



# **Nanabush On A Motorcycle: Trickster Tale In Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass: A Novel***

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**Abstract:** The archetypal mythical figures renowned for their mischievous features are called tricksters. This paper entitled “**Nanabush on a Motorcycle: Trickster Tale in Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass: A Novel***” is an attempt to trace out the characteristics of the trickster figure. Specifically, the paper endeavours to point out the intricate similarities and features of the mythical trickster figure Nanabush, and John, a character in Taylor's novel. One feature leads to another which is one of the peculiarities of these mythical beings. Tricksters are well known for their shape-shifting abilities, which they utilise to play tricks upon others. Certain tales present tricksters as comical, cultural-heroes, and even as saviours of culture. Trickster tends to challenge and question societal norms as they are entitled as taboo-breakers and boundary-crossers. By drawing parallels between the trickster figure Nanabush and the selected literary character, the analysis delves into their shared attributes, for instance, cunningness, shape-shifting, and roles as cultural carriers. Merging ancient myth and contemporary narrative, Taylor gives the trickster a position of renewal, resilience and cultural commentary in the present society.

**Keywords:** Trickster, Nanabush, Myth, Mysterious, Shape-shifting, Imitating, Persuasion

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In *An Open Life* (1990), Joseph Campbell defines a trickster as the one who disrupts and breaks into an established order. These mythical figures are culture-specific and also transmit social and moral lessons through their actions. *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticism*, magnum opus of William. J. Hynes and William. G. Doty and also a seminal work in the field of trickster studies identified trickster as a “source of cultural reflection” (1993: 4). Tricksters are hailed as those figures who illustrate human behaviour in an unnatural way adeptly breaking and mending societal norms. These figures are often called cultural-heroes due to their influential roles. Tricksters like human beings are full of contradictions as they are mixed up with feelings and emotions. Duality is one of their key attributes as they change from one form to another, and also act as a stupid being to the cleverest simultaneously. There are many titles carried on by these beings for instance, cultural-carrier, master of metamorphosis

(transformation), lord of in-betweenness, polyvalent being among many others. Tricksters are lustful beings and have an appetite for food as well.

Carl Jung categorized tricksters as one of the archetypes. The four major archetypes according to Jung are the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the self. The word 'persona' means 'mask', as the persona archetype shows how an individual is presented before the world by wearing different persona or masks as per the needs of the society. The next archetype, that is, the shadow depicts the appetites and instincts of a human being that includes all forms of repressed emotions. In other words, the shadow is the darker side or it consists of those behaviours that are not acceptable in the society. The anima and animus define the feminine side of the male psyche and the vice-versa respectively; the combination of these two is called syzygy. The archetype self consists of the unconsciousness and unified consciousness of a human being. Jung along with the above mentioned four major archetypes highlighted that, archetypes are not fixed as it can also include the figure of a father, hero and a trickster as well. Jung considered trickster as an archetype because archetypes are defined as the recurring images or motifs observed in myths and folktales; and one such motif is that of a trickster. In other words, archetypes can be emotions or images that occur in fantasies or dreams which are universal in nature. Thus, tricksters are universal figures which are an unavoidable part of the human psyche as well. Apart from these findings, Jung in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* noted that tricksters are a "psychologem- an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity" (1980: 260). Tricksters can be, "subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being" (Jung, 1980: 263) simultaneously. Due to their unrelated and unconscious behaviour, Jung observed that tricksters are stupider than animals.

Jung's view of a trickster as an archetype have been contradicted by Robert Pelton in his work *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* as he observed that "the trickster is not an archetypal Idea, but a symbolic pattern" (1980: 3). An important point to be noted here is that, Jung too has said that archetypes are "patterns of behaviour" (1980: 5). In that case, tricksters also depict a kind of pattern that shapes an individual's behaviour which is what Pelton also tried to communicate, as for him pattern indicates how an individual's character is being structured.

Allan Combs and Mark Holland noticed trickster as "an archetype whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (1990: 121). Tricksters are beings with no centre and as Paul Radin observed what goes around comes around with tricksters. Radin in *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1959) notes that the trickster adds disorder to order, creating a holistic experience by introducing elements of what is not permitted within the fixed bounds of society. Radin also highlighted that, "the trickster in archaic society serves primarily to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted" (1959: 185). According to Nikola Danisova, who in her paper titled "Notes on the trickster as a literary character in archnarratives. A brief analysis" categorised tricksters into four types namely, "civilizer, fool, user, and body" (28). Danisova points out that all these variants uphold certain features that represent the traits of a trickster. For instance, in the trickster-fool type, a trickster mostly appears in the supernatural or mythical world where these figures are entrusted with some divine powers.

Tricksters are often treated to be the rule-breakers and boundary crossers and they themselves set their own norms. Some tales represent tricksters as comical figures. One more trait of these figures is that they are addressed as the sacred beings that are in close contact with the divine. Contradictions are a signature quality of these figures which is also one of the major sources for arousing humour. These contradictions happen as a result of their dual/binary quality, the tricks they employ and even due to the sudden transformation to another form or gender. In other words, they are polytropic beings as Hyde in *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* noted, i.e., "turning in many ways" (2010: 52). Tricksters take up multiple roles as Brian V Street in the essay "The Trickster Theme: Winnebago and Azande" (1972) asserted that they are a balance between creativity and destruction.

Hynes and Doty in their seminal work have identified the multifaceted roles taken up by the trickster, namely as "Animal-Person (particularly Blue Jay, Coyote, crow, Fox, hare, Mink, Rabbit, Raven and Tortoise), Anti-Hero, Confidence person...Buffoon...Transformer" (1993: 24). Some of the often identified trickster figures in mythologies are Coyote, Loki, Anansi, Nanabush and so on. Apart from the multifaceted roles of trickster, Hynes and Doty have also characterized six common features of a trickster, for instance, "the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster;

deceiver/trick player; shape-shifter; situation-invertor; messenger/imitator of the Gods; and sacred/lewd bricoleur" (1993: 34). An important factor to be noted with regard to the features highlighted by Hynes and Doty is that, they say all these features are inter-related or in other words, one feature can lead to another. For example, their shape-shifting nature can bring in ambiguity; they use shape-shifting as one of their tricks and so on.

## 2. METHOD

The trickster spirit of Anishinaabe or the Ojibwe community is called the Nanabozho/Nanabush as they are widely known for their shape-shifting ability, as they appear as both male and female in the tales; and also takes the form of animals such as raven or coyote that are known for their cunningness. The multiple forms taken up by the trickster, for example, Nanabush appears as a raven, a coyote, and as a hare are part of the different phases of the life cycle as represented in certain Indigenous cultures. Nanabush is regarded to be the trickster of the First Nation. He plays the role of a cultural-hero, creator and trickster in various Indigenous oral histories who appears with several names. As a trickster, Nanabush plays a crucial role in imparting life lessons. For instance, Nanabush is credited with manipulating the world around him in order to teach and learn lessons from it. This quality of Nanabush serves the feature attributed to a trickster who imparts moral lessons like honesty and humanity. In other words, he is regarded as an embodiment of life, that is, Nanabush possesses the power to create life in others. Nanabush is credited with creating problems as those struggles are the real experience of the Native people. Certain studies defined the trickster Nanabush as manipulative, greedy and also money driven, as these traits also reflect the complex nature of the human experience, highlighting both virtues and vices. They have unlimited desires and also develop deep relationships. As already stated, these figures are well-known for their shape-shifting quality as they can be both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic. This adaptability makes them representative of the tribes, often taking the shape of animals significant to the community.

One peculiarity of this mythical being is that on the one hand they create and protect life and on the other hand, break all the conventions and rules and do mischievous actions. In the tales of Arctic and Sub- arctic, these tricksters are called the Raven whereas in the areas of California, they are Coyote. They are androgynous beings, as their gender varies according to the stories. Nanabush are beings who can adapt and change wherever necessary. Studies claim that Nanabush is the spirit of directions whose mother is a human, and father a spirit named E-bangishimog. They usually appear as a rabbit and are known by the name Mishaabooz (Great Rabbit/Hare) or Gitchii-waabooz (Big Rabbit). He is credited as the founder of Midewiwin (the Grand Medicine society, the religion of some of the Indigenous people of Maritimes), fishing and hieroglyphs (the Ojibwe writing system). Interestingly, it is noted that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" draws inspiration from Nanabush stories. Nanabush appears as the central character in Thomas King's short story "The One About Coyote Going West" and also in his novel *Green Grass Running Water*. Apart from this, he hails as the seagull, a nighthawk and the bing master in Tomson Highway's play *The Rez Sisters*.

Drew Hayden Taylor, an award-winning playwright from Ojibway is also credited with the titles as a journalist, novelist, and scriptwriter and so on. Taylor's interest was in depicting the issues of the Indigenous. Through his non-fictions, Taylor tried to impart knowledge and educate the world regarding certain issues pertaining to Canada's First Nations. *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass: A Novel* (2010) is a story of a mysterious stranger who resembles the trickster figure, Nanabush and related conflicts in the life of Maggie and her son Virgil. The life of Virgil, who lives near Otter Lake, is turned upside down with the arrival of the motorcyclist, John. The stranger appears as if he is in a relationship with Virgil's mother, Maggie. The story is proclaimed as a coming-of-age novel which depicts Native American cultural belief and myths. In other words, the novel explores the life and struggles of a North American family which is depicted in a humorous tone by Taylor. The novel depicts many symbolisms through which the conflict between tradition and modernity is depicted by the writer. For instance, the 1953 Indian Chief motorcycle, sweetgrass that represents peace, Wayne's martial arts which symbolizes tradition and a balance between past and present and John, the Nanabush. *Now Magazine* has reviewed that "*Motorcycles and Sweetgrass* is a fun, rollicking book, and Taylor's voice is fresh and unique"; and Joseph Boyden commented that, "If the great Ojibwe trickster Nanabush wrote fiction, I imagine he'd write just like Drew Hayden Taylor. You will find much sadness just below the laughs, and sly humour masked by sorrow".

### 3. ANALYSIS

At the very beginning of the story, the readers encounter a man who created chaos through his appearance which frightened the woman sitting near the river. Creating chaos is a quality that can be attributed to the trickster figure which is evident in the stranger as well. The woman addressed the stranger as a “half fish” (Taylor) as he jumped into the river with the speed of a dragonfly and returned as a spirit. This can be related to what Jung said as tricksters are both “subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being” (1980: 263) one of the significant traits of the trickster i.e., shape-shifting ability of the creature. Indeed, the man was mysterious and also had some supernatural abilities. For instance, the man reads the mind of the woman as he informs the woman that “There’s supposed to be a Thunderstorm tomorrow. A big one” (Taylor). This astonished the woman as the man knew something that was a secret for her that is she loved thunderstorms. This incident indicates the ability of the stranger to read others’ minds which was something beyond the powers of humans that again asserts what Jung said that trickster “is a primitive “cosmic” being of divine-animal nature” (1980: 264) which notes that tricksters are superior beings because of their divine or superhuman qualities. The superpower in the stranger again becomes evident when he predicts the thunderstorm to occur in the future as he predicted that the thunderstorm “is supposed to be the biggest of the summer” (Taylor). In conclusion, these instances prove the fact that the stranger who appears in the beginning of the novel carries some traits of a trickster figure. Thus, later it is understood that the woman was Lillian, Maggie’s mother and the stranger was John respectively.

Apart from the indirect representation of a trickster figure within the novel, Taylor incorporated the traits of a trickster in the character named John Richardson. Once, Maggie’s car was stuck with a flat tire while she was returning from her mother Lillian’ funeral, where John appeared as a saviour who introduced himself as John Richardson. Jung has declared tricksters as the “forerunner of the saviour” (1980: 263) and also Street highlighted that “...universal feature of the trickster is his role as both revolutionary and saviour” (1972: 97). Thus, it could be concluded that tricksters take the role of a rescuer or a saviour which is evident in the character of John as well. Another interesting thing about the character John is that from his first appearance he was able to persuade Maggie that implies yet another trait of a trickster, that is, they are good at persuading others in order to achieve what they want. After Maggie, John encountered Dakota who was also impressed by his presence. Here, one of the characteristics of trickster that is, telling lies is observed in the character John as he introduced himself to Dakota as John Clayton, and not John Richardson. As per Danisova’s classification of tricksters into four variants, as mentioned earlier, trickster-user variants can be examined in the case of John. In this form of variant, tricksters are portrayed as lustful characters who tell lies in order to satisfy their desire. It is through telling lies that trickster plays his tricks upon others and even persuades others.

Another interesting fact about John is that he is known by several names at different places, for instance, he is known as John Tanner in the railway station, as John Richardson in front of Maggie, and John Clayton for Dakota and so on. This implies one of the peculiar features of a trickster, i.e., tricksters are known by several names at different places. For instance, Wayne, Maggie’s brother, asserted that “He’s known by a lot of different names by different people” (Taylor). Later, when John and Dakota headed towards the restaurant, they encountered Elvira to whom John introduced himself as John Frum. John is known by the name Caliban for Sammy and for Wayne, John is John Matus. This shift of last name in John created ambiguity in the mind of Virgil as well as Wayne. The first and foremost feature attributed by Hynes and Doty to a trickster is that of ambiguity and anomalousness. The change of name by John not only features tricksters’ quality of telling lies and confusion, but also points to what Hynes and Doty hailed the trickster as the “master of metamorphosis” (1993: 37). In other words, tricksters are good at transforming their form, gender and even names. Here, in the case of John, he transforms from John Richardson to John Tanner; from Tanner to Matus and so on. His conversations with the characters are filled with a number of lies. The biggest lie that John tells is his change of last names which implies a characteristic of the trickster Nanabush as they are also known by several names like Mishaabooz, Great Rabbit, and Gitchii-waabooz among many others.

An important point regarding the character of John is that he was able to develop a good rapport and relationship between Maggie and himself, as he was even invited for dinner at Maggie’s house. At the dinner, John met Maggie’s son, Virgil, who became very suspicious about John’s behaviour. When Virgil asked John’s name, he replied, “John Richardson...Tanner. Yes, I have two last names...”

(Taylor). From this statement of John, it becomes clear that he was lying to everyone he met by changing his last name from Richardson to Tanner and to Frum among many others which resembles the trickster's quality of telling lies. Virgil after closely watching Maggie and John, he feared whether his mother and John would end in a relationship. Virgil felt some weirdness in John's behaviour as he shared his thoughts with his Uncle Wayne that "...There's something weird about him, Uncle Wayne. Really Weird" (Taylor). Virgil could sense some strangeness in John as he noted that he did all "...strange things. Like animal calls. He sounds like the animals. I mean really sounds like the animals. Trains too..." (Taylor). Weirdness, mysteriousness, mimicking and so on are some of the attributes of a trickster figure which are visible in the character of John as portrayed by the writer.

Like Virgil, Uncle Wayne too felt some weirdness in the behaviour of John, as both Virgil and Wayne set out on an expedition to unravel the mystery behind the guy John. They reminded themselves to be vigilant because John could be known by several names at different places and he also can play tricks which can divert their path, "All this because John 'Caliban' Matus can make good animal calls...Don't forget he also goes by Tanner and Richardson..." (Taylor). Once while Virgil and Wayne followed John during night they saw that he was conversing with the raccoons which incited fear in them. Raccoons' presence can be spotted here and there in the story which created a frightening atmosphere. Thus, a man conversing with the raccoons was really mysterious, which proves that John was not a normal human as he is able to talk with animals. From this sight, Virgil and Wayne concluded that their doubts regarding John were true as Virgil said to Wayne that, "I told you he was strange" (Taylor). These observations about John give an idea of some of the general trickster traits which are visible in the character too. Tricksters are strange beings who do everything with a purpose and intention.

Maggie was impressed by John so much that she always talked about him that irritated Virgil. Wayne remembered the tales his mother, Lillian used to narrate about the trickster Nanabush as he recalled the words of his mother, "Momma always talked of him like he really existed. That's what made her storytelling so special. Virgil, that...that guy just might...I know this sounds crazy...but he could be Nanabush" (Taylor). Wayne started feeling that the traits and behaviour of John resembles that of the trickster figure of Anishinaabe- Ojibwe community, i.e., Nanabush about whom his mother narrated. Simultaneously, Virgil too started connecting the behaviour of John with that of a trickster, especially the Nanabush. From then on, both of them started resolving their doubts regarding John by trying to prove whether John is the real Nanabush or not. Lillian's tales helped them to easily identify the mythical traits of Nanabush in John's character. Wayne told Virgil that, "That's the only Nanabush I know. Will, I guess he could also be called Nanabonzo, and generically, the Trickster. He's known by a lot of different names by different people" (Taylor); as Wayne tried to connect John's change of last names as he said, "And...he keeps changing his last name. Tanner, Matus, Richardson...Depending on where you are in Canada, he also goes by different names. Weesageechak, Coyote, Napi, Glooscap, Raven..." (Taylor). From John's multiple names, Wayne and Virgil could examine the first similarity of a trickster with John, that is, both carry multiple names.

At first, Virgil couldn't believe that John was a trickster named Nanabush as he argued with his Uncle Wayne that,

...Nanabush doesn't exist. He's a made-up guy, from Native stories...I would believe you more if you said he was Santa Claus. I mean besides the fact that Nanabush is make-believe, John is white...I assume Nanabush would at least look a little Indian (Taylor).

Virgil tries to assert that John couldn't be a trickster named Nanabush because he is White and in the mind of Virgil, tricksters would at least appear like an Indian who is brown in colour, but John is not which made him constraint from accepting him as a trickster. Uncle Wayne couldn't withstand Virgil's thoughts as he pointed out the mythical traits that, "Tricksters have the ability to change their shape, Virgil...He can talk to the animals. You saw him...Tricksters love irony!" (Taylor). From this statement it is clear that tricksters are shape-shifters which is one of the prominent characteristics as pointed out by Hynes and Doty. In other words, tricksters are polyvalent beings. As Craig S Womack opines in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* that,

One of trickster's primary modi operandi, shape-shifting, the power to move fluidly beyond static definitions of cultural boundaries and taboos, is an impulse with both positive and destructive possibilities. Celebrating tricksters, it seems to me, should be done with caution. It is important to remember that shape-shifting can also be a form of witchery and that tricksters can be oppressive assholes as often as liberators... (1999: 301).

From Womack's words, it becomes evident that tricksters use their shape-shifting quality to cross boundaries and also for witchery; and even they transform themselves from man to woman and from animal to bird and so on. As Vizenor in *Manifest Manners* opined that trickster, "the name is an intimation of transformation, men to women, animals to birds..." (1994: 15).

For Virgil, tricksters were the silly and stupid beings as narrated by his grandma as he told Wayne that, "...I thought Nanabush was this goofy guy that always got himself into trouble, did stupid and silly things like tripping on shit and stuff..." (Taylor). He was not able to comprehend the fact that Nanabush can be dangerous too because of the mythical tales he had heard about tricksters which depicted them as foolish and stupid beings. It was Wayne who made him understand that tricksters, especially Nanabush can be seen as silly and stupid only in the stories told by grandma but not in reality or myths related to them. He also pointed that there are darker versions of the stories pertaining to the trickster which grandma didn't narrate. One of the myths related to trickster as Wayne highlighted is that, "...Yes Nanabush teaches us the silliness of human nature, but don't forget he has special powers. And people with powers tend to act differently from you and me..." (Taylor). Wayne figures out one more quality of the mythical figure, that is they can possess special powers and behave differently to different people and also noted that "They have their own set of rules..." (Taylor). From these findings, it becomes evident that tricksters are generally regarded to be the taboo-breakers who break societal norms and implement their own.

Segueing into one more dimension of trickster traits as noted by Wayne is that, "...he is a creature of appetites, of emotions, of desires...That's what usually got him into trouble. He would often do whatever he wanted to get what he wanted, whenever he wanted it..." (Taylor). Lewis Hyde rightly called the tricksters "a technician of appetite and a technician of instincts" (2010: 19) as they are able to do anything at any time. They invent situations according to their needs and achieve what they desire by hook or crook. Thus, by pointing out the quality of appetite, Wayne warns Virgil to be cautious as Nanabush could get what they wanted "...And if what you say is right, he wants..." (Taylor). Virgil remembered how John once threatened him not to interfere in his matters and also not be an obstacle between Maggie and himself, "She's going to be mine. And if you get in the way, there will be problems. And I am very good at dealing with them. So do not become a problem or things could get messy. Very messy" (Taylor). John declares himself to be very messy and said that he is good at dealing with problems too. All these thoughts made Virgil even more anxious.

Petroglyphs play a vital role which symbolizes trickster quality evident in the character John. For instance, Virgil spotted some petroglyphs carved on the rock while he was roaming near the railway station. Virgil could visualize two distinct images from the carved petroglyphs: "One appeared to be a man riding something-maybe a horse-or sitting on something. The second crude rendering...seemed to represent a woman" (Taylor). He tried to connect the images with John, who rides a motorcycle, and the second was his mother, Maggie, but he failed to trace out the hidden meaning behind the carved images. He keenly observed those images, "...as if the male figure was beckoning with one arm to the female. The other arm was pointing at yet another image...carved father down the rock. It appeared to be that of the sun of the horizon" (Taylor). Virgil finally concluded that either the image could mean that the woman will be taken away by the man sitting on something or was hinting to the disappearance of the woman into "the setting or rising sun" (Taylor), which connoted death. By listening to Virgil's narration about the petroglyphs, Wayne could immediately connect the images with the tales of Nanabush. As he put forth the fact that their culture believed in "the west or the land of the dead" (Taylor), and suddenly Virgil recalled the image he saw of "the setting sun" (Taylor). Wayne concluded that, "...He arrived, and your grandma, my mother, went west. Nanabush knows how to get there and back. And now, maybe, he has developed an infatuation with your mom" (Taylor). Wayne tries to convince Virgil that John's arrival took the life of Lillian and he rightly knows how to get there which hints to the feature of a trickster that is they can cross the boundary from heaven to hell and vice-versa. Yet another myth related to tricksters is that they are the spirits who can move freely from one place to another and they can go to the land of

the dead and return as they wish. Wayne concluded that John the Nanabush first took his mother, Lillian, to the West and next his target was Maggie.

The next important mythical attribute of the trickster as pointed out by Wayne to Virgil is about his mischievous character. Wayne also noted that wherever this trickster travels mischief too goes with them as he told, "...Virgil, where he goes, mischief follows. Luckily he's half human..." (Taylor). Wayne also highlighted that as already stated earlier, tricksters can transform their shape. Luckily John is now a half-human and there is no reason for fear at present. But Wayne warns Virgil to be vigilant as they can't predict when and how John would become half-animal and it is when they play their tricks upon others.

Like Virgil, Maggie too couldn't believe that John was the trickster Nanabush as Virgil tried to convince his mother by saying that, "...John is, in fact, Nanabush, a fictional character from Native mythology" (Taylor). Apart from Virgil and Wayne, Dakota too felt some strangeness in John's character as she told Virgil one day, "I'd been watching him. I don't know if you know this but he likes to dance. And talk to animals...raccoons at least" (Taylor). John's conversation with the raccoons is noticed by everyone. This particular scenario reveals the fact that John was not an ordinary person as normal human beings do not have the ability to talk with the animals especially, the raccoons. Another peculiarity Dakota observed in John is that, "...he must have great eyesight, especially at night, like an owl" (Taylor) as she compared the eyesight of John with that of an owl. From all these perceptions, one thing becomes evident that John resembles a trickster, especially the Nanabush.

At a later point, Maggie too started feeling that John was weird and mysterious as he sometimes behaved like a trickster. Once it happened, Maggie rejected a dinner offered by John which made him disappointed and in anger and desperation, he pivoted his motorcycle, hitting Maggie's knee badly. But he didn't respond for a few minutes as he just put on his helmet and drove away. Maggie was embarrassed and thought how immaturely John behaved as she felt that, "John was indeed acting like a petulant, self-obsessed man-child, like Nanabush in many of the legends..." (Taylor). Sammy's statement about Anishnaabe legends proves that John had friends like the thunderbirds or dinosaurs as he stated that "Some had been his friends, others he'd battled, others he'd avoided due to personal disagreements" (Taylor). Sammy's statement about John makes it clear that in the past John resided not with human beings, but with animals which again implies that John was not an ordinary person rather resembles the features of a trickster.

Chapter twenty-one plays a crucial role in analyzing and concluding that John was the real Nanabush, the trickster of the Anishinaabe community. For instance, one night John was waiting amidst the branches for everyone to go asleep because "mischief is best done in the dark" (Taylor). It was then that he saw a stray dog trying to relieve himself which made John growl "his best wolf growl" (Taylor) which horrified the dog. Thus, from this example, it becomes clear that John could imitate the sounds of animals which points to yet another features of a trickster. Hynes and Doty have asserted that tricksters are good at imitating others. From a human, John suddenly mimicked the sound of a wolf, which indirectly implies the transformation evident in tricksters as they are good at imitating or mimicking others which they use as a weapon to attack or play tricks.

One more example from the story to prove that John was the trickster is when he encountered God in the dream. Hynes and Doty have hailed tricksters as the messengers of god and a scared being, which can be applied to this particular scenario. Like John conversing with the raccoons, he also converses with the God which ordinary humans are not capable of. John saw God in his dreams and talked about many things, for instance,

Touche. Hey, I read that book about you, your biography.

My biography?

Yeah, that big black book everybody talks about.

I think it's called the Bible. (Taylor).

From these words, it could be scrutinized that John encountered God as John was talking about the biography of God, that is, the Bible.

Wayne sets himself to have a duel with John to get rid of him forever, but Virgil was afraid as he feared that if John was the real Nanabush, could Wayne be successful. Wayne was only concerned about his sister Maggie,

As you said, this is about your mother, my sister. Most people think Nanabush is a loveable goof, a children's character. But he is more human than most humans, he has all their nobility, and all their faults-magnified. He's a wild card... (Taylor).

Finally, it was the turn of Virgil to accept the fact that John is the real Nanabush, the trickster. It was when John and Virgil dugged the boulder and traced out the carved indentations which dates back to a couple of hundred years. It is from this incident Virgil concluded John as the trickster. It was John who found the place where the carvings were hidden which made Virgil curious to ask him "how did you know they were here?" to which John replied that "I carved them myself" (Taylor) which made Virgil numb stuck for a moment to accept John's words which reveals that their observations regarding John as the Nanabush were true. John himself indirectly declares that he is the trickster figure Nanabush. Virgil couldn't believe John's words as he requested him to turn to an animal which was refused by John by saying that, "Yeah when I have to. It's actually really painful" (Taylor). John's reply terrified Virgil as he tried to change their topic of discussion as he started to enquire about the petroglyphs seen across North America. John's knowledge about the petroglyphs again serves as a proof for Virgil to accept the fact that John was the Nanabush as John said that he was "on the road a long, long time" (Taylor) and all petroglyphs are different. John was responsible for all the petroglyphs carved on the rocks hundred years ago as he was roaming around different places at different times.

## CONCLUSION

In Drew Hayden Taylor's *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass: A Novel*, the character John epitomizes the trickster archetype who brings in transformation to the story. John's character reflects the culture as the trickster traits evident in him acts as a catalyst for change and introspection. The characteristic features of the mythical and mischievous trickster figure of Anishnaabe-Ojibwe community; the Nanabsuh is portrayed through John in this story. The traits such as mischievous behaviour, ability to transform and unpredictable behaviour align him with the traditional trickster figure found in Indigenous cultures. John's trickster feature helps him to navigate between the old and contemporary life and also between the spiritual and physical realm. The cultural identity is re-evaluated through some of John's actions which also motivate other characters to preserve their traditions by adopting modern ways. By juxtaposing these findings, it becomes evident that the trickster persona of John in *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass*, serves a crucial role to the novel in exploring the cultural dynamic and transformation. John's trickster traits along with enriching the narrative reflect the issues of change, identity and tradition. In conclusion, the paper unravels the myth and mystery behind the trickster, especially the Nanabush and also represents the similarities between Nanabush and John, a character in the novel.

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