

ABSTRACT**ANANSI: THE EVOLUTION OF THE TRICKSTER FIGURE
IN THE WEST INDIES**

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Anansi the Spiderman has become synonymous with guile and cunning, his exploits have enriched the realms of the children's story and folklore. However, an examination of Anansi's origins would lead to the discovery of a figure who has more in common with the ambivalent, amoral yet creative trickster figures in other societies than had previously been thought. It is the contention of this paper that the trickster figure in the West Indies is in actuality a multi-faceted being who has come to inhabit an increasingly more clearly defined yet complex role in the literature of the region.

The strong survival instincts of the captive African slaves in the diaspora are responsible for the proliferation of trickster stories. The unpredictable response of this character to adverse circumstances has made him the object of admiration, scorn and fear. In some respects he is not unlike the picaresque of European literary tradition.

It is the intention of the writer to examine the trickster figure as he exists in the anthropology of other cultures. A profile of the trickster is then constructed and the folklore of the West Indies examined accordingly. The development of the trickster from folklore hero to calypsonian is then assessed. An overview of the picaresque novel is followed with a view

towards highlighting the points of similarity existing in this form and the trickster figure in both oral and scribal literature. Selected works of literature are then looked at in order to assess how an understanding of the trickster figure has affected the writer's craft.