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# Aspects of the Local Character Phenomenon in a Nova Scotian Community<sup>1</sup>

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Diane TYE

From urban street gangs to University departments, most if not all small group contexts have their "characters": larger-than-life individuals who stand out from others in the group. While at first glance these minor nonconformists may appear to be anomalies who have little to do with group structure or folklore, upon closer investigation they provide a contemporary illustration of Barbara Babcock-Abrahams's observation concerning tricksters: "...that that which is socially peripheral or marginal is symbolically central and dominant."<sup>2</sup> Local characters and the folklore transmitted by and/or about them may contribute to group members' sense of tradition, expectations for group behaviour and understanding of intergroup relationships. Discovering how and why people become characters, and what provisions are made for their accommodation into the overall community are fascinating questions that folklorists are only now beginning to explore but which promise to reveal much about the development and maintenance of group membership and the acquisition of rules that govern interaction within specific contexts. Here some

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1. This article is based on a paper presented to the Folklore Studies Association of Canada, Windsor, Ontario, May 1988 and draws on my Ph.D. dissertation for Memorial University of Newfoundland, "Local Characters and the Community: A Case Study of Tradition and Individual Nonconformity in the Maritimes." Research was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council doctoral fellowship.

Numbers following quotations refer to taped interviews held in my possession.

2. Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, " 'A Tolerated Margin of Mess': The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1974), 150.

of the aspects that characterize the ambiguous relationship between characters and the communities in which they live and some of the ways in which characters contribute to community folklore and dynamics will be explored.

My investigation of the local character phenomenon focusses on one Nova Scotian town of approximately 10,000 residents. In the 1890s this community represented an industrial centre of national significance with diversity of manufactured products ranging from stoves to bathtubs, structural steel to shoes and suitcases. The town's rapid expansion attracted a large influx of workers to the factories, including a small Black population. Acadians living in the area, employed in the agricultural sector, were also lured to the town so that the community came to be comprised of a majority Yorkshire and Loyalist population with Black and Acadian minority segments. Like other communities in the Maritime region, the town has been in economic decline since World War Two and today only a few of these industries remain manned by skeleton work crews. It has evolved primarily into a commercial and service centre, equipped with the county court house, several government departments, and two shopping malls. Earlier intergroup tensions that were often unarticulated but expressed in limited educational, social and economic opportunities for minority group members are visible in neighborhood designation that still largely confines Blacks and Acadians to specific residential sections.

When asked about local characters who have populated the town's past and present, informants volunteered over eighty names.<sup>3</sup> The final list which included an upright Baptist minister, a visually impaired derelict, and an alcoholic dentist, stretched over approximately one hundred years of the town's history and spanned such a broad spectrum of individuals, it initially seemed unclassifiable. Furthermore, many informants indicated that they clearly value the ambiguity associated with the term "character" that allows them to negotiate each individual's status on its own merits. Nevertheless, analysis of the individuals named as characters reveals similarities that result in the following definition:

A character is an individual whose dramatic performance, consistent within a particular context, is recognized as being in contrast to, or in con-

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3. This information is based largely on approximately forty-five interviews conducted between 1980 and 1988.

flict with, governing social norms. The character is seen as nonthreatening, and often humorous, by most, if not all, other group members.

Although one might first think of the village idiot when the word "character" is mentioned, it was discovered, in the study community at least, that physical or mental disability is not criterion enough to warrant the designation. Informants often referred to several mentally disabled adults in the town who are not thought of as characters and live quiet, almost anonymous lives. Neither is personality along the explanation. Although an "outgoing" personality no doubt predisposes an individual toward the choice of a character designation, as sociologists Robert Dentler and Kai Erickson explain, "deviant behaviour is a reflection not only of the personality of the actor but of the structure of the group in which the behaviour was enacted."<sup>4</sup> Rather, the role of character seems to be adopted on some level of consciousness by individuals who are dissatisfied with their low status. Most if not all eighty characters suffer from what Erving Goffman terms stigma: either tribal stigma of race, nation, religion, or association with a stigmatized family; a physical or mental disability; or a character blemish which Goffman suggests includes perceived alcoholism, laziness, weak will, homosexuality, dishonesty or an unwillingness or inability to find employment. In fact, many characters in the study community suffer from more than one type of stigma, that is they may be mentally disabled as well as a minority group member or suffer from alcoholism and belong to a stigmatized family. For these individuals, the adoption of the character designation represents one of few opportunities to improve status.

Negotiation of the new status that involves both character and other community members in a complex and fluid process is a subject for another study. Once recognized as a character, however, the individual takes on a role that is linked to community tradition and identity. On one level, all the characters in the community could be considered tradition bearers in that they are, as Paul Smith describes, "individuals who have knowledge concerning a tradition and transmit it, consciously or otherwise, to prospective adopters through performance, usage or intentional communication."<sup>5</sup> Many are experts in verbal proficiency and have earned a reputation as being entertaining storytellers or "good talkers." While a context such as a corner

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4. Robert A. Dentler and Kai T. Erickson, "The Functions of Deviance in Groups," *Social Problems* 7 (1959), 98.
  5. Paul Smith, "Tradition—A perspective, Part IV," *Lore and Language* 5,1 (1986), 8.

store might be designated as one for talk, specific individuals may also be identified with the expression of verbal art. Whether in the sphere of yarns, news, or argument, theirs is "an expressive role".<sup>6</sup> Narratives circulated by or about them which have been condensed to a phrase, or rhymes or expressions customarily used by characters, may become a component of community folksay.<sup>7</sup> The favorite saying of a character from the 1930s: "Wing, Wing, nobody like old Seaman Noiles" (T86:9) and an early peddler's cry: "Ice cream, ice cream; me make it, me sell it; good for the belly" are remembered and sometimes repeated within neighborhoods, families, or friendship groups (T86:9; T87:4). Other characters within the study community contribute to local musical traditions. In the case of one individual, he not only played the fiddle but also produced musical instruments. As craftsman, he followed in the footsteps of one of the town's earliest and most widely celebrated characters, an itinerant clockmaker. Several of this man's clocks, which he marketed throughout northern Nova Scotia, now form part of the collection of the provincial museum. Today a mentally disabled artist peddles small pen and ink sketches to residents and small businesses.

No matter in what other area(s) of folklore characters may act as tradition bearers, by the very fact of being characters, they introduce a stabilizing, ritualistic element to community life. As Michael Taft explains in his introductory folklore text, ritual involves escape from daily routine where one plays a conscious part in some communal celebration or some extraordinary event where we know beforehand how to respond to the playacting of others.<sup>8</sup> Although Taft is referring specifically to forms of folk drama or rituals surrounding rites of passage, informants' descriptions indicate that their interactions with characters are responsibilities that separate these encounters from other forms of usual discourse. For example, if the character does not introduce the role adoption, he or she is expected to cooperate at the informant's initiation. The use of phrases such as "getting a charac-

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6. Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American Anthropologist* 77,2 (1975), 299, states, "As with events, certain roles will incorporate performance as a definitive attribute."
  7. For a discussion of the relationship between narrative and folk expression, see [awrence] G. Small, "Traditional Expressions in a Newfoundland Community: Genre Change and Functional Variability," *Lore and Language* 2,3 (1975), 15-18.
  8. Michael Taft, *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore* (Edmonton, Alberta, NeWest Press [1985]) 15.

ter going" (T86:20; T87:4; T87:5) or "getting the character wound up" (T87:4) to describe this initiation suggests the adoption of a dramatic stance that stands out from ordinary discourse. A businessman describes some of the strategies he relies on to activate a character who regularly visits his store:

Steven: Gary [*comes in*] every morning. Gary, like he gets wound up about anything, usually it could be the French and English or it could be something political—Mulroney and all the women working. . . .

Diane: Do you try to get him going?

Steven: Oh yeah, tease him. We'll say, 'Well, what's the topic today, Gary?' Because he'll have one topic. . . . Sometimes you can say stuff to him to get him going. Usually he's just fired up about politics.

Diane: Who would get him going?

Steven: Everybody sort of. I'm kind of the main agitator but. . . they all do or. . . they try to, or they like to go along with him, laughing or whatever (T87:4).

Once a character "is going", the interaction usually follows a mutually agreed upon course that is governed by rules and boundaries. While the participants do not have a predetermined script, they are familiar with the stance each has taken and what is demanded of the role they are playing. Often the initiator maintains the dramatic interaction by assuming the role of the apparently innocent bystander. Jean, who is described by his friend Scott as "jumpy" or "goosey", may suffer from a startle response disorder that causes him to imitate loud or sudden noises or actions. When Scott deems the context suitable—that is where Jean will not hurt himself and where there is an appreciative audience—he will startle Jean into performing some socially inappropriate action. In keeping with Taft's definition of ritual, once Scott has set up the character performance, the interaction follows a predetermined course for Scott knows what to expect of Jean, even if the man's behaviour might seem irrational or unpredictable to others. He relates a favorite incident:

We were walking through the Mayflower Mall, Jean and I together, you know and Jean strayed, he went into the women's—'The Ladders' they call it—the women's shop. I looked at Bruce and I said, 'He's going in there shopping.' So we went for a coffee. I said to Bruce, I said, 'You sit here and I'll sit there.' And I knew what was going to happen. Jean won't sit beside me because I'm always goosing him, eh, so he'd sit beside Bruce. Twenty minutes later Jean walks back, throws the bag on the table. He sits down, orders a coffee. 'Well,' I said, 'Let's see what you bought.' 'Oh,' he said, 'You know what I bought.' 'Yeah,' I said, 'well Bruce don't.' I said, 'Show Bruce.' He hauls out a pair of panties, you know. 'Oh,' he said 'I got a pair of panties for the wife.' So all you have to do is sit there and the minute he took the panties out and he had it

in front of him, all I did was [Sniffs]. Sniff [Sniffs] and he [imitates Jean sniffing the panties. Laughs]. So Bruce, he was facing the waitress, I made sure he was sitting over there and. . .the waitress was looking at him. And. . .he tried to go through the wall. He got all red in the face he was wild. Everybody looked at him, you see (T87:5).

For Scott and Jean the interaction follows a pattern established by previous interactions. While at first glance it might appear that Jean has little or no control over the exchange, this is not the case. He may or may not have physical control over his actions at the time Scott provides a stimulus, but that he cooperates generally with the performances is evidenced by the men's friendship that spans over twenty years. The fact that both are francophones who moved to the community at approximately the same time, may suggest the two form what Erving Goffman describes as "a performance team"<sup>9</sup> that has helped them adapt to an unfamiliar culture. Both consider the relationship a "special"<sup>10</sup> one and Jean resists any substitute for Scott as the instigator of his performances. Scott's wife describes how Jean once became angry when he spilt a cup of coffee after being purposely startled by one of her sons (T86:4). Scott's comfortableness as member of the performance team is reflected in the emphasis he places in his narrative on the embarrassment experienced by Bruce, rather than Jean or himself.

The fact that character performance is at once nonconformist and predictable not only introduces the play element,<sup>11</sup> but allows the character to become a noticeable reference point for those who share group membership. The very presence of the character may represent a traditional element for community members that symbolizes their attachment to place and intensifies their awareness of a

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9. Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1959), 79 defines "performance team" thus: "I will use the term 'performance team' or, in short, 'team' to refer to any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine."
  10. Orrin Klapp, *Collective Search for Identity* (New York, Holt, 1969) 30, distinguishes between a special relationship which only two people share and a class relationship that involves more than two participants. In the first, the contribution of each is considered unique, while an individual in the second might be easily replaced.
  11. Here 'play element' is used as defined by Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1950) 8-9. Huizinga describes play as a voluntary activity, set apart from ordinary life, that is characterized by secludedness or limitedness.

shared past. An important and often mentioned characteristic of the character performance is its consistency within a particular context. As one informant comments, "characters are individuals who are seen in pretty much the same way all the time" (T87:2). The tendency to identify the character as a traditional element of community life is further supported by the fact that informants frequently offer similar responses when asked about a particular character. For example, when Annie, an early nineteenth century character, is mentioned, most informants describe how she used to ride through town with her Black chauffeur calling out, "Lovely day" to everyone she met. Watson, a pedlar who died in the 1970s, is remembered walking the roads carrying shopping bags and wearing a large overcoat fastened with a safety pin. Nearly twenty years after his death the pedlar's image remains a vibrant one for at least some community members, and one informant comments she is sometimes referred to as "Watson" when she arrives at her local church group, laden down with shopping bags (T81:1).

Characters like Annie or Watson act as tradition bearers not only in the sense that they may transmit particular genre forms or exert a ritualistic presence, but because they exhibit a high degree of continuity in both spatial and temporal dimensions. In his exploration of the meaning of tradition, Paul Smith states "...in reality, as opposed to the mind of the researcher, traditions are transmitted not only by oral or oral/literary means but rather by the individuals involved utilising their audio, visual, tactile and olfactory sensory mechanisms."<sup>12</sup> Not only by their performance, but through their very presence, characters create a continuity for others that contributes to a sense of group belonging.

The character's overt performance as a tradition bearer, either through the transmission of folklore genres or through symbolic representation of community or cultural stability, constitute what Paul Smith defines as a superstructure of tradition. The character performance offers "the behavioral component necessary to reify the tradition."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the message of the performance, and its significance to the group, comprises traditional infrastructure, communicating underlying ideology, beliefs and functions. In keeping with Kay Cothran's definition of folklore, the character symbolizes for group

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12. Paul Smith, "Tradition—A Perspective, Part II," *Lore and Language* 2,3 (July 1975), 8.

13. Smith, "Tradition—A Perspective, Part II," 6.



members some of "the rules by means of which a given context is made sensible, by means of which further contexts are made possible."<sup>14</sup>

The narrative that describes Jean's inappropriate behaviour in a coffee shop is reflective of much of the folklore generated by and about characters in that it depicts a violation of conventional norms of propriety. Such narratives are humorous because audience members have a shared appreciation of the nature and extent of the violation. For example, Steven and his sister Debbie offer similar narratives describing how Wayne, a mentally disabled character who helps out on a milk route, responded with an obscenity when he became frustrated with an elderly customer's inability to put out the correct coupons for her milk (T87:4; T87:7). The incident has been incorporated into each of their repertoires although neither was directly involved. While the use of profanity is not personally offensive to the informants, each is appreciative of the shock and outrage it would instill in some of the older residents of this conservative area. The humour of the incident is heightened by the informants' awareness of the disruption this outburst caused, and the repercussions which followed—Wayne's temporary suspension from his duties on the milk truck. One of the most central functions of the character's role is the representation of the outermost limits of what is acceptable, or conversely, the illustration of what is not allowable. Narratives that circulate concerning one family of characters and their notorious disregard for personal cleanliness are not only cathartic for residents but reinforce a shared emphasis on personal cleanliness. Anecdotes ridiculing another family's miserliness or one character's argumentative nature and poor work habits reify other guidelines of expected social behaviour. The presence of characters, in addition to many of the narratives generated by or about them, validate community held social norms (T86:7).

At the same time as they explore boundaries and rules that govern forms of social interaction, such narratives offer group members a vehicle for projection or wish fulfillment that demands no direct involvement or commitment. That this may be the source of at least some of Steven's enjoyment of his narrative about Wayne is reflected by a second anecdote it prompted. Steven recalled, "[Wayne swore

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14. Kay L. Cothran, "Participation in Tradition," *Readings in Folklore*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York, W.W. Norton, 1979) 445.

at] Harold [*Steven's father and boss*] in the store one day. The way he talks, he [*Harold*] couldn't recognize what he was saying...Harold was teasing him or something" (T87:4). For Steven—who works with his father—the inappropriateness of Wayne's use of profanity, and the fact that he got away with his remark, adds to the narrative's humour and personal value. Similarly, the anecdote of Wayne using profanity with a customer may have special significance for a businessman such as Steven who deals with customers during every work day.

As Barbara Babcock-Abrahams indicates concerning trickster tales, character performances and narratives based on them often result in a reversal of statuses and a leveling of hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> When Emma, a Black character who died in the 1960s, was faced with what she deemed were unreasonable demands from a woman whom she had known from childhood, she righted the situation. Her former employer recalls:

Roger had his little store down on Church Street, we had just been married a year or so. . . So this day Emma was coming to scrub the floor and I was there and of course she knew me from that high. So a crowd was standing by the stove talking with Roger and Emma wasn't moving anything. 'Emma,' I said, 'Emma you got to move that apple barrel, you've got to move this, you've got to move that.' 'Go away girl, go away girl, go on home girl.' 'No now Emma you do that, you know better, you can't scrub that way. You just move those things and scrub behind them.' So she looked over at Roger and she said, 'Does she go on like that all the time?' And Roger said, 'All the time, Emma what would you do if you were me?' She said, 'I'd make my peace with God and take chloroform' [*Laughs*] (T86:7).

Use of humour and adoption of a character role represented one of the only options available to Emma that allowed her to assert any control over the interaction. By relying on these techniques she redirected the course of the exchange and attempted to bring to it more balance and equality. She successfully undermined her employer's newly assumed position of superior and reduced her status to a level that was more in keeping with Emma's assessment.

The character, customarily regarded as being on the psychological fringe of the community, may act as one of its primary agents of social control, guarding against those who attempt to increase their social status inappropriately or without community consensus. In several of the narratives collected from one of the community's finest storytellers, a sight impaired character from the early 1900s named

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15. Babcock-Abrahams, 15.

Phomes, curbs unwarranted status elevation to restore social equilibrium. In the first anecdote, he gets the better of Bessie, a very staunch, unmarried woman from one of the town's most elite families:

Bessie was the organ player and. . .they tell this story about this Sunday, ah, she was playing the organ...And after they came out of the church, he [Phomes] come up to her and he said, 'Miss Downey we certainly made good music today.' And she said, 'Get away from here you old man,' she said, 'I don't want to talk to you.' She said, 'You don't have nothing to do with making the music.' So he walked away. Next Sunday he was pumping the organ. Just in the middle of the song he stopped pumping the organ and put his head around the organ and he said, 'Who's making the music now?' I guess he showed her [Laughs]. That was Phomes.

The narrator continues:

One night this Phomes come running into the fire station and he said to the old fellow, to Jim [*the supervisor*], he tapped him on the shoulder and he tried to tell him something, you know. And Jim said, 'Get away from me, I don't want to bother with you. Get away from here.' And just then the fire whistle blew and Jim said, 'Oh, there's a fire.' And old Phomes said, 'I've been trying to tell you for half an hour Blair McLaughlin's store's on fire.' (T86:3).

Linked closely with the play element, character performances and narratives concerning them may serve as an acceptable channel for aggression not only for the individual character but for the entire group of which he or she is a member.<sup>16</sup> Frustrations with particular groups, specific individuals, or injustices of the social system all may find expression in the character's performances and the stories told about them. Any success in bringing about the "proper moral order", even momentarily, reflects on all group members. As a result, character performance may be utilized as a technique to combat group problems such as prejudice. As Richard Stephenson comments in his exploration of the conflict and control functions of humour, "Conflict humour not only functions to express aggression but serves to strengthen the morale of those who use it and to undermine the morale of those at whom it is aimed."<sup>17</sup>

While Blacks are no longer forced to participate only in segregated activities, narratives including one that tells of a white employee in a government office rustling the hair of a Black co-worker and calling her "Buckwheat" (T86:14), clearly demonstrate that they continue to experience indirect prejudice, or "polite racism" from some majori-

16. Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle* (Hatboro, Penn., Folklore Associates, 1964) 40, states "Aggression is usually allowed in a play or contest situation."

17. Richard M. Stephenson, "Conflict and Control Functions of Humour," *American Journal of Sociology* 56 (1950-51), 569.

ty group members (T86:14). As character performances are most effective in contexts where participants are familiar with each other and the social norms governing the interaction, and are separated by only a moderate amount of social distance, Blacks report sometimes adopting the character role to combat prejudice they encounter from "poor whites"<sup>18</sup>, the social group they identify as being the most problematic (T86:17). In bolstering minority group morale through a brief leveling of hierarchy, character performances provide a catharsis for marked community members, helping to relieve possible intergroup tension and prevent any open expression of conflict. While not endorsed by every member of the town's Black community, two of its characters are described by informants as political men who struggled for Black equality. Whatever criticisms may be leveled against their performances, they have succeeded in bringing Black culture and concerns to the attention of majority group individuals.

Characters with membership in a minority group, such as the Black community, but who are a visible presence in contexts dominated by majority group members, act as mediators. As Everest Stonequist comments in his study of marginality, "the marginal man is the key personality in the contact of cultures. . . He is the crucible of cultural fusion."<sup>19</sup> Through their performances, characters facilitate the accommodation in the community of all individuals who share their mark. Not only is their high visibility a constant reminder of the presence of marked community members, but because of their association with the play element, characters frequently offer majority group residents an opportunity to directly confront a mark. An informant describes a discussion he held with Emma about her blackness:

I was in the West Indies. And one day I showed her [Emma] a picture. Emma, I think was the darkest colored girl in town. She was really black. . . . So I said, 'Look Emma, this girl looks like you.' 'Like hell, it does. She's a lot darker than I am' [Laughs]. She [Emma] couldn't be darker.

Another informant approached a visually impaired character concerning the cause and extent of his blindness. He recalls:

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18. John Davidson, T45 Cumberland County Museum, Interview by Anna Lowther, 22 November, 1978.
  19. Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York, Russell and Russell, 1961), 221.

I met him on the street one day. . . . And I said, 'Russell, are you completely blind?' I didn't really know. I thought, I had assumed he was. 'Well,' he says, 'Only when the pension inspector comes,' he says [*Laughs*]. I got a kick out of that but he was functionally blind, there's no doubt about that. He wasn't being dishonest. But he had to have his little joke (T86:12).

By responding in a playful manner to an inquiry about his blindness, Russell helped to deemphasize the mark and to keep it in perspective.<sup>20</sup> The interaction emphasizes the character's desire for integration into the overall community as he asserts his normalcy.

The character performance is only one strategy open to those suffering from what Goffman terms physical, character or tribal stigma; other possibilities include direct confrontation and perhaps violence.<sup>21</sup> It continues to be relied upon, however, not only because it is the least socially disruptive alternative, but also because it offers the psychological benefit of demonstrating a potential for social change. The character performance encourages all residents to reexamine the existing social order and to reflect on the possibility for constructive reorganization.<sup>22</sup> It presents a safe form of evaluation, however, for any social change resulting from the character performance is more illusory than real. At the close of a character performance nothing is really changed. The higher status individual has played with a marked individual, or the idea of being marked personally, but his or her status has not been seriously threatened. Likewise, any status elevation enjoyed by the character is only temporary. Emma may put her employer "in her place", but following the exchange Emma still remains the employee and Hazel her employer. Phomes challenges Bessie's attempt to take sole responsibility for the organ music he has helped to create but cannot seriously alter her position in the community as a member of one of the most established families. The physical conditions of his own position as a visually handicapped, lower-income, sporadically employed individual have not been improved.

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20. See E.E. Jones *et al.*, *Social Stigma. The Psychology of Marked Relationships* (New York, W.H. Freeman and Co., 1984), 215. The authors state: "Forms of self-depreciating humor may be especially effective as the markable person displays his ability to keep the mark in perspective and to inform the marker that it is all right (ie not upsetting) to talk openly about his condition."

21. Research has well established that the more confrontational role of witch was once an alternative open to marginal individuals. For example, see John Demos, *Enter-taining Satan* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983).

22. Babcock-Abrahams 183, identifies this as an important function of the trickster.

While many character performances end in status reversal of the participants, like the licentious behaviour of the carnival, they are accepted and enjoyed in part because of the knowledge they are out of the ordinary.<sup>23</sup> Participants are aware that when the performance is completed, natural order will return and perhaps be strengthened because of the community's brief flirtation with disorder or alternative order.

Characters are central to a community's identity voyage, for as Klapp says of fools, they "provide vacation from conformity but affirm the order they seem to flout either by holding up negative models, or by catharsis through vicarious misbehaviour and the spirit of carnival."<sup>24</sup> Through observing and discussing characters, the rest of the community comes to understand the demands of membership more clearly. Kai Erikson writes that deviants, like traditional folklore creatures such as demons, devils and witches, represent another kind of reminder of the otherwise formless dangers that threaten a community and its members:

As trespasser against the group's norms, he represents those forces which lie outside the group's boundaries; he informs us of what evil looks like. . . . It may well be without this ongoing drama at the outer edges of group space, the community would have no inner sense of identity and cohesion, no sense of the contrasts which set it off as a special place in the larger world.<sup>25</sup>

As transmitters of tradition and/or media of catharsis and control, characters help the marked and unmarked better understand themselves and the group(s) of which they are a part. In a multifaceted role that may represent continuity, introduce the play element, articulate community personality, and/or emphasize rules that govern interaction, characters both help to clarify group boundaries and establish the relative relationship of individual members and subgroups, one to another.

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- 23. For an analysis of carnival behaviour see Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman, "Ranges of Festival Behavior," *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara Babcock-Abrahams (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1978) 193-20.
  - 24. Orrin Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1956) 82.
  - 25. Kai T. Erikson, "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance," *The Other Side*, ed. Howard S. Becker (New York, Free Press, 1964) 15.