to the hymn's deity. Birth narratives are also common and ideal for illustrating the origins of a divinity and the manner in which they go about acquiring their respective honours and position within Olympus. Examples include the hymns to Demeter, Apollo, Hermes and the fragmentary hymn to Dionysus, all of which appear early in the collection.

⁴⁷³ Thucydides regards all *Homeric Hymns* as *prooimia*, "that is something that preceded the singing of a heroic οἴμη" (*Thuc.* 3.104.4–5). Maslov (2012: 191) provides two possible definitions for the term *prooimion*: 1) The meaning "that which precedes a heroic lay" develops into the meaning "that which comes in the beginning"; 2) The meaning "that which comes in the beginning, including an address to the gods" develops into the meaning "a poem that is addressed to a god" (e.g., a *Homeric Hymn*).

⁴⁷⁴ Clay in Faulkner 2012: 246. The *Homeric Hymns* are characteristically Panhellenic in nature; they adeptly avoid association with any specific places or local tradition. For example, the fragmentary *Hymn to Dionysus* rejects a number of local claims for the god's birthplace (cf West in Faulkner 2012: 33) and the *Hymn to Apollo* and the *Hymn to Demeter* both focus on the founding of a cult but do not depict locations or rituals of local interest, focussing throughout on Panhellenic aspects: in the *Hymn to Apollo* both Delian and Pythian Apollo are united and celebrated.

of diffusion and mobility for their composers. Like Homeric epic, they could be performed in Athens, Sparta or Lesbos with little or no alteration.⁴⁷⁵

*Whatever the locus of 'original' performance and audience, re-performance in different venues continued to shape the Hymns and reinforce their Panhellenic character, creating a kind of theological lingua franca.*⁴⁷⁶

Section 1.2: Summary of the Hymn to Hermes

The *Hymn to Hermes* narrates the new-born's adventures and chicanery during the first three days of his life. He devises several new inventions such as the lyre, sandals and fire sticks. He also steals fifty of Apollo's sacred cattle and tricks his brother by herding the cattle in a zig-zag pattern and uses two of them to perform a proto-sacrifice for the Olympians. He is eventually discovered by Apollo, who grabs him but releases him after his fart omen and is then taken to Olympus for judgment. On Olympus, Hermes uses clever wordplay to avoid perjuring himself in front of the Olympians. This amuses Zeus greatly, but he can still see through his son's trickery and orders him to show Apollo where the cattle are hidden. Once Hermes has delivered the stolen cattle to his brother, they both exchange several oaths: Hermes gives Apollo his lyre for the cattle and finally swears an oath to never steal or use trickery against the immortals. In return, Apollo grants Hermes the caduceus, the oracle of the 'Bee Maidens' and patronage over several kinds of animals. He is finally appointed as the messenger to Hades by Apollo.

Section 1.3: Analysis of the Hymn to Hermes

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* was composed later than most of the other *Homeric Hymns*, with the scholars claiming Athens, Boeotia or Arcadia for its place of composition and dating it to the late 6th or early 5th century.⁴⁷⁷ The *Hymn to Hermes* is unlike any other major

⁴⁷⁵ The Hymns' extensive range both regarding length and diffusion made them ideal performances at competitions and public and private festivals. Clay sees the hymns as episodic compositions which were never compiled into cyclical narratives, like Homeric epic. Clay in Faulkner 2012: 252.

⁴⁷⁶ Clay in Faulkner 2012: 247.

⁴⁷⁷ Versnel (2011: 319) sees Attica or Boeotia as the most likely places of origin. In regard to its performance, Johnston (2003: 171-174) suggests festivals of Hermes that celebrated the maturation of males, which she sees as the athletic Hermaia. Dates: Kirk (1985: 74) suggests some point between late sixth and early fourth century; Janko (1982: 133-50) sometime in the late sixth; Radermacher (1931: 216 & 222) and Eitrem (1906: 282) sometime in the early fifth. Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936: 275-76) argued for the seventh century on the dubious grounds that the hymn would refer only to places that still existed at the poet's time.

Homeric Hymn, in that it does not include a narrated epiphany of the praised deity.⁴⁷⁸ It is filled with playful humorous antics, displays an irregular form of diction and is noted for its shifting narrative progression.⁴⁷⁹ Due to such elements early critics denied the possibility of any serious intent from the hymn and many have attempted to construct extravagant theories to explain the hymn's apparent disunity.⁴⁸⁰ Scholars such as Allen, Halliday and Sikes see any attempt at uncovering a unifying theme within the hymn as futile and simply label the narrative subject as "a day in the life of Hermes".⁴⁸¹ Clay, however, argues that this is a misinterpretation of the hymn and admits that, while it differs from the other major hymns in tone, style and structure, the entirety of the poem follows the main generic features of the *Homeric Hymns*.⁴⁸² According to Clay, it expresses the quintessential nature of Hermes through his words and actions, and deals with how he acquires his honours among the Olympian pantheon, establishing a permanent and fixed reorganization of the divine social order. Like the *Hymn to Apollo*, it recounts the birth of a new god who initially appears to threaten the stability of the already established pantheon but who, in the end, takes their place within the divine social order.⁴⁸³ Clay sees the rivalry between the two brothers as striking and important. Apollo was born at an earlier stage of the Olympian regime, before all divine powers were consolidated, while Hermes (in the context of his hymn) was born last, when all the powers and honors have already been distributed.

⁴⁷⁸ Vergados 2011: 26.

⁴⁷⁹ Vergados (2011: 23) clarifies this: "While Hermes' vocabulary is not childish at all; the overall effect of his language may be intended to reflect the speaker's age. He uses short, choppy sentences which sometimes lack connectives. Three out of nine lines have a minor internal pause at the bucolic diaeresis, marked in our editions with a comma (30–32), while four lines contain a stronger internal pause (32,34, 35, 38). Necessary enjambement occurs only once at 38, while all other instances of enjambement belong to the progressive/unperiodic type. The overall structure is paratactic, without a single instance of a subordinate clause."

⁴⁸⁰ Cf Clay (2006: 95-6) for a list of scholars who have denied the possibility of any seriousness intent: W. Schmid and O. Stählin *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* Munich (1929: 236); Baumeister (1860: 185). See Clay (2006: 95-6) also for a list of academics that have attempted to construct theories to explain the hymn's apparent inconsistencies: Baumeister (1860: 182-84), Ludwig (1908: 27-30), and Humbert (1936: 105). For example, C. Robert ("Zum homerischen Hermeshymnos," *Hermes* 41 [1906]: 389-425) reduced the "original" hymn to less than half its length. Furthermore, Clay points to Herwerden (1907: 181-91) for the resulting truncated text. Ludwig (1908) and J. Kuiper, "De discrepantiis hymni homerici in Mercurium," *Mnemosyne* 38 (1910: 1-50), attempted to refute Robert's arguments, but Ludwig's drastic transposition theory convinced no one. Among the Unitarians should be listed: Baumeister (1860), Gemoll (1886), L. Radermacher, *Der homerische Hermeshymnus*, (Sitzungsberichte, Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien 213, no. 1 .1931); Humbert (1936); AHS (1936); and Càssola (1975), although some doubt the authenticity of the last seventy lines. Janko (1982: 133) characterizes the present situation as follows: "despite various attempts to dissect it in the past, the integrity of the Hymn to Hermes is not nowadays seriously disputed."

⁴⁸¹ Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1936: 268.

⁴⁸² Clay 2006: 96.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.* 96.

*Nothing remains for Hermes, who is thus obliged to acquire his honors by theft or exchange. Apollo and Hermes, then, are set at opposite poles of the mythological history of the Olympian family.*⁴⁸⁴

Hermes begins life with nothing, Vergados calls this Hermes' 'identity crisis' while Clay and Kahn see this ambiguity as the reason why Hermes can so easily pass and penetrate between socio-cultural boundaries.⁴⁸⁵ Versnel divides the hymn into two distinct sections: lines 1-130 make up the human-centred section, where Hermes is motivated to appease his very human "craving [for] meat".⁴⁸⁶ Section two is the Olympian section: after denying himself a taste of meat, Hermes refocuses his energy on acquiring honours and recognition from Olympus.⁴⁸⁷ The precipice that divides the two sections is the infamous sacrificial scene, where Hermes finally resolves his identity crisis by refusing to partake in the meat he has prepared. Scholars have suggested various theories as to what this ritual sacrifice scene is intended to convey.⁴⁸⁸ Versnel comments that, regardless of the sacrificial scene's

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 97.

⁴⁸⁵ Vergados 2011: 4; Clay 2006: 98; Kahn (1978) *Hermès passe: Ou, Les ambiguïtés de la communication*.

⁴⁸⁶ *HHH.* 64, κρειῶν ἐρατίζων.

⁴⁸⁷ Versnel 2011: 320-22. Versnel illustrates this transition between the human-centred section and the Olympian one through the two songs sung by Hermes. In the first section Hermes performs a song of his own begetting (54-60): "The god sang beautifully to it, impromptu, experimentally, as young men at dinners make ribald interjections" (θεὸς δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄειδεν / ἐξ αὐτοσχεδίας πειρώμενος, ἥυτε κοῦροι / ἠβηταὶ θαλίῃσι παραιβόλα κερτομέουσιν). Hermes' initial song is very human in focus and steeped in ephebic characterisation. Vergados (2011: 5) labels it a hymnic performance intended to legitimize his ambiguous birth by celebrating his parents' amours and presenting them as a special loving relationship and not just one of Zeus's many sexual escapades. Hermes' second song (423-33) in the Olympian section focuses on much grander issues (427-8): "he spoke authoritatively of the immortal gods and of dark Earth, how they were born originally and how each received his portion" (κραιῶν ἀθανάτους τε θεοῦς καὶ γαῖαν ἐρεμνήν, ὡς τὰ πρῶτα γέροντο καὶ ὡς λάχε μοῖραν ἕκαστος). Vergados (2011: 5) labels the second song as a theogonic performance: Hermes weaves a tale of how the gods came to be with him included in the arrangement. Initially, Hermes sings the youthful, human concerns of his mother and father's complicated relationship. He does this because, aside from his lyre, he has yet to accomplish anything worth praising. However, by the time of his second performances, Hermes has accomplished much: he has stolen his brother's cattle and confronted the gods on Olympus. Now that his identity crisis has been resolved, Hermes begins to sing a complete theogony with his powers and deeds now included, as he is now their equal. Clay (2006: 109) notes that Hermes' first song reflects his ambiguous state. He acts like a human bard, asking the Muses for inspiration, something that the supposedly divine Hermes does not need to do: "The anomalousness of Hermes' song reflects his anomalous position: not a mortal, but not yet fully a god".

⁴⁸⁸ According to Brown (1969: 102), the ritual contributes nothing to the plot, while Radermacher (1931: 190-91) suggests that the theft and slaughter of Apollo's cattle serve as an origin myth to explain a peculiar rock formation of an unidentified cave near the Alpheus. Burkert (1984: 835-45) argues that the scene offers an account of the origins of a local ritual dedicated to Hermes and the twelve gods performed and celebrated within the vicinity of Olympia. Burkert's theory has been criticised, however, for his selective use of evidence that neither proves or disproves his theory: see Clay 2006: 118. Kahn (1978: 41-73) argues that Hermes' ritual sacrifice represents a "pseudo- or anti-sacrifice" wherein the rules governing Olympian sacrifice, created to define the distinctions between gods and mortals, are inverted. This inversion of sacrificial norms and vocabulary allow Hermes to establish a passage between the boundaries separating mortals and immortals. Thus "Hermes enacts his essential function as a liminal and mediating divinity". Clay (2006: 199) suggests that the episode does not reflect the institution of ritual sacrifice, but another closely related institution with its own distinct set of rules and norms: the *dais* or feast. Clay argues that Hermes is not establishing a vertical hierarchy based on rank or status, but establishing a *dais* creates a horizontal distribution that affirms equality among all participants. For Clay, Hermes is not acting as the priest or herald preparing a sacrifice but as "companion of the feast," (δαίτης ἐταῖρος, 436), who gives a feast

underlying meaning, throughout the scene Hermes is depicted from a human perspective, right until he chooses not to eat the meat. This is the crux of Hermes' crisis: as a human actor he has a craving for meat, yet as a god he cannot consume the meat as he would risk losing his divine status.⁴⁸⁹ Hermes appears stuck between two distinct spheres and through his ritual sacrifice unites the two separate categories within one ambiguous actor. Thus, Kahn's analysis, that Hermes functions as a mediating figure that opens passages between the realms of mortals and immortals, seems sound.

*Hermes is able to affirm not only the divinity of the Twelve Gods, but also his own. But, defined by his own history, he will become a god friendly to man.*⁴⁹⁰

All the powers and honour have already been distributed on Olympus, and Hermes must now acquire them through theft or exchange. Hermes therefore targets his brother Apollo, and through deception and trickery will acquire the honours he desires. Yet why is this the case? What is it about Hermes' and Apollo's relationship that brings them together in such a manner? Apollo is depicted as Hermes' sole antagonist in the hymn. However, in cultic practice the two shared one of the six altars of the twelve gods in Olympia, suggesting a close friendship or alliance rather than a rivalry.⁴⁹¹ Indeed, in the *Odyssey*, the half-brothers' friendship is shown through their cheerful banter.⁴⁹² Eitrem argues that the gods' rivalry in the hymn reflects an actual rivalry between their competing cults.⁴⁹³ Hermes' encroachment upon and acquisition of aspects of Apollo's domain conform to this rivalry, such as Hermes' invention of the lyre and the transference of honours at the end of the hymn where Apollo makes Hermes god of the herd and gives him control of a rudimentary form of prophecy.⁴⁹⁴ Along similar lines, Brown argues that the hymn represents the feelings of the rising working

among equals where everything is portioned fairly. Through his *dais*, Hermes establishes that he is worthy of membership within the Olympian community, as he demonstrates that all participants are equal and all deserving of divine honours. However, Hermes does not gain legitimacy or recognition from his *dais* as he intended (why else would he go through so much effort to construct it). As a god, Hermes cannot partake in the meat; it is not the establishment of either the ritual sacrifice or the *dais* that confirms Hermes' status but his refusal to eat the meat at the crux of the sacrificial scene. (West follows Matthiae (1805) reading *πανεόμενε δαιτὸς ἐταίρην* = 'busy with the feast's companion' – i.e. inventor of the lyre).⁴⁸⁹ Versnel 2011: 322 cites H.G. Evelyn-White (following Gemoll) in the Loeb edition of 1914: "Can it be that by eating he would have forfeited the position he claimed as one of the Twelve Gods?". Cf. H. Jeanmaire, 1945: 66–89; J.-P. Vernant in Detienne & Vernant 1979: 242. Burkert (1984: 837), however, rejects this theory as it does not follow his argument of a ritual background for the whole scene.

⁴⁹⁰ Kahn 1978: 66.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. the Scholium to *Pind. Olympian*. 5.10a; *Paus.* 5.14.8.

⁴⁹² *Od.* 8.334-42, see chapter 3, section 2.2B.

⁴⁹³ Eitrem 1906: 248.

⁴⁹⁴ *HHH.* 495-562.

class and Hermes' acquisition of powers from Apollo represents the encroachment of new money on the luxury activities of the aristocratic elite (e.g. music, arts, education, or debate).⁴⁹⁵ It is significant, however, that the *Homeric Hymns* articulate the origins and organization of the Olympian Pantheon, and within the context of this more extensive system the rivalry between Hermes and Apollo takes on an appearance similar to the rivalry seen between Amerindian tricksters and shamans. Clay argues that "in Apollo, the Greeks recognized the god who maintains order and observes hierarchies and distinctions, especially those separating gods and mortals".⁴⁹⁶ Apollo is the only god allowed to interpret the word of Zeus and functions as a gate-keeper that separates the realms of gods and men, through his ability to dispense truth both of the past and future.⁴⁹⁷ Hermes is the boundary crosser; he makes passages between spaces that generally do not connect. Bungard argues that Hermes represents a new way of understanding the world, one based on inventiveness and the ability to repurpose what is already at hand to make something new,⁴⁹⁸ while Apollo represents the old way, based on static religious doctrine of pre-existing factual information, specifically the ability to reference past knowledge that the god possesses. From birth Apollo shines bright, he is known to everyone as soon as he begins his adventures in his hymn.⁴⁹⁹ He is not a mediating figure. He destroys his opponents Pytho and Telphousa and creates a sense of anxiety among the Olympians.⁵⁰⁰ He is a god of distinction and separated spaces. Hermes is born unknown and is illegitimate. Where Apollo takes his powers, Hermes must negotiate and steal them; he must find new meanings for what is already fixed and defined. Apollo is privileged, endowed with knowledge and authority. Hermes is disenfranchised. Recalling Brown's notion of the rising working class and the ensuing democratic process, Hermes must utilize whatever is available to get ahead.⁵⁰¹ Tricksters represent the humanist way, and this is what Hermes does in his hymn: relying on his human wit he reimagines the old, creating something entirely new. In this respect, Apollo corresponds to the pure religious practitioner, who relies on sacred knowledge, authority and religious doctrine (the truth) to effect change. The god of

⁴⁹⁵ Brown 1969: 81-105.

⁴⁹⁶ Clay 2006: 101.

⁴⁹⁷ *HHA*. 131-2.

⁴⁹⁸ Bungard 2012: 443-69.

⁴⁹⁹ *HHA*. 1-19.

⁵⁰⁰ *HHA*. 1-5, 372-87.

⁵⁰¹ Vergados 2011: 136.

illumination and light casts a shadow that relegates his perception to black and white, truth and falsehoods. There is no middle ground, no room for movement or mediation. Hermes, the ambiguous trickster, embraces the grey in-between and creates new ways of engaging with the world, that reflect a multifaceted perspective rather than one defined by distinct categories or boundaries.

Through tricky and comedic manipulation, through his deceptions against Apollo, Hermes orchestrates his entrance and admittance into Olympus. After Apollo has suffered comedic humiliation by Hermes, Apollo captures him and takes him to Olympus for trial. Hermes, however, the master of language, mediation and inversion, turns truth upon itself and successfully argues his innocence. He is then recognized as legitimate by Zeus and ordered to show Apollo where the cattle are hidden. However, upon finding the cattle Apollo sees the remnants of the sacrifice and realizes the potential danger Hermes could present through his trickery if left unchecked. Apollo therefore attempts to bind Hermes in vines. Hermes easily evades this, however, by transferring the binding vines to the cattle instead. Before Apollo can act Hermes takes out his lyre and sings a theogony that in a way binds Apollo in awe.⁵⁰² After the revelation of the lyre, Hermes now has something to barter with. In exchange for the lyre, Apollo grants Hermes patronship over herdsmen, the oracular practice of the Bee Maidens, and gives him the caduceus and the right to “perform property-switching on men over the nurturing earth” (ἐπαμοίβια ἔργα θήσειν ἀνθρώποισι).⁵⁰³ However, Apollo also demands that Hermes swears a great oath to never use his trickery and deception against the immortals.⁵⁰⁴ Kahn has noted a marked ambiguity within the language of the exchange between the two brothers.⁵⁰⁵ Apollo rightly predicts that Hermes will obtain great *kleos* for his deeds, while Hermes demands *kudos* for his actions.⁵⁰⁶ This is ambiguous as *kudos* is what the gods grant to mortals and *kleos* similarly refers to mortal accomplishments.⁵⁰⁷ As Versnel comments, the honours and powers

⁵⁰² Clay (2006: 138) comments: “The enchantment of Hermes’ music binds Apollo more tightly than any chains. Its spell ensnares not just the body, but entrances the spirit with desire.”

⁵⁰³ HHH. 516.

⁵⁰⁴ HHH. 514-23.

⁵⁰⁵ Kahn 1978: 159–164.

⁵⁰⁶ HHH. 457, 477.

⁵⁰⁷ On the meaning of κῦδος and κλέος, see Clay 2006: 140, Versnel 2011: 326.

granted to Hermes all have a noted human touch.⁵⁰⁸ The hymn finishes with the brothers' eternal declaration of friendship and ends with Zeus' catalogue of the powers that now belong to Hermes, noting his role as psychopomp, a role in which Hermes functions as the boundary crosser par excellence. The final words of the hymn summarize what makes Hermes so unique, fascinating and ambiguous: "He consorts with all mortals and immortals" (ὃ γε θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισιν ὀμιλεῖ).⁵⁰⁹ Hermes is the god of the boundary, mediation, language, exchange and trickery, and throughout the hymn we see Hermes utilising his cunning and wit to take what has already been distributed.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* serves as the ideal model for understanding the degree to which Hermes conforms to the type defined by Hynes' criteria of 'tricksterness'. Essentially, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* recounts how Hermes becomes Hermes. By analysing this process through the lens of Hynes' six criteria, we can paint a clear picture of how this divinity relates to the trickster and how he differs.

Section 2: Hynes' criteria applied to Hermes

Section 2.1: Ambiguous & Anomalous

Hermes is the patron of ambiguity. Less than a day old he ventures out into the world to achieve his goals, where he appears to violate socio-cultural boundaries from the outset. He steals his brother's cattle, lies to his mother and father, but also performs as a cultural hero who establishes the correct method for ritual sacrifice. His very tracks are ambiguous: not even the far-seeing Apollo can give meaning to the monstrous tracks he leaves in the wake of his theft. Hermes is the progeny of the nymph Maia and chief god Zeus but is unacknowledged by his father: is he an Olympian like his father and siblings, or is he a fleeting mortal destined to die? Hermes begins greatly desiring the taste of flesh, a very human drive as the gods do not eat such things.⁵¹⁰ Nevertheless, having defied socio-

⁵⁰⁸ Versnel 2011: 326. Hermes is made patron of herdsmen, a human-centred activity, as well as deeds of exchange among mortals, and is tasked with guiding mortal souls to the underworld. Even Hermes' Bee Maidens reflect his ambiguous in-between status; they may predict the future if the circumstances are right but can easily lie if not. Like mortality, nothing is constant. This type of prophecy is in the hands of chance and not the secure authority of Delphi. In all aspects, Hermes is tied to the mortal sphere, and thus it is not surprising that he asks for *kudos* and *kleos* as he is the god who is closest to the mortal realm.

⁵⁰⁹ *HHH*. 576.ff.

⁵¹⁰ *Il.* 5.339-34.

cultural boundaries to procure it, at the very last moment he denies himself a taste. Vergados refers to this as Hermes' 'identity crisis'.⁵¹¹ This identity crisis is greater than acknowledgement by Zeus and its implication of immortality. If Hermes is to be a god what are his supposed powers? Scholars have noted that the abstract essence of Hermes' specific powers may also be the reason why he experiences this ambiguous identity crisis.⁵¹² Welcker comments that

*Hermes is the only one of the great gods who possesses no visible substratum, whose mythological nature is not based on the material.*⁵¹³

An ambiguous actor, Hermes' powers are not confined to a specific sphere or spheres of influences but act like a web which connects and crosses between individual spheres. Due to the abstract character of Hermes' powers, the hymn does not simply label the anomalous aspects of the god's domain but throughout the narrative portrays Hermes as becoming his function by enacting it within the narrative.⁵¹⁴ In a manner similar to Wakdjunkaga, Hermes begins life ambiguously and changes from plastic potential into a defined Olympian actor. Hermes' motives are, moreover, themselves mixed and ambiguous. He simultaneously desires the mortal taste of meat and recognition as an immortal on Olympus. Hermes' identity crisis only begins to find resolution when he denies himself the portion of meat.

Not knowing where he belongs, Hermes understands from the start that he is an outsider and tells his mother, and the audience, that he will defy all borders and categories to ensure that the two of them will live in luxury.

ἀμφὶ δὲ τιμῆς,
κάγῳ τῆς ὀσίης ἐπιβήσομαι, ἧς περ Ἀπόλλων.
εἰ δέ κε μὴ δώησι πατήρ ἐμός, ἧ τοι ἔγωγε
πειρήσω, δύναμαι, φηλητέων ὄρχαμος εἶναι.

⁵¹¹ Vergados 2011: 4-5.

⁵¹² Clay argues (2006: 102), that "unlike Apollo who can lay claim to his prerogatives moments after his birth, Hermes must invent them and, even before that, he must discover his proper place. For it is by no means immediately clear whether he belongs with the gods or among men."

⁵¹³ Welcker 1857: 343.

⁵¹⁴ This is clearly illustrated in the hymn when Hermes composes a hymn to himself. Such a task is typically assigned to a human poet who celebrates the powers and feats of a god. Here however we have a god whose status is still ambiguous, singing to himself. "The anomalousness of Hermes' song reflects his anomalous position: not a mortal, but not yet fully a god." (Clay 2006: 109).

*As for privilege, I'm going to enter on my rights the same as Apollo. And if my father doesn't let me, then I shall set out — and I have the means— to be the prince of thieves.*⁵¹⁵

Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle can be divided into three phases, each marked by a liminal period of time: at dusk Hermes crosses the threshold of the cave to go to Pieria; at midnight he comes to Alpheus; and he returns to the cave at dawn.⁵¹⁶ These liminal periods do not just occur when Hermes acts alone: when he and Apollo enter Olympus the transition is marked by the rising sun and Apollo describes Hermes as feigning innocence under the dim light of dusk.⁵¹⁷ That the actions of the ambivalent god of the liminal twilight and movement are marked by such periods is unsurprising as it is during such liminal periods that Hermes' abilities extend to greater heights.⁵¹⁸

Section 2.2: Deceiver & Trick player

Much of the hymn deals with Hermes' acts of trickery and deception, specifically the theft of Apollo's cattle. Hermes employs multiple tricks to deceive his brother: he drives the cattle in a zig-zag path, evading normal roads; he turns the cattle backwards to conceal their correct direction; he invents and uses a pair of sandals to obscure his footsteps and makes the guard dogs fall asleep.⁵¹⁹ Hermes utilizes deceptive legalese language to avoid perjuring himself in front of the gods while still expertly denying the truth of his acts, and uses the lyre to appease Apollo near the end of the hymn.⁵²⁰

Hermes' acts of trickery do not initially appear to backfire upon him, as is commonly the case among trickster figures. Having made a fool out of Apollo, he is ordered by Zeus to reveal the herd's location, but this is only after Hermes has been acknowledged as an Olympian. At the hymn's end, however, Apollo makes Hermes swear a series of oaths that prevent him from using his trickery against the immortals, thus severely diminishing his future potential as a trickster.

⁵¹⁵ HHH. 172-5.

⁵¹⁶ HHH. 68-9, 95-100, 142-3; Clay 2006: 112.

⁵¹⁷ HHH. 326, 341.

⁵¹⁸ Bacchyl. *Ep.* 10.32-3: "Hermes could not / Outwit him in mornings" but had to wait until his full power was attained in the dusk of evening (Godolphin 1964: 269).

⁵¹⁹ HHH. 72-82, 145.

⁵²⁰ HHH. 368-386, 417-435.

Hermes does also make a fool of himself in the hymn. This is not just apparent in his acts of humorous self-abasement, such as his fart-omen, but also in his embarrassing craving for meat. At the apex of his identity crisis, Hermes denies himself a taste of meat as he now knows that he is divine and not mortal, yet, after realizing this he goes to great pains to conceal what he has done. He “put it [the meat] away in the high-roofed steading” and then destroyed the hoofs, horns and sandals in “the heat of the fire” before concealing all evidence of the fire.⁵²¹

*Although the banquet beside the Alpheus constitutes an essential preliminary to the god's acquisition of timai, it also remains an enduring source of embarrassment, attesting to a lasting ambiguity in Hermes' divine status.*⁵²²

Like the trickster, Hermes can be a slave to his appetite, which leads him to acts of violation that show him to be a buffoon, still learning who he is.

Section 2.3: Shape-Shifter

Hermes engages in both rudimentary and complex types of shape-shifting within his hymn. He invents a pair of sandals to conceal his footprints which appear as “monstrous” to Apollo when he tries to determine who stole his cattle.⁵²³ He also transforms into a mist to slip through the keyhole of his home to avoid literally stepping over the threshold, something he will later argue in his defense during his trial before Zeus.⁵²⁴

Section 2.4: Situation-Inverter

Hermes exhibits aspects of the situation inverter throughout the hymn. The fact that he is a newborn, illustrates one aspect of the situation inverter: age and innocence itself are inverted, presenting a parody of the precocious child manipulating the situation to acquire what he wants. The situation-inverter can convert safe spaces into bad ones and then back again with ease and through this process can either highlight the importance of socio-

⁵²¹ HHH. 134-40: ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν κατέθηκεν ἐς αὔλιον ὑψιμέλαθρον, / δημόν καὶ κρέα πολλά, μετήορα δ' αἴψ' ἀνάειρε, / σῆμα νέης φωρῆς· ἐπὶ δὲ ξύλα κάγκαν' ἀγείρας / οὐλόποδ', οὐλοκάρηνα πυρὸς κατεδάμνατ' αὐτμῆ.

⁵²² Clay 2006: 121; *ibid*: 96: τμᾶ (timai) means honour, (specifically within our context it refers to honour paid to a supernatural force by way of cult; simply put a gods τμᾶ are the various aspects/roles attributed to them).

⁵²³ HHH. 219-220.

⁵²⁴ HHH. 146-7, 366.

cultural boundaries or profane, mock and parody them. Hermes' confrontation with the tortoise is itself a parody of a proverb found in Hesiod's *Works & Days*: οἴκοι βέλτερον εἶναι, ἐπεὶ βλαβερὸν τὸ θύρηφιν; "Better to be in the house, it's dangerous outside".⁵²⁵ In the *Works & Days*, Hesiod uses this phrase to warn against the dangers of commercial culture and to emphasize the importance of self-sustainability. With Hermes, however, the passage takes on much darker connotations. He warns the tortoise that it is better to stay indoors, but since the tortoise's home is upon its back Hermes' words blur the lines between safe spaces and dangerous ones: he inverts the safety of the tortoise's home into a dangerous space. Hermes also repurposes this home for his lyre, again inverting a morbid situation into a new creative outlet.

Acting as a herald/mediator, Hermes establishes ritual sacrifice through dividing the sacrifice by randomly casting lots, thus creating a truly equal and fair distribution of honours.⁵²⁶ Initially, Prometheus established ritual sacrifice that favoured humanity more than the gods, and both were punished as a result.⁵²⁷ Hermes' establishment of ritual sacrifice is an inversion of the inverted: he parodies Prometheus' failed attempt and consequently reorders ritual sacrifice in a way that respects both humans and gods alike.

The situation-inverter is often depicted in opposition to a purely religious figure such as shamans. Although not shamanistic, the hymn does, as noted, illustrate a rivalry between Hermes and his brother Apollo, the paragon of religious virtue. This inversion is seen throughout the hymn and during his conversation with his mother Hermes openly declares his intent to pester his brother continually through trickery.

εἴμι γὰρ ἐς Πυθῶνα μέγαν δόμον ἀντιτορήσων
ἔνθεν ἄλις τρίποδας περικαλλέας ἠδὲ λέβητας
πορθήσω καὶ χρυσόν, ἄλις τ' αἴθωνα σίδηρον
καὶ πολλὴν ἐσθῆτα·

*I shall go to Pytho to burgle his great house, and from it I'll plunder plenty of beautiful tripods and cauldrons and gold, and plenty of gleaming iron, and lots of vestments.*⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ HHH. 36-7; Hes. *Erga*. 364-5.

⁵²⁶ HHH. 126-9.

⁵²⁷ Hes. *Theog*. 535-69.

⁵²⁸ HHH. 178-81.

There is a tinge of mockery as Apollo, the god of divination, knowledge and truth is unable to make sense of the unusual tracks left by Hermes, and is forced to investigate the theft as mundane humans would through questions and answers. When Apollo uses his powers of divination, he is depicted as a fool. Using ornithomancy, he tries to ascertain the identity of the thief and only discovers vaguely that they are the progeny of Zeus.⁵²⁹ When Apollo encounters Hermes in Maia's cave, he seizes him, upon which Hermes releases an “unruly messenger” a fantastic fart that makes Apollo drop the child. However, Apollo, takes this presumptuous message as a divine prophecy and thanks Hermes.

θάρσει, σπαργανιώτα, Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱέ·
εὐρήσω καὶ ἔπειτα βοῶν ἴφθιμα κάρηνα
τούτοις οἰωνοῖσι· σὺ δ' αὖθ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμονεύσεις

*Don't you worry, swathing son of Zeus and Maia, I shall yet find my sturdy cattle with these omens, and you will lead the way.*⁵³⁰

Apollo's patronage of knowledge and truth is thus relegated to divining Hermes' fart omen, which turns out to be quite reliable. Through mockery and inversion, however, this demotes Apollo from divine knower into a witless victim of trickery, unable to dislodge himself from the situation. During his trial on Olympus, Hermes both inverts and mocks Apollo as he upturns truth itself.⁵³¹ Hermes' defence rests on his day-old existence, a defence that in almost any other circumstances would have been enough: through clever wordplay, Hermes turns the tables on his brother. What starts as an objectively valid accusation of theft by Apollo is inverted by Hermes, who in turn accuses Apollo of making extravagant charges against an innocent baby. Hermes argues the absurdity of what Apollo is claiming; that he, a baby, was able to achieve so much mischief. Tricksters invert the situation; Hermes notes the illogical fallacies of Apollo's accusations. Apollo is in the right, yet due to the absurdity of the scenario, he cannot argue with the young god of language and lies adeptly.

Despite seeing through Hermes' deceptive-language, Zeus bursts out laughing, establishing an air of *communitas* where all participants are brought down to the same level through the actions of the trickster. Through establishing *communitas*, Hermes brings Apollo down to his

⁵²⁹ HHH. 213-14.

⁵³⁰ HHH. 301-3.

⁵³¹ HHH. 325-86.

level and can now easily ascend to the halls of Olympus, since he is now recognised as an equal to an Olympian.

Section 2.5: Messenger & Imitator of the gods

An essential element of the *Hymn to Hermes* is that he is illegitimate and unacknowledged by Zeus, and thus begins life not knowing whether he is a god or a mortal. Much of the hymn is concerned with answering this identity crisis. This uncertainty locates Hermes between categories, as he transitions between the prince of robbers and culture hero to assert his legitimacy. Hermes is, in a related sense, herald and messenger to both gods and men, and near the end of the hymn, Apollo grants Hermes the caduceus and the role of psychopomp, guide to the underworld who helps souls' transition between the world of the living and that of the dead.⁵³² Hermes functions as a messenger and psychopomp because he possesses a unique ability to function within, and connect, multiple spheres. He similarly conforms to the trickster motif of the culture hero, who can transfer necessary benefits or punishments from one sphere to the other. Although Hermes does not directly help humanity in his hymn, he creates a method of kindling fire, invents the first pair of sandals, creates the lyre and panpipes and establishes the correct method of ritual sacrifice to the gods.⁵³³ There is a tendency among trickster figures to create cultural benefits not out of altruism but to further their self-interest, and to some extent this is what Hermes does. He never thinks of humanity when creating fire sticks, sandals or ritual sacrifice, his motive is gaining acknowledgement from Olympus. Nevertheless, where Prometheus separates the spheres of mortals and immortals, Hermes' parody of ritual sacrifice creates a breach in the boundary between gods and men, allowing for passage and communication between the two spheres.

*Hermes is able to affirm not only the divinity of the Twelve Gods, but also his own. But, defined by his own history, he will become a god friendly to man.*⁵³⁴

⁵³² HHH. 572-3.

⁵³³ HHH. Fire sticks: 109-111, Sandals: 79-86, Lyre: 39-54, Panpipes: 511-12, Sacrifice: 115-129.

⁵³⁴ Kahn 1978: 66.

Tricksters often act as a scapegoat that allows for necessary benefits to pass to humanity without humans violating sacred taboos; they tend, however, to evade the full extent of their resulting punishment. To a certain extent Hermes is punished for his actions within the hymn. Near the end he swears a series of oaths with Apollo, promising never to cause trouble for the gods through his trickery, but aside from this caveat, Hermes remains unblemished in the hymn.⁵³⁵ His acts of violation are celebrated on Olympus as Zeus laughs upon hearing what he has been up to.⁵³⁶

The messenger and imitator of the gods often engages in parody within their narratives. The *Hymn to Hermes* is littered with parodies. The majority of the action is performed by a precocious infant, there is the mockery of lines from Hesiod, and the parody of Prometheus' establishment of ritual sacrifice. Generally, tricksters fail at their acts of imitation or humorously makes a fool of themselves in the process. This does not happen to Hermes as he performs the ritual correctly, whereas Prometheus did not.⁵³⁷ However, we cannot forget what initially drove Hermes to establish this ritual, his craving for meat. After taking the time to establish the correct ritual process, Hermes fails to appease his appetite. Perhaps Hermes' ritual sacrifice is not a parody of Prometheus' failed attempt so much as an imitation of heralds, who like Hermes, would divide the portions by lot and follow the correct process. Herald, however, get to eat the meat whereas little Hermes does not.

As messenger, herald and psychopomp, Hermes is connected with divination, specifically the art of cleromancy: the oracular practice consisting of the prophetic interpretation of randomly thrown stones.⁵³⁸ Granted to him by Apollo, in the form of the three Bee Maidens, this type of divination is unreliable. If the Bee Maidens are hungry, they speak falsely, if not, they speak the truth.⁵³⁹ Where Apollo's oracles speak divine truths always, the maidens, like tricksters, are driven by self-interest and will bend the truth if necessary.

⁵³⁵ HHH. 513-523.

⁵³⁶ HHH. 389-390.

⁵³⁷ Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of parody is its uncanniness: parodies come close to the real thing yet differ in some small, often humorous way. Prometheus' ritual sacrifice separates mortals from the immortals, while Hermes' version unites them through fair and equal distribution: Hermes parodies the Promethean sacrifice and comes close to the real thing, yet there is a significant difference. One closes doors of contact and communication, the other forces them wide open.

⁵³⁸ Reggiani in Miller and Clay 2019: 329-30; Jaillard 2012: 94, 96-9.

⁵³⁹ HHH. 560-563.

Section 2.6: Sacred & Lewd Bricoleur

In the hymn, Hermes functions as both the sacred and lewd bricoleur. As he crosses the threshold of his home for the first time, he meets a tortoise, kills it and invents the lyre. Put another way, Hermes creates new life out of death, taking the profane (a dead tortoise) and creating something sacred (Apollo's lyre).⁵⁴⁰ Utilizing what is at hand, Hermes creates a method for kindling fire and a pair of sandals, both of which illustrate his quick thinking for creative problem-solving.⁵⁴¹ An aspect of this criterion is that tricksters are impelled to violate all taboos, especially gastric, sexual and scatological ones. Indeed, the first half of the hymn is focused on Hermes' need to appease his hunger for meat: his theft of Apollo's cattle is but one violation out of many attempts to appease his appetite. As is often the case with tricksters, however, Hermes does not get to fulfil his desires for tasty flesh. Regarding sexual taboo, although never mentioned within the hymn itself, Hermes is strongly connected with phallic imagery, notably the ithyphallic herms found throughout the ancient Hellenic world. Hermes is briefly connected to the lewd aspects of excrement within the hymn and this reflects his ability as a lewd bricoleur. When taken by Apollo in Maia's cave, Hermes employs his fart-omen to escape his brother's clutches.⁵⁴² Still a helpless infant, Hermes uses what he has at hand to form a creative solution to being taken by Apollo.

Section 2.7: Conclusions

It is evident that to some degree, Hermes does conform to Hynes' typology of the trickster figure. Throughout his hymn, Hermes utilizes various types of trickery to both appease his appetite and acquire honours and status among the Olympians. Hynes' typology is not an answer however, but one step among many along a path towards answers to the question: to what extent Hermes is different from our understanding of the trickster? Now that these criteria have been applied to Hermes and the three figures, an in-depth analysis can be undertaken. This analysis will examine how these potential tricksters compare and how they

⁵⁴⁰ *HHH.* 39-54.

⁵⁴¹ *HHH.* 109-111, 79-86.

⁵⁴² *HHH.* 294-297.

differ, both from one another and from the trickster category itself. Like the other three figures, Hermes is an outsider; unlike the others, however, Hermes goes to great lengths to be accepted by the Olympian community, including a willing curtailment of his powers as a trickster. Why does Hermes do this? Why does he feel the need to seek approval and recognition? Tricksters are fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous, and we see this side of Hermes in the hymn, yet he is unsatisfied with this indeterminate status and transforms the world to change it. The following chapter will discuss these questions and, I hope, suggest some satisfactory answers.

Chapter 5: Application and Analysis

The following chapter will analyze and compare the conclusions derived from applying Hynes' six criteria to Hermes, Wokdjunkaga, Ture and Loki. Through this process I aim to assess the usefulness of such typologies and the extent to which these figures conform to the definition of the trickster that Hynes' typology describes. This analysis will highlight the fundamental differences between these figures and determine whether such differences imply that they are not part of the trickster category. Through this comparative process, I will address the essential question that forms the basis of this research: to what extent does Hermes diverge from the concept of the trickster?

Section 1: Archetypes and Universality

How has Hynes' typology of the trickster figure informed us regarding archetypes and universality? Hynes' typology has illustrated that there is indeed a base commonality between all four figures. The trickster category is a useful descriptor of a particular set of aspects often possessed by relatively neutral, liminal and amoral mythological figures. Within certain cultures, this type of figure serves as a narrative device to explain the importance of taboos and what happens if these taboos are violated.⁵⁴³ In other narratives, their ambiguity and amorality allow them to be a divine figure, yet still be at odds with the divine sphere, as they possess an admixture of both divine and mundane traits that allows them to embrace and reject both the divine and mundane systems simultaneously. Through this antagonistic relationship, the system is open to change and adaptation, as is the case with Loki and Ragnarök.⁵⁴⁴ However, the trickster category is not inherently universal; it is only universal in the same way that protagonists and antagonists are universal in all narratives. The protagonist drives the plot, and the antagonist pushes against it. Trickster figures exist within the narrative, and they reside in-between these two polar opposite functions. They occupy the middle ground, and the term trickster helps describe figures

⁵⁴³ Singer & Street 1972: 88.

⁵⁴⁴ Hyde 2010: 99.

from myth and legend that do not readily belong to the standard ideas of the hero and villain. They exist somewhere in-between, embracing both yet neither.

However, despite not being a universal category, it is fascinating that all tricksters do share some fundamental aspects, such as shape-shifting and the bricoleur's ability to formulate creative solutions, as well as their propensity for trickery. The connection between these aspects is their ambiguous uncertainty. All such elements are inherently unpredictable; they are not the sun predictably rising every day like Helios. For example, tricks can go wrong, so travel, exchange, and inventions may be fanciful failures and take time to develop into something tangible and reliable. All elements are at risk of flux and change. They are inherently unreliable endeavours. Furthermore, as liminal outsiders who embrace the uncertain, this category is the ideal representation of human anxieties and all of humanity's uncertainties. This is perhaps why tricksters are, in myth, so close to humanity. The gods have powers to affect the world, while humans only have their imagination and cunning. The trickster category is a depiction of humanity at its utmost extreme, pursuing survival and adaptation at all costs. Humanity was useless against the cold snow until it invented warm clothing and the instruments necessary to make it. Tricksters reflect the human ability to think outside of the box and to use one's mind to manipulate what is at hand to survive, get ahead and dominate.

Perhaps because tricksters represent and celebrate humanity, they also represent other facets of humanity at its extremes. Their heightened libido reflects humanity's basic need to procreate, and their emphatic hunger reflects humanity's basic need for nourishment. Similarly, the buffoonery and comedy tied to this descriptor also exemplify the exaggeratedly human. Humans are well aware of their propensity for failure, and comedy if nothing else serves as a buffer for the memory of these failures. This also extends to the trickster's tendency to fail or have their tricks backfire. Humans are adept at failing: they can, however, learn from past experiences, laugh at their failures and adapt.

It should be noted that many tricksters never learn from their mistakes, yet in this too they are a caricature of humanity. On behalf of their culture, tricksters often fail in order to highlight the importance of not following the proper way of interacting with the world. They

are not, necessarily, in on the joke. This may be why tricksters can be simultaneously stupid and impulsive yet still decisively cunning all at once, for they represent all aspects of humanity, both beautiful and ugly, the foolish and the clever.

Although tricksters embody humanity at its extremes, they are still cast as outsiders. This aspect may depend on the trickster's origins, such as Hermes and Loki deriving from a union of two distinct categories. However, such origins are not universal to all figures, and only their outsider status is constant. Tricksters are relegated as outsiders by the gods because of the liminality that ties them to humanity. What makes them outsiders to humans is that they embrace all aspects of humanity. Humanity will have those that adhere to law and order, but it will also have those who embrace the experimental and potential changes. Within human society, taboos are always violated and challenged; how else are such rules created without someone first defying them and society learning the consequences of this violation? Human society establishes a culture and its boundaries through the memories of those that initially violate them so the rest can learn and adapt. As the breaker of boundaries, with an ambiguous uncertainty, tricksters remain at the margins of humanity; an aspect of them will always be the outsider. Tricksters' connection to human cunning distance them from the more 'perfect' two-dimensional gods of their respective cultures. They are outsiders because they are too godly for humanity yet too human for the gods. In the end, like humans, tricksters' potential for unpredictable ambiguity is what unites them under this descriptive category.

Section 2: How does Hermes relate to Wakdjunkaga, Ture & Loki?

Section 2.1: Ambiguous & Anomalous

All four figures firmly conform to the ambiguous and anomalous criterion. Although their contexts differ, all four tricksters begin life as outsiders to their communities. Wakdjunkaga is unique, as he is firstborn and begins life ambiguously, susceptible to change. Hermes faces his 'identity crises' forcing him to learn if he is a god or a simple mortal, while Loki's very existence is a violation of Æsir marriage laws.⁵⁴⁵ Both Hermes and Ture share the motif of the precocious child. While this aids Hermes in his ascent to godhood, it relegates Ture to the liminal as his childhood antics ostracize him from his parents, who leave him to fend for himself and his twin sister.

All four figures eagerly violate all socio-cultural taboos that they come across. Hermes lies, cheats and steals from his family, as does Ture, who manipulates his loved ones to acquire a tasty morsel. Loki continually violates taboos, as in his killing of Balder and his mischief during the *Lokasenna*.⁵⁴⁶ Wakdjunkaga also violates social taboos, as best seen in his first narrative concerning the war-bundle ritual.⁵⁴⁷ All four figures confirm the trickster category regarding taboo violations, motivated to appease their appetite. All four continually breach socio-cultural boundaries to further their self-interest, which tends to be a desire to appease their appetite in whatever form the narrative requires. Conforming to the trickster category, they desire either food or sexual gratification. Hermes' acts of theft at the beginning of his hymn are initially fueled by his craving for meat; Ture always seeks out easy access to other people's termites; Wakdjunkaga even commits child murder to eat some mother racoons, and sends his detachable phallus across a river to sleep with an unexpecting woman.⁵⁴⁸ Like Wakdjunkaga, Loki's appetite is more varied than that of Ture and Hermes. On the surface, it does not appear that Loki is motivated by his appetite; he appears more like a malicious actor creating trickery for trickery's sake. However, his shaving of Sif's hair and his boasting and drinking during the *Lokasenna* imply that his sexual and gastric appetite can fuel him.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁵ Vergados 2011: 4; Clay 2006: 98; Schnurbein 2000: 118.

⁵⁴⁶ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 316-20.

⁵⁴⁷ Radin 1956: 115.

⁵⁴⁸ *HHH*. 130; Evans-Pritchard, 1967: 97-8; Radin 1956: 29-31.

⁵⁴⁹ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 68; Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 146-7.

Although all four figures have some relationship with magic, both Hermes and Loki possess a somewhat ambiguous type of magic. Loki is the only male figure in the Norse pantheon to utilise the feminine magic known as *Seidr*.⁵⁵⁰ Hermes begins life without a tangible set of powers.⁵⁵¹ In the course of his hymn, he acquires a set of abstract areas of control not as easily definable as those of the other Olympians.⁵⁵² Wakdjunkaga's magical abilities emphasise his ambiguity, notably his creation of necessary foodstuffs out of his gnawed phallus and incredible excremental abilities.⁵⁵³ This, however, differs from the true 'magic' seen in both Hermes and Loki. Ture's position is unique. He has no innate magic to speak of: where magical rituals feature in his narratives, they tend to illustrate his lack of observance of the prescribed rules and regulations, and his violation of these rituals illustrates his ability to break taboos with disastrous consequences.

All four figures are outsiders within their community. Ture and Loki, however, know what they are, while both Hermes and Wakdjunkaga begin as truly ambiguous beings. Their ambiguity manifests in different ways. Hermes has his 'identity crisis' and begins not knowing where he belongs or what his purposes should be. Wakdjunkaga is undefinable at the beginning of his cycle. As he experiences the world, he slowly remembers what his purpose is and what he must do. In both figures' narratives, they begin as undefinable, and through their narrative journeys become defined and tangible beings.

Loki, Wakdjunkaga and, to some extent, Ture, defy traditional gender and sex categories. Loki frequently changes sex and even gives birth as a mare to facilitate his trickery.⁵⁵⁴ The same is true of Wakdjunkaga, who disguises himself as a woman and has children with his unsuspecting partner.⁵⁵⁵ Ture's gender and sex status are never questioned, and Hermes' status is also never questioned in the hymn. Although Hermes and Ture still function as

⁵⁵⁰ Schjødt 1981: 55.

⁵⁵¹ Hermes begins life without advantage. He has no special access to divine powers and utilizes his wit and intelligence to invent and create new ways of engaging and manipulating the world. Hermes' only noted demonstration of actual magic within his hymn is when he transforms into a mist to pass through a keyhole (*HHH*. 145-47). The magic itself is intangible, as Hermes is at the beginning of his hymn. It is only through engaging with the world and finding new ways to control it does Hermes' anomalous status change during the hymn.

⁵⁵² Welcker 1857: 343; Clay 2006: 102.

⁵⁵³ Radin 1956: 39-40.

⁵⁵⁴ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 296-9.

⁵⁵⁵ Radin 1956: 21-24.

ambiguous actors, this ambiguity is not depicted in terms of gender, as is the case for Loki and Wakdjunkaga.

All four figures are social outsiders then, the manner in which they react to this status differs. Wakdjunkaga and Hermes set out to find definition and meaning. Hermes is direct in his purposes. He sets out immediately to orchestrate a way to ascend to Olympus and gain legitimacy among the Olympians. Wakdjunkaga only discovers his status circumstantially: as he experiences both success and humiliation, he begins to remember what he is and what he must do. Ture and Loki know who they are, despite being outsiders. There is no anxiety regarding their statuses. This is especially true of Ture, who is never confronted with such questions of who or what he is. Loki knows why he is ostracized and is an integral aspect of Ragnarök where he will be the instrument of change, reorder and chaos.

Section 2.2: Deceiver & Trick-Player

All four figures exhibit supreme trick-playing abilities and are adept at deception and cunning acts. However, what motivates each to their trickery varies to some degree. Although all are driven to appease their appetites somehow, this is not always a constant or their sole motivation. Carroll sees two distinct types of trickster figures, each with different motivations: the selfish-buffoon and the clever hero.⁵⁵⁶ The clever hero uses their intelligence to outwit their opponents, while the selfish-buffoon fixates on gratifying their enormous appetites for food and sex, the tricks they enact to appease their appetite often backfire, leaving them looking like a fool.⁵⁵⁷ All four characters conform to the selfish-buffoon category, where they attempt to appease their appetites with humiliating consequences. For Ture and Wakdjunkaga this is a constant element, and there is no evidence that they belong to the clever hero category.

Wakdjunkaga experiences bodily mutilations when trying to outwit Chipmunk and feels humiliated and ashamed after deceiving a young chief into marrying and having children with him. Wakdjunkaga is constantly humiliated through his trickery and perfectly illustrates the motif of the trickster's tricks backfiring. Ture is also a selfish-buffoon. In most of his

⁵⁵⁶ Carroll 1984: 106.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 106.

narratives, his trickery is motivated by a need to satisfy his hunger. He often attempts trickery to get out of doing the work required to obtain food. Like Wakdjunkaga, Ture's tricks often backfire in some manner, although never to the same excessive extent. Ture is often out-tricked by opponents such as Orphan and Red Duiker.⁵⁵⁸

An aspect of tricksters is their ability to escape full punishment for their deception, and Ture illustrates this motif perfectly. He is always forgiven his crimes and is often resurrected from death by the very individual he tricked.⁵⁵⁹ Wakdjunkaga does get punished, mainly in a physical way. These punishments, however, help him learn and grow as an individual and culminate in him remembering his proper purpose at the end of his cycle. Aside from one narrative regarding his mother-in-law, Ture is solely motivated to appease his hunger, while Wakdjunkaga is a slave to both his hunger and his libido. Both experience the full force of the selfish-buffoon and are tricked by themselves and others, yet escape the appropriate punishments for their violations of cultural norms.

Both Hermes and Loki exhibit elements of the selfish-buffoon and experience some form of humiliation that backfires upon them. Loki's shenanigans at the *Lokasenna*, where, fuelled by drink, he violates social norms, lead to his capture and eventual imprisonment, where he awaits Ragnarök. Of all four figures Hermes conforms to the selfish-buffoon the least. His craving for meat almost leads him to a life of mortality, but keeping to the motif of escaping the consequences for their actions, at the last moment Hermes evades this fatal decision and, ashamed, attempts to hide all evidence of his proto-sacrifice.⁵⁶⁰

Loki and Hermes perform rather as clever heroes who use their cunning to outwit their opponents. Loki does this on numerous occasions, for example with the dwarven brothers Brokkr and Sindri, the giantess Skathi and the mountain giant, and during the 'building of the wall' narrative.⁵⁶¹ Hermes only has one opponent, Apollo, the god of truth and illumination. He is the ideal antithesis and target for Hermes' schemes. Hermes employs several different tricky acts to deceive his brother Apollo, such as his use of sandals to hide his tracks, driving the cattle backwards and in a zig-zag pattern to conceal their direction

⁵⁵⁸ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 97-8.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 111, 91-2.

⁵⁶⁰ *HHH.* 115-35.

⁵⁶¹ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 38-9, 54, 68.

and creating the lyre to use as a bargaining chip later on, to win Apollo over.⁵⁶² For most of his hymn Hermes adeptly avoids any form of punishment. He escapes Apollo's clutches through a fart and astutely avoids perjuring himself when taken to Olympus, through cunning lies and wordplay framing Apollo as a bully and a fool.⁵⁶³

Hermes and Loki are still punished for their trickery, but being clever heroes, their punishments are perhaps not as evident as those of Ture and Wokdjunkaga. Loki embraces both the clever hero and the selfish-buffoon types more than Hermes. Depending on his context, either as a buffoon or as clever hero, he experiences different levels of punishment. When acting as the clever hero, Loki does not necessarily experience punishment, but rather humiliation through self-abasement. During his confrontation with the giantess Skathi, he willingly engages in self-abasement to make the giantess laugh.⁵⁶⁴ At the same time, in the wall narrative, he transforms into a mare and gives birth to Odin's steed Sleipnir, for which he experiences humiliation and mockery from the gods, despite saving the day.⁵⁶⁵ Yet, when Loki is motivated by his appetite, conforming to the selfish-buffoon category, he is inescapably punished for his actions. When he shaves Sif's hair, he is forced by the gods to find more and is eventually punished by the dwarven brothers who initially want to behead him. Keeping to the motif of evading consequences, however, Loki manages to escape this punishment and has his lips sewn shut instead.⁵⁶⁶ Killing Baldur and his violations within the *Lokasenna* lead to Loki's most decisive punishment, his imprisonment until Ragnarök.⁵⁶⁷ However, Ragnarök cannot begin until Loki escapes, implying that he will eventually evade this final punishment. In Hermes' various iterations in ancient Greek literature he engages in several acts of humiliating self-abasement. The closest he comes to this within the hymn, however, is his craving for meat. Hermes is punished in the hymn, and it appears that it is a punishment he cannot escape. Apollo makes Hermes swear a great oath near the end of the hymn never to use his trickery against the gods again.⁵⁶⁸ Hermes eagerly agrees and, in return, his various godly functions are confirmed and he emerges

⁵⁶² HHH. 79-86, 76-77, 490-502.

⁵⁶³ HHH. 294-297, 368-386.

⁵⁶⁴ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 54.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 38-9; Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 147.

⁵⁶⁶ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 54.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 44-51.

⁵⁶⁸ HHH. 513-523.

from relative ambiguity to become a defined Olympian actor. Hermes is now forever altered, however, and no longer represents the fundamental change, made possible through incessant boundary violations and transgressions, that Loki, Ture and Wakdjunkaga do within their narratives. By the end of the hymn, Hermes subjugates himself to Zeus' authority, and although he may still make mischief among mortals, within the divine sphere he is now a passive servant of his father.

All four conform to the various elements of the trick-playing criterion, but each does so in their own distinct way, and it is only Loki who truly balances between the selfish-buffoon and clever hero.

Section 2.3: Shape-Shifting

All four figures exercise different types of shape-shifting to further their acts of deception. Loki embodies this criterion more than any of the other figures. He uses shape-shifting in most of his narratives, transforming into a fly, a horse, an older woman, a giantess, a bird and a salmon.⁵⁶⁹ Loki never utilises rudimentary types of disguise as the other figures do and his shape-shifting may result from his strong association with ambiguous magic, something that the other figures do not possess. Wakdjunkaga and Ture utilise both complex and rudimentary shape-shifting types. Wakdjunkaga's metamorphosis is continuous. As his body suffers from his failed deceptions, he changes from an ambiguous creature who carries his large phallus in a box on his back and his testes on his head, to one resembling a human.⁵⁷⁰ Wakdjunkaga blurs the lines between literal metamorphosis and rudimentary disguise when he uses animal intestines and women's clothing to disguise himself as a woman entirely.⁵⁷¹ What makes this episode so ambiguous is that although it seems that his deception manifests through a simple change of clothes and creative use of props, he bears three children while disguised as a woman. How this occurs or its implications for Wakdjunkaga's abilities as a shape-shifter are as ambiguous as he is. Nevertheless, Wakdjunkaga also uses rudimentary disguise when he needs to, such as when he paints his face black to fool the mother racoons.⁵⁷² Ture employs rudimentary disguise

⁵⁶⁹ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 38-9, 44-5, 53-4, 58; Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 321.

⁵⁷⁰ Radin 1956: 39-40.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.* 21-24.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* 29-31.

when he is directly forbidden to enter specific places or festivals. In the two instances where this occurs, he disguises himself as an older woman or uses a hat to alter his appearance.⁵⁷³ His only instance of true metamorphosis is when he transforms into a beetle to escape someone's digestive system.⁵⁷⁴ Hermes creates sandals to disguise his tracks from Apollo and transforms into a mist to slip into his mother's cave without technically crossing the threshold.⁵⁷⁵ These are the only two instances within the *Homeric Hymn* where Hermes uses any form of shape-shifting. He does disguise himself as a mortal in Homeric epic on occasion, but this type of metamorphism does not occur in his hymn.⁵⁷⁶

Section 2.4: Situation-Inverter

All four figures conform to the criterion of the situation inverter, where they upturn or invert people, places or belief systems. A fundamental aspect of the criterion is the way in which, through profaning and inverting social customs and beliefs, the importance of these beliefs is highlighted and the necessity of observing them is explored. Hermes, Wakdjunkaga and Ture are all depicted as mocking or profaning rituals in their respective narratives. Hermes parodies the Promethean sacrifice, but where Prometheus inverted the distribution to favour humankind, Hermes reorders things in an equal way that unites the mortal and immortal realms.⁵⁷⁷ Wakdjunkaga is depicted as mocking the war bundle ritual in his first narrative, and when confronted with the laxative plant defies all of its warnings, consumes it and suffers.⁵⁷⁸ Here Wakdjunkaga illustrates how not to act through inverting cultural norms. Ture parodies magical rituals in several of his narratives and utterly fails as he never performs them correctly. Loki never parodies any specific Norse rituals, but he does invert various gods and places within his narratives, as is best shown during his confrontation in the *Lokasenna*.

An aspect of the situation inverter category is the parody of religious figures such as shamans or religious heroes. In contrast to shamanistic heroes, tricksters represent the humanist way of engaging with the world: where shamans rely on otherworldly powers and

⁵⁷³ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 93, 123.

⁵⁷⁴ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 75.

⁵⁷⁵ *HHH*. 79-86, 219-226, 145-147.

⁵⁷⁶ *Il.* 24.347-8; *Od.* 10.277-9.

⁵⁷⁷ *HHH*. 124-6.

⁵⁷⁸ Radin 1956: 4-7, 25-7.

precedents of interaction with the world, tricksters, as humanists, rely on their cunning and wit to adapt and change the world to suit their needs.⁵⁷⁹

Of the four, Ture conforms to this element the least, and although he parodies magical rituals, these are not tied to any specific religious practitioner or shamanistic figure. These practices are a type of ritual magic that any observant person can enact if they follow the proper rules. Ture, however, as a situation inverter, never does observe the rules.⁵⁸⁰ He even dies in one attempt, illustrating to his audience the importance of following the rules correctly. The other three figures do however find themselves at odds with some manifestation of a pure religious being.

Although Wakdjunkaga is never pitted against a shaman or religious practitioner, he pretends to be a great spirit in order to trick villagers into helping him out of a sticky situation.⁵⁸¹ Moreover, while pretending to be a woman, Wakdjunkaga's youngest child starts crying and demands impossible gifts such as a piece of cloud and the sky.

Wakdjunkaga and his husband seek out a shaman to procure the gifts, but they fail to obtain them and have to settle for inferior mundane knock-offs.⁵⁸² Although the duality between tricksters and shamanistic beings was first noticed in Amerindian cultures by Ricketts, Wakdjunkaga does not directly conform to this element. A characteristic of shamans, however, is their ability to communicate with animals and nature. During one of his early narratives, after humiliating himself with the ducks and fox, some passing birds mock Wakdjunkaga.⁵⁸³ Wakdjunkaga fails to understand what they are saying, despite being able to communicate with animals in other narratives. Wakdjunkaga, as a trickster, actively ignores this form of communication, revolting against shamans. His various attempts to imitate other animals have also been taken as mockery of a shaman, but there is no direct confrontation between a shaman and Wakdjunkaga.

For Hermes the contrasting religious figure is his brother Apollo, the god of secret knowledge, light and truth, whom Hermes expertly tricks, manipulates and embarrasses

⁵⁷⁹ Ricketts in Hynes & Doty 1997: 87.

⁵⁸⁰ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 43-4, 91-2.

⁵⁸¹ Radin 1956: 34-5.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.* 23-24.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.* 8.

throughout the hymn. He makes the god of knowledge out to be a witless fool. As the god of truth, it is particularly embarrassing that Apollo fails to discern it on Olympus, where Hermes subverts truth and reality, making himself appear to be the innocent party. In contrast, Apollo is made out to be a bully and a 'liar'. Furthermore, Hermes embraces rather mundane forms of trickery to trick his brother. He creates inventive ways of covering up his tracks that do not rely on any inborn magical abilities, aside from turning into mist.⁵⁸⁴ Almost all that Hermes does within his hymn could be copied by any observant human. Hermes is the god closest to humanity and that he represents the humanist way of engaging with the world is unsurprising. Using almost entirely human methods for dealing with Apollo, Hermes further mocks and inverts this powerful god of healing, prophecy and secret knowledge.

As a situation inverter, Loki upturns places and people, not specific rituals. However, the people he tends to mock and subvert are, to some extent, adherents of the shamanistic or religious hero category. Loki often makes Thor, the protector of gods and men, out to be a fool and is continuously at odds with Odin, who embodies many aspects of the shaman, with sacred wisdom and powers over the world that none of the other Norse gods possess.⁵⁸⁵ Loki's killing of Baldur the beautiful, the god of light and illumination, is arguably a form of inversion, as Baldur's newfound immunity disrupts the natural order of things. By violating custom through killing Baldur, Loki highlights the importance of the natural state of things, reminding everyone that not even a god can negate natural order.⁵⁸⁶ However, despite not parodying or subverting any specific rituals, Loki is arguably the best representative of the situation inverter. While the other figures subvert and mock to highlight the importance of rituals or mock the stagnant religious figure, they never upturn things as Loki does when he implements Ragnarök, where everything topples and changes, resulting in an entirely new world and cosmic order.

All four figures represent the situation inverter then, as well as embracing the humanist perspective that relies on creative cunning and wit to affect the world, in contrast to a shaman or religious hero who represents a supernatural way of engaging with the world.

⁵⁸⁴ *HHH*. 75-86, 145-147.

⁵⁸⁵ Krause-Loner 2003: 56.

⁵⁸⁶ Hyde 2010: 107-8.

Section 2.5: Messenger & Imitator of the Gods

All four figures derive from ambiguous and uncertain origins, but only Loki and Hermes have 'impure' origins between cultural categories. Loki is the progeny of a god and giantess while Hermes is the illegitimate child of Olympian Zeus and the nymph Maia.⁵⁸⁷ Wakdjunkaga is the firstborn being, and is originally an undefinable figure who gains definition through his cycle, alone and outside the system.⁵⁸⁸ Like Hermes in his hymn, Ture begins life as a precocious child. Unlike Hermes, however, this precociousness relegates him to the outer limits as his parents abandon him and his sister because of it.⁵⁸⁹ Beginning life as social outsiders, tricksters embody a mixture of both divine and mundane traits which may allow them to act as a messenger, transitioning between socio-cultural boundaries with ease. This ability also allows tricksters to act as a culture heroes or cultural transformers. They transport, either intentionally or, more often, unintentionally, culturally significant benefits from one side to the other.⁵⁹⁰ All four figures strongly conform to this aspect of the criterion, but the manner in which they exhibit it varies with each figure.

In his first three narratives, Ture brings water, fire, and agriculture to humanity through his selfish trickery.⁵⁹¹ None of his actions are intended to benefit humanity: he wishes to cause mischief and appeases his appetite in all his interactions. Nevertheless, he still acts as a cultural transformer who changes human culture for the better. Hermes is the messenger to both gods and men who can quickly move between different social and cosmic spaces.⁵⁹² Of all four figures, Hermes best illustrates the messenger aspect of this criterion, but he also functions as a cultural transformer who unintentionally bestows benefits, creating lasting gifts for humanity, such as the first pair of sandals, the lyre and the panpipes.⁵⁹³ The most vital transformation in his hymn, however, is his imitation of the Promethean sacrifice. Hermes is the god of mediation, peace, communication and random distribution, and utilising all these aspects he reorders the Promethean sacrifice to create one that recognises both humans and gods. Through his actions in the hymn, Hermes creates an essential

⁵⁸⁷ Schnurbein 2000: 118; *HHH*. 1-5.

⁵⁸⁸ Radin 1956: 160.

⁵⁸⁹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 141.

⁵⁹⁰ Hynes & Doty 1997: 40.

⁵⁹¹ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 37, 39.

⁵⁹² Clay 2006: 95-8.

⁵⁹³ *HHH*. 79-86, 39-54, 511-12.

method of contact and communication between the gods and mortals, something that Prometheus tore asunder when he attempted to establish his ritual sacrifice.⁵⁹⁴

Wakdjunkaga best represents the cultural hero. He also bestows benefits upon humanity intentionally, after an unexpected turn of events and in order to further his own interests. When Chipmunk gnaws his phallus, he uses the leftovers to create vital medicines and foodstuffs, and he does the same when he gets his head stuck inside an elk's skull, requiring the help of villagers to remove it.⁵⁹⁵ At the end of his cycle of mishaps and mischief, however, Wakdjunkaga remembers that he was put on earth to make things more habitable for humans, and proceeds to rid the world of evil sprites and make the rivers easier to fish and navigate.⁵⁹⁶ Wakdjunkaga is thus the only one of the four to help humanity intentionally, although, in many instances, this is only a last resort after making a fool of himself.

Loki is the only figure who never actually engages with humanity properly, and who never directly grants it any benefit. He does, however, create the fishnet for humans while trying to evade capture by the gods, and his chicanery with Sif's hair and the dwarven bothers leads to the creation of Thor's hammer Mjolnir, which will act as the ultimate safeguard against those who threaten the safety of both gods and humans.⁵⁹⁷ Furthermore, Loki's role as herald of change and chaos during Ragnarök can also be seen as a transference of vital benefits to humanity. Loki rejuvenates the world by instigating the apocalypse and, in doing so, rids the world of the stagnant old gods, ensuring a new, fresh existence for the humans that survive the ordeal.

Since tricksters transfer cultural benefits through the violation of defined cultural categories, any consequential punishments are deflected from humanity to tricksters themselves.⁵⁹⁸ Ture is never punished in this respect. He is punished for his various acts of deception but is only celebrated for bringing about agriculture, water and fire. Wakdjunkaga is continually punished for the benefits he brings, and is physically mutilated and injured as

⁵⁹⁴ *HHH*. 123-9.

⁵⁹⁵ Radin 1956: 43.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 50-3.

⁵⁹⁷ Thorpe (*Elder Edda*): 321; Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 58.

⁵⁹⁸ Hynes & Doty 1997: 39-40.

a result of these transformative gifts. Loki is also punished for his actions, but, as the trickster category demands, he escapes punishment in the end. He avoids decapitation after organising the creation of Mjolnir and is eventually released for Ragnarök after killing Baldur. Hermes is also punished for the benefits he brings. Apollo forces him to swear a series of oaths that diminish his abilities as an agent of change and a trickster. After his performances in his hymn Hermes will never again be able to subvert the system and transfer benefits to humanity in this way.

Another aspect of this criterion is the trickster's imitation of the gods. Although all four figures parody and imitate various people and creatures, only Hermes and Wakdjunkaga imitate a supernatural being. Wakdjunkaga imitates a great water spirit in order to trick villagers into helping him and grants them essential medicines as thanks. Hermes imitates the Promethean sacrifice and reorders it to benefit both gods and mortals. In none of the four cases studied, however, are there instances of our tricksters directly imitating one of the major spirits or gods within their cultural system.

As a border-breaching being that defies all preconceived categories, tricksters may act as the psychopomp who guides the souls through their transition between life and death. Only Hermes belongs to this aspect of the criterion. Hermes is famously the guide of souls, and within ancient Greek society, this was one of his principal functions.⁵⁹⁹ The other three figures have little to do with death. Ture merely defies death when it approaches, Wakdjunkaga has even less of a connection with death and its transitions. Within the Norse pantheon, it is the Valkyries, not Loki, who act as psychopomp. Loki is, however, the father of Hel, goddess of the underworld, and his role in the apocalypse could be seen as 'psychopompic', in that he guides the living from one world to another.⁶⁰⁰

Section 2.6: Sacred & Lewd Bricoleur

All four figures conform to the bricoleur criterion. Within their respective narratives, each trickster utilises what is at hand to formulate a creative and inventive solution to the problems they face.⁶⁰¹ They differ, however, regarding their rudimentary creativity and its

⁵⁹⁹ HHH, 572-3.

⁶⁰⁰ Byock (*The Prose Edda*): 32-33.

⁶⁰¹ Levi-Strauss, 1966: 16-18.

lewd or sacred aspects. All four figures demonstrate creative quick-thinking throughout their narratives to implement their acts of trickery. The bricoleur tends to generate creative inventions, and all four figures' notable problem-solving also shows a unique way of perceiving the world.

Hermes, Wakdjunkaga and Loki embrace both the bricoleur's rudimentary form of inventiveness and its transformative lewd and sacred aspects. Hermes invents the lyre out of a tortoise corpse, essentially turning death into musical life, and his creation of sandals, the panpipes and a method for kindling fire illustrates the more rudimentary type of inventive bricolage.⁶⁰² Wakdjunkaga creates a method for hunting buffaloes and creates necessary foods and medicines out of his phallus and an elk's skull.⁶⁰³ Of all four figures, he best represents the ability to transform the lewd into sacred. Loki is credited as a craftsman, notably in his creation of the wand of destruction. Although not directly, he is instrumental in creating Thor's hammer and the other treasures used by the gods to defend humanity. Loki also embodies the lewd aspects of the bricoleur: he gives birth to Odin's horse Sleipnir, and is credited as both the mother and father of ogres. By consuming a witch's heart, he gives birth to an entirely new species; through death and cannibalism, Loki creates new life.⁶⁰⁴

An intrinsic aspect of this criterion is that tricksters appear inwardly compelled to violate all taboos, especially sexual, scatological and gastric ones. Ture is perpetually motivated by his hunger and only violates sexual taboos once, with his mother-in-law.⁶⁰⁵ Wakdjunkaga embraces all aspects of this element. He violates taboos to appease his hunger and engages in taboo sexual relationships, such as his marriage to the chief and using his gnawed phallus to establish new benefits.⁶⁰⁶ Wakdjunkaga is also the only one of the four who is truly involved with scatological taboos: he is almost buried alive in his excrement when he defies the laxative plant's warnings about consuming it.⁶⁰⁷ During the same episode he is comically propelled into the air by the forces of his excretions, and asks a group of villagers to sit on

⁶⁰² HHH. 39-54, 79-86, 511-12, 109-111.

⁶⁰³ Radin 1956: 7-8, 43-5.

⁶⁰⁴ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 139.

⁶⁰⁵ Evans-Pritchard 1967: 146.

⁶⁰⁶ Radin 1956: 21-24, 39-40.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 25-7.

his back to weigh him down. The feat fails, and Wakdjunkaga propels the villagers across the known world. The tale is an aetiological illustration of how the first humans were initially scattered through Wakdjunkaga's excremental taboo violations. Wakdjunkaga is again linked with excrement when he makes his anus guard his food while he sleeps. The plan backfires, and Wakdjunkaga awakens to find himself without food and covered in a pile of his own faeces.⁶⁰⁸

Loki is also motivated by his appetite, both gastric and sexual. His overconsumption of alcohol in the *Lokasenna* leads to the disruption of Ægir feast and his eventual capture.⁶⁰⁹ Within the same narrative, he continually boasts about his sexual promiscuity. It is also noteworthy that he gives birth both to Ogres and to Sleipnir, defying traditional sexual categories in the process.

Although Hermes is traditionally associated with phallic imagery within his culture, this is not the case within the hymn.⁶¹⁰ He is definitely a hungry individual however. Indeed, the first half of his hymn is focused on his need to appease his craving for meat.⁶¹¹ Throughout the first half of the hymn Hermes violates and defies socio-cultural taboos, stealing his brother's cattle and making new and creative instruments, all for one reason: to pacify his very human hunger. Initially, this is his sole motivation in the hymn, only altering when he realises that more is at stake than his mundane hunger for human food. Hermes also engages in some excremental trickery when he employs his fart omen to escape Apollo's clutches.

Tricksters tend to fail at appeasing their appetites within their narratives, although this failure is not universal to our four figures. Ture is often punished for his actions and is sometimes out-tricked by others, losing out on the food he wanted. It is, however, just as likely that he does succeed in his narratives, depending on what he is doing and whom he is tricking. Wakdjunkaga falls somewhere in between success and failure in this regard. He is often out-tricked either by himself or others, but unlike the other tricksters, Wakdjunkaga embraces change: he is the master of turning a humiliating failure into something beneficial.

⁶⁰⁸ Radin 1956: 16-14.

⁶⁰⁹ Hollander (*The Poetic Edda*): 116.

⁶¹⁰ Burkert 2013: 156.

⁶¹¹ *HHH*. 1-130.

He violates all taboos, is humiliated, but still manages to find a positive outcome through the process: he is a bastion of optimism. Loki violates both sexual and gastric taboos through his narrative, but, unlike the other tricksters, he tends to succeed in appeasing his appetite, albeit with disastrous consequences. His overconsumption of alcohol leads to his capture, but he indulges nonetheless. The same is true of his sexual violations, he is never left wanting. He successfully engages in sexual relations, but is mocked and humiliated for the ambiguous liaisons that lead to his function as a mother figure, something alien to the traditional idea of Norse masculinity.⁶¹² Hermes observes this aspect best. He never actually appeases his hunger within the hymn: he *is* left wanting. By not appeasing his hunger he gains something better however: ascension to Olympus and legitimacy as an Olympian god.

Section 2.7: Conclusion of comparison

All four figures relate to all six of Hynes' criteria to some extent, but each relates to the criteria in their own specific manner, and they only correspond to each other in a broad or general sense. Hynes' typology of the trickster was initially formulated as a guiding tool to discover a potential figure's 'degree of tricksterness'. All four definitely appear to have some degree of tricksterness, although it is not easy to ascertain whether one figure has more or less than the other. In this sense, Hynes' typology is comparable to Wittgenstein's 'polythetic definition': a category defined by characteristics, any number of which may be shared by a member of that category. This definition is not exclusionary (x is a member, but y is not). It indicates stronger or weaker observance of the category (x has more group characteristics than y).⁶¹³ This analysis has illustrated that, at the very least, these four figures fall under the broad category of the trickster as defined by Hynes & Doty. Each, however, has nuances that make them anomalous even within this category and resistant to black and white definition.

Hermes conforms to the trickster category, but what truly distinguishes him from the other three figures is his interaction with Apollo at the end of the *Homeric Hymn*. Hermes is the only figure to submit to a higher authority and willingly negate their abilities as an agent of change to join a new social group. All are outsiders, but Hermes is the only figure who gives

⁶¹² Schnurbein 2000: 121-2.

⁶¹³ Wittgenstein 1953-1963³: 66-67.

up an aspect of this status to join the inner circle. Wakdjunkaga submits to the supreme deity Earthmaker at the end of his cycle, but this differs from Hermes' submission. Wakdjunkaga was always a tool of Earthmaker: his issue is that he has forgotten his purpose, and it is only through his antics and mishaps that he remembers.⁶¹⁴ Initially, Hermes is genuinely independent. Outside the system, Zeus has no real authority over him, a fact best illustrated by Hermes' initial fixation on appeasing his very human penchant for meat. If Hermes had partaken in the meat he would have been relegated to the mortal realm; it is merely luck and intuition at the last moment that stops Hermes from doing so.

At the outset, Ture and Hermes are very dissimilar. Although both share a drive for food and a tendency for clever trickery, there is not much beyond this that unites them in persona and intention. What this analysis has illustrated is that, like heroes and villains, tricksters can manifest in a multitude of different ways and forms: if we are to accept this as a valid category of mythological figures, it must be with the important reservation that it is a broad and flexible one. Ture embodies the clever buffoon who, driven by their hunger and laziness, tricks and manipulates others (and sometimes themselves) to appease their appetites. In this respect, Ture is also dissimilar to Loki who, like Hermes, also embraces the clever hero category more than that of the buffoon. While all four figures have something of the buffoon and the clever hero within them, Loki and Hermes conform more to the latter. Through acting as clever heroes, they drive forward the plots of their respective narratives: Loki must be a trickster as, without this disposition and its polymorphic abilities, he would not instigate Ragnarök. Hermes is the same, he must initially function with the full force of the trickster category to satisfy the overall plot of the hymn: to resolve his identity crisis and acquire the abstract set of powers that will eventually define him within the Olympian realm. Before Hermes' introduction into the Olympian cosmos, Jenny Strauss Clay argues that

*Something essential is still lacking to its functionality... when we observe that the fully articulated Olympian system of divisions and boundaries remains static and lifeless unless it acquires the possibility of movement between its spheres and limits.*⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ Radin 1956: 52-3.

⁶¹⁵ Clay 2006: 98.

The possibility of such movement can only arise after the hierarchical configuration of the cosmos has been adequately recognized to maintain its defined boundaries while simultaneously allowing movement between its several different spheres. This is why Hermes has no tangible powers initially. Everything has already been defined within the boundary lines, and he must use what is at hand to create dynamic movement between the disparate categories. Hermes' fundamental characteristic within his hymn is his identity crisis, he does not know who he is or what he will be. With only his cunning and wit to aid and guide him, Hermes uses what is at hand to create a situation where he must be accepted into the Olympian cosmos. Hermes is the god of exchange, and although it seems that he diminishes his powers as a trickster and change agent at the end of his hymn, from another perspective the narrative illustrates him being true to himself. The god of trade and barter, Hermes trades his invention of the Lyre to the god of music and in return is confirmed as an Olympian with his powers now defined and his identity crisis resolved. Although Hermes is, in a sense, altered during this process, this does not seem to matter to him. He seems willing to exchange a large part of his trickster freedom to attain the Olympian status.

It may also be possible to argue that Hermes is still a trickster at the end of his hymn. Although he is recognized as an Olympian, he will always be the god closest to humankind, and, in this respect, Hermes will always be an outsider to the Olympian family. Hermes still remembers that ambiguous liminal period where he could have ended up as human and he remains a master of the human perspective. Hermes is no longer like Loki, the cosmic trickster who has the powers to upturn reality as we know it: by the end of his hymn he corresponds more with Wakdjunkaga and even Ture.⁶¹⁶ All three are still tricksters, yet their trickery is tied to the human world and the humans living within it. They are not the gods' problem and revel in making mischief primarily among mortals. Wakdjunkaga eventually ascends to another world, and it is only Ture and Hermes that still play with mortals. Delighting in their ambiguity, they do what they wish to appease whatever needs appeasing and more often than not they highlight the importance of socio-cultural boundaries in the process.

⁶¹⁶ Hyde 2010: 238.

Section 3: What makes Hermes different?

Hermes is the only figure that relinquishes an aspect of his outsider status to join a social group. He is also the only figure derived from a culture that utilised writing and the various narrative forms of a literary tradition. The *Eddas* are primarily oral performances archived by a Christian commenting on old pagan beliefs, and the same is true of the narratives of Wakdjunkaga and Ture. All three were recorded by outsiders to the culture that lived and experienced them earnestly. Hermes' narratives were recorded and invented by those who were still living within and experiencing the Olympian system of religion.

Various Greek writers recorded their contemporary perceptions of Hermes. An oral tradition is dynamic and adaptable, but essentially provides one perspective in that it is supra-personal and transcends individual narrators. It is a perspective that changes as its tellers and audiences change with time and culture, but in most cases the last recorded iteration is only one preserved.⁶¹⁷ Literature remembers the other perspectives, and thus Hermes dramatically differs from the other three figures because he has various perspectives recorded about him. In Homer, he functions more as a messenger and friend to humanity, while in comedy he embraces the trickster's comic buffoon aspect.⁶¹⁸ In fables he embodies the cultural buffoon to its full extent, made out to be a fool for the betterment of humanity.⁶¹⁹ Within the *Homeric Hymn* there is an element of the buffoon but more of the clever hero. There is, moreover, the possibility that the *Hymn to Hermes* has been edited and altered over time, notably the end of the hymn which some scholars have suggested was the work of an apologist for Apollo, who sought to reassert Apollo's authority after the embarrassment orchestrated by Hermes within the hymn.⁶²⁰ Such nuances have made it impossible to clearly define who or what Hermes was to the society still experiencing him. This diverse set of representations has made Hermes the most ambiguous of the four figures. He becomes something contradictory and different depending on his writers' audiences and the contexts within which they wrote.⁶²¹ As we understand him, Hermes

⁶¹⁷ Pope 1963: 1-6; Tonkin 1986: 203-13; Foley 1986 & 1988; Scodel in Fowler 2004: 45-59.

⁶¹⁸ *Od.* 5.99-104; *Ar. Pl.* 1139-49; Beta in Miller and Clay 2019: 98.

⁶¹⁹ Versnel 2011: 332; P. 178 = H. 315.

⁶²⁰ Vergados 2011: 546-86.

⁶²¹ Scodel in Fowler 2004: 45-59; There is no denying that Hermes was experienced and understood within the Greek oral tradition at some point in history. However, this tradition is nearly lost to us. What has survived for study is what was

manifested in a written world where he was susceptible to constant flux and alteration; he changes in every different recording. Thus, he appears as less constant in his overall picture than the other figures, each of whom has a soul cycle or collection of narratives associated with them. These narratives may have changed within their respective cultures, but as they developed the older vestigial aspects disappeared. This never happened with Hermes, the contradictory vestigial aspects remain in some form. Thus, his character exhibits unorthodox aspects, such as his incorporation within the Olympian family. One can only imagine what had to be adapted and altered in order to make the amoral ambiguous trickster fit into such an ordered and rigid system.

The three other tricksters also differ from Hermes in that outsiders to their respective cultures documented them. Radin, Evans-Pritchard and even Snorri were all essentially anthropologists recording other cultures stories. They approached the endeavour critically and lacked the beliefs that appear evident among those who recorded Hermes' narratives. As these recorders only aimed at documenting these narratives, they lack the nuances found within Hermes' literature. Unfortunately, we do not fully understand what each respective culture truly intended when engaging with these narratives because of this documentation. Only through examining their specific cultural contexts can we attempt to gauge their intentions. This issue presents a somewhat neutral palette for interpretation. Radin can argue for universality through the Winnebago trickster cycle because he interpreted it so from the beginning. It is likely however that his own perception and intentions have helped to formulate our understanding of Wakdjunkaga. The same is true of Ture: Evans-Pritchard, who actively denied the universality of the trickster category in his recordings of Ture, exemplifies this.⁶²² His student Brian Street interpreted Ture as a universal trickster figure, and through his perceptions and interpretations, Ture comes across as such.⁶²³ Loki appears as a malicious actor, and again Snorri's Christian prejudices likely contributed to this. Scholars have argued that Loki was a much more neutral figure and only acquired his inborn naughtiness through Snorri conflating him with the Christian

recorded by the ancient Greeks. Although Homer's works, including the *Hymns*, derive from an oral tradition, there is no way of knowing how much these ancient texts have been adapted and altered since they were first put down in writing.

⁶²² Evans-Pritchard 1967: 29.

⁶²³ Singer & Street 1972: 85-101.

devil.⁶²⁴ Snorri's personal perception and interpretation of the Norse sagas created the understanding and perception of Loki that is necessarily prevalent today. These figures' plasticity as tricksters has been to some extent dictated by the outsiders who documented them in all three cases. Whether intentionally or not, they imbued them with their personal understandings and perceptions, which have universally affected how we in turn perceive and understand them.

From the outset, Hermes' functionality as a trickster is tamed. Were it not, his ascension onto Olympus would be impossible. The *Homeric Hymns'* overall intention is to outline how each respective god acquired Olympian status.⁶²⁵ As this was the poets' primary intention, Hermes' actions within the hymn are conditioned by it. He must be tamed and altered within the hymn, for as an unconstrained trickster he could not join the Olympian hierarchy. Elements such as cultural context, genre and audience reception fundamentally inform how a storyteller formulates their narrative. Hence Hermes' depiction as a comedic-buffoon within comedy: the genre itself demands comedic enterprise. Almost all figures who appear within it come across as comedic buffoons. Homer presents an Olympianised Hermes, who has already been assimilated into the hierarchy; thus, Hermes is depicted as a helpmate and guide to humanity and the gods. The poets subsumed under the name Hermes a figure intended to depict a helpful character close to humanity. In this, they succeeded, yet elements of the greedy, polyform trickster still emerge within the Homeric narratives. The same is true in the more generally popular form of storytelling, fable. Within the more vernacular context of fable, Hermes appears more human. He is susceptible to making mistakes and is openly mocked. Hermes is presented as incredibly close to humanity within this genre, and is shown to be an instrument for both moral lessons and crass comedy. Again, the genre is shaped by the storyteller's intention and the audience's response. Hermes' functionality as a trickster thus to a large extent depends on the genre and the storyteller's intentions when describing him.

To return to the focus of this study then, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the god's unorthodox actions may not derive from his adherence to the trickster category, but rather

⁶²⁴ Rooth 1961: 85; Hyde 2010: 95-8.

⁶²⁵ Clay 2006: 96.

the type of narrative he finds himself in. Within the context of the *Homeric Hymns*, the trickster comes across as somewhat diluted, since the genre demands admission into a community, going against the concept of the liminal outsider which is fundamental to the trickster category. Hermes is different because the recorded literature that has survived concerning him reflects the different motivations and perceptions that shaped this figure's cultural existence. Tricksters are polymorphic creatures however, always changing and adapting to suit their context, and although Hermes may appear tamed as he switches between genres and contexts, he remains in all cases a liminal figure, residing on the boundaries of worlds and categories.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the representation of the Greek god Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, with a view to establishing the extent to which he partakes in Hynes' defined set of characteristics associated with mythological 'trickster' figures. As I suggested in the final chapter, Hermes does indeed partake in Hynes' defined set of characteristics associated with trickster figures. I argued that Hynes' typology is a useful tool to engage with the trickster. I illustrated that although each respective figure does conform to all aspects of the trickster criteria, they each engage with it in a specific manner. I have attempted to demonstrate that the manner in which they relate to the criteria is to some extent dictated by their respective cultural contexts, and what their narrators intended to illustrate through the stories wherein tricksters reside. Narrative intent, genre and cultural context appear to be the main factors that mould each respective figure. It is these factors that influence Hermes' unorthodox actions within his hymn. The hymn presents Hermes as a tamed figure because all *Homeric Hymns'* underlying intention is to illustrate how a divinity acquires their powers and how they become accepted into the Olympian system. Although Hermes is a trickster, he appears to be tamed, because of the interactions between his nature as a trickster/outsider, and the systematizing tendency of the *Homeric Hymn* genre. However, trickster figures are marked by their ambiguity, liminality and unpredictable plasticity, and although Hermes defies the category by renouncing an aspect of his outsider status, he does display all the aspects that define and make up the concept of the trickster.

Aside from determining the extent to which Hermes partakes in Hynes' defined set of characteristics associated with mythological 'trickster' figures, the questions I set out to answer were: Where did this figure originate? In what ways has the figure of Hermes developed throughout its history? How can Hermes function as an outsider within the Olympian hierarchy? What are the similarities and differences, if any, between descriptions of tricksters in comparative studies and representations of Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*? To what extent is Hermes different from our traditional understanding of the trickster figure? Should he still be considered a trickster in this light?

I answered these questions through first articulating and describing the trickster phenomenon and presenting an in-depth discussion of the various methodologies employed

to engage with tricksters in comparative studies. I then set out to test the validity of Hynes' criteria by applying them to three global trickster figures. Through this analysis, I formulated a baseline of comparison that could be used to gauge the extent to which Hermes conforms to the trickster category. In chapter three I outlined Hermes' potential origins and considered how these led to the functions and characteristics he possesses in Classical Greek literature, which contributed to his 20th century designation as a trickster. These findings illustrated that much of Hermes' sphere of control is connected to intangible, uncertain and specifically anthropocentric powers. I then considered how Hermes was understood and perceived within an Ancient Greek cultural context, through an analysis of representations of the god in Classical Greek literature, which showed how his depiction and performances were to a large degree determined by the narrative context he was bound to. This was followed by an analysis of the *Homeric Hymn* itself, and a discussion regarding whether or not Hermes should still be considered a trickster figure. I concluded that he should, as, despite his conformity to the Olympian system, his liminal status is an essential aspect of this system, as he allows for movement and passage between its various parts, as well as communication between it and the human realm.

My first chapter concludes that although there is indeed a complex and paradoxical set of issues regarding tricksters and the comparative method itself, it is still a valid method of study if appropriate respect is given to each potential figure's cultural context before global comparisons are made. The nominalists are correct to caution us about the dangers of reductivism that can occur when utilising the comparative method and that the universalists go too far with their assertions of universality. The idea of cultural evolution and the notion that certain cultures are 'primitive' or still functioning at a 'childhood' stage of development are clearly problematic, as is the idea that trickster figures can be located within the narratives of most global cultures. There is still space however for respectful comparison, and a method for doing this is provided by Hynes & Doty's two-level approach to the trickster, in which respect for the importance of cultural context and understanding of the origins and intentions of the figure within that context allow for some degree of appropriate global comparison.

In my second chapter, I adopted Hynes' two-level approach to studying tricksters. I began by providing a cultural context for each of the three other trickster figures, Wakdjunkaga, Ture and Loki, with reference to which I discussed their performances within their respective narratives. I then applied Hynes' six criteria to each character. I not only illustrated the degree to which each figure conforms to the criteria and how they do not, but also provided a cross-comparative analysis between all three figures. There are broadly two types of trickster characters: the cultural buffoon, who is motivated to appease their base desires, and the clever hero, who utilises their cunning and trickery against a specific opponent. I concluded that Wakdjunkaga and Ture both align more closely with the cultural buffoon, while Loki at first glance seems to be more the clever hero. However, upon further examination, Loki does appear to embody both types. What defines the type he embodies is the context the narrative places him in. When he acts alone within his narratives his base desires fuel him, yet he also embraces the clever hero when the gods ask him to implement his trickery. This analysis concludes that context, cultural and narrative, is key to determining the degree of 'tricksterness' within all three figures.

Chapter three encompassed an overview of Hermes' possible origins and divine functions, and a survey of contextually appropriate literature. Discerning Hermes' true origins is near impossible. I concluded, however, that Hermes' earliest documented manifestations observed several fundamental aspects of the trickster figure. His stone herms rest, as he does, on territorial boundaries, delineating the known from the ambiguous unknown. He is the mediator and connector between gods and mortals and lies in between these sundered spheres. His functions as the god of merchants, travel, language and thievery all speak to his ability as a connector, his ambiguity and his association with liminal spaces. He is the patron god of lots and displays aspects of the cultural distributor who allocates various qualities and attributes to humankind in many of his narratives. The survey of Hermes' performances in epic, comedy and fable illustrate how, depending on his context, Hermes differs in the aspects of the trickster he represents. In comedy, he embraces the comedic buffoon as this is a necessary aspect of the genre. In epic Hermes functions as a mediating figure who helps guide the human actors through liminal areas, but he is also depicted with very human desires for both food and sexual gratification. The survey of Hermes in literature interestingly highlighted how close to humanity Hermes is. Tricksters occupy a space

between fundamental categories, such as between the divine and mortal spheres. Hermes is an Olympian god with the appropriate status and powers that go with this label. His mannerisms and personality, however, are more characteristic of a human than a god. I suggested that to some extent, Hermes functions as a humanist actor on the divine stage: he breaches the divine through his imperfections and embraces the follies of mortality, as many tricksters do in their narratives. I concluded that Hermes' inherently ambiguous status and propensity for liminal transitions is what ties him to all these uncertain and disparate areas of control.

I applied Hynes' six criteria to Hermes' performances in his *Homeric Hymn* in chapter four. I argued that Hermes does indeed accord with Hynes' trickster criteria, noting his ability to utilise a humanist perspective, where he makes use of what is at hand to create something new. Although Hermes conforms to all of the criteria, I argued that Hermes does appear to be unique among tricksters discussed in this thesis. He is unorthodox because he willingly disempowers himself and swears never to implement his trickery against the gods, as he has against Apollo in the hymn. I note, however, how although Hermes is willingly tamed at the end of the poem, contradicting the liminal freedoms associated with trickster figures, he still embraces his characteristic functions as a god of exchange and mediation when he barter his newly invented lyre for a set of powers from Apollo and acceptance into the Olympian system. Throughout the hymn Hermes is cast as an outsider, who is ambiguous as he does not know what he is or who he is meant to become. Hermes utilises cunning trickery and inventive fortitude to fool Apollo, and by embodying the trickster, he becomes who he is through his own actions and choices. Although Hermes is willingly tamed and relinquishes his outsider status, in a sense this is only achieved by embracing the very status he is giving up. Hermes, the tamed Olympian, only achieves this role because he is a trickster. Were he not, he would never have been able to embrace the humanist perspective, and unite the intangible and abstract areas of control that now belong to him.

In chapter five I argued that, although the trickster category is an appropriate term to apply to a specific type of ambiguous and liminal actor, it is not universal in the sense that Jung and Radin suggest. The category is a useful way to indicate a type of narrative figure, but to suggest that it is ingrained into a shared collective unconscious seems incorrect. I also

presented the final comparative analysis, in which I cross-compared all four tricksters together under Hynes' criteria. I argued that each figure conforms to the typology in their own unique way. The most significant factor in determining how they perform comes down to their cultural context and what that culture intends to express through the trickster as a narrative vehicle. I concluded that what makes Hermes inherently different from other trickster figures is the literature we have concerning him. Hermes is the only one of the four who is presented in numerous surviving texts written by those who perceived and understood him thoroughly. I argued that outsiders recorded the narratives of the other three figures, all of which come from oral traditions. Although Snorri was a native Icelander, he was a Christian and never a practitioner of Norse pagan beliefs. The same is true for Ture and Wakdjunkaga. Despite being documented by scholars on opposing ends of the comparative method, both figures were still documented by anthropologists who were outside the system, and who, whether intentionally or not, presented each figure from an etic perspective. None of the three figures' narratives were recorded by those within the religious system that created it. Although Radin and Evans-Pritchard interviewed and spoke to those still within these cultural systems, they were still outsiders. I conclude that Hermes is an unorthodox trickster figure because of the various surviving representations we have of him from the ancient past. Each narrator had a specific intent and purpose for Hermes, although in all the surveyed literature he still corresponds to some extent to the trickster. Hermes manifests as a liminal outsider across all the surveyed genres, characterised by a hankering for food, comedic self-abasement, and his friendliness to humanity. These aspects form a constant across all genres, underlying what the individual narrators wished to do with Hermes as a narrative character.

In comedy, Hermes appears rather as a caricature of himself than a complex trickster figure. Nevertheless, he still conforms to the characteristics of comedic self-abasement, gluttony and close friendship with humanity throughout. The same is true for Hermes in fable, where he is mocked and humiliated, like Ture, Loki and Wakdjunkaga, due to his mistakes. I argued that the fundamental intention of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* was to describe and outline how Hermes acquired his divine functions and how he attained Olympian status. These factors are paramount in the hymn and Hermes' functionality as a trickster is secondary. Thus Hermes, and for that matter any trickster whose culture engages with a hierarchical

system of divinities, will in some respect become tamed as the necessary price for acceptance.

The last step of this process is to collate these conclusions and apply them to the overarching question first outlined in the thesis' introduction. Hermes is a trickster. He is not, however, a member of a universal club that manifests within all cultures and individuals. Hynes' six characteristics are, as its creator argues, "a modest map, heuristic guide, and common language for the more complex individual studies of particular tricksters within specific belief systems".⁶²⁶ Hynes' typology serves as an identifier of a character's propensity for description as a trickster. It is indeed a useful tool, but it is only that, a tool, and not a test that starkly determines what is and what is not part of a fixed category. It is arguable that many mythological figures could be measured by these criteria and come across, to some extent, as tricksters. Hermes, however, follows very closely to the trickster description, and this association is reinforced by a diverse set of functions and powers which embrace the ambiguous and uncertain liminal state of things. Hermes shares a great deal with the other three figures studied. All firmly conform to the base concepts set out by Hynes.

The analytical comparison shows, however, that the ambiguous trickster can manifest in many different ways. As argued above, what makes Hermes fundamentally different is his narrative context and the overarching intentions the narrative's creators wished to exemplify. Of the four figures, Hermes derives from a culture that produced different written texts that have been preserved for millennia. He is different because we are privileged to have accounts of how he was perceived by those who experienced him, unlike the other three figures whose stories were recorded by outsiders to the culture who lacked the nuanced understanding of what it meant to experience each figure within their cultural system. On the other hand, while the other three figures only have one or two surviving recorded accounts, these do perhaps provide a clearer idea of each figure in the sense that they are not muddled by various opposing perceptions and views. Hermes changes depending on which narrative genre he manifests in. This factor has diluted any chance of establishing an overall defined picture. His functions in fable and comedy differ to those in

⁶²⁶ Hynes & Doty 1997: 33.

epic and other mythic narratives concerning him. In this sense it may be said that Hermes and many of the Olympians suffer from overabundance of paradoxical versions and opinions. However, it seems evident that this is a more authentic reflection of mythological or religious characters' complexity in any culture. Clarity and simplicity, such as we find with the other figures, are illusory.

Hermes does partake in many aspects of the mythological trickster figure. He is different because of the different narratives that describe him and changes depending on cultural context and narrative intention. This is best illustrated in the hymn which aims to express how he becomes an Olympian: from the outset Hermes will be tamed within such a narrative because the narrative genre demands it. What seems evident is that the multitude of narratives concerning Hermes, each with their own intentions and motivations, tend to confirm his trickster status as ambiguous and unknowable. Tricksters are ambiguous, liminal and amoral figures, they are indefinable

to define (de-finis) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture; they are notorious border breakers.⁶²⁷

If nothing else, Hermes is a border breaker and ultimately indefinable, as the trickster should be.

⁶²⁷ Hynes & Doty 1997: 33

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fables

The following fables have been taken from Versnel (2011: 329-35) who has summarised the Fables to show their most important elements. P. denotes Perry's translations and refers to the numbers in the survey of all other fables in his edition and H. refers to Halm's edition Versnel (2011: 328).

- 1) A man had a wooden statue of Hermes for sale and cried around that "he was selling a god who would provide both goods and profits." To the not unreasonable question why then he wished to sell it instead of reaping the profit for himself, the response was: "I need ready cash and the god is never in a hurry to render his services." (P. 99 = H. 2).
- 2) A craftsman had a wooden image of Hermes. Every day he poured libations to it and offered sacrifice (θύων) but he continued to fare badly. In a fit of anger with the god, he picked up the image by the leg and dashed it to the ground. From its broken head gold poured forth. While he was gathering this, the man said: "Hermes, you are a pig-headed fellow and ungrateful to your friends. When I was serving you with adoration you gave me no help at all, and now that I have insulted you, you have repaid me with many blessings. I did not understand the strange kind of worship that you require" (τὴν εἰς σὲ καλὴν εὐσέβειαν οὐκ ᾔδειν). (Babrius 119).
- 3) Wishing to know in how much esteem he was held by men, Hermes *took the form of a mortal man* and entered the workshop of a sculptor. First, he asked the price of a statue of Zeus, which was one drachma. Next one of Hera, which was higher. Then, seeing a statue of himself and supposing that men would consider this more valuable, since he was the divine messenger and the god of profit, he asked "How much is this Hermes?" "If you buy the other two," said the statuary, "I'll throw that one in for free." (P. 88 = H. 137).
- 4) A sculptor was trying to sell a marble statue of Hermes. One man wanted it for a gravestone, another wanted to set it up as an image of the god himself (ὄς μὲν εἰς

στήλην, ὁ δὲ ὡς θεὸν καθιδρύσων). In his sleep the sculptor saw Hermes at the gate of dreams saying: "So then, my fate is being weighed in your balances: it remains to be seen whether you will make me a corpse or a god" (ἢ γὰρ με νεκρὸν ἢ θεὸν σὺ ποιήσεις). (Babrius 30).

- 5) By the roadside stood a square-hewn statue of Hermes, with a heap of stones at the base. A dog came up and said: "I salute you first of all, Hermes, but, more than that, I would anoint you. I could not think of just passing by a god like you, especially since you are the athlete's god." "I shall be grateful to you," said Hermes, "if you do not lick off such ointment as I have already, and do not make a mess on me. Beyond that, pay me no respect." (Babrius 48).
- 6) Zeus after having created man, entrusted Hermes with pouring some intelligence over mankind. Hermes, *making equal portions*, poured for each man his portion. Thus, it happened that the men of small stature were completely filled with the brain liquid and so became intelligent, but tall men have less sense than others. (P. 108 = H. 150).
- 7) It was Hermes' job to distribute the lies equally over the world. He loaded them in his chariot and *distributed small portions* in each country but in Arabia his car broke down and the Arabians plundered it and took all that was left. Hence, more than any other people the Arabs are liars and cheats. (Babrius 57. cf. H.141).
- 8) Zeus charged Hermes to pour over all the artisans the poison of lies. Hermes pulverized it and, *making an equal amount for everyone*, he poured it over them. But when he got as far as the cobbler he still had plenty of the poison left, so he just took what remained in the mortar and poured it over him. And since then all artisans have been liars, but most of all the cobblers. (P. 103 = H. 136).

Related, but of a slightly different nature:

- 9) Zeus ordained that Hermes should inscribe on *ostraka* the faults of men and deposit these *ostraka* in a little wooden box near him so that he could do justice in each case. But the *ostraka* got mixed up together and some came sooner, others later, to the hands of Zeus for him to pass judgements on them as they deserved. (H. 126).

The god himself falls victim to a flawed distribution:

- 10) A traveller had vowed to offer half of everything he might find to Hermes. He finds a wallet with almonds and dates (although he had hoped that it would contain

money), eats everything edible and gives the rest to Hermes: “Here you have, Hermes, the payment of my vow; for I have shared with you half of the outsides and half of the insides of what I have found.” (P. 178 = H. 315).

Hermes does pay visits to men but not as a god:

11) Wishing to test the prophetic abilities of Teiresias Hermes stole his oxen. Then, *adopting the likeness of a man* (ὁμοιωθεὶς ἀνθρώπῳ), he went to live with Teiresias *as a guest* (ἐπεξενώθη). They went together to the outskirts of the city to find the stolen oxen and Teiresias asked Hermes to report anything that might seem of worth as an omen. An eagle, flying from the left to the right, was deemed irrelevant but then appeared a black crow looking first upward towards heaven and then downward at the earth. After Hermes had reported this observation Teiresias declared: “Here we have it, this crow is calling heaven and earth to witness that I shall get back my oxen that is: if you wish it so.” (P. 89 = H. 140).

12) Once two women entertained Hermes (apparently in human form) “in a mean and shabby fashion.” As he was about to leave, he said: “In me you behold a god, I will give each of you at once whatever you may wish” (*Deum videtis; tribuam vobis protinus quod quaeque optarit*). Of course, their wishes are thoughtless and foolish and on being fulfilled reward them for their uncouth behaviour.

The most human of all gods comments on the human nature of gods in general:

13) A man having witnessed a shipwreck claimed that the decrees of the gods were unjust, for to destroy a single impious person they had also made the innocent perish. At the same moment he was bitten by an ant and while trying to kill it he crushed them all. Then Hermes *appeared* (another appearance) to him, and struck him with his wand saying: “And now do you not admit that the gods judge men in the same way you judge the ants?” (Babrius 117).

Appendix 2: Babcock-Abrahams' sixteen characteristics of 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 indeterminate (in physical stature) and may be portrayed as both young and old, as perpetually young or perpetually aged;
11. Exhibit a 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 behaviour) in which an individual normally has privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code;
16. In all their behaviour, tend to express a concomitant breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection.

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IV. Visual art sources

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