

When pivotal relations in trickster tales are considered in relation to behavioral clusters, some interesting variations between literary traditions emerge. In the trickster tales of all four traditions which revolve around relations between friends, some tales show the trickster behaving antisocially and others depict him behaving in socially positive ways. By contrast, in trickster tales focusing on domestic relations, all Limba, Mende, and Vai tales show the trickster behaving antisocially; only in Temne tales does the trickster exemplify both social and antisocial modes of behavior. In a few tales, the Temne trickster as husband-father shares food with his wife and children; in other tales he – like his Limba, Mende, and Vai counterparts – selfishly tricks his family in order to obtain more food for himself. Nevertheless, the trickster as son-in-law behaves positively toward his mother-in-law in Limba and Temne tales, but negatively in Mende tales. Whereas the Mende trickster steals his mother-in-law's food or ruins her property, the Limba and Temne son-in-law respectfully fulfills his mother-in-law's injunctions. Social and antisocial behavior characterize trickster figures in the relationship between uncle and nephew in Mende and Vai tales; in the relations between chief and subject the trickster behaves positively in Temne tales, while antisocial behavior characterizes the Mende chief and subject and the Mende and Temne employer and employee relationships.

An inquiry into the character embodying the trickster in his socially positive and negative roles in different literary traditions reveals some intriguing variations. In Mende tales, Spider is always associated with antisocial trickster behavior and Royal Antelope is invariably characterized by socially positive behavior. In Limba and Vai stories, Royal Antelope is associated with socially positive behavior and Spider behaves both positively and negatively. In Temne tales, both forms of behavior are associated with both characters. In Mende culture, therefore, the association between behavior and persona is more consistent – hence more simplistic – than in the other oral traditions, while the relation is most complex and enigmatic in Temne culture.

This analysis is reinforced by an examination of trickster tales involving socially positive behavior that recurs in several traditions. Three tales in the Limba, Mende, and Temne collections differ only in the persona of the trickster and some minor narrative details. In the Mende versions Royal Antelope is the character who achieves rational goals that Spider attains in the Limba and Temne tales. For example, one tale recounts how predatory Leopard was tricked into believing that a big storm was coming and that he should be tied up so that he would not be blown away. By successfully tying up Leopard, the trickster saves the animal community from Leopard's depredations – at least temporarily. In the Mende version of this tale, Royal Antelope is the trickster while Spider performs the same ruse in the Limba and Temne renditions<sup>4</sup>. Spider, of course, also displays

antisocial behavior in many tales recurring in several Sierra Leonean literary traditions<sup>5</sup>.

Spider and Royal Antelope interact in thirteen tales (Temne: 6, Mende: 4, Limba: 2, Vai: 1). In twelve of these tales, Royal Antelope displays socially positive behavior in contrast to Spider's antisocial behavior. In one Temne story, however, Royal Antelope behaves selfishly. Similarly, in twelve tales Royal Antelope outwits Spider showing himself to be cleverer than Spider or any other creature, but in one Limba tale, Spider is depicted as cleverer than the kindly dupe Royal Antelope. Thus, variations in the association between persona and behavior occur even in tales in which Spider and Royal Antelope are both present – at least in Temne and Limba recorded traditions.

The variable association between behavior and character in these Sierra Leonean trickster tales suggests that the clusters of behavior associated with the trickster figures are more constant than the association between a persona and a behavior. Sometimes, as Denise Paulme has noted, one persona mirrors another to reveal complementary natures. Royal Antelope and Spider in Mende tales exemplify such complementarity, for Royal Antelope consistently displays socially positive and Spider negative behavior. At times, however, the same persona displays different kinds of behavior, as is true for Spider in Limba and Vai tales and for both Spider and Royal Antelope in Temne stories. These variant associations indicate that in order to understand the trickster figure in these literary traditions, it is useful to begin by examining trickster tales rather than trickster characters in order to appreciate the range of behavior associated with trickster figures.

Such an exploration of the trickster figure in Limba, Mende, Temne, and Vai literary traditions suggests that tales convey a sophisticated conception of human nature. Not only are men perceived as animals behind the veneer of social convention as Evans-Pritchard has argued, but men are depicted as socialized creatures capable of working for communal well-being. Moreover, deception may be an instrument of both the selfishly irresponsible and the socially responsible. This more complex paradoxical view of human nature and the role of deceit in human society is conveyed by the trickster figures of Spider and Royal Antelope in the tales of four socially similar and geographically contiguous West African societies.

<sup>4</sup> Kilson: 233–236, Finnegan: 316–319, and Cronise and Ward: 209–213. Mende tale 59 (Kilson: 240–244) with resourceful Royal Antelope corresponds to Temne (Cronise and Ward: 117–122) and Limba (Finnegan: 301–303) tales with clever Spider; Mende tale 38 (Kilson: 181–184) with Royal Antelope as trickster corresponds to Temne (Cronise and Ward: 40–49; Thomas: 7) and Limba (Finnegan: 314–315) tales with Spider.

<sup>5</sup> For example, (1) Limba (Finnegan: 316–319), Mende (Kilson: 368–369), Vai (Creel: 81–88); (2) Mende (Kilson: 78–79), Vai (Creel: 135–144); (3) Mende (Kilson: 157–159), Temne (Cronise and Ward: 279–280), and Vai (Ellis: 207–208); (4) Mende (Kilson: 197–202), Vai (Creel: 53–58); (5) Limba (Finnegan: 305–308), Mende (Kilson: 256–263); (6) Limba (Finnegan: 309–311), Temne (Cronise and Ward: 167–171); (7) Limba (Finnegan: 292–295), Temne (Cronise and Ward: 152–159); (8) Mende (Kilson: 269–271), Temne (Thomas: 64–65); (9) Mende (Kilson: 79–83), Temne (Cronise and Ward: 101–109); (10) Mende (Kilson: 194–197), Temne (Thomas: 70–74). Recurrence of tales in different oral traditions: 0 tales in 4 traditions; 4 tales in 3 traditions; 4 of 5 Vai tales, 6 of 14 Limba, 10 of 27 Temne, and 12 of 29 Mende in other collections. Thus, 14 of 75 tales appear in more than one collection and 43 in only one collection.