The Trickster and Queen

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Abstract

The trickster is a primary motif that appears in numerous cultures in the form of a mischievous and impulsive character, who tricks others to get what he wants. However, in reality the trickster is far from a simple-minded clown. He is actually very complex and sees through the facade of society and its strict hypocritical cultures and traditions, seeking to challenge these mechanisms that restrict the flow of logic and pleasure. For this paper, I will theoretically analyze the mechanism of the trickster, and the intimate relation between his trickery and his role as a culture-hero. I will apply this analysis to describe the trickster qualities within four key songs from the band Queen, i.e. the category-defying quality of “Bohemian Rhapsody,” the anti-establishment tones of “Fight From The Inside,” and “Sleeping On The Sidewalk,” and the gender-bending music video of “I Want To Break Free,” before concluding with an analysis on the trickster qualities of the band itself. Through this analysis, I will show that the trickster, as a conduit for questioning structure to reduce society to the inherent reality, is crucial to the functioning of the band as a vehicle of enlightenment, and was a critical part of making Queen the greatest band of all time.
Introduction

The trickster is well known for breaking the rules of society at every turn. A well-known example of a trickster is Bugs Bunny. In the cartoon “Rabbit of Seville,” Bugs Bunny partakes in a chase scene with his nemesis Elmer Fudd, filled with much chicanery. In addition to that, Bugs Bunny attempts to break as many rules and norm as possible, from cross-dressing to embarrassing Fudd by undressing him. The episode ends with being tricked into “marrying Bugs,” who tricks Fudd yet again by dumping him out a trap door. Although one may ascribe such behavior to a childish attitude, there lies a more complicated and meaningful spectacle at play. This is best illustrated through the gender-bending throughout the episode. At first Bugs uses a feminine disguise to trick Fudd into dropping his guard so as to cut his suspenders, thereby embarrassing him. This is interesting in the way Bugs uses the weakness of a man to make him vulnerable to society. Everybody has a fear of being examined by society to find their flaws, whether they are physical or psychological. Furthermore, the metaphor of “tying” Fudd’s gun in a knot represents the emasculation of men, completely reversing the dominant role of men in society. Finally, in showing Fudd compassion and care, he gets Fudd to be his bride. However, he then throws him out a window, in the final trick to mock his adversary. In this tale both sides of the trickster are presented, from the destructive and amusing episodes to the actions that involve more thought than society would like to admit. This trickster tale allows us to study the intelligent part of the trickster, which seeks to constantly renew society by challenging everything society holds as being sacred and conventional.

Through the trickster we learn much regarding the morals and values of a society such as what is acceptable decorum, and what is held dear and sacred. He teaches us much more than the hero ever could about the boundaries and divisions within society. In fact Barbara Babcock-Abrahams discusses this trickster-culture-hero evolution in her work “A Tolerated
Margin of Mess” as part of a theoretical analysis of the trickster within Native American trickster tales. Babcock-Abrahams states that, counter-intuitively, “the trickster may be an older type of character ... than the so-called culture hero.” (163) This is because he is undifferentiated within the context of society and culture. He is not prejudiced by the cultural developments in society with time. Cultural differentiation is the process whereby the developing traditions of a society inhibit the actions that are deemed counter-productive to the norms within that society. The members of that society are no longer acting free of cultural influence. The hero, on the other hand, exists out of cultural differentiation because his role is to serve the community. Thus, the hero only exists once society has “evolved” to some extant, and become culturally differentiated itself. The hero is a by-product of cultural “development.” This is seen most clearly through the development of the themes of stories over time. Different types of stories were told over time, with the aim of creating a society that mirrored the qualities of the main characters in those tales. Trickster tales were told in a way that painted the trickster as being selfish and foolish with the aim of preventing members of society from acting in a similar way. Heroic tales would create a group of people whose actions would benefit the community. The role of the hero became more prominent in storytelling with time because the progression and evolution of the trickster/hero character mirrors that undergone by society as it evolved from a more basic structure into a more “cultured” and “civilized” one.

The trickster is thus more fundamental because of his undifferentiation. This point is discussed in Paul Radin’s book *The Trickster*, in which he theoretically analyzed some trickster myths from North America. The trickster “represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but the undifferentiated present within every individual” (163). He gives the possibility for everything to occur since his thoughts exist independent from the moral prejudices and influences of society, whereas the hero is already distinguished in his
morality and civility. The trickster provides a link to our more un-evolved and primordial past, when humans were less “cultured” and "civilized” in their thoughts and actions. The trickster is actually a hero of society due to his ability to re-align society with it’s fundamental state, which is free from cultural influence and differentiation. Babcock-Abrahams discusses this in her essay in which she discusses the trickster-hero dichotomy in view of the evolution of society. The trickster “evolves into a trickster-culture-hero, and then in more ‘advanced’ cultures becomes two separate and distinct figures” (164). However, the trickster-culture-hero was never performing a heroic deed with the benefit of society in mind. Very often, the beneficial outcomes of some trickster episode are coincidental. The trickster had no intention to act for the betterment of society.

To properly understand the trickster, one must view his actions within the cultural sphere in which he lives because what is normal is relative to the society within which the norms exist. Without these cultural norms, the tricksters actions will be ascribed no meaning other than sheer tomfoolery, outright disgust and occasionally dangerous acts, such as the scene in which Bugs gives Fudd a “shave” while actually disfiguring his face (“although your face looks like it might have gone through a machine” as Bugs sings in the cartoon). With such potentially threatening acts in mind, it is easy to understand why the trickster and hero originally began as one character in storytelling, which was primarily a trickster character. The evolution of the trickster-hero character mirrored the evolution of society. Within a society, it was originally more important use stories to spread the message to simply not engage in trickster-like behavior rather than encouraging people to become a hero for society. The fear of trickster like behavior was influencing the storytelling themes of the time. The stories were told such that those listening would not want to partake in trickster-like behavior because he was always set up as being simple minded. The trickster
was described as unintelligent. Secondly, the trickster was painted as being selfish and unpatriotic toward society. By using peer pressure, people were pushed into seeing the way of the trickster as being solely negative. With the passage of time, groups of people got bigger and had greater needs, such as more food. Thus, the need for tales spreading the heroic quality to help the group became more important.

Regardless of the evolutionary state of the human, there is a reservoir of primitive motifs present within the psyche of all human beings, which functions as a basis for us to act in our early years before any cultural differentiation resulting from interaction with society. Carl Jung discusses this reservoir of motifs, which he calls the collective unconscious, in his book *The Archetype and The Collective Unconscious*. He describes the collective unconscious as “a part of the psyche” that “does not ... owe it’s existence to personal experiences and is not a personal acquisition” (42). It is populated by archetypes, i.e. themes that “seem to be present always and everywhere” (42). These motifs are fundamental to human nature. One of them is the trickster motif, according to Jung himself. Thus, the trickster is a basic part of the human psyche. This quality of the trickster that defies categorization and structure is a fundamental building block in the psyche of human. In other words, to question the norms of a society is fundamental in human nature.

The intriguing question is why do tricksters behave as they do? This question is relevant whether we are analyzing a trickster in an oral narrative from a tribe in East Africa, or the trickster traits of a rock band from the 70s. The answer is that tricksters are forced to contend with rules and norms of a society with which they had nothing to do. As Radin postulates quite nicely, “is this a *speculum mentis* wherein is depicted man’s struggle, with himself and with a world into which he had been thrust without his volition or consent?” (x) Why should someone have to deal with the stipulations and mandates of a previous culture, the creation and development of which that person had nothing to do? There exists no right for one
society or generation to bind another to its rules and regulations. Even within one society, there exists no right for the top brass to dictate how everyone should behave and act. As Thomas Jefferson once said “I am increasingly persuaded that the earth belongs exclusively to the living and that one generation has no more right to bind another to its laws and judgments than one independent nation has the right to command another” (Ross). Tricksters feel exactly in this manner regarding this topic. They proceed to act out against these vivid constrictions by defying them because these constrictions are illegitimate and ludicrous.

In defying the constrictions of society, tricksters are frequently depicted as performing dangerous deeds because they go against the normal modes of behavior in society. Storytellers have used the trickster and his abnormal actions to define the region of actions that constitute acceptable decorum. Due to this, tricksters have come to be seen in bad light, as they tend to always be observed in situations in which they are frowned upon. This viewpoint is brilliantly discussed in Babcock-Abrahams essay, in which she contends “all too often, ‘marginality’ ... has connoted being outside in a solely negative sense, being dangerous to or somehow below ‘normal’ boundaries” (149). The way storytellers describe the trickster is (and always has been) from a negative point of view such as being simple-minded, easily outwitted and always detrimental to society. However, the trickster contains an infinite variety of options and interpretations, which help us to define ourselves based on our past and present. The misinterpretation of the nature of the trickster and the true purpose of his ways took place within the context of social interactions, in which the individual is not sought out for his individuality, but for his agreement with the general consensus. By allowing the mass psychology of groups to affect and dominate the individual, the richness of the individual is lost. In his book *The Undiscovered Self*, Carl Jung discusses the effects of group psychology on the psyche of the individual. Jung states that “if the individual is not truly regenerated in spirit, society cannot be either, for society is the sum
total of individuals.” (40) The loss of the diversity is a hindrance to the overall quest for enlightenment of society and the human race, and it slows down the process of questioning and debating what we think we know to figure out whether that is the inherent truth of nature. If we individually don’t know what is going on, how is society to be expected to know how to function in a holistic and enlightened way?

We are fooled into accepting the view of the masses in terms of how we act in our daily lives in attempting to live up to a false set of ideals, which is dangerous for numerous reasons, such as the false cloak of civility that transcends humanity and can implode at anytime. Only by adhering to the trickster part of the psyche will a human being become free from the hypocrisies of society. This is because the trickster constantly challenges the traditional norms of society, the acceptable and unacceptable modes of interaction within society. From his lack of prejudice with regards to tradition and culture, he has enlightenment, which is a fundamental understanding of the way the world works. More often rather than not, in oral narratives across cultures, the trickster is not shown for the truly amazing intellectual he is. He was portrayed as a simple-minded and selfish fool that everybody else should aspire to imitate. However, in reality, the trickster chooses not to be differentiated because he sees through the facade of society’s vain norms and rigid entrapments. By accepting and understanding the whole aspect of himself, the trickster is able to see more clearly through the hypocrisies of society, and subsequently chooses to act in a way to ridicule these ludicrous “ideals.” In being culturally undifferentiated, the trickster abandons beliefs that are historically accepted yet have no real foundations from any logical point of view. The person who truly abandons such conventions in favor of logic and reasoning is more enlightened, as he has chosen to seek out fundamental and inherent truths of reality. The hero, on the other hand, is simply serving a “higher” being, with the thought of “contributing” to the “betterment” of society. So, we must always ask ourselves: is the
hero really the hero and the trickster really the trickster?

In challenging the norms of society, the trickster frequently pokes fun at the society within which he lives. This is a fundamental trickster trait, and is done by all tricksters whether it was Bugs Bunny ridiculing the gender roles of society or the rockers of the 70’s that mocked the bureaucratic administration that sought to control society in their songs and performances. Tricksters are omnipresent in all societies and are always attempting to redefine the boundaries within their society. The music scene often criticizes or satirizes its own cultural context, and has thus played host to many people who embody the ways of the trickster, especially in the 60’s and the 70’s, in which the disdain for and criticism of the bureaucratic administration was ubiquitous and quintessential to the functioning of the great rock bands. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on Queen, the scintillating classic rock band that are simply the greatest rock band of all time, and the trickster epic that is their history, legacy and most importantly, their gift to society. I will first use the above theoretical framework to analyze four of their songs to show the trickster qualities in these songs before ending with a section on how the band itself was a trickster independent of their music.

Bohemian Rhapsody

The song from within their discography that is the most trickster-like is undoubtedly “Bohemian Rhapsody.” It is a song well-known for its defiance of boundaries and classification like the trickster. It begins with a slow opening section, driven by Mercury’s iconic piano playing that is bridged by an emphatic guitar solo into an opera section before moving into a heavy rock section marked by a tone of anger and finally ending on a softer note. Due to this wild nature of the song and its content, it represents one of the most well-known and best loved songs of all time among classic rock fans. However, most people use it as a punchline, like most other well-known Queen songs. The reason for this is unclear. It could have been Freddie’s queer personality, the questionable qualities of 70’s rockers in
general or simply some poor infidels way of making sense of an enlightened trickster’s questioning of unnecessary boundaries and restrictions. This song is well-known for the inability of anyone to pinpoint the meaning as intended by Mercury, who wrote it. Like the trickster and his constant occupation of liminal spaces or boundaries, this song has avoided being classified in terms of its overall meaning. Just like the trickster in a liminal space, there is no one real category to place “Bohemian Rhapsody” into. In fact, just like the trickster, there lies an infinite possibility of interpretations for “Bohemian Rhapsody,” each relevant to the person who is interpreting it.

One thing we can say despite the uncertainty on the original meaning is that the operatic section is interesting in the way it describes the two sides of good and evil fighting for, what is likely, the soul of the narrator. They are essentially the two opposing sides of the trickster-hero dichotomy or the Apollonian-Dionysian duality. In Friedrich Nietzsche’s “The Birth of Tragedy,” he discusses the Apollonian (rational and ordered) and Dionysian (sensual and emotional) sides of life. In the opera section of “Bohemian Rhapsody,” there are two sides fighting for what is likely the soul of the narrator of the song. These two sides represent the Apollonian and Dionysian parts of life respectively. They are the hero and trickster parts of the human psyche respectively. The Apollonian “embodies the drive ... toward the drawing and respecting of boundaries and limits; he teaches an ethic of moderation and self-control” (xi). The Apollonian is the morally upright hero, who respects the boundaries of society and strives to maintain these divisions against the trickster. The Apollonian is not willing to let the narrator of the song go and even states that “Beelzebub has a devil put aside” for the narrator indicating his fate is sealed. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is “the drive towards the transgression of limits, ... and excess” (xi). It is the trickster part of the human, which strives towards transgressing boundaries to determine for himself whether or not passing these limits is actually beneficial to himself. The Dionysian
is fighting the Apollonian part to let him go free of a force that is dictating everything that the narrator can do against will, just like how society dictates what we can and cannot do. Both of these concepts are partially needed to achieve fulfillment.

The trickster embodies the Dionysian in the way he strives to seek out the inherent realities of life by transgressing boundaries. In fact, “Bohemian Rhapsody” may be considered a trickster in and of itself because it defies categorization like most other songs which do not contain three or more genres of music. It also contains several instances that perfectly describe the feelings and thoughts of the trickster. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the essay “The Destructive Character” by Benjamin Walters. In this essay, Walters discusses several idiosyncrasies of the destructive character in delineating theoretically why the destructive character acts the way he does. For example,

The destructive character lives from the feeling not that life is worth living, but that suicide is not worth the trouble. The destructive character sees nothing permanent.

But for this reason he sees ways everywhere (Walters 10).

These two points can shed new light on the ways of the trickster. In his inability to terminate his life, he continues living. Having been dealt the cruel blow of life, the trickster chooses to do whatever he pleases. It only makes sense since life did not ask his permission before handing him this opportunity that he lives it on his terms. This same message is conveyed in “Bohemian Rhapsody.” In the lines “I don’t wanna die. But sometimes I wish I’d never been born at all,” the narrator intimates his indifference life; he doesn’t want to end it, but if it ended it wouldn’t be the worst thing to happen to him. Later on in the song, during the heavy section after the magical opera section, he angrily goes against a cruel oppressor. He ends the song by saying “anyway the wind blows,” i.e. he is open to anything and everything that life has to offer. In other words, he is willing to live life as and when life offers itself to be lived and not in the
manner in which society wants him to live out his life, with his own devil waiting for him at the end of it.

**Fight From The Inside**

None of Queen’s other songs quite defy categorization like “Bohemian Rhapsody.” However, they do have many more songs that provoke one to rethink what we know or have taken for granted in our daily lives, just like the trickster and his ways. One of such works from Queen is “Fight From The Inside.” It is one of their heavier and louder songs, no doubt helped by Taylor’s raspy voice. This heavier sound works well with the sarcastic tone used to portray most people being fooled into thinking they are part of a bigger picture when in reality they are really just more bricks in the wall. It critiques society for falling into the entrapment of the capitalistic world. This is most clearly seen in the lines “You’re just another money spinner tool,” and “you’re just another sucker ready for a fall.” Both these lines entail a sharp dislike for the current nature of the western world in which money is the dominant variable in the equation of life. This is a reference to the cultural hegemony has been put in place by the powers that be to achieve their goals. In discussing capitalist worldviews, the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels is quintessential because of the way the authors delineate the way the ruling elite subject the majority of the population to their dictates to maintain their power. We are “allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it” (Marx). In other words, the majority of the population are merely drones used by the ruling elite to maintain their cultural and capitalistic hegemony. A line in the song goes “you think that out in the streets is all true,” implying that the listener has been fooled into believing the propaganda of the ruling class, and thus becomes part of their plans. In reality, the listener is just another workhorse that will bring the ruling class more money. He is also dispensable and his welfare is irrelevant to the ruling class. Where the powers that be have vested interests in the outcome of a certain
situation, the individual must embody the way of the trickster. He must remember the concept of mass psychology and strive to think as an undifferentiated individual. There is nothing wrong in accepting who you are and doing what makes you feel fulfilled.

The interesting aspect regarding “Fight From The Inside,” among other things, is the chorus. It goes

You gotta Fight From The Inside
Attack From The Rear
Fight From The Inside
You Can’t Win With Your Hands Tied
Fight From The Inside
Fight From The Inside
Right Down The Line.

This sequence of lyrics entails some very non-heroic and non-traditional aspects. The song suggests attacking from the rear, from where your opponent cannot see you. Furthermore, the song intimates freeing yourself from the attachments of the material world for this fight (can’t win with your hands tied). It also proposes that we fight along a line. Lines may be thought of as dividers. As such, lines are liminal spaces. Thus, the chorus of the song, which is it’s backbone, contains a reference to the space occupied by tricksters. In this case, the line mentioned in the lyrics is the line that divides the hero and the trickster or the two different sides of a human. Though someone may deviate from the division, he/she should always return to the line because the line is at once both the hero and the trickster. The line offers the traits of both. The fundamental nature of the trickster and the hero are critical towards helping humans navigate through the hurdles of life. You may choose to follow society, which is forever afraid of the unknown and always sides with the light. Or, you can accept the unknown trickster energies, and use it together with the heroic energies to
enrich yourself in the fight against the cage. The two contrasting energies provide a balance and richness that make humans more holistic. One cannot separate the hero and the trickster for they are two sides of the same coin. In repeating the line “right down the line,” Taylor is using repetition to drive home the point that we must use both archetypes in attempting to fight against the dogmatic norms of society.

However, a division of morality between the hero and trickster was put in place by the powers that be. This division was a mechanism to reinforce their role at the top of the social strata by preventing the common man from utilizing both of these archetypes in a quest to enlighten himself and see through the facade of the powers that be. This division was how they tied our hands. Marx and Engels discuss this in the Communist Manifesto as they delineate the manner in which the ruling elite reinforced their position in society. They “sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation” (Marx). The ruling elite want to keep the status quo as is, since it benefits them the most. To maintain the status quo, the ruling elite used the social codes of conduct to keep society under thumb. “Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests” (Marx). These mechanisms are used to create a set of conditions that entrap the society within a framework of false realities that cloud their ability to see the inherent truths. In “Fight From The Inside,” this can be seen in the line “Hey you boy, think that you know what you’re doing.” This is a scenario in which society thinks it a good handle on their lives when in reality they are only allowed to determine the unimportant details. The powers that be have already decided the important aspects relating to how society will be used to help them make money and maintain their power. However, in attempting to maintain the social strata, the bourgeois inevitably sets in motion the questioning of this rigid framework by the trickster. The trickster does not want the dictatorship of society and society does not want the trickster in
their dictatorship. The trickster doesn’t want to be subjected to the rigid structures of society that he had no part in creating, which restrict his ability to live life in a way that makes him thoroughly happy. Society, in turn doesn’t want the trickster destroying their robotic and systematic way of life because it creates a state of change and humans are creatures of habit. Though this mutual dislike exists, the trickster is constantly trying to return society to its basest aspect. Walters provides an explanation regarding the trickster’s fundamental need to reduce society to its root aspects in his essay “The Destructive Character.” Walters explains “What exists he reduces to rubble - not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it” (10). In reducing the world to it’s simplest, we see what is significant. The trickster attempts to reduce society to an unprejudiced state because the extra constrictions deny the trickster the right to live his life in the manner of his choosing. The line “Fight from the inside,” is a challenge to fight from the fundamental parts of the human psyche, free from the inhibitions of culture and traditions to free society from the dictates of the bourgeois. It is a call to use the disorder of the human being to fight the order of the establishment.

**Sleeping on The Sidewalk**

In general, anti-establishment themes were not uncommon in works by Queen. “Sleeping on the Sidewalk,” written by Brian May is another song from Queen that blatantly attacks authority. The song is much softer and slower than “Fight From The Inside,” but rather uses patterning to get the meaning across. There is a line that is subtly manipulated as it repeated throughout the song to get across the theme of “Sleeping on The Sidewalk.” In the beginning the narrator sings the line as “I sure get hungry but I sure don’t want to go home.” In this song, a society is imagined, much like that of today, where the aim of the individual is to make it in the capitalistic world. Upon doing so, the individual gains much fame and money. Thus, the narrator doesn’t want to give up and works very hard to achieve
his goals. Then, the narrator gets a lucky break and becomes a big star. He then sings “I don’t get hungry and I sure don’t want to go home.” Having become rich and famous, the narrator wants to enjoy his spoils. However, as is the case with capitalism, the urge of the elite to control everyone else leads to a disagreement between the individual and the organization that made him famous. So he tells them “where to stick that fancy label,” and proceeds to quite from the business. He then sings the line one more time as in “I sure get hungry and I sure do wanna go home.” The trickster nature of the narrator has helped him to see that the dream of society is not a dream worth pursuing as you lose the ability to live for yourself. The trickster is not interested in what society or the ruling elite want. He is only interested in reducing the world to it’s fundamental state so that he may live free from the hypocrisies of society. The narrator has learned from his experiences, and realizes that the most fulfilling life is one in which he lives simply, with few material attachments and close to nature so that he doesn’t fall into the ruling elite’s trap just like society. In doing this, he may seek out what is fulfilling to him as an individual.

The song emphasizes the theme of individuality, which is something the trickster is always linked with because the trickster strives to reduce everybody to their fundamental nature before they were differentiated by society into people with similar likes and dislikes. Thus, the trickster always critiques any hierarchy or structure because in creating such a system, the ruling elite are enforcing a certain way onto the people within the system. The gentler tone of this song compared to the previous one doesn’t detract from the anti-establishment theme throughout it. Geoffrey Bradshaw discusses a similar anti-establishment style with the band “The Grateful Dead” in his thesis *Collective Expressions and Negotiated Structures: The Grateful Dead in American Culture*. In it he describes how the band and the society of the time sought ways to free themselves from the thought control of the government. In this song by Queen, what is clear is a stinging rebuke
of one of the “dominant models of the modern worldview” (Bradshaw 365) similar to the way the Deadheads rejected the general way of life to seek out enlightenment. The Deadheads followed the band around and abandoned their regular life with a nine-to-five job because it wasn’t as fulfilling as the life they could lead with the Grateful Dead. They chose to embrace life on the road, which is a liminal space because it is neither the place you being nor the destination but merely somewhere in between. They left behind a life of money and luxury because they saw that this life could not bring them intellectual fulfillment. All this life brought was subjugation to a power through various means such as money and religion. “Power is manifested ... through the iron cage of bureaucratic administration,” Bradshaw writes (380). In aligning with the bureaucrats, one is essentially submitting to a power that cannot be satisfied and will strive to get more money and resources. The narrator of this song, just like the Deadheads, has embraced his trickster nature to rid himself of the shackles of modern capitalism. In questioning the dominant worldview, the trickster nature of the narrator has helped him realize that he was not living according to his own will.

In choosing a life on the road (“it’s just me and the road from here”), the narrator is essentially taking the path of the Deadheads. He is rejecting the superficial materialistic life encouraged by society. In rejecting a life of the style of “modern” society, the trickster will be allowed to live without all the unnecessary complications that most other people deal with. However, such a lifestyle will eventually influence the others around the trickster to some extent. The powers that be realize that trickster can, in such situations, turn the world upside-down. The trickster is portrayed as evil and harmful to society through propaganda much the same way communism is portrayed as worse than capitalism. In reality, however, successfully placing communism, as delineated by Marx and Engels, as the dominant way of life in this world will be the crowning moment for human intellectual achievement because we will then be able to live to do whatever we please, without the fear of not being able to
support ourselves or our families. Such propaganda can be very influencing indeed, especially over years of usage. However, one must consider whether the trickster is really in the wrong. Oftentimes, the trickster is simply a *speculum mentis*, i.e. the mirror of the mind, who serves to question the actions of the surrounding area. The trickster is the mirror of the mind and he can guide us to what is intrinsically and inherently fulfilling in nature. In this song, the narrator means he is leaving behind the life of adhering to the bureaucratic dictators who view the narrator of the song as a cash cow. He has realized that the simplest life is one free of material attachments and close to nature. Although he seemingly wanted the riches of his dreams, he soon learned that this was not worth much in reality, just as the Deadheads rejected the current lifestyle of the “modern” world. Thus, this song attempts to recreate a world filled with people living truly fulfilling lives for themselves, as opposed to simple serving the powers that be. This song’s lyrics may in general be interpreted as a society in which most of it’s members are simply born onto a conveyor belt to be part of someone else’s plan. In doing so, the proletariat do not really achieve the goals that have significant personal meaning to themselves. They lead an empty life, dragged along by the thought of serving a higher being or purpose to make the life worth living. By spreading this message through songs of this nature, Brian has tried to re-educate and re-enlighten society using his trickster nature.

**I Want To Break Free**

The nature of the trickster is such that he will use any method possible in satirizing society. He may act or dress weirdly. A relevant example of a modern day trickster is the drag queen and the way the gender roles of society are mocked by the dress code of the drag queen. In the music video for “I Want To Break Free,” all four members dress in drag for part of it. As is always the case with drag queen performances, especially when Bugs Bunny dressed in drag, the most interesting detail lies in the imperfection of the impersonation. Eric
Savoy discussed this detail in “The Signifying Rabbit,” in which he discussed, among other things, the consequences of gender-bending through cross-dressing. He stated that "The imperfection of her imitation is what makes the drag queen appealing, what makes her eminently readable. Foolproof imitations of women by men, or men by women, are curious, but not interesting” (204). The tell tale sign is interesting because it tells everyone that perfection in imitation is not as important as the act of imitation itself. This could not be more true of Freddie’s trickster and his ways in general, but is especially true of this song. Through the tell-tale sign, the band members sought to perfect the uproar, so as to ensure that the true meaning of the performance is not lost in the subterfuge. The cross-dressing calls into question the “constraints of straight society.” (Savoy 203) Society is thrown into limbo as one of the main divisions in it is torn to shreds. Although everything returns to normal after this temporary state of flux, they have performed the heroic duties of the trickster in reminding society to embrace the true self, however abnormal it may be. Harold Scheub discusses this in his book “Story,” in which he talks about storytelling and how the storyteller conveys the meaning of a story within the context of African stories, although the analysis is far more general. Scheub states that even when order is restored after the momentary descent into anarchy, “we cannot return to normality completely; we have been changed by ... trickster’s illusions. In the process, we have seen a part of the world in a fresh way” (271). The aim of a trickster is to constantly challenge society to see things in a new way as a method of renewal. This is fundamental in allowing society to rid itself of any unnecessary restrictions that impede its flow towards a more enlightened state.

The acts of the trickster serve as wake-up calls to rethink that which we have accepted or that which we do not really understand. His tricks serve to make us question our every aspect of life. This can be most easily seen through drag queens and their gender-bending. Although there seemingly exists a hetero-normative culture today within society, sexuality is
not made of a discrete type. Rather, it exists on a continuum. However, anything that lies outside the norm has always been ridiculed throughout history. Even in the 1600’s (and for long before), Galileo Galilei was subjected to cruel treatment because he went against what the church taught even though he was right. In “What The Fuck is Queer Theory,” Eugene Wolters briefly describes queer theory and how it is being used to deconstruct the fake boundaries of society, the existence of which automatically guarantees ridicule for those who lie on the wrong side of these boundaries. “The ideas we have in our head about what constitutes male-ness, female-ness, and what constitutes ‘normal’ are all socially constructed” (Wolters) yet treated as undeniable truths and realities. These norms have no inherent right or claim to be accepted as the one, true way in life. The aim of the trickster is to help the inherently true ideas beyond the hypocrisies of society emerge in a free discourse.

In “Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety,” Marjorie Garber discusses the contribution of transvestites and their actions to society today. She discusses how the manners "by which heterosexuality had encoded and recognized itself have become detached from a referent with which those signs are thereby revealed to have had a conventional rather than a natural connection" (147). Through the years, the norms of society have been accepted as the one true convention, whether it be heterosexuality, religion, or capitalism. Through queering, the trickster attempts to raise questions regarding the norms we have taken for granted all along. Inherently in nature there exists no reason for these “norms” to be held up as reality. The true meaning of queering is the “calling into question the possibility of ground” (Garber 150). Thus, the drag queen is calling into question the possibility that the traditional gender roles are not fundamentally inherent nature. Logically equivalent would be to say that there is nothing wrong with dressing in drag, since dressing in drag is deemed “wrong” in comparison to traditional gender roles, which are not true by any invariant rule or law. The song and especially the video of it served as a reminder to
never chastise someone because they are Other. “Everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, of his own condition.” (9) The trickster has helped bring society back to it’s basics to learn what is is real and inherent in nature by questioning and opposing something everyone in society has simply accepted as true to show that it is really a reality with a false legitimacy.

**Queen**

All of the above four songs have a similarity in that they tackle the accepted traditions that have come to be the false legitimacy described previously. Each song was written by one of the four band members. The fact that the four band members were able to write songs that were so trickster-like is a testament to the fact that they were all themselves very tricksterish in their own nature. In this section, I will attempt to show that their trickster nature went beyond simply the songs they wrote. The best way to do this is to discuss specific examples from throughout the band’s career describing their trickster-like behavior. However, I will first begin by delineating the name of the band and the trickster energies that went into the naming of the band. The name “queen,” was suggested by Mercury when the band was first formed in 1970 from the remnants of an earlier group called Smile. Taylor and May (Deacon only joined the band in 1971) were not initially fond of it because of the link with the word drag-queen. Freddie Mercury, however, in a true trickster sense, saw the word as it should be. He saw the word as something regal and beautiful. Like a trickster, Mercury was not influenced by the prejudices and stigmas of society. May and Taylor eventually came around and agreed to name the band Queen. But the androgyny doesn’t stop there. Throughout the band’s career, they have toyed with the concept. From lyrics of some their songs, to Freddie’s on-stage antics, to music videos, such as I Want To Break Free, and even their current frontman, Adam Lambert. Being normal was never prominently on the agenda with Queen.
During the era of the 70’s, Queen were just beginning to find their feet in the world of rock and roll. It was during this time that Mercury changed his surname from Bulsara to Mercury, a.k.a the Roman trickster/messenger god. This can be traced back to a song Mercury wrote, entitled “My Fairy King.” There is a line in this song that goes “Oh mother Mercury, look what you’ve done to me ...” Freddie felt that he needed to become Mercury because he said the mother in that song was his mother. The other members thought this was weird at first but decided to go along with it anyway. Brian May, the guitarist, spoke about how the “changing of his name was part of him assuming this different skin. The young Bulsara was still there, but for the public he was going to be this god” (afr00dita). Mercury was going to change his name as part of a metamorphosis process to become this great entertainer for the public. In *Freddie Mercury: The Definitive Biography*, written by Leslie-Ann Jones, the notion is put forth that Freddie chose the name Mercury because it was the name of the messenger of the gods (84). The trickster characteristics in this decision are plentiful, from the choice of the name, to the symbolism of moving between worlds and even the transition from Bulsara (man) to Mercury (god) as mentioned by May. The trickster is well known for living in liminal spaces. This was another way of escaping classification by society. Freddie was a very shy man when out of the public eye. The legendary and lively persona of Freddie Mercury only lived and thrived on a liminal stage, namely concerts and parties. Mercury was a skin Bulsara would wear when he went into the public eye.

Whenever Freddie Mercury was involved, there was always some wild ride in store.

Thus, with Mercury as the frontman of Queen, the band for the most part was synonymous for being excessive and hedonistic. This can be seen most clearly through the outlandish parties thrown by the frontman Mercury. His 39th birthday party lasted a month into his 40th year! In the video “Freddie Mercury - The Untold Story Part 7,” some of the attendees go into some detail about the activities that went on during the party. As Trip
Khalif, a sound engineer for the band, said in the video “You walk in and there were trolls and dwarfs and ogres and thieves and ballerinas and transvestites and transsexuals and ... I think there’s two or three people of the third sex there” (afro0dita). In short, there were numerous people wearing clothes that either were not commonly worn in society or that could not be identified with any classification scheme based on norms of society at the time. Of particular relevance is the fact that there were a lot of people dressed in drag during the party. Eric Savoy discussed the drag queen dress code in his essay “The Signifying Rabbit,” in which he delineated how performing in a drag queen costume is more than just defying traditional gender classes. This display, “is a self-conscious aesthetic that plays with style and power, rather than an embrace of one's 'true' nature against the constraints of straight society” (203). Rather than simply accepting that everybody is different and subsequently welcoming everyone regardless of queer idiosyncrasies, Freddie takes it a step farther. He attempts to redefine the gender roles of society altogether. This queering was especially relevant early in the band’s career, he performed with a more feminine look. In fact, all four band members painted their nails and had long hair during the first few years of the band’s history. They all subsequently retained a more masculine look on stage in the 80s. However, Freddie still threw parties like the one described previously. He attempted to break through the dogmas of conventional society, and sought to call into question the norms of society, such as the conventional gender structure through his gender-bending lifestyle.

As such, Freddie Mercury is the greatest living example of a trickster. He was the poster boy for hedonistic exploits. However, for all his excessive pursuits in life that may have portrayed him as nothing but a sex-crazed and drug-crazed animal, he had another side of him that was far more intellectual, as can be seen by his lyrics, compositions and comments made throughout his life. This is something that has been neglected in older stories about tricksters, i.e. their intellect. Tricksters generally have reasons for the way they
act. They are not simple-minded fools who act as though they did not know better when satirizing society. Tricksters choose to abandon the structural norms that they are placed within, without their consent since it goes against their undifferentiated nature. In fact, all four members of the bands were very enlightened intellectuals. They wrote songs with lyrics that helped renew society. The four songs analyzed previously are only a handful of their work that would testify to this. In addition to that, the four individuals were also attempting to renew society through their actions. This can be seen most clearly in the episode where Deacon criticized May and Taylor for performing “We Are The Champions” with Robbie Williams. Deacon remarked “It is one of the greatest songs ever written but I think they’ve ruined it. I don't want to be nasty, but let's just say Robbie Williams is no Freddie Mercury” (The Royal Family). Deacon’s comment are true because Freddie Mercury was the greatest singer the world has ever had the pleasure of listening to. Robbie Williams is certainly not good enough to come anywhere close to Freddie Mercury. However, such an opinion is not commonly held or exchanged in society because decorum and manners are emphasized. Furthermore, the harshness in Deacon’s comment spoke volumes beyond what he explicitly said. As Babcock-Abrahams wrote, tricksters “tend to express a concomitant breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection.” John made those remarks as though he was making these remarks in his mind, to himself. In reality, he discredited both the other two members and Robbie Williams by making those remarks. He failed to see the socially-constructed dividing line between a proper remark, and a discrediting remark. Obviously, the recording with Williams had good intentions behind it. However, Deacon refused to be held-up by society’s niceties and made sure he was unequivocal about his feelings on the matter. I have to side with Deacon on this incident because Robbie Williams is no Freddie Mercury.

Such episodes with unadulterated emotion like this involving John Deacon are rare
because he was the one resemblance of normalcy within Queen. Being the most “normal” character of the fearsome foursome, he was the trickster in plain sight. He was the one who never quite partook in the more outlandish episodes or Freddie or Roger. John never really seemed to want the limelight like the other three members. Again, the Walters essay “The Destructive Character” can be drawn upon to provide an explanation for one of the actions of a trickster. Walters states “The destructive character has no interest in being understood” (9). John was never one to care about the high life, despite the fact that he was a member of one of the most outrageous bands of all time. He was content to just write and play his music and get across his thoughts and thinking. In addition to that, there were some rumors suggesting that he suffered from depression after the death of Freddie Mercury, and that he never really recovered from that. As such, it is very likely that he shunned the limelight because it was/is too painful. That is understandable, and in doing so, he reminds society that each of us owes no one anything. People label him a recluse, which has a certain stigma attached to it. However, we forget that there exists no right or wrong on the scale of introversion and extroversion. It is only worth doing something if you really want to do it. Deacon was happy with the role he had in the band and had no need for the limelight. He felt no need to partake in some of the more outlandish episodes of the other band members. This is one of the traits of a trickster who wants to reduce the world to it’s simplest state free from the complexities brought about by social interactions and norms. Deacon was content with leading a simple life.

Although Deacon episode with Williams has not left an indelible mark in the world in the sense that some other episodes in history have, the message behind it is clear. Through such actions, the trickster seeks to bring out the truth ahead of society’s need to be nice to one another. Deacon sought to get rid of this societal cancer that prevents humans from speaking what they really want to because of a fear of being labeled mean or rude. This
minor episode is/was part of a more massive cultural upheaval. Cultural upheavals come in many forms. A massive cultural renewal occurred in the cultural experiments of the sixties and the seventies. One of the most interesting details lies in the use of recreational drugs. Of particular importance was lysergic acid diethylamide-25, more commonly known as LSD or acid. Bradshaw discussed the role of LSD as a conduit for enlightenment in his thesis regarding “The Grateful Dead” in which he discussed scientifically how LSD worked. LSD had the benefits of inhibiting serotonin re-uptake. Serotonin restricts the perception of stimuli to allow for the brain to focus more pertinently on a matter at hand. As such, ingesting LSD allowed the brain “unrestricted information from both sensory stimuli and memory. Thought patterns were freed from traditional moorings” (Bradshaw 174). LSD allows the user’s brain to focus much more on a particular memory or thought to free himself from any prejudices he might have in a less unrestricted state. Thus, LSD was used to build a community that was always “questioning mainstream society, and offering an alternative vision of creative anarchy” (Bradshaw 179). Anarchy, in this sense, is a freedom from the government or the rigid structures of society. In freeing the brain from traditional prejudices, society is reconstructed into an alternative reality that is free from these restrictions. In a similar way, Queen was a recreational drug in and of themselves; a conduit through which enlightenment could be sought. Enlightenment can be obtained via their songs. Their songs are guiding lights to the path of freedom from the government and other controlling structures. This was shown in the analysis of the four songs earlier and applies to many more of the songs in their discography.

The most obviously anti-establishment songs from Queen’s discography come from Taylor’s work. In general, his songs have a tone of critiquing society and the expectations it has for the individual members within it. The most famous example of this is “Radio Ga Ga” and it’s criticism of the quality of music on the radio in the 80s. The lines “we hardly need to
use our ears / how music changes through the years” perfectly illustrate this. These lines
describe how the video realm had been taking over the audio realm in the ever changing
music scene. The true meaning and quality of the music was becoming second nature to the
visual effects. Taylor was tackling the deteriorating quality of music on the airwaves. Society
was generally quite receptive to the radio at the time. It always has been. Roger, though, saw
through this mediocre and quality-lacking front. In addition to that, this song also criticized
the commercialization of the music industry at the time, which was becoming very big and
wealthy. Capitalism was ruining the music industry. The lines “Don’t become some
background noise” relate to this. In becoming ever more dominated making more money,
quality was sacrificed for quantity. The music was becoming more similar in the sense that
everyone sounded the same. Uniqueness was gone. It mattered not who was playing as long
as records were being sold. The radio was becoming more background noise since no one
really cared who was playing. Society simply went along with the blending of the sound of
the 80s. Taylor challenged society to return to the music of the 70s, which has still to be
matched to this day. The challenge is still open.
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