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Plato, Gorgias, and Trickster: Seeking Rhetoric's Muse

Cover Page Footnote

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Keith Rhodes

*We should never forget that in any psychological discussion
we are not saying something about the psyche,
but that the psyche is always speaking about itself.*

C. G. Jung

Introduction: Trickster's Place in Archetypal Rhetoric

Jung's vision of a "collective unconscious," where metaphorical "archetypes" perform their shadowy dramas on a figurative sub-stage of consciousness, has a natural application to the history of ideas. These deep forces, operating similarly in human minds across space, time, and even cultures, can account interestingly well for the persistence of certain modes of human thought—as literary critics like Northrop Frye have amply demonstrated. Eventually, I hope to argue that the Trickster archetype, one of Jung's most puzzling figures, bears a special, even integral relationship to the theory and practice of rhetoric. Indeed, as part of this argument I mean to claim that, for rhetoric, archetypal analysis is far from being just another theoretical lens. Rhetoric, as a consequence of its integral relationship with the Trickster archetype, might be seen as itself an essentially archetypal practice—one that is most centrally about playing out a specific role in our collective psychological drama. Whatever may be the wider range of possible approaches to composition theory and practice, to take a rhetorical attitude toward writing may be nothing more or less than to invoke a Trickster muse. Certainly, that may claim too much; but let us examine the evidence at length, and then come back to this notion.

First, we must turn our attention to the Trickster itself. Originally, the Trickster archetype received scant direct attention from Jung himself. This can seem

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strange, since Trickster is a prominent character in one of Jung's most central psychic constellations. That is, Trickster is to the Shadow as Hero is to the Ego. Just as Hero is the collective figure manifested in the individual Ego, Trickster is the collective figure manifested in the individual Shadow (Jacobi, 1973, pp. 109–115; Jung, 1980, p. 262). One reason Trickster can escape attention, of course, is that it collects together material that the contemporary psyche tries to put behind it. Trickster is the dark cloud made of everything bestial and unconscious that literate, Heroic humanity struggles to leave behind. Historical and social forces have generated the Self as a more humane and fully differentiated state of psychic being. The more primal material that collects into Trickster thus retreats from view as the more Self-ish Hero rises to become the most prominently manifested collective archetype. There is danger, though, in pretending that the struggle can ever truly end. If the relatively Heroic project of Jungian archetypal theorizing itself does not also contain Trickster's continuing influence within the psyche, that project will suffer the usual, dire fate of overly proud Heroes who ignore the deeper gods.

Hence, it would be quite literally a tragedy if those who are interested in the project of exploring connections between archetypal theories and rhetoric should ignore Hero's older, quieter partner. Indeed, there may be a particular value in discussing Trickster within the context of applying archetypes to rhetoric and writing. Trickster sets useful problems before the psyche and then offers arcane resources by which the psyche may resolve these riddles, helping the Heroic ego along the path toward fuller psychic integration. It may be that, just so, rhetorical theorists inform largely Heroic writing teachers, enabling teachers in turn to empower largely Heroic writers; and so we also should expect to find Trickster prominently involved in the transaction between rhetoricians and those who learn from them.

If I come not to bury Trickster, though, neither do I come, exactly, to praise such a figure. It would be a grossly mistaken use of Jungian theory to attempt to "liberate" the Shadow or the Trickster, to dream of some impossible unification of conscious and unconscious processes. Trickster has a dangerous siren call, promising to reveal to us the true life of the body, the legacy of evolutionary forces brought to bear upon a primate that was once not yet verbal. But there is no real hope of going back across the Rubicon of language to recover the roots of an "essential" embodied reality. Nor is there any real hope, postmodernism notwithstanding, of freeing the intellect from the body and its evolutionary inheritance, creating a new Empire of mind. Trickster is impossible to ignore, then, but it is also beyond hope of redemption. To play on my previous cultural references, we are "Caesarean," irremediably Heroic Selves, torn from the womb of nature by human artifice. As such, we neither can nor should fully inhabit the role Trickster offers.

Thus, to align rhetoricians with Trickster, as I will seek to do, is not immediately to call for a higher valuation of Trickster. Trickster's value lies not so much in what it is in itself as in what it does for Hero. Trickster brings to consciousness what Hero, intent on its quest, intentionally forgets: that ultimately the conscious ego is not a thing apart from the psychic vastness it seeks to control. Like a Shakespearean fool, Trickster has a maddening usefulness for those

who will listen. Trickster deflates hubris and reveals the complicity of Heroic individual action in larger unconscious and transpersonal dramas. Within the vast historical movement toward fully conscious human literacy, rhetoric has played the Fool, being maddeningly useful relative to the more straightforward Heroic quest of philosophers and other rationalists.

These days, though, rhetoricians (and others whose works have been drawn into the rhetorical canon) may remain maddening, but their usefulness has fallen into question. As Stephen North (1987) explains, teaching practitioners are largely out of touch with the work of rhetorical theorists—and sometimes defiantly so. Buried in often slavish conditions, many composition teachers who would value theoretical discussions are simply unable to take the time to participate in them. Indeed, even where rhetorical theorists' views are used, it seems often to be a matter of the brute coercion of relatively powerless graduate assistants and adjunct instructors by academically empowered theorists who control composition curriculum and other institutional processes. Further, reviewing scholarship in the field of modern rhetoric, it becomes quite clear that a rationalist sort of Heroism is at work in the over-all paradigm of its production. If there are significant numbers of rhetoricians who are practicing the Tricksterish arts of being witty, troublesome, maddening, or seemingly foolish in service of profundity, most are not being published regularly. Instead, theoretical scholarship is almost unrelentingly earnest and deferential to authorities, even when extolling the virtues of "anti-foundationalist" theories. Scholarly camps within rhetoric seem to have become monarchies without Fools—a tragedy in the making if seen with an archetypal eye.

Rhetoric seems in dire need of applying Trickster's healing attention to its own processes, then; and as the discipline has intuited, one source of possible healing lies in examining its own history. Of particular interest has been the history of rhetoric in classical times, when rhetoric shifted its nature quickly and permanently. Once simply the practice of effective utterance, rhetoric became, especially in the hands of Aristotle, the practice of *shaping* utterance—a more completely conscious practice. This development in the history of rhetoric is clearly analogous to the generation of ego out of a previously undifferentiated psyche in the creation of self-consciousness. The generation of ego in turn converts Trickster into an archetype, a personal psychic replacement for the tribal shamans who served Trickster's role in earlier stages of more rudimentary psychic integration (Jung, 1980, pp. 466–472). Thus, there may be synchronicity at work in the history of rhetoric, such that an examination of rhetoric's emergence as a conscious practice might illustrate Trickster's dialectical value to rhetoric and to writing pedagogy.

Examining the Origin Myths of Rhetoric

Rhetoric's roots typically have been rendered rather more as myth than as history; and, since these myths are commonly known, I will not "blame" any myth on any cited source. The old myth of rhetoric starts with Corax and his student Tisias—respectively the first to discover and the first to learn a reliable art of speaking effectively—honing their skills in the emergent democracy of

Syracuse, in Sicily. As the story goes, Tisias and his own student, Gorgias, made an emissary to Athens on behalf of Syracuse, and Athenians fell in love with the sweet nothings that Gorgias delivered so well. This ushered in the age of the “Sophists,” a band of gifted, silver-tongued charlatans. After Plato’s withering critique of these Sophists, Aristotle finally regularized rhetoric by establishing it on a sound, ethical, and rationalist base. This myth has had a long and stable history, and retains a great deal of currency in our culture—whatever its inaccuracies.

Lately, though, a new myth of rhetoric’s origins has been taking shape. The new myth rehabilitates the Sophists, finding in their slipperiness somewhat less of artful cynicism and somewhat more of legitimate skepticism. Still, if the Sophists were the first to find “social constructionism,” apparently it was largely an accidental accomplishment on their part and came to little in their hands. As proof of this, we find in this new myth that the Sophists were unable to prevail over the reactionary efforts of Plato, paving the way for Aristotle to implant his rationalistic paradigm into the consciousness of the centuries in between then and now. It is important to point out that Plato and Aristotle, the key figures in the old origin myth, remain the key historical figures within the new myth. In one sense, this is hardly surprising. Given that we have many hundreds of pages of works by Plato and Aristotle and only a few fragments of the works of the Sophists, traditionally Heroic scholarly work on the Sophists themselves is inherently limited. This is particularly true within the rational-ideal paradigm carried forward unreflectively in the hierarchical and traditional genre conventions still used by most scholars of the “new myth,” who apparently remain Aristotelians despite themselves.

Of course, Plato’s reputation has not always come out well in either myth. Indeed, esteem for Plato seems always to be less than absolute. Within the old myth, Plato’s flaws—for instance, his lack of thematic coherence in works such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagoras*—always required some rationalization. In recent times, though, esteem for Plato has become much more problematic. Indeed, the project known as the “rehabilitation of the Sophists” could, at least by volume of discussion, be cast more readily as the *dehabilitation* of Plato. At best for Plato, William Covino’s casting of him as a “wondering star-gazer” reduces Plato to simply one of several who have urged a view of “rhetoric and writing and reading as play with an expanding horizon” (1988, p. 21). At worst for Plato, Jasper Neel (1988) casts him as the scourge of civilization, a deviously successful millennial politician who redirected the course of history, to our great disadvantage, through an intentional abuse of the rhetoric of narrative. Somewhere in between is a Derridean view (according to Neel, at least) of Plato as a flawed figure valuable primarily for what a good deconstruction of his work might reveal (Neel, 1988, pp. 140–201). What recent critics of Plato share with older, gentler treatments, though, is a tendency to write extensively about Plato at the expense of writing very much about the Sophists. Even Neel, who complains persuasively that the very worst thing Plato did was to obscure the ideas of the Sophists, devotes only a brief final chapter, little more than a post-script, to the Sophists’ ideas themselves.

It seems a rather odd move, this attempt to dehabilitate Plato by featuring

his thought in both the content and title of one's work; and here I am, seeming to do the same thing. Perhaps it is time to go beneath these myths to find new ones.

A Trickster Myth of Rhetoric

Richard Leo Enos (1993) has carefully verified that Empedocles, the mystic Sicilian philosopher, has a serious claim to be the most important source (if not the founder itself) of rhetoric as a conscious discipline. Enos demonstrates the likelihood that Corax, Tisias, and Gorgias forwarded an art sprung from Empedocles' thoughtful understanding of the meaning and effect of language. As the standard myth holds, this art was affected by the need for persuasive arts in Syracusean democracy; yet it had other sources that were both deeper and more conscious. In other words, Gorgias did not merely know the practice of persuasion and artful speaking, enhanced by a few handy tricks. Instead, Gorgias is likely to have known a fully philosophical and theoretical practice of rhetoric, a practice of the sort that earlier mythologies of rhetoric traditionally reserve for elucidation by Aristotle.

Further, Empedocles' own understanding was not an accident of genius or inspiration, whatever his own claims. According to Freido Ricken's (1991) usefully compressed exposition, the Hellenic/Ionian world as a whole had participated actively in a philosophical movement which had already been through three distinct stages of growth by the time Gorgias and Socrates initiated a fourth. This highly secular and scientific philosophical tradition opposed itself to the belief in animistic gods that, if not genuinely philosophical, was certainly the first step away from a purely physical human existence into the generation of psychological life.

In the first genuinely philosophical stage of this psychological process, originating in the Asia Minor port of Miletus in the seventh century B.C.E., Thales and others sought rational explanations for mysterious matters generally attributed to gods—matters such as, on the one hand, "objective" earthquakes, and, on the other, "subjective" passions. This first stage appears to have lasted until about the start of the fifth century B.C.E. In the second stage, much more dispersed but thriving most fully in the southern Italian city of Elea, Parmenides and others eventually discovered that pure rationalism founders in irreconcilable dualisms like "changeless change." In the closely following third stage, more pragmatic philosophers, including Zeno of Elea and Empedocles, tried to reconcile the insights of rationality with empirical observations. Like the second stage, this third stage was widely dispersed. Still, following the leading influence of the second-stage philosopher Anaxagoras (originally from Asia Minor) over the Athenian ruler Pericles, the fourth, Socratic stage of this philosophical movement eventually became centered in Athens.

Before this time, Athens seems to have been a backwater of philosophic exploration; and, as Enos demonstrates, Sicily had been one of philosophy's real hot-beds. Interestingly, Democritus, another leading light in the latter part of "third stage" philosophy, came from Abdera, in Thrace. Abdera, of course, was the original home of Protagoras, the only real peer of Gorgias in the first Athenian Sophistic. Thus, contrary to likely assumptions within the earlier myths,

Gorgias and possibly even Protagoras—and hence the Sophistic movement—came from regions that most likely outstripped Socrates' Athens in the depth of their philosophical traditions.

Meanwhile, as Enos most centrally demonstrates, running through all of this history, influencing both Athens and Sicily, was the hypnagogic tradition of the Homeric rhapsodes. Plato asserts in his *Ion* that the rhapsodic tradition was one of "mere" divine inspiration, and not a genuine art (1961, pp. 216–228). Importantly, we can suspect that Gorgias would differ. The dispute between Socrates and Gorgias most likely was not one between philosophy and rhetoric but one between differing attitudes toward the place of the irrational in a study of language. Socrates, harking back to deistic and rationalistic thinking that the philosophic tradition had left behind in earlier, non-Athenian stages, appears to have seen language as a mere device, used at its best in service of either gods or abstract rationality. Gorgias, following Empedocles, most likely saw language as a fully human phenomenon always combining irrational and rational components, either component being a legitimate subject of practical inquiry. In other words, the apparent dispute between Socrates and Gorgias, reading both with and against Plato here, may have been between a naive, naturalistic philosophy and a more mature, rhetoricized philosophy.

To further elucidate this important difference, I need to add a prominent and well-known historical element that Enos rather curiously omits from his review: the interplay of shamanism with the philosophy of the time, and particularly with the philosophy of Empedocles. We should pause to recall, first, that Trickster's advent and the fall of shamanism are necessary complements in Jung's theories. Shamanic cultures still have their external Tricksters; only post-shamanic minds need the internalized archetypal entity as a regular part of their internal narratives. Further, the internalization of the Trickster archetype and the demise of shamans were an integral part of this important transitional time in the history of the West. Empedocles was still quite heavily influenced by shamanic ideas and practices (Dodds, 1951, pp. 145–147), an influence that makes sense within a Jungian framework. That is, as the psyche began to disassociate itself from the body, at first it fell to a god-like but tangible figure, the shaman, to represent the repressed body to consciousness. By the time of Empedocles, tangibility and divinity had become partially detached, with Empedocles only vaguely indicating his possible divinity and claiming mostly to have access to a Muse who could tell divine truths (Freeman, 1971, p. 51).

Gorgias and Socrates seem to be at last the bearers of differentiated psyches, individuals who claim most of their creative powers for themselves as those natural to a mortal being. This is the beginning of the sort of psyche in which the Trickster archetype could at last manifest itself as the sort of generative muse moderns would be willing to credit as a psychological phenomenon. While Socrates and Gorgias made use of this same phenomenon, there might be a highly significant difference between their visions of its nature. The famous charioteer metaphor from the *Phaedrus* exquisitely captures the Socratic attitude toward Trickster, the shadow, and the body. All three are clearly represented by the unruly black horse, the one that seeks to bring the chariot to the ground. The Heroic white horse seeks, as Heroes will, to escape the earth, to fly to the

ethereal heavens. To Plato's Socrates, the answer seems simple: whip the black horse into submission so that the chariot might soar. To give Socrates his due, of course, he does not advise getting rid of the black horse, and ultimately his metaphor must be seen as proposing a version of dialectic. Further, certainly neither Socrates nor Gorgias can be held to the standard of having a conscious understanding of the archetypal implications of their work. Still, Gorgias can be seen as providing a more practical alternative: the alternative of accepting the maddening usefulness of Trickster in helping the ego toward a fuller integration of all of its possibilities.

Gorgias is notorious for two works which, I would contend, are misinterpreted unless seen as attempts to be maddeningly useful in Tricksterish fashion. In the "Encomium of Helen," Gorgias reveals the troubling incommensurability between the concepts of fate and blame: if gods and fate rule humanity, Helen of Troy can hardly be blamed for doing as the gods required and thereby launching the Trojan War. Of course, readers of a rationalist bent could conclude that Gorgias actually meant to be understood referentially, as inferring that morality is relative and that blame was thus never possible for any human. The argument can just as easily be seen, though, as an indirect attack on the idea of fate, a demonstration that the ordinary conception of fate leads to intolerable ethical contradictions.

The other of Gorgias' notorious works, reputedly titled "On Nature," has not been preserved in its original (Freeman, 1971, pp. 127-129), but has survived in part because its thesis is so memorably outrageous. Gorgias is credited with a proof that, in descending order, either nothing exists, or, if anything does exist, it cannot be comprehended, or, if anything can be comprehended, it cannot be communicated (Freeman, 1971, pp. 128-129). Again, one who looks only at referential meanings might conclude that Gorgias meant to be profoundly relativistic. Two other quotes from the relics of Gorgias' productions give us a clue that something very different was at issue, however. First, Gorgias, not Aristotle, seems to have originated the concept that "One must destroy one's adversaries' seriousness with laughter, and their laughter with seriousness" (Freeman, 1971, p. 138). Second, Gorgias contradicts his "nothing exists" conclusion, at least partially, when he remarks that "Being is unrecognizable without seeming, and seeming is weak unless it succeeds in being" (Freeman, 1971, p. 139). The first quotation alone might continue to support a view of Gorgias as a nihilist, someone who aimed only at reversal, contradiction, and making the worse case the better. The second, however, opens up another possibility that, paradoxically, destabilizes attempts to cast Gorgias as merely a relativist.

If one reconsiders Gorgias as someone who knew what he was doing all along, then the idea of being and seeming having a dynamic relationship in the construction of reality becomes the most likely candidate for being a genuinely referential comment. After all, despite what he said elsewhere, Gorgias did continue his attempts to communicate and did prize material aspects of existence. The idea of laughing at the seriousness of one's adversaries, in this light, becomes the key to interpreting the playfulness of seeming to attack blame while actually undercutting the theology of fate, or of seeming to communicate the idea that ideas cannot be communicated. In other words, Gorgias was not being

Heroically referential, nor was he being merely contrarian; he was being maddeningly useful, following the Tricksterish way with a purity all the more astonishing for being without reference to Jung's legitimating theories.

This interpretation of Gorgias' works makes even more sense when Gorgias is seen as informed by trends in the philosophical tradition in which he clearly belongs. The idea that, rationally, "nothing exists" was not news to Empedocles, much less to any of his students. That it may have been news to most Athenians creates the context in which Gorgias' supposed proof becomes a spoof, a satirical riff on provincial Athenian attitudes toward reference and objectivity. Even before Gorgias there was an interesting proto-Trickster, Zeno of Elea, who did much the same thing within the community of Hellenic/Ionian philosophers. Zeno—a contemporary of Empedocles who worked even more closely with their common teacher, the skeptical empiricist Parmenides—specialized in creating paradoxes that revealed the lack of "seeming" value in rationalist accounts of "being." In the most famous of these, it is "demonstrated" that, in a race between Achilles and a turtle, the speedy Achilles will lose if he starts later. That is, logically, Achilles will only be able to make up half the distance, then half of the remainder, then half again, and so on forever; he will never catch the turtle because, logically, he cannot escape from eternal regression (Salmon, 1971, pp. 8–9). Given such obvious ribaldry (however serious its purposes) within Gorgias's philosophical tradition, it may be absurd in the extreme to read Gorgias referentially.

What, then, could Gorgias have been after? Perhaps one more quote from the scant record of Gorgias' words holds the final key: "Tragedy, by means of legends and emotions, creates a deception in which the deceiver is more honest than the non-deceiver, and the deceived is wiser than the non-deceived" (Freeman, 1971, p. 138). This attitude could certainly apply as well to orations that were quite intentionally something other than they seemed to be—that were, then, essentially dramatic and performative. In that light, Gorgias goes beyond being merely ironic—intending, for instance, merely to produce the belief that fate is bad by pretending to excoriate blame in the "Encomium of Helen." Instead, Gorgias may well have been intending something more radical, something like a dramatic deception that leaves those who enter into full psychic participation with it wiser at some inarticulate and irrational level of being. After all, this is what could come of musing with an archetype like Trickster, the defier of pure mind, the bringer to earth, the harbinger of primeval processes still at work beneath the appearance of rational transcendence.

Plato's Place in a Trickster Myth of Rhetoric

Despite Gorgias' claim to a more complete respect, Plato's continuing centrality in rhetorical discussions may well have more merit than the heroes of the new myth want to grant (even though their actions still grant it). That is, Plato's openly Tricksterish craft may be more important than his rather more Heroic referential content. The instability of Plato's referential meaning, of course, is old news. Still, it seems impossible to choose among, for instance, Derrida's (supposedly) earnest but deluded Plato, Covino's starry-eyed and playful Plato,

or Neel's masterful and dastardly Plato. For a failure, Plato certainly has been difficult to top; for a wonderer, Plato certainly is heavy-handed; for a schemer, Plato certainly does seem transparent. I would like to propose something informed by all of these readings that renders choice among them unnecessary: Plato had learned from all of his predecessors how to use the Trickster muse of rhetoric, a matter which renders the issue of his personal "intent" not merely problematic, but essentially unfathomable—and by design.

I find two clues in Plato's work to be extremely compelling in this regard. First, in his *Ion*, Plato demonstrates his belief that art is, at its best, a "divine" inspiration, one that necessarily comes from extra-human sources. In that work, (harking back here to Enos' tracing of the rhapsodic roots of Gorgian rhetoric), Plato persuades Ion, a rhapsode, that his artistry must come from inspiration rather than technique. After all, Ion clearly does not possess the encyclopedic knowledge that would be necessary to generate his ability on the basis of articulable technique. Certainly, we all know examples of artists for whom this is true—even if now we have other explanations of the transpersonal agencies that manifest themselves in spectacularly imaginative artistry. Even more to the point, though, is Socrates' readiness to surrender to his *daemon* for his own creative bursts of rhetorical art, nowhere more emphatically than in the *Phaedrus*, the most central and penetrating of Plato's dialogues on rhetoric. Indeed, in the *Phaedrus*, the third and final speech, the supposed pinnacle of truest rhetorical art, is cast as entirely the creation of Socrates' *daemon*. Even if it is possible to believe that Plato wanted us to see Socrates as being playful in making this claim, it is also possible to believe that Plato, Socrates' student, knew full well the value of musing as a path toward the finest persuasive art.

Still, I must agree with the pervasive judgment that Plato was flawed, even if the instability of the explanations of Plato's flaws should make us all wary. Perhaps Plato was prevented from gaining full mastery of this process of musement by his seeming view that musement came from independent gods rather than from the psyche of an ordinary, mortal language-user. On the other hand, given his prolific and wonderfully "deceptive" (in Gorgias' sense of deceiving us toward wisdom) theatrical art (for what else are Plato's dialogues but theater?), perhaps it is necessary to give Plato more credit. Whatever may have been Socrates' limitations in regard to musement, we have evidence in the artistry of Plato's dialogues themselves that Plato out-mused his teacher. Indeed, even considering the limitations in the available evidence, perhaps Plato transcended all of his teachers, including Gorgias. Perhaps by virtue of being there on the scene at exactly the most propitious, fresh moment, Plato simply nailed the art of musing with Trickster like nobody else ever has. If that were true, nobody would ever be able to say for sure what had happened in Plato's work, but it would be hard to escape its maddeningly useful effects. That certainly does seem to have been Plato's legacy.

Something even more significant may emerge in Plato's work, explaining more understandably why even Plato's most astute critics spend so much time considering his work. Empedocles and then Gorgias may be said to be true rhetorician-philosophers, but Plato could mark the point zero from which primarily Heroic philosophy and primarily Tricksterish rhetoric diverge, as they must, into

an archetypal dialectic. Plato may mark this separation because he introduces a third idea capable of interpreting rhetoric and philosophy together, hence permitting them to be distinguished from each other. Interpreting philosophy and rhetoric together is the work of *psychology*, of being neither Tricksterish nor Heroic but interpreting both together dialectically. Plato's millennial power over the entire scene of relations between rhetoric and philosophy may arise precisely because he was neither philosopher nor rhetorician, but primarily the first psychologist.

Still, I see no sign that Plato knew what he was doing sufficiently well to articulate to himself the nature of this superior, psychological vantage. His errors remain as glaring as his potency. Further, it seems fairly plain that rhetoric continued to be, at its best, Tricksterish in the Gorgian sense rather than psychological in this potentially Platonic sense. Covino (1988) may under-estimate the uniqueness of Plato, then, but the Tricksterish perspective supports his contention that Aristotle, Cicero, Montaigne, Vico, and Hume continue what I have called the Gorgian style of Tricksterish discourse, the art of intending readers to experience something other and more than the mere reproduction of referential meaning. I do not need to assert that Tricksterism was the "intent" of these and other rhetoricians, though. Rather, by entering into a discourse which was by nature and tradition closely allied to the role of Trickster, these most penetrating and relentless pursuers of rhetorical wisdom became subject, at least in part, to rhetoric's muse and its collectively unconscious agenda. If few of these rhetoricians were as fully psychological (and hence fully dialectical) as Plato, neither could any rhetorician who wrote after Plato be entirely without a psychologized perspective—even if the perspective came from a point beneath consciousness.

In recent times, of course, there has been a change in the rhetorical tradition. As Covino demonstrates, earnest nineteenth century rhetoricians seem to have succeeded in driving Trickster out of acceptable rhetorical discourse. Meanwhile, Freud and others opened up the possibility of articulated psychological technique, a technique that Jung brought to bear on the very source of musing. Modern writers on rhetoric and semiotics, like Derrida, Lacan, Burke, Langer, and Eco, are more fully aware of themselves as psychological beings. They have been able to move beyond the mere trickery of using non-referential or "irrational" language to deceive, and have begun to explore these phenomena and their meanings in both referential and performative ways. Recent works more closely tied to the community of academic writing teachers have taken advantage of this new atmosphere of psychologically informed rhetoric. Writers like Stanley Fish (1980) and Peter Elbow (1973) have gone beyond mere trickery to open up "seriously playful" methods of reading and writing. Perhaps most stunning of all from this perspective is the insight of Hélène Cixous (1976) in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that writing the embodied self could liberate unconscious resources in rhetorically powerful ways.

In sum, it may well be that in this time, precisely now, a new paradigm may be opening not only for rhetoric, but for the use of Trickster—and by logical extension, for the psyche itself. Meanwhile, rhetorical theory and writing instruction seem poised at the very edge of this new paradigm, uniquely positioned to use it and to begin to articulate it.

Trickster, Psychology, and Teaching

Most applications of archetypal thought to writing instruction tend (even without intending) to establish Hero as the muse of "empowered" writers—and by extension, the muse of teachers in their efforts to "write" an empowering classroom experience. Here, I claim instead that Trickster has been the most useful muse of rhetoricians, of writers about writing. This latter claim, however, complicates matters for writing teachers. Surely, writing teachers are also rhetoricians, "writers" and speakers about writing who intend to complicate and support the efforts of Heroic writers in much the same way that theoretical scholars intend to complicate and support the efforts of writing teachers. If the writing teacher is both Hero and the supporter of Heroes, the demand upon writing teachers to become impossibly wise, to be timeless and genuinely individuated Trickster-Heroes, may be acute. The seeming impossibility of this demand lurks within the most prominent conflicts in composition theory, those concerning how consciousness is supposed to interact with the unconscious processing of such things as syntax, ideology, reasoning, writing processes, and theory itself. As in writing processes, in teaching processes there is simply too much for Heroic consciousness to manage if everything is attempted at once.

As has been indicated above, writing teachers can take on another role, one that mediates between Trickster and Hero: the role of psychologist of the writing self. Shoshona Felman (1987) has written with great clarity and understanding about the application of Lacan's ideas to this project, and I mean to take nothing away from that effort in suggesting something else. Archetypal thinking also enters this scene usefully, offering symbols with which to mediate between the complex, invisible vastness of unconsciousness and the Heroic sense of individual freedom. Moreover, Jungian psychology dares to approach what the anonymous writer we refer to as "Longinus" long ago recognized to be the heart of rhetoric's value: its ability to generate writing that is sublime, able to remind readers viscerally of their most profound longings. Trickster's most central role, after all, is that of forcing Heroic egos into the conflicts out of which they may emerge as what Jungian analyst James Hillman calls, without apology, "souls" (1977, pp. ix–xvi). As Hillman points out, the rhetorical perspective on language breaks down all attempts to cast the human condition as systematizable, concrete, and mechanical, and so becomes a vital aspect of the even larger transpersonal movement of soul-making (pp. 142–154).

This description of rhetoric as a Tricksterish discipline directly and centrally involved in issues of both re-embodiment and "soul-making" has an immediate aptness when considering figures like Empedocles, Plato, Longinus, Erasmus, Vico, or Burke. Still, it would seem to have lost a good deal of applicability in the professional lives of academic rhetoricians. Moreover, in the current atmosphere of institutionalized education teachers may fear and resent the risks of rhetorical teaching as this analysis suggests it should be, something dangerously close to psychotherapy—and a rather aggressively upsetting kind of therapy at that.

Nevertheless, what other responsible avenue is available? Simply to ignore the Tricksterish aspects of rhetorical learning is to be at cross-purposes with the

activity itself. Even a brief review of Jung's metaphor of the psyche as a whole reveals that merely cheering on the Hero is bound to fail, for Trickster will come along, bidden or not. Even worse, resorting to postmodern rhetoric's decidedly Tricksterish resources without a fully psychological understanding may well be the very model of an unwitting psychic "therapy" of a potentially dangerous sort.

Bold words—even in hyperbole—for someone who has not yet proposed a program, I suppose. There really is not a need for a new program, though, as much as there is a need for better understanding of what existing programs offer. That writing is a form of Heroic rationality in need of constant remediation from Tricksterish irrationality lies behind nearly every recent advance in the teaching of writing, and informs all practices that render these advances genuinely advantageous. Students who have been fed a steady diet of their errors lose the Heroic spirit; students who have been given a steady diet of rational prescriptions become pathetically incapable of using irrational means to effective ends. "Process" techniques like freewriting and loop-writing, on the other hand, give the irrational room to enter the process. So we are making some progress; and yet at bottom what is needed is something rather more like the thorough devotion of teachers and students to something like Ann Berthoff's image of writing as the practice of a fully dialectical and psychological Imagination. We seem not yet to have had the collective curricular courage or rigor to meet Berthoff's call. Perhaps an understanding of the psychic patterns in which we work can encourage us.

Ultimately, though, the symbol-using mortal body, aware because of its symbols of both the apparent immortality of ideas and its own inevitable death, is not merely a system of cognition, a cultural construct, or an operator of rules. It is a fragile, embodied soul in need of understanding, and most in need just when it is asked to enter into transactions of consequence with other souls. There is much we already know about what sorts of things these souls can do to write better texts, but ultimately there is no "program" for the larger purpose. We just pull each other out of the cave, one Self at a time—as Plato knew. ☺

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