

ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE TRICKSTER-FIGURE¹

[456] It is no light task for me to write about the figure of the trickster in American Indian mythology within the confined space of a commentary. When I first came across Adolf Bandelier's classic on this subject, *The Delight Makers*, many years ago, I was struck by the European analogy of the carnival in the medieval Church, with its reversal of the hierarchic order, which is still continued in the carnivals held by student societies today. Something of this contradictoriness also inheres in the medieval description of the devil as *simia dei* (the ape of God), and in his characterization in folklore as the "simpleton" who is "fooled" or "cheated." A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures, and—last but not least—his approximation to the figure of a saviour. These qualities make Mercurius seem like a daemonic being resurrected from primitive times, older even than the Greek Hermes. His rogueries relate him in some measure to various figures met with in folklore and universally known in fairytales: Tom Thumb, Stupid Hans, or the buffoon-like Hanswurst, who is an altogether negative hero and yet manages to achieve through his stupidity what others fail to accomplish with their best efforts. In Grimm's fairytale, the "Spirit Mercurius" lets himself be outwitted by a peasant lad, and then has to buy his freedom with the precious gift of healing.

[457] Since all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them, it is not surprising to find certain phenomena in the field of parapsychology which remind us of the trickster. These are the phenomena connected with poltergeists, and they occur at all times and places in the ambience of pre-adolescent children. The malicious tricks played by the poltergeist are as well known as the low level of his

intelligence and the fatuity of his “communications.” Ability to change his shape seems also to be one of his characteristics, as there are not a few reports of his appearance in animal form. Since he has on occasion described himself as a soul in hell, the motif of subjective suffering would seem not to be lacking either. His universality is co-extensive, so to speak, with that of shamanism, to which, as we know, the whole phenomenology of spiritualism belongs. There is something of the trickster in the character of the shaman and medicine-man, for he, too, often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured. For this reason, his profession sometimes puts him in peril of his life. Besides that, the shamanistic techniques in themselves often cause the medicine-man a good deal of discomfort, if not actual pain. At all events the “making of a medicine-man” involves, in many parts of the world, so much agony of body and soul that permanent psychic injuries may result. His “approximation to the saviour” is an obvious consequence of this, in confirmation of the mythological truth that the wounded wounder is the agent of healing, and that the sufferer takes away suffering.

[458] These mythological features extend even to the highest regions of man’s spiritual development. If we consider, for example, the daemonic features exhibited by Yahweh in the Old Testament, we shall find in them not a few reminders of the unpredictable behaviour of the trickster, of his senseless orgies of destruction and his self-imposed sufferings, together with the same gradual development into a saviour and his simultaneous humanization. It is just this transformation of the meaningless into the meaningful that reveals the trickster’s compensatory relation to the “saint.” In the early Middle Ages, this led to some strange ecclesiastical customs based on memories of the ancient saturnalia. Mostly they were celebrated on the days immediately following the birth of Christ—that is, in the New Year—with singing and dancing. The dances were the originally harmless *tripudia* of the priests, lower clergy, children, and subdeacons and took place in church. An *episcopus puerorum* (children’s bishop) was elected on Innocents’ Day and dressed in pontifical robes. Amid uproarious rejoicings he paid an official visit to the palace of the archbishop and bestowed the episcopal blessing from one of the windows. The same thing happened at the *tripudium hypodiaconorum*, and at the dances for other priestly grades. By the end of the twelfth century, the subdeacons’ dance had degenerated into a real *festum stultorum* (fools’ feast). A report from

the year 1198 says that at the Feast of the Circumcision in Notre Dame, Paris, “so many abominations and shameful deeds” were committed that the holy place was desecrated “not only by smutty jokes, but even by the shedding of blood.” In vain did Pope Innocent III inveigh against the “jests and madness that make the clergy a mockery,” and the “shameless frenzy of their play-acting.” Two hundred and fifty years later (March 12, 1444), a letter from the Theological Faculty of Paris to all the French bishops was still fulminating against these festivals, at which “even the priests and clerics elected an archbishop or a bishop or pope, and named him the Fools’ Pope” (*fatuorum papam*). “In the very midst of divine service masqueraders with grotesque faces, disguised as women, lions, and mummers, performed their dances, sang indecent songs in the choir, ate their greasy food from a corner of the altar near the priest celebrating mass, got out their games of dice, burned a stinking incense made of old shoe leather, and ran and hopped about all over the church.”²

[459] It is not surprising that this veritable witches’ sabbath was uncommonly popular, and that it required considerable time and effort to free the Church from this pagan heritage.³

[460] In certain localities even the priests seem to have adhered to the “*libertas decembrica*,” as the Fools’ Holiday was called, in spite (or perhaps because?) of the fact that the older level of consciousness could let itself rip on this happy occasion with all the wildness, wantonness, and irresponsibility of paganism.⁴ These ceremonies, which still reveal the spirit of the trickster in his original form, seem to have died out by the beginning of the sixteenth century. At any rate, the various conciliar decrees issued from 1581 to 1585 forbade only the *festum puerorum* and the election of an *episcopus puerorum*.

[461] Finally, we must also mention in this connection the *festum asinorum*, which, so far as I know, was celebrated mainly in France. Although considered a harmless festival in memory of Mary’s flight into Egypt, it was celebrated in a somewhat curious manner which might easily have given rise to misunderstandings. In Beauvais, the ass procession went right into the church.⁵ At the conclusion of each part (Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, etc.) of the high mass that followed, the whole congregation *brayed*, that is, they all went “Y-a” like a donkey (“*hac modulatione hinham concludebantur*”). A codex dating apparently from the eleventh century

says: “At the end of the mass, instead of the words ‘Ite missa est,’ the priest shall bray three times (*ter hinhamabit*), and instead of the words ‘Deo gratias,’ the congregation shall answer ‘Y-a’ (*hinham*) three times.”

[462] Du Cange cites a hymn from this festival:

Orientis partibus
Adventavit Asinus
Pulcher et fortissimus
Sarcinis aptissimus.

Each verse was followed by the French refrain:

Hez, Sire Asnes, car chantez
Belle bouche rechignez
Vous aurez du foin assez
Et de l’avoine à plantez.

The hymn had nine verses, the last of which was:

Amen, dicas, Asine (*hie genuflectebatur*)
Jam satur de gramine.
Amen, amen, itera
Aspernare vetera.⁶

[463] Du Cange says that the more ridiculous this rite seemed, the greater the enthusiasm with which it was celebrated. In other places the ass was decked with a golden canopy whose corners were held “by distinguished canons”; the others present had to “don suitably festive garments, as at Christmas.” Since there were certain tendencies to bring the ass into symbolic relationship with Christ, and since, from ancient times, the god of the Jews was vulgarly conceived to be an ass—a prejudice which extended to Christ himself,⁷ as is shown by the mock crucifixion scratched on the wall of the Imperial Cadet School on the Palatine⁸—the danger of theriomorphism lay uncomfortably close. Even the bishops could do nothing to stamp out this custom, until finally it had to be suppressed by the “auctoritas supremi Senatus.” The suspicion of blasphemy becomes quite open in Nietzsche’s “Ass Festival,” which is a deliberately blasphemous parody of the mass.⁹

[464] These medieval customs demonstrate the role of the trickster to perfection, and, when they vanished from the precincts of the Church, they appeared again on the profane level of Italian theatricals, as those comic types who, often adorned with enormous ithyphallic emblems, entertained

the far from prudish public with ribaldries in true Rabelaisian style. Callot's engravings have preserved these classical figures for posterity—the Pulcinellas, Cucorognas, Chico Sgarras, and the like.¹⁰

[465] In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in magic rites of healing, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise.¹¹ He is obviously a "psychologem," an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level. That this is how the trickster figure originated can hardly be contested if we look at it from the causal and historical angle. In psychology as in biology we cannot afford to overlook or underestimate this question of origins, although the answer usually tells us nothing about the functional meaning. For this reason biology should never forget the question of purpose, for only by answering that can we get at the meaning of a phenomenon. Even in pathology, where we are concerned with lesions which have no meaning in themselves, the exclusively causal approach proves to be inadequate, since there are a number of pathological phenomena which only give up their meaning when we inquire into their purpose. And where we are concerned with the normal phenomena of life, this question of purpose takes undisputed precedence.

[466] When, therefore, a primitive or barbarous consciousness forms a picture of itself on a much earlier level of development and continues to do so for hundreds or even thousands of years, undeterred by the contamination of its archaic qualities with differentiated, highly developed mental products, then the causal explanation is that the older the archaic qualities are, the more conservative and pertinacious is their behaviour. One simply cannot shake off the memory-image of things as they were, and drags it along like a senseless appendage.

[467] This explanation, which is facile enough to satisfy the rationalistic requirements of our age, would certainly not meet with the approval of the Winnebagos, the nearest possessors of the trickster cycle. For them the myth is not in any sense a remnant—it is far too amusing for that, and an object of undivided enjoyment. For them it still "functions," provided that they have not been spoiled by civilization. For them there is no earthly

reason to theorize about the meaning and purpose of myths, just as the Christmas-tree seems no problem at all to the naïve European. For the thoughtful observer, however, both trickster and Christmas-tree afford reason enough for reflection. Naturally it depends very much on the mentality of the observer what he thinks about these things. Considering the crude primitivity of the trickster cycle, it would not be surprising if one saw in this myth simply the reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness, which is what the trickster obviously seems to be.⁴²

[468] The only question that would need answering is whether such personified reflections exist at all in empirical psychology. As a matter of fact they do, and these experiences of split or double personality actually form the core of the earliest psychopathological investigations. The peculiar thing about these dissociations is that the split-off personality is not just a random one, but stands in a complementary or compensatory relationship to the ego-personality. It is a personification of traits of character which are sometimes worse and sometimes better than those the ego-personality possesses. A collective personification like the trickster is the product of an aggregate of individuals and is welcomed by each individual as something known to him, which would not be the case if it were just an individual outgrowth.

[469] Now if the myth were nothing but an historical remnant, one would have to ask why it has not long since vanished into the great rubbish-heap of the past, and why it continues to make its influence felt on the highest levels of civilization, even where, on account of his stupidity and grotesque scurrility, the trickster no longer plays the role of a “delight-maker.” In many cultures his figure seems like an old river-bed in which the water still flows. One can see this best of all from the fact that the trickster motif does not crop up only in its mythical form but appears just as naïvely and authentically in the unsuspecting modern man—whenever, in fact, he feels himself at the mercy of annoying “accidents” which thwart his will and his actions with apparently malicious intent. He then speaks of “hoodoos” and “jinxes” or of the “mischievousness of the object.” Here the trickster is represented by counter-tendencies in the unconscious, and in certain cases by a sort of second personality, of a puerile and inferior character, not unlike the personalities who announce themselves at spiritualistic séances and cause all those ineffably childish phenomena so

typical of poltergeists. I have, I think, found a suitable designation for this character-component when I called it the *shadow*.¹³ On the civilized level, it is regarded as a personal “gaffe,” “slip,” “faux pas,” etc., which are then chalked up as defects of the conscious personality. We are no longer aware that in carnival customs and the like there are remnants of a collective shadow figure which prove that the personal shadow is in part descended from a numinous collective figure. This collective figure gradually breaks up under the impact of civilization, leaving traces in folklore which are difficult to recognize. But the main part of him gets personalized and is made an object of personal responsibility.

[470] Radin’s trickster cycle preserves the shadow in its pristine mythological form, and thus points back to a very much earlier stage of consciousness which existed before the birth of the myth, when the Indian was still groping about in a similar mental darkness. Only when his consciousness reached a higher level could he detach the earlier state from himself and objectify it, that is, say anything about it. So long as his consciousness was itself trickster-like, such a confrontation could obviously not take place. It was possible only when the attainment of a newer and higher level of consciousness enabled him to look back on a lower and inferior state. It was only to be expected that a good deal of mockery and contempt should mingle with this retrospect, thus casting an even thicker pall over man’s memories of the past, which were pretty unedifying anyway. This phenomenon must have repeated itself innumerable times in the history of his mental development. The sovereign contempt with which our modern age looks back on the taste and intelligence of earlier centuries is a classic example of this, and there is an unmistakable allusion to the same phenomenon in the New Testament, where we are told in Acts 17:30 that God looked down from above (ἡ *υπεριδῶν*, *despiciens*) on the *Χρόνοί τῆς ἀγνοίας*, the times of ignorance (or unconsciousness).

[471] This attitude contrasts strangely with the still commoner and more striking idealization of the past, which is praised not merely as the “good old days” but as the Golden Age—and not just by uneducated and superstitious people, but by all those legions of theosophical enthusiasts who resolutely believe in the former existence and lofty civilization of Atlantis.

[472] Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. He is a forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. Because of it he is deserted by his (evidently human) companions, which seems to indicate that he has fallen below their level of consciousness. He is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other. He takes his anus off and entrusts it with a special task. Even his sex is optional despite its phallic qualities: he can turn himself into a woman and bear children. From his penis he makes all kinds of useful plants. This is a reference to his original nature as a Creator, for the world is made from the body of a god.

[473] On the other hand he is in many respects stupider than the animals, and gets into one ridiculous scrape after another. Although he is not really evil, he does the most atrocious things from sheer unconsciousness and unrelatedness. His imprisonment in animal unconsciousness is suggested by the episode where he gets his head caught inside the skull of an elk, and the next episode shows how he overcomes this condition by imprisoning the head of a hawk inside his own rectum. True, he sinks back into the former condition immediately afterwards, by falling under the ice, and is outwitted time after time by the animals, but in the end he succeeds in tricking the cunning coyote, and this brings back to him his saviour nature. The trickster is a primitive “cosmic” being of *divine-animal* nature, on the one hand superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness. He is no match for the animals either, because of his extraordinary clumsiness and lack of instinct. These defects are the marks of his *human* nature, which is not so well adapted to the environment as the animal’s but, instead, has prospects of a much higher development of consciousness based on a considerable eagerness to learn, as is duly emphasized in the myth.

[474] What the repeated telling of the myth signifies is the therapeutic anamnesis of contents which, for reasons still to be discussed, should never be forgotten for long. If they were nothing but the remnants of an inferior state it would be understandable if man turned his attention away from

them, feeling that their reappearance was a nuisance. This is evidently by no means the case, since the trickster has been a source of amusement right down to civilized times, where he can still be recognized in the carnival figures of Pulcinella and the clown. That is one important reason for his still continuing to function. But it is not the only one, and certainly not the reason why this reflection of an extremely primitive state of consciousness solidified into a mythological personage. Mere vestiges of an early state that is dying out usually lose their energy at an increasing rate, otherwise they would never disappear. The last thing we would expect is that they would have the strength to solidify into a mythological figure with its own cycle of legends—unless, of course, they received energy from outside, in this case from a higher level of consciousness or from sources in the unconscious which are not yet exhausted. To take a legitimate parallel from the psychology of the individual, namely the appearance of an impressive shadow figure antagonistically confronting a personal consciousness: this figure does not appear merely because it *still* exists in the individual, but because it rests on a dynamism whose existence can only be explained in terms of his actual situation, for instance because the shadow is so disagreeable to his ego-consciousness that it has to be repressed into the unconscious. This explanation does not quite meet the case here, because the trickster obviously represents a vanishing level of consciousness which increasingly lacks the power to take express and assert itself. Furthermore, repression would prevent it from vanishing, because repressed contents are the very ones that have the best chance of survival, as we know from experience that nothing is corrected in the unconscious. Lastly, the story of the trickster is not in the least disagreeable to the Winnebago consciousness or incompatible with it but, on the contrary, pleasurable and therefore not conducive to repression. It looks, therefore, as if the myth were actively sustained and fostered by consciousness. This may well be so, since that is the best and most successful method of keeping the shadow figure conscious and subjecting it to conscious criticism. Although, to begin with, this criticism has more the character of a positive evaluation, we may expect that with the progressive development of consciousness the cruder aspects of the myth will gradually fall away, even if the danger of its rapid disappearance under the stress of white civilization did not exist. We have often seen how certain customs, originally cruel or obscene, became mere vestiges in the

course of time.¹⁴

[475] The process of rendering this motif harmless takes an extremely long time, as its history shows; one can still detect traces of it even at a high level of civilization. Its longevity could also be explained by the strength and vitality of the state of consciousness described in the myth, and by the secret attraction and fascination this has for the conscious mind. Although purely causal hypotheses in the biological sphere are not as a rule very satisfactory, due weight must nevertheless be given to the fact that in the case of the trickster a higher level of consciousness has covered up a lower one, and that the latter was already in retreat. His recollection, however, is mainly due to the interest which the conscious mind brings to bear on him, the inevitable concomitant being, as we have seen, the gradual civilizing, i.e., assimilation, of a primitive daemonic figure who was originally autonomous and even capable of causing possession.

[476] To supplement the causal approach by a final one therefore enables us to arrive at more meaningful interpretations not only in medical psychology, where we are concerned with individual fantasies originating in the unconscious, but also in the case of collective fantasies, that is myths and fairytales.

[477] As Radin points out, the civilizing process begins within the framework of the trickster cycle itself, and this is a clear indication that the original state has been overcome. At any rate the marks of deepest unconsciousness fall away from him; instead of acting in a brutal, savage, stupid, and senseless fashion, the trickster's behaviour towards the end of the cycle becomes quite useful and sensible. The devaluation of his earlier unconsciousness is apparent even in the myth, and one wonders what has happened to his evil qualities. The naïve reader may imagine that when the dark aspects disappear they are no longer there in reality. But that is not the case at all, as experience shows. What actually happens is that the conscious mind is then able to free itself from the fascination of evil and is no longer obliged to live it compulsively. The darkness and the evil have not gone up in smoke, they have merely withdrawn into the unconscious owing to loss of energy, where they remain unconscious so long as all is well with the conscious. But if the conscious should find itself in a critical or doubtful situation, then it soon becomes apparent that the shadow has not dissolved into nothing but is only waiting for a favourable opportunity

to reappear as a projection upon one's neighbour. If this trick is successful, there is immediately created between them that world of primordial darkness where everything that is characteristic of the trickster can happen—even on the highest plane of civilization. The best examples of these “monkey tricks,” as popular speech aptly and truthfully sums up this state of affairs in which everything goes wrong and nothing intelligent happens except by mistake at the last moment, are naturally to be found in politics.

[478] The so-called civilized man has forgotten the trickster. He remembers him only figuratively and metaphorically, when, irritated by his own ineptitude, he speaks of fate playing tricks on him or of things being bewitched. He never suspects that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow has qualities whose dangerousness exceeds his wildest dreams. As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual, the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated.

[479] The disastrous idea that everything comes to the human psyche from outside and that it is born a *tabula rasa* is responsible for the erroneous belief that under normal circumstances the individual is in perfect order. He then looks to the State for salvation, and makes society pay for his inefficiency. He thinks the meaning of existence would be discovered if food and clothing were delivered to him gratis on his own doorstep, or if everybody possessed an automobile. Such are the puerilities that rise up in place of an unconscious shadow and keep it unconscious. As a result of these prejudices, the individual feels totally dependent on his environment and loses all capacity for introspection. In this way his code of ethics is replaced by a knowledge of what is permitted or forbidden or ordered. How, under these circumstances, can one expect a soldier to subject an order received from a superior to ethical scrutiny? He has not yet made the discovery that he might be capable of spontaneous ethical impulses, and of performing them—even when no one is looking.

[480] From this point of view we can see why the myth of the trickster was preserved and developed: like many other myths, it was supposed to have a therapeutic effect. It holds the earlier low intellectual and moral level before the eyes of the more highly developed individual, so that he shall not forget how things looked yesterday. We like to imagine that something which we do not understand does not help us in any way. But that is not

always so. Seldom does a man understand with his head alone, least of all when he is a primitive. Because of its numinosity the myth has a direct effect on the unconscious, no matter whether it is understood or not. The fact that its repeated telling has not long since become obsolete can, I believe, be explained by its usefulness. The explanation is rather difficult because two contrary tendencies are at work: the desire on the one hand to get out of the earlier condition and on the other hand not to forget it.¹⁵ Apparently Radin has also felt this difficulty, for he says: "Viewed psychologically, it might be contended that the history of civilization is largely the account of the attempts of man to forget his transformation from an animal into a human being."¹⁶ A few pages further on he says (with reference to the Golden Age): "So stubborn a refusal to forget is not an accident."¹⁷ And it is also no accident that we are forced to contradict ourselves as soon as we try to formulate man's paradoxical attitude to myth. Even the most enlightened of us will set up a Christmas-tree for his children without having the least idea what this custom means, and is invariably disposed to nip any attempt at interpretation in the bud. It is really astonishing to see how many so-called superstitions are rampant nowadays in town and country alike, but if one took hold of the individual and asked him, loudly and clearly, "Do you believe in ghosts? in witches? in spells and magic?" he would deny it indignantly. It is a hundred to one he has never heard of such things and thinks it all rubbish. But in secret he is all for it, just like a jungle-dweller. The public knows very little of these things anyway, for everyone is convinced that in our enlightened society that kind of superstition has long since been eradicated, and it is part of the general convention to act as though one had never heard of such things, not to mention believing in them.

[481] But nothing is ever lost, not even the blood pact with the devil. Outwardly it is forgotten, but inwardly not at all. We act like the natives on the southern slopes of Mount Elgon, in East Africa, one of whom accompanied me part of the way into the bush. At a fork in the path we came upon a brand new "ghost trap," beautifully got up like a little hut, near the cave where he lived with his family. I asked him if he had made it. He denied it with all the signs of extreme agitation, asserting that only children would make such a "ju-ju." Whereupon he gave the hut a kick, and the whole thing fell to pieces.

[482] This is exactly the reaction we can observe in Europe today. Outwardly people are more or less civilized, but inwardly they are still primitives. Something in man is profoundly disinclined to give up his beginnings, and something else believes it has long since got beyond all that. This contradiction was once brought home to me in the most drastic manner when I was watching a “Strudel” (a sort of local witch-doctor) taking the spell off a stable. The stable was situated immediately beside the Gotthard railway line, and several international expresses sped past during the ceremony. Their occupants would hardly have suspected that a primitive ritual was being performed a few yards away.

[483] The conflict between the two dimensions of consciousness is simply an expression of the polaristic structure of the psyche, which like any other energetic system is dependent on the tension of opposites. That is also why there are no general psychological propositions which could not just as well be reversed; indeed, their reversibility proves their validity. We should never forget that in any psychological discussion we are not saying anything *about* the psyche, but that the psyche is always speaking about *itself*. It is no use thinking we can ever get beyond the psyche by means of the “mind,” even though the mind asserts that it is not dependent on the psyche. How could it prove that? We can say, if we like, that one statement comes from the psyche, is psychic and nothing but psychic, and that another comes from the mind, is “spiritual” and therefore superior to the psychic one. Both are mere assertions based on the postulates of belief.

[484] The fact is, that this old trichotomous hierarchy of psychic contents (hylic, psychic, and pneumatic) represents the polaristic structure of the psyche, which is the only immediate object of experience. The unity of our psychic nature lies in the middle, just as the living unity of the waterfall appears in the dynamic connection between above and below. Thus, the living effect of the myth is experienced when a higher consciousness, rejoicing in its freedom and independence, is confronted by the autonomy of a mythological figure and yet cannot flee from its fascination, but must pay tribute to the overwhelming impression. The figure works, because secretly it participates in the observer’s psyche and appears as its reflection, though it is not recognized as such. It is split off from his consciousness and consequently behaves like an autonomous personality. The trickster is a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior

traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually. Not always, of course, as a mythological figure, but, in consequence of the increasing repression and neglect of the original mythologems, as a corresponding projection on other social groups and nations.

[485] If we take the trickster as a parallel of the individual shadow, then the question arises whether that trend towards meaning, which we saw in the trickster myth, can also be observed in the subjective and personal shadow. Since this shadow frequently appears in the phenomenology of dreams as a well-defined figure, we can answer this question positively: the shadow, although by definition a negative figure, sometimes has certain clearly discernible traits and associations which point to a quite different background. It is as though he were hiding meaningful contents under an unprepossessing exterior. Experience confirms this; and what is more important, the things that are hidden usually consist of increasingly numinous figures. The one standing closest behind the shadow is the anima,¹⁸ who is endowed with considerable powers of fascination and possession. She often appears in rather too youthful form, and hides in her turn the powerful archetype of the wise old man (sage, magician, king, etc.). The series could be extended, but it would be pointless to do so, as psychologically one only understands what one has experienced oneself. The concepts of complex psychology are, in essence, not intellectual formulations but names for certain areas of experience, and though they can be described they remain dead and irrepresentable to anyone who has not experienced them. Thus, I have noticed that people usually have not much difficulty in picturing to themselves what is meant by the shadow, even if they would have preferred instead a bit of Latin or Greek jargon that sounds more “scientific.” But it costs them enormous difficulties to understand what the anima is. They accept her easily enough when she appears in novels or as a film star, but she is not understood at all when it comes to seeing the role she plays in their own lives, because she sums up everything that a man can never get the better of and never finishes coping with. Therefore it remains in a perpetual state of emotionality which must not be touched. The degree of unconsciousness one meets with in this connection is, to put it mildly, astounding. Hence it is practically impossible to get a man who is afraid of his own femininity to understand

what is meant by the anima.

[486] Actually, it is not surprising that this should be so, since even the most rudimentary insight into the shadow sometimes causes the greatest difficulties for the modern European. But since the shadow is the figure nearest his consciousness and the least explosive one, it is also the first component of personality to come up in an analysis of the unconscious. A minatory and ridiculous figure, he stands at the very beginning of the way of individuation, posing the deceptively easy riddle of the Sphinx, or grimly demanding answer to a “quaestio crocodilina.”¹⁹

[487] If, at the end of the trickster myth, the saviour is hinted at, this comforting premonition or hope means that some calamity or other has happened and been consciously understood. Only out of disaster can the longing for the saviour arise—in other words, the recognition and unavoidable integration of the shadow create such a harrowing situation that nobody but a saviour can undo the tangled web of fate. In the case of the individual, the problem constellated by the shadow is answered on the plane of the anima, that is, through relatedness. In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness. This gradually brings liberation from imprisonment in *ἀγνοία*, ‘unconsciousness,’²⁰ and is therefore a bringer of light as well as of healing.

[488] As in its collective, mythological form, so also the individual shadow contains within it the seed of an enantiodromia, of a conversion into its opposite.