

### The Joker's Cycle

This paper is a structural sketch of the joker figure as he appears in various representations. Whether he takes on the shape of a mythical or folkloristic figure, or is incarnated as a professional entertainer, some very basic similarities are present, such as his ambiguous nature and, consequently, his mediating potential. We shall in the course of the exposition point to such similarities, and to some of the transformations that take place between the actual manifestations.

The cast includes the trickster, the clown, and the court jester, but first in order of appearance is the culture hero.

#### The Culture Hero

It may not be an obvious choice to classify mythical culture heroes as 'jokers'; the culture hero is not usually conceived of as a funny figure. Our classification is, however, based on the fact that he may be said to fulfil the same role in the cultural system as does the joker in a pack of cards: he can complete any set and finish any game; he brings fire when that is lacking to complete a human setting, or he brings and blesses weapons where these are needed in defense of the cultural game.

The culture hero is able to play King as well as Queen, yet he remains the Joker. The source of his creative powers is not to be sought in any ambiguity of his person; it is found in the fact that he occupies an ambiguous position in the myths of creation. His creativity is thus extrinsic to his person, he is a complete being in himself, and in that sense he is divine. We should note at this point that the kind of creation in which the culture hero is involved is not so much a beginning as it is a transition. It is a transformation from an amorphous, non-human condition to a well known, well formed living reality. Since the culture hero operates with and in transition, he is usually distinguished from an unambiguous creator-god. He is divine but he makes things this-worldly and so secures social reality. From one angle he must be regarded as the cultural being par excellence, from another angle he is God (which in a Durkheimian frame of reference amounts to much the same anyway).

As a mythical figure the culture hero is of worldwide distribution. In so far as we may say that all myths are myths of origin (i.e. they deal with contemporary conditions which are said to have originated under specific circumstances in illo tempore), it is not surprising that the distribution of the culture hero as a cultural joker-transformer should be extensive. Reading one's way for example through the Mythologiques of Levi-Strauss (1964-71) involves a constant encounter with American variants of this figure. We shall here take as our example the Indonesian character Panji; the attributes given to him and the total setting in which he plays his role are aptly documented by Rassers (1959). Panji possesses all the qualities of a culture hero: he is the bringer of cultural goods, the divine mediator on earth. Apparently Panji suffered a kind of degradation in the course of the evolution of the cosmological system; once he embraced sky and earth but now his earthly nature seems to be the most stressed. However, 'upon closer examination we see that in his human form he was god all the same' (p. 296). This may be taken as evidence to the point made above that the culture hero remains the same, only his position changes. It was this fact which originally made us classify the culture hero as a joker: He is a figure who possesses (indeed is)

an admission card to any trick, yet he need not be either tricky or funny by himself. This permanence through transition is reflected in the fact that he is unequivocally an apotheosis of the social.

In the case of Panji he is a symbol of the patrilineal principle, the supreme male ancestor. A consideration of Panji's close connection with the Javanese kris may illustrate this feature and also provide some clues to the significance of Panji in the everyday life of the Javanese people. The kris, which is a kind of dagger, is a mystical object, but it certainly has a very real importance through the peculiar role it plays in the life of the individual man and of the community as a whole. It was invented and first worn by Panji, who also invented the Javanese theatre; the genetic relationship between the Wayang shadow play and the kris is owed to the fact that they are 'children of the same father' (p. 220). In passing we should like to note that Panji also created the Gamelan orchestra, thereby ensuring the percussion to accompany the transition, i.e. the creation of socio-cultural values (cf. Needham 1967). The kris is the only weapon that Panji will handle, and in fact most of his supernatural powers are vested in the kris as the powers of the Norse Thor were vested in his hammer.

Panji stories are also dramatized and form part of the performances of the Wayang shadow plays, the scene of which coincides with the men's house. When a blacksmith makes a kris, as he often does since every man is supposed to possess one, the smithy is for the purpose ritually transformed into the same kind of scene. 'The workshop of the kris smith and the area within which the adventures of Panji should be acted are essentially the same' (Rassers 1959:225). In an abstract sense the kris is an emblem of the whole community, being a metonymic representation of Panji. But the kris is also a very real object. It is individually owned, and it must be shaped in accordance with the character of its owner; any one kris will not suit any man. It follows that a man has an intimate relationship with his kris; not only does it make him complete culturally, some will add a physical dimension, too, by regarding the kris as replacing the left rib that man is supposed to be in lack of. The kris is a materialization of the eternally living culture hero himself, and through the possession of this dagger, made in 'the house of Panji', a man becomes one with his divine ancestor.

Panji is decidedly a male ancestor, and the kris is unequivocally a male symbol, it is the masculine goods par excellence. The female counterpart of Panji is named Dewa Sri who is the spinner of cloth, the principal female goods. The front of the Javanese house is devoted to the male principles, notably Panji, while the inner part is female. Paradoxically the family kris'es are kept in the inner part of the house, so we note that though sexually unambiguous the kris - and hence Panji - may occupy different positions in the sex-symbolic universe. The joker can play both King and Queen, as it were.

In general, the Indonesian reality is a beautiful example of the congruence between the social, the symbolic, and the cosmological to the extent that it becomes almost meaningless to maintain the distinction between these spheres. In the case of Panji he certainly mediates such analytical categories since he encompasses the individual's experience of past and present, here and there, self and others, human and god in a simultaneity. This is the supreme power of the joker as culture hero. He does the trick.

### The Trickster

We shall start this section by mentioning some transformations that take place from culture hero to trickster. In the first place we note that where the culture hero is an apotheosis of the cultural human being, the trickster is a humanization of sacred cosmological values. The diacritical feature of the trickster as opposed to the culture hero is that of his intrinsic ambiguity. He is both human and animal, man and woman, good and bad. This is clearly in contradistinction to the 'complete' being of the culture hero. The trickster is a tricky one, whereas the culture hero completes a trick. In terms of creation (i.e. transition) we see the trickster embodying the transition itself while the culture hero brought it about. The culture hero moves from the other world to this world with a strong personal integrity while the trickster stands with one leg in each world, integrating their aspects into one person. It is a permanent transcendence as opposed to the transitive permanence of the culture hero.

It is by virtue of his intrinsic ambiguity that the trickster is always a source of laughter. In his very figure universes collide continuously, and this collision of universes entails the humorous effect (Milner 1972). In some societies, notably the Amerindian and Indonesian, the trickster is also a mediator between social spheres in the sense that he mediates the opposites of the dual social organization. This latter point becomes pertinent in relation to the Winnebago trickster who is one of the best documented tricksters of all (Radin 1956).

The Winnebago word for trickster is wakdjunkaga which is taken to mean 'the tricky one', but this is in all probability just an inference from a proper name since there is no etymological, or comparative, evidence that it should 'really' mean this (p. 132). The surrounding tribes name him differently, and there are between these other names clearly etymological connections. For the present purpose we shall only mention the Dakota name, ikto-mi which means spider. This is a striking equivalent to the name of the Zande trickster which is Ture, also meaning spider (Evans-Pritchard 1967:20). Evans-Pritchard records an informant telling that 'the character has the name Ture because he was so clever, like the spider which can make a web out of itself' (ibid: 23).

This is a powerful image. The trickster-spider makes a web from intrinsic sources, but these creative powers do not ensure him against being a captive of his very own web. The suspension is also a trap; this is part of the joke. Spiders are ambiguous animals, and tricksters are spiders in this sense. Their ambiguity entails a certain kind of classificatory danger, and as Leach (1964) has pointed out the typical reaction to taboo categories can either be joking or refusal of recognition. In the case of the trickster joking prevails. He is certainly a funny character, and the humanization of the cosmological values and problems he represents occasions relief and laughter where confusion and terror might have dominated. This mediating function is apparently also carried out in the animal manifestations of the figure, as demonstrated by Levi-Strauss' discussion of the logic of myth on the basis of American tricksters' transformation into coyote and raven (1955). Even transplanted into alien cultural settings the humorous properties of the trickster persist, which again lends evidence to the point that the trickster's joking potential is intrinsic to him, as opposed to that of the culture hero whose joker job is done by a change of position rather than a switch of attributes.

Even though we are able to conceive of the culture hero and the trickster as opposed in various ways we should not overlook the similarities that also exist. Both figures are 'mythical', or at least they belong to an oral (and sometimes to a literary) tradition. The personifications are not of the material world, and in fact they belong to the same level of collective representations to the point where they may even conflate; the trickster and the culture hero are sometimes just 'aspects' of one and the same named character. The Zande trickster is a case in point. He is mainly a trickster with all that this involves in terms of inherent ambiguity etc., but he can also act as a culture hero: in the first three tales (Evans-Pritchard 1967) he brings food, water, and fire, respectively. Panji, the Javanese culture hero, may act as a trickster as well, and we find a still better documented merging of the distinct personae among the Winnebago and related tribes; the Hare figure here combines both aspects to the extent that he defies labelling as either trickster or culture hero (Radin 1956).

Even if the particular joker characters may conflate in specific instances, we shall like to keep the categories of trickster and culture hero distinct. This is of course related to our method of presentation upon which we shall make some comments in the concluding paragraph.

As a genre of narrative the trickster tales are distinct, too. In relation to a brief consideration of Propp's Morphology of the Folktale Evans-Pritchard notes that 'it might be said that there is only one theme in the Ture tales, that of the trick' (1967:32), and this theme is acted out in a variety of plots and incidents. The theme is universal, also when considered in a more truly 'structural' way in terms of transformations, oppositions, and mediations, yet the gallery of persons and incidents are culture specific. Despite the common theme - the trick - there is an interesting difference between the Winnebago trickster stories and the Zande tales. The Winnebago stories, namely, built up a cycle, whereas the Zande tales do not. It is difficult to tell, Evans-Pritchard states, which of the Zande stories are versions and which are different tales because they are told in a rather haphazard manner. This should be seen in relation to the apparently more 'sacred' character of the Winnebago trickster stories; they can only be narrated by certain people who have the right to do so, whereas every Zande may tell the Ture stories, provided the sun has set. The comparison indicates that the Wakdjunkaga stories of the Winnebago are closer to the category myth than are the Ture stories which would rather be classified as folktales. Such a classification is not only based upon a consideration of relative sacredness, since this is always somewhat dubious, it is also, and especially, founded upon stylistic features. The Zande tales are told to children as bedtime stories, and they will as a matter of course be provided with a fixed ending, which is a characteristic of the (more literary) tradition of folktales. Although a piece of nonsense in relation to the story itself, the definitive ending fixes the story in time and space, a feature not found in myths. The genres to some extent overlap, but we should note the differences of our particular examples since they are matched by differences in the actual content of the stories. The Wakdjunkaga stories are in the main constructed upon stronger oppositions than are the Ture tales, the former being primarily universal and cosmological, the latter comparatively moral and local (cf. Levi-Strauss 1960:134). Naturally, a number of the oppositions found in the Winnebago trickster stories must be local as well, but the overall concern of the narratives is still of a more culture transcending nature than is that of the Zande tales.

We shall therefore rely for our main example of the trickster's mediating and joking capacities on the Winnebago material, and we shall relate briefly two of the Wakdjunkaga plots since these so admirably provide some clues to the trickster's tour in the joker's cycle. First

there is the battle of right and left: Trickster had killed a buffalo and was engaged in the process of skinning it, making use of his right arm.

"In the midst of these operations suddenly his left arm grabbed the buffalo. 'Give that back to me, it is mine! Stop that or I will use my knife on you!' So spoke the right arm. 'I will cut you into pieces, that is what I will do to you', continued the right arm. Thereupon the left arm released its hold. But shortly after, the left arm again grabbed hold of the right arm. This time it grabbed hold of his wrist just at the moment that the right arm had commenced to skin the buffalo. Again and again this was repeated. In this manner did Trickster make both his arms quarrel. The quarrel soon turned into a vicious fight and the left arm was badly cut up. 'Oh, oh! Why did I do this? Why have I done this? I have made myself suffer!' The left arm was indeed bleeding profusely." (Radin 1956:8)

Obviously, when considering that the Winnebago have a dual organization, the right-left opposition can be seen to be a local fight, but the more universal symbolic load of this pair is also well known and well documented (Needham 1973).

As the fight between right and left took place within Trickster, so is also another opposition, the male/female, embodied in his person: It was getting towards winter, and Trickster was looking for a place to live comfortably during the hard times together with his 'younger brothers', the fox, the jaybird, and the nit. Trickster said

"Listen. There is a village yonder, where they are enjoying great blessings. The chief has a son who is killing many animals. He is not married yet but is thinking of it. Let us go over there. I will disguise myself as a woman and marry him. Thus we can live in peace until spring comes.' 'Good!' they ejaculated. All were willing and delighted to participate.

Trickster now took an elk's liver and made a vulva from it. Then he took some elk's kidneys and made breasts from them. Finally he put on a woman's dress. In this dress his friends enclosed him very firmly. The dresses he was using were those that the woman who had taken him for a racoon had given him. He now stood there transformed into a very pretty woman indeed. Then he let the fox have intercourse with him and make him pregnant, then the jaybird and, finally, the nit. After that he proceeded toward the village." (Radin 1956:22-23)

He was eventually married to the chief's son and gave birth to three sons in succession. Of course the trickery could not go on, and when the true identity of the chief's son's wife was finally revealed, 'the men were all ashamed, especially the chief's son (ibid:24). Trickster, the fox, the jaybird, and the nit then fled from the village, and Trickster went to live with the woman to whom he was really married and by whom he had a son; and for a while he settled down to live an ordinary family life.

These two stories are abundant illustrations of Bastide's point about the semantic richness of the trickster figure as well as of laughter in general (197).

By way of concluding this section we shall argue that it is useful to make a firm analytical distinction between the trickster as a character in specific narratives and the trickster seen as a

category. As a category the trickster is a distinctive manifestation of the joker, a humorously ambiguous creature, a cosmological buffoon. As a character he is far less distinct, to the extent that particular representations may mediate the categories. We have already mentioned the merging of trickster and culture hero in the Winnebago Hare figure, and it seems that Radin's problems of deciding where in the North American Indian myths he encounters a trickster, and where a culture hero stem from the fact that he does not distinguish between character and category.<sup>1</sup> As far as the North American Indian mythology in general is concerned we should probably have to be content to label the various characters 'trickster-fixer-transformer-hero' (Ricketts 1966) and in each case find out what aspects are prevalent. But for wider structural comparisons we find it more helpful to single out the categorical elements of trickster and culture hero as we did in the beginning of this section by listing a number of inversions that take place from one category to the other.

### The Clown

Having considered the culture hero and the trickster as joker figures belonging to certain kinds of narratives we shall now proceed to take a look at jokers in flesh and blood, and we shall start with the clown.

The terminological conflation that was found in respect to culture heroes and tricksters almost becomes a confusion when clowns are considered. We find 'clowns' in circuses, in the theatre, and in rituals, but we are left in doubt as to what are the features that justify the assignment of the label clown to them all. Ortiz (1969) in his analysis of Tewa cosmology speaks of the ritual obligations of ceremonial clowns but leaves us wondering what, for instance, such clowns look like, or how, and why, and if, they are funny; at the same time he repudiates others for sticking the label clown to characters which are not, according to him, clowns at all (p. 77). Ritual clowns are frequently reported from other groups in the American southwest as well, but we shall here concentrate on clown figures as they are found at occasions of rather more plain entertainment. Our point of departure, then, will be a conception of the clown as being a comic figure in some kind of public performance who fools about and jokes, usually, at the expense of his fellow performers and/or himself. The clown is funny, however, primarily because he is a clown and not so much because he performs in a circus or a theatre. As in the case of the trickster the comic potential of the clown can be said to lie in qualities intrinsic to his person.

Peacock's study (1968, 1971) of Javanese popular drama provides a case in which the role of the clown must be understood - much like that of the trickster - as that of a cosmological joker.<sup>2</sup> Although the Javanese ludruk plays are concerned, on a surface sociological level, with the class antagonism, Peacock (1971:57) points out that the actions of the clown can only be appreciated by reference to cosmological categories: by his comments the clown - in the shape of a servant in the play - effects a collision of the cosmological categories alus and kasar ('elite' and 'folk'), and madju and kuna ('progressive' and 'conservative'). The clown's marginal position and mediating capacity is stressed over and over again in the plays:

"The clown is an outsider to the story-society whose categories he reveals. In the stories the clown plays a celibate, family-less, infantile, orally-focused, age-less servant in a society whose citizens marry, form families, act grown-up, are genitally-focused, and age... The clown's spatial domain is the stage's

edge, where he is an onlooker to the stage-citizens living their lives in the center" (ibid:161)

The European tradition of the clown took its shape during the Renaissance, in the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, the popular comedy in which a number of stock characters to a certain extent improvised over a series of skeleton plots. The plots are not unlike those of the Javanese ludruk plays. In addition to the young lovers and a couple of old men who, frequently in their capacity of father or husband of the heroine, presented obstacles to the love affair, the plays invariably featured two or more comic servants or zanni who were so to speak the dynamic forces of the plot. All the Commedia dell'Arte characters were named: Columbina, the heroine, Pantalone, the husband or father, Il Dottore, his neighbouring friend or enemy; the word zanni was occasionally employed as a personal name, other comic servants being Pedrolino, Pulchinella, and Arlecchino. To all these names, and to quite a few others as well, were assigned individual personalities. The latter name and personality, that of Arlecchino, or Harlequin, merits our special attention. Not only did he become the favourite among the audiences (especially when the Italian Commedia dell'Arte companies became popular in Paris where they, because of the language difficulty, had to rely more upon individual characters than upon the intrigue), but according to Nicoll he is outstanding as far as personality is concerned:

"Harlequin exists in a mental world wherein concepts of morality have no being, and yet, despite such absence of morality, he displays no viciousness... In contradistinction from many of his companions, too, he exhibits no malice. Another character who has been cheated or insulted will bear a grudge and seek means for securing revenge; only rarely does Harlequin behave this way. ...Maybe a partial explanation of this quality may be traced to another aspect of his nature - his inability to think of more than one thing at a time or, rather, his refusal to consider the possible consequences of an immediate action. He gets an idea; it seems to him at the moment a good one; gaily he applies it, and, no matter what scrape it leads him into, he never gains from his experience: one minute later he will be merrily pursuing another thought, equally calculated to lead him into embarrassment" (1963:70). "Rarely does he initiate an intrigue, but he is adroit in wriggling out of an awkward situation. Although he may seem a fool, he displays a very special quickness of mind, and allied to that, there is evident in him a sense of fun" (ibid:72)

It seems relevant to quote Nicoll at this length, not only because we get a good description of Harlequin's personality, but also because the description applies very precisely to the trickster figure as well.

There are other facts which may be taken as evidence of Harlequin's trickster-like nature. In the Commedia dell'Arte tradition each character was associated with a particular part of Italy; Pantalone was a Venetian, Il Dottore was from Florence, etc., and although Arlecchino was said to be of Bergamese extraction, he is unique in having accomplished to have historians bestow him with a quite different and older origin. He appeared, namely, in the belief of the early Middle Ages as the leader of the 'Harlechin Family', a group of ghosts whose nocturnal procession was known as the Wild Hunt. As repeated encounters with the the Harlequin Family apparently proved them to be fairly harmless, 'the wailing procession of lost souls turned into a troupe of comic demons' (Welsford 1961:292). The supernatural aspects of

Harlequin, however, persisted to a certain extent, for in a couple of French poems from 1585 he is depicted as a kind of diabolic acrobat who 'is not angry at being regarded as a devil, but does object to being described as a disreputable buffoon' (ibid:295). His appearance also supports the impression of his special, almost semi-human nature: the extraordinary agility of his movements, his 'strutting' way of walking, and his hat decorated with an animal's tail suggest his animality; the black mask on his face and the bat in his hand suggest the demonical. He is marginal to the extent that on stage he is frequently invisible to Pantalone and to his fellow zanni. An incident from 'real life' should also be mentioned. Welsford relates that on one occasion in the late 17th century Paris Harlequin appeared

"with one half of him disguised as a female laundress, and the other half as a masculine seller of lemonade, his pantomimic skill culminating in the scene where he made his two halves appear to fight with one another" (1961:298),

an act which begs the comparison with the trickster's adventures referred to above.

The structural similarities between Harlequin and the Winnebago Trickster also extend to their 'biographies': In relation to their original commissions both characters failed; Trickster was originally sent by Earthmaker to help man fight against evil beings, but he failed so completely that not even Earthmaker could rehabilitate him (Radin 1956:145). Harlequin was originally deemed by God to be a wandering ghost, but he was unable to uphold his image as a devil and was welcomed by us as a comic figure. Their personalities became their fate.

Just as criteria of morality do not apply to Trickster and Harlequin, we can say that neither do criteria of intelligence; and this also sets Harlequin somewhat apart from his comic colleagues in the Commedia dell'Arte: Pedrolino (Pierrot) and Pulchinella (Punch) 'are at bottom "fools", that is to say subnormal men who please by the exhibition of stupidity and insensibility' (Welsford 1961: 304).

The latter characters fit better the general idea of typical circus clowns, and although we may also find clowns exhibiting Harlequin-like features in present day travelling circuses,<sup>3</sup> we shall argue that circus clowns are essentially of the "fool" variety, and that they are generally of two varieties: The one, the 'white clown', seems a fairly direct descendant of the French Pierrot; solitary, pathetic, frequently substituting music for speech, and with an added touch of transvestism and viciousness. The other (who could possibly be traced back to Pulchinella) is the ridiculous buffoon in the ill-fitting garment, joyful, sociable, and immensely foolish. Each of them is by himself a comic figure, but the interplay between them makes the scene complete, because it exhibits contrasting forms of folly: The excessive splendour of clothes and make-up of the transvestite versus the complete disregard of proportions in the appearance of the largely asexual buffoon; the pathetic insistence on solitude versus the obtrusive sociability; the astute cunning versus the happy, innocent buffoonery.

The viciousness of the white clown may be an outcome of his self-righteousness which may alternatively be expressed in mere sadness. His sexual ambiguity need not be very explicit, either. Both he and perhaps more frequently the other clown display, however, another kind of ambiguity in that they may transgress the boundary between the circus ring and the audience. In fact the principal role of the clown is often that of filling the intervals between other acts, directing our attention away from the changing of equipment etc.; only clowns could conceivably perform while the sawdust was being cleaned of elephants' dung.



This leads us to consider a more theoretical point related to the clown. We shall argue that the clown is essentially a 'muted' figure.<sup>4</sup> The expression 'muted' in this context does not necessarily mean that the characters are actually prevented from speaking; it is a structural concept pertaining to the fact that alongside the dominant structure of any social configuration there exist one or more other structures which the dominant structure prevents from being 'realised', hence their 'mutedness'. The fact that clowns may be said to be in a structurally 'muted' position has a very palpable dimension to it. The primary concern of a circus community will naturally be that of attending the animals and maintaining the equipment of acrobats and jongleurs. This fact plus the necessity of continuous rehearsals and exercises in order to maintain and improve the standard of the most demanding acts have as a result that circus life is more or less dominated by the concern for these acts. This practical dimension is, however, just a correlate to the categorical characteristics of the clown, and the model of dominant and subordinate structures has the advantage that it allows us to look at the problems on a higher level of abstraction. The subordinate position of clowns is expressed very directly in their performances. We noted above that the white clown seldom speaks but expresses himself in music. The 'mutedness' of the white clown is even sometimes doubly stressed; not only is he as a clown member of a muted group but his musical activity is frequently suppressed by the continuous interventions of his fellow performer, the buffoon. The buffoon does speak, but his speech is almost invariably addressed to the audience and not to fellow performers.

Peacock mentioned the marginal position of the clowns in the Javanese ludruk plays, and he points out that also there may the clown mediate the gap between the stage and the audience by addressing the latter; for example by suddenly saying to one of the other actors, 'Sssh, somebody is listening!', and when asked, 'Who?', he will answer, 'Them!', pointing to the audience (1971:161).

The historical origins of the pantomime of Harlequin and others are to be found in 17th century Paris. At that time the Commedia dell'Arte figures were performing with great success at fairs on the outskirts of Paris. However, the monopoly of comedy lay with members of the Comedie Francaise who were jealous of the success of their popular colleagues at the fairs. The Comedie Francaise therefore enforced its monopoly by having other performers forbidden to use dialogue, and Harlequin consequently had to resort to pantomime (Welsford 1961:298-299). We should note that even though the popular actors were suppressed through the prevention of use of actual speech, this is also an expression of the structural phenomenon of dominance and subordination. The dominant structure was that of the bourgeois Comedie Francaise who in a very real sense muted the structurally subordinate popular comedy as it was found in marginal suburban settings. The relative structural position of the two kinds of public performance is not unlike that of the position of the theatre and the travelling circus today.

Ultimately the clown may mediate even the gap between the popular and the elite performance, namely when he succeeds in turning the craft of working with cliches into an 'art'. That he may accomplish such a feat is evidence, once more, of the fact that the joking powers of the clown are intrinsic to his person. When such a mediation takes place, we are, however, leaving the category of the anonymous role player and moving towards the individual star performer; where the former lends his person to enact a stereotype, the latter is exploiting a stereotype to embody his personality. The names of Grimaldi and Grock are thus more closely related to that of Charlie Chaplin than they are

to their innumerable colleagues in the travelling circuses. When the anonymous clown becomes a Grock, when the teller of folktales becomes a Hans Anderson, when the fiddler becomes a violin virtuoso, etc., we are to some extent leaving collective representations behind and social anthropology must for the present give way to disciplines specially designed for the analysis of these various arts.

### The Court Jester

Harlequin has been with us at least since the 16th century and he has changed but little in the course of the centuries. His appearance and personality combined into a powerful symbol and even though his tricks are not much in demand these days he has remained a 'trickster'. Clowns in various guises are found everywhere and at all times. The comic effect of both Harlequin and all kinds of clowns is due to qualities vested in these persons themselves. We shall argue that, in contrast, the comic powers of the court jester, or court fool, rest mainly in his position rather than in his person. As opposed to the clown the court jester is an element in the dominant structure; he may be subhuman, indeed even dumb, but his position prevents him from being structurally 'muted'.

The court jester had his heyday in the 15th and 16th centuries and vanished quickly afterwards. Even so, the jester in cap and bells is our stereotype of the joker today. He has become a symbol much like Harlequin, but, unlike Harlequin and any clown, in his living life he could never exist in his own right. He was kept more or less as a domestic animal and was evidently regarded as such by his master. Sometimes princes would temporarily exchange fools, and they

"regarded a compliment to their fool as a compliment to themselves, and took a pride in possessing rare specimens of folly or deformity" (Welsford 1961:137).

In Levi-Strauss' terms (1966) the jester would be classed as a metonymical non-human being, and it would not matter what kind of folly or deformity made him non-human; dwarf, idiot, or lunatic - any freak would do because any freak could fill the role of the 'fool'. The filling of this role was necessary in order that the ruler could set off his own infallibility and the divine nature of his office. As an individual character the 'fool' may have much in common with the clown, but in the case of the 'fool' the joke lies primarily in the relationship with the ruler. The ruler, in principle the perfect, divinely installed being, is placed in juxtaposition with the fool characterized by his infra-cultural deficiencies (cf. Milner 1972:25). However, to complete the joke and to establish the category court jester as distinct from individual 'fools', a further component should be added. We used to think about the court jester not so much as a babbling idiot but rather as a sort of adviser to the ruler. Lowie said that 'a man's jokers are also his moral censors' (1949:95), and this seems to be especially true in the case of the court jester; the jester with (and because of) his infra-cultural deficiencies was permitted to point out moral, political, and other short-comings in the principally infallible ruler who, in his turn, could afford to take the comments seriously because they were made in jest. As long as the divine nature of kingship was unquestioned the jester had to be there, but 'when the divinity that hedges a king was broken down the fool lost his freedom, his joke and the reason for his existence' (Welsford 1961:195).

A specific instance is worth mentioning. Cardinal Richelieu was known to disapprove strongly of Louis XIII's jester; his dislike of the man can be seen not only as a personal affair, but almost as a structural necessity, for we see the following significant transformations take place: The divine king gave way to the ecclesiastic in pursuit of worldly power; and the king's merry jester, dressed in motley and working indirectly (namely in jest), but openly, gave way to the cardinal's 'Grey Eminence', an austere, colourless personage who worked directly, but secretly.

In his capacity of adviser to the king and commentator on his actions the jester bears resemblance to the Norse skjald and the Celtic bard, and a skilful and loyal jester could be of great political value. We may get an impression of his various functions as early as in an episode in the Beowulf epic. Beowulf and his followers were seated at a banquet in their honour at the Danish court before the slaying of the monster Grendel. At a certain time Unferth, son of Ecglaf, 'who sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings', started challenging Beowulf about some allegedly unsuccessful and slightly disreputable adventure of his. Beowulf rejoined by giving his own extended and rehabilitating account of the incident and accusing Unferth of being the slayer of his brothers. After that 'there was glad laughter among the warriors', the King was evidently pleased and the Queen could assume her duties as a hostess. A jester, Unferth was certainly no fool; rather we should see him as an intelligencer. By seizing upon the only point in the hero's career that was still obscure to him he got the information he (and the King) wanted and, by giving the hero a chance to rehabilitate himself, he at the same time ensured that the hero was purified before his confrontation with the monster - plus he made the audience laugh. All that was no little diplomatic achievement for which he received only a curse from Beowulf.<sup>5</sup>

The jester is here also acting as a ritual purifier, a capacity that all jokers may possibly share (cf. Douglas 1968:372-73). Not only could the jester as a purifier redress cosmological irregularities but he was commonly employed as a healer of physical ailments as well. There are many stories of a prince being ill, all sorts of medicines were applied in vain, but when the jester came along and gave a performance the prince was immediately cured. In the capacity of healer the jester bears some resemblance to the culture hero, the healer-fixer who could set things right and complete the cultural setting.

The association of comedy and healing is by no means confined to court jesters. The legend of circus is full of incidents where members of the audience were made well because of a good laugh at the clown. Early 17th century Paris was full of troupes of jugglers performing in the streets.

"In most cases the street-performers were attached to some herb dealer or medicine man who promised to cure any and all ills. At times a single opérateur - the term usually applied to the street manipulators of jokes and nostrums - did the stunts and sold the medicaments" (Wiley 1960:70-71).

These were the original charlatans, and both the acting and the medical professions were equally jealous of the success of their medicine shows.

We have mentioned that the office of the court jester ceased to exist when the king lost his divine aspects, but we should also note how an individual jester might end his life. A seemingly wandering story of the death of a jester goes like this: The prince was ill with fever and the jester decided that he ought to be cooled, so he threw him into the cold stream. Momentarily the prince was somewhat shocked and he condemned the jester to death for that improvident trick, 'and although there was no intention of carrying out the punishment the unfortunate fellow died of shock' (Welsford 1961:129-30). He died while operating as a healer, but he died because the prince for once assumed his role. Just as the jester's joking powers were vested in his relationship with his master his proper death ~~was~~ caused by a disorder in that relationship.

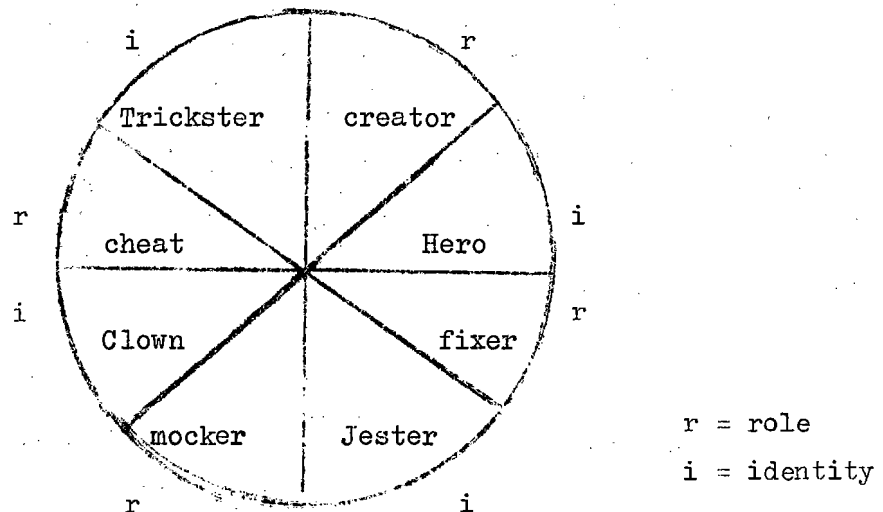
### Conclusions

Though the office of the court jester, and hence the individual jester characters died out, the category persists as part of our collective representations. We shall return to the categories below, but first we must emphasize the fact that in specific instances it may be impossible to class an individual character as for example either jester or clown. In more general terms we note that at the moment we focus on characters rather than categories we perceive an undulating series of similarities and differences between culture heroes, tricksters, clowns, and jesters; the cycle becomes truly circular. We saw how Harlequin - and by virtue of his transvestism the white clown - was like the trickster who in turn could play the role of either clown (the buffoon) or culture hero (the creator). As for the jester he may, as an individual character, be indistinguishable from the clown since they may both play the role of a merry buffoon while as a healer the jester aligns himself with the culture hero (the fixer). Comparing Harlequin with the court jester Welsford makes the following comments:

"Unlike the fool in cap and bells, he (Harlequin) can tap no hidden source of mysterious wisdom or unworldly knowledge. The fool had his niche in a divinely planned order of society, to whose dependent, ephemeral and often corrupt character it was his function to bear witness. Harlequin, on the other hand, was wholly a creature of make-believe, without background, and therefore without either religious significance or subversive tendencies" (1961:303).

On the other hand, an individual Harlequin figure could put on a trickster-like performance, as related above, or he could play the court jester for a while, as when Harlequin-Tristano Martinelli and his troupe paid their respects to Henry IV in Paris; Harlequin managed to get himself into the King's chair, and speaking to the King he said, 'Very well, Arlequin, you and your troupe have come here to amuse me; I am delighted that you have, I promise to protect you and give you a good pension, and other things too' (quoted by Wiley 1960:27-28).

These comparisons are little more than just summaries of some of the points already made, but we should like to draw attention to the circularity of the similarities and differences that have been demonstrated. Keeping in mind that we are still focusing on the characters we may represent their interconnections in the following model.



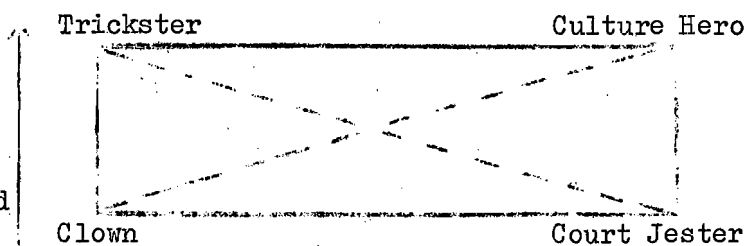
This model allows us to see how the roles of the individual characters may mediate the identities ascribed to them. Obviously, it is not the roles per se which define the characters. A culture hero can be a creator as well as a fixer but he is never a cheat or a mocker, as is the trickster who may be a creator-cheat, or the jester who may act as a fixer-mocker, etc. Rather the characters are identified by the specific scenes or settings in which they play their roles as jokers.

The scene for the clown's performance is the stage or the circus ring; the court jester naturally performs in court. The scene for the trickster's adventures is the mythical representation of a particular society; the trickster takes as objects for his joking the very customs and institutions of that society. If the trickster is operating in 'society', we may say that the culture hero operates in 'cosmos'; he brings fire, food, water, weapons, etc. into 'society' from outside, never being confined to an unequivocal place within it.

When we shift the focus of our inquiry from characters to categories the concern for circulating similarities and differences of roles must give way to considerations of distinct oppositions and identities. In the attempt to extract the categorical order from the seemingly unbounded and somewhat accidental configurations of characters and roles we have found it helpful to set up the following model in which the transformations indicated express the oppositions and identities between any pair of categories.

symbolic representations  
conceived of  
as real persons

real persons conceived  
of as symbols



the joke  
vested in  
the person

the joke  
vested in  
the position

We need not use many more words than those already in the model to explain it since the material for so conceiving of the interrelationship between the categories is presented in the body of the paper. Suffice it to note, therefore, that the categories are of course built up from individual characters and personalities, but as categories they are generalizations and they should consequently not be taken as precise descriptions of every single character. As generalizations they can also be represented in the following diagram which is correlated to fig. 2 but has a different emphasis.

	human	non-human
metaphoric	Trickster	Culture hero
metonymic	Clown	Court jester

Fig. 2 emphasized the transformations that are found between the four categories. Fig. 3 is also about transformations but the stress is here upon the attributes of each category. We noted earlier the placing of the jester in this Levi-Straussian scheme about which we shall make a few explanatory remarks. The trickster and the culture hero are part of a series separated from the ordinary social space but they are, nevertheless, conceived of as 'persons'. Their relationship to man is defined as metaphoric but in inverse ways: The trickster is a metaphoric human; though part of a series distinct from the human he represents a humanization of cosmological values. The culture hero is in contrast a metaphoric non-human because he represents a divinization of the human institutions. The clown and the court jester are related in a metonymic fashion to the human series, but as in the case of the first pair their relationship to man is inverted: The clown is a metonymic human; he is part of the human space, only a little less human than ordinary people, a 'fool'. The jester is also a 'fool', and hence sub-human, but since he has reached the point of becoming an object for the perfect human being he is classified as non-human; even when assuming the role of adviser he remains so classified because his non-humanity is also related to his position as an element in a divine structure.

These interrelationships have a correlate in the interrelationships between the scenes which identify the various characters. The court of the divine king was in many ways seen as a miniature-cosmos; the relation between court and cosmos is one of similarity, it is metaphoric. If we think of the Javanese ludruk plays, or the Commedia dell Arte plays for that matter, it is obvious that the stage is a metaphoric representation. Peacock even depicted the setting of the ludruk plays as the 'story-society', to which the clown was an outsider, as is the trickster to his 'society'.

By establishing these categories and their transformations we have concluded the analysis. Even if individual joker characters continuously transgress the boundaries of the categories we find that we have gained something in respect to clarity. The joker is a tricky fellow and he tends to play his own game with us as analysts; but having exposed his categorical identities we believe to have come to grips with his nature, whatever role he chooses to play.

### Notes

1. Radin's primary concern was with the evolution of the figures in North American Indian mythology, and he found the general tendency to be a development from trickster to culture hero (1956, spec. ch. VIII). He said that 'among the Winnebago and Iowa the character of Hare has been purged in order to make him conform more perfectly to the picture of a true culture hero' (ibid: 131). It is interesting that Radin should use the notion of purging in relation to the suggested evolution of Hare. Through his development, then, Hare loses his typological ambiguity and ceases to be dangerous, in Douglas' sense; he becomes pure. Furthermore, this alleged general evolution parallels in a certain sense Douglas' interpretation of the specific Winnebago Wakdjunkaga cycle:  

"Trickster begins, isolated, amoral and unselfconscious, clumsy, ineffectual, an animal-like buffoon. Various episodes prune down and place more correctly, his bodily organs so that he ends by looking like a man. At the same time he begins to have a more consistent set of social relations and to learn hard lessons about his physical environment... I take this myth as a fine poetic statement of the process that leads from the early stages of culture to contemporary civilization, differentiated in so many ways" (1966:80).
2. We owe the term 'cosmological joker' to Dr. Niels Fock, Copenhagen.
3. We have a case fresh in mind; in Sir Robert Fossett's Circus, visiting Oxford in May 1975, a couple of Hungarian clowns suggested parallels to a Pulchinella-Harlequin couple. However, in relation to the third clown of that particular circus the couple merged into one kind of clown, the happy buffoon, as opposed to the third, the more pathetic figure of the white clown.
4. The term 'muted' as applied to individuals or groups is part of the theoretical framework developed by the Ardeners (T. Ardener 1975, S. Ardener 1975) for the analysis of structurally determined relative articulateness. The common theme of the book *Perceiving Women* (S. Ardener (ed.) 1975) is that 'the problem of women' is a problem of the structural articulation of women in a dominant male structure.
5. The suggestion that Unferth be viewed as a jester was made by Welsford (1961).

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