Trickster's Way

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I first thought about Trickster over forty years ago. I was working on my Master's thesis (on a tale in the Old Norse prose *Edda*) and came across Roheim (1952). This led me, subsequently, to Jung 1954 [1972] and Radin 1972. More recently, Doniger [O'Flaherty] 1980 and 2000 have influenced my thinking.

The Eddaic tale I was working on (*Gylfagynning* 44-47) deals with the construction of a wall about Valhalla, constructed by two giants with the aid of a stallion. When the giants are nearly finished, Loki turns himself into a mare and leads the stallion astray, so that the completion date is missed and no payoff is required.

Loki, god of fire and trickster extraordinaire, is parallel to the "notorious North American Trickster. He is primarily a `he,' but he not only masquerades as a female bu actually gives birth to children. ... What his character represents, however, is a coincidence of opposites far more general than androgeny: It is primeval chaos, in which the basic social, moral, sexual, and even gross physical distinctions are yet unmade." (Doniger 1980:286f.)

(Loki, incidentally, "had such dealings with the stallion that he bore a foal, which had eight legs, and was grey, and was the fleetest horse among gods and men."[my translation])

The Trickster, of course, does not populate the primitive mind alone. Such sophisticated media as the theatre and opera are rife with Trickster's activities. Orsino, Olivia, Viola, Sebastian, and Malvolio are both subjects and objects in *Twelfth Night*; just who is who in *Marriage of Figaro* or *Fledermaus* or *Rosenkavalier* is unclear to some of the participants (and add to the problems the fact that in *Rosenkavalier* we have a female singer portraying a pubescent boy...). Eco remarked that the subject matter of semiotics was those media in which lying can occur. Certainly, most human interactions are covered by such a generalization. But modern technology has rendered our ability to lie ever simpler.

In this brief essay, I'd like to examine the Internet as a facility in which the Trickster thrives. This has been true since the beginning of networking, but has become ever-more-salient as the Net has grown. (In early 2002 there were 175 million host machines connected to the Internet; just how many individuals this represents is unclear.)

The cartoon of the dogs' conversation with the caption: "On the Internet no one knows you're a dog,"is familiar. And, of course, this is true. When you get email from "snoopy@..." you have no notion as to whether the sender is a beagle or some individual infatuated with a cartoon character. Moreover, you don't know what the remainder of the address might [really] mean. Masquerading is quite simple, as a male teenager in Israel learned in 2000, when he was lured to his death by a (presumed) Palestinian girl ... who happened to be aHamas member in her twenties.

It's not only the evil who do this. The March 20, 2002,*Austin [Texas] American Statesman* carried a headline (Section B): "How to catch a Web predator: Pose as a girl." The story began:

> Police Sgt. JeffHeyse can't get enough of the boy bands and Britney Spears. The lyrics, their new looks, who's dating whom -- he wants to know it all.
>
> In his assumed role as a 12-year-old girl, that information is an essential tool for him to "get in character" and catch the predators who are targeting children on the Internet. ...

But there are many other aspects of note: spoofing being a good example. There are several kinds of spoofing, but all depend upon a malefactor pretending to be at an Internet address other than his/her own.

On the basis of these, I proffer the Internet as Trickster instantiated.

Spoofing and posing as a 12-year old girl are not all. For example, in 2000-2001 Marcus Arnold was the Number 1 legal advisor onAskMe, a Web site created in 1999 by former Microsoft employees. In February 2000 it openedaskme.com, a site which soon became the most-heavily used knowledge exchange on the Web.

Marcus was popular, authoritative, and 15. He had acquired his knowledge from watching Court TV. After many months, he confessed and was vilified. He hadn't practised in any legal sense; he had accepted no fees. He had lived out a sort of nostalgic dream.

On 14 February 2002, the *New York Times* carried a feature article about Cole Bartiromo, a teenager in trouble with the Securities and Exchange Commission. http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/technology/AP-Cyberscam-Teens.html

> Like a typical teen-ager, ColeBartiromo played baseball and listened to rap music.
>
> He was also a whiz when it came to the Internet, but that got him in trouble with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.
>
> Law enforcement officials say the Orange County high school student is like a growing number of his peers -- teens who use the Internet to pull of

everything from securities fraud to identity theft.

"We have seen a rise in the crimes, with an increasing degree of sophistication by a younger demographic," said FBI agent Frank Harrill of the Los Angeles cybercrime squad.

Last month, the Securities and Exchange Commission filed a civil complaint against Bartiromo, 17, alleging he raised more than $1 million by selling what he described as "risk-free" investments in which he pooled investors' funds to bet on sporting events.

The boys, ages 14 to 16, obtained the credit card numbers by allegedly tricking people into transmitting their account information over the Internet.

In 2000, 15-year-old Jonathan Lebed of Cedar Grove, N.J., faced only civil action for manipulating stocks in what federal authorities called a "pump and dump" scheme.

"The federal government is just not set up to deal with" prosecuting children, said Howard Friedman, who heads the Cybersecurity Law Institute at the University of Toledo in Ohio.

In addition to repaying the money, Bartiromo also was expected to file an accounting of his actions, outlining how he set up the investment program and how much money came in, SEC officials said.

The very next day, *USA Today* reported:
http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/tech/2002/02/14/cyberterrorism.htm

RESPONSE TO CYBERATTACK ON U.S. COULD INCLUDE MILITARY ACTION

White House technology advisor Richard Clarke told a Senate Judiciary subcommittee that a cyberattack on the United States would be answered "in any appropriate way: through covert action, through military action, any one of the tools available to the president." Clarke pointed out that a serious cyberattack is almost inevitable from the nation's enemies, because it is cheaper and easier than a physical attack. Senator Charles Schumer (D, NY) pointed out the potentially serious consequences of a successful attack over the Internet: "A well-planned and well-executed cyberattack wouldn't just mean the temporary loss of e-mail and instant messaging. Terrorists could gain access to the digital controls for the nation's utilities, power grids, air traffic control systems and nuclear power plants." (AP/USA Today 14 Feb 2002)

What stories like this fail to mention is that the SEC hammer isn't all that big. Lebed's case is well known; less well known: the SEC allowed him to keep $500,000 of his ill-gotten profits.

On a totally different level, on 10 May 2002,Crist J. Clark <crist.clark@attbi.com> posted:

> I was stuck in a dial-up-only hell for a few months and used quite a bit of Earthlink dial-up. I during that time, I did a variety of tinkering of the email headers (like masquerading envelopes). It sure didn't seem to me tha Earthlink cared at all what domain was in the return path. Their SMTP servers would relay **anything** provided you're source IP was in their IP-space.
>
> So, AFAIK, you can do whatever you want with respect to outgoing mail (any source domain in the envelope or headers that you want) and Earthlink's SMTP servers will relay it.

You can be whoever you want to be. You can have any job you want. You can be anywhere you want.

Security? Identity? Confidentiality? Don't be silly.

In the 21 January 2002 *InfoWorld*, Brian Livingston estimated that there were 10 million machines running Microsoft's IIS (Internet Information Software) that might "become 'zombies' ... due to XP's security hole" (p. 39).

That's the Internet.

Ha, ha, ha!

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