



Unearthing the trickster function in Icelandic myth

Description

Loki is tied in an underground cave in the company of a serpent who tortures him with venom. Loki's occasional writhing causes earthquakes. (139 characters. I've just made a tweet out of a saga.)

According to an authoritative source, the god Loki plays a central role in the exchange of goods (von Schnurhein, 2000). Loki has other attributes associated with trickiness: "Loki brings misfortune upon us, haplessness, or malevolence, he always capacities, or his eloquence" (p.115).



We've just been holidaying in Iceland. I've not

yet read of anyone linking Iceland's economic misfortunes of 2010 to Loki as trickster. In any case, Loki belongs to the Nordic and Germanic mythic pantheon. It just so happens that it's the Icelandic sagas that preserve the Nordic myths in such detail.

Karl Jung devotes many pages to the elaboration of the trickster. As explored in a [previous post](#), the trickster is the archetype that crosses boundaries and that denies categories.

In fact from the perspective of Sigmund Freud there are only three “archetypes”: that which unites, that which individuates, and that which confuses.

The great mother (Frigga in Norse myth) stands for the unity: “the love that means homecoming, shelter, and the long silence from which everything begins and in which everything ends.”

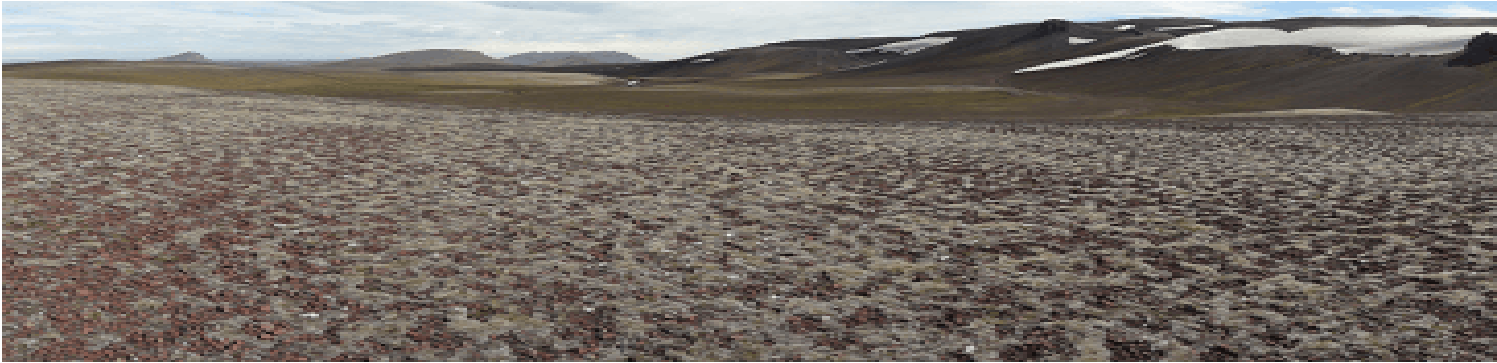
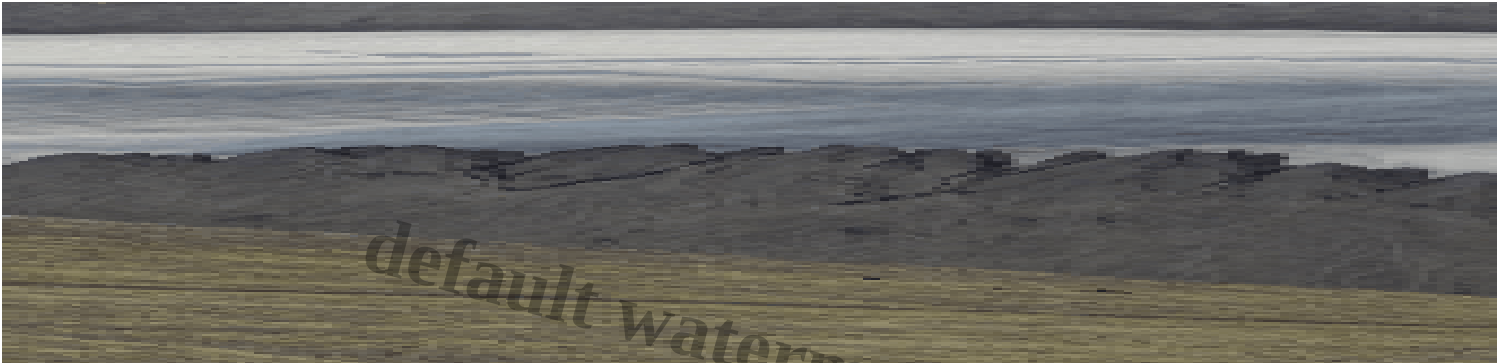
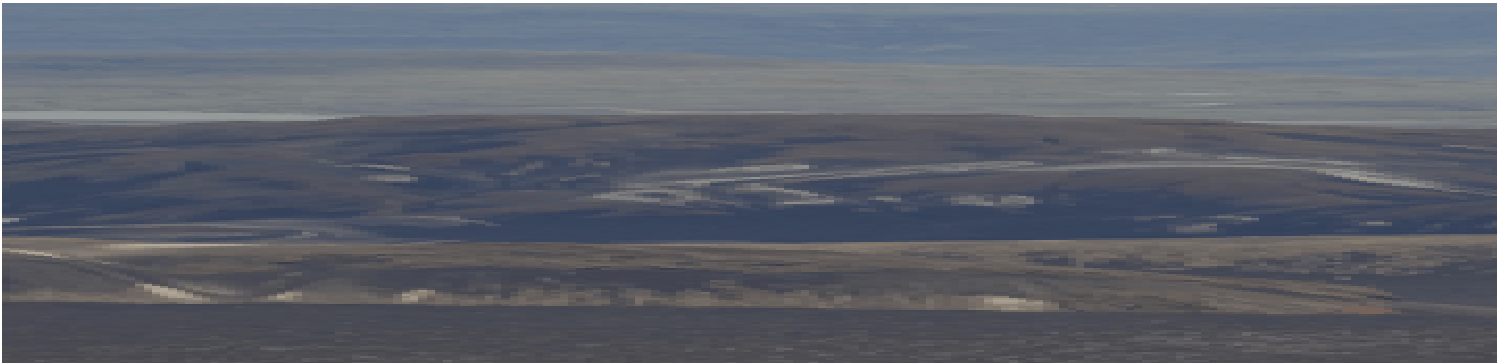
Then there is the father (Odin), who, according to Freud, Jung, and Jacques Lacan, individuates; that is, he lays down the law. For Jung, “it is always the father-figure from whom the decisive convictions, prohibitions, and wise counsels emanate.” The impetus to categorize belongs with the law of the father.

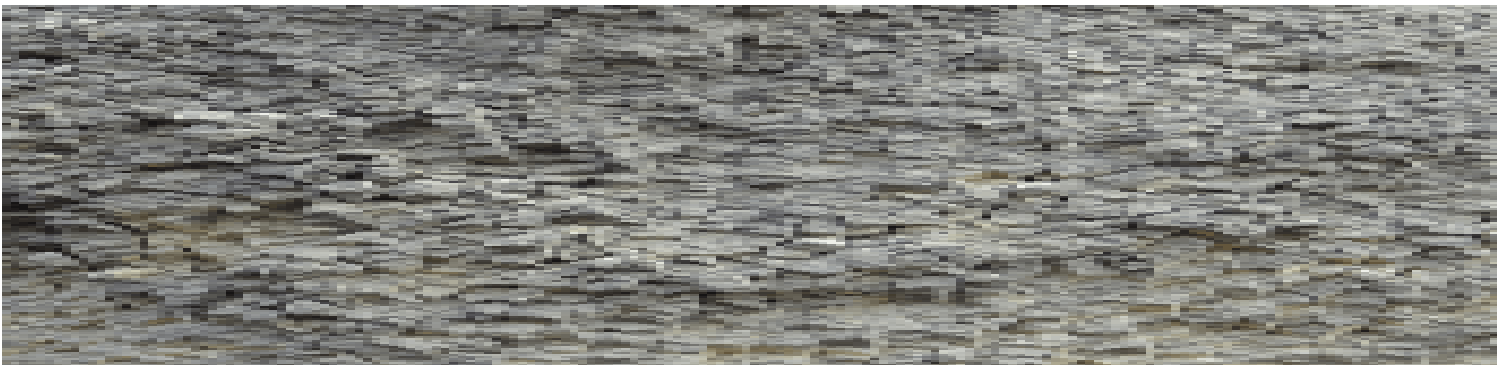
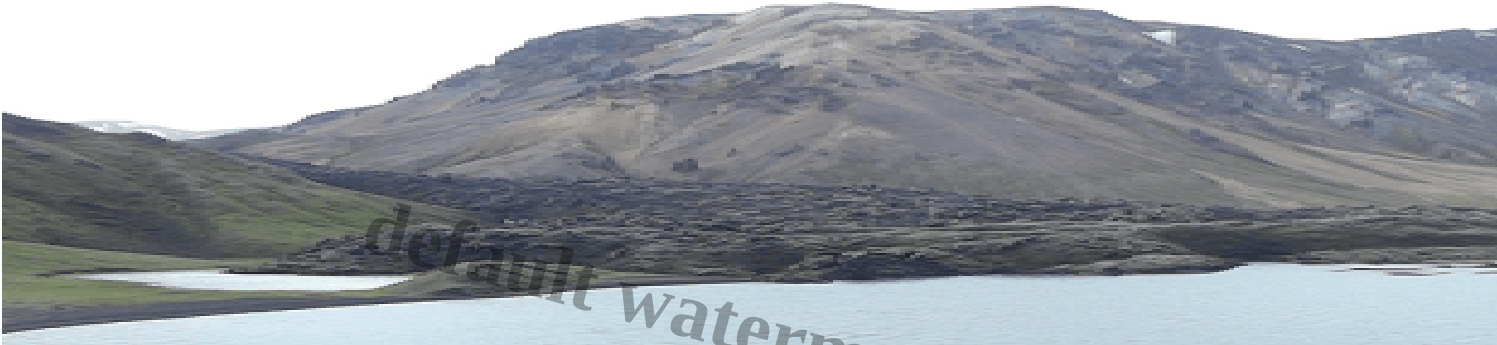
The tension between the mother and the father in this psychic alchemy constitutes the basis of what Freud, drawing on Greek myth, terms *the Oedipal condition*.

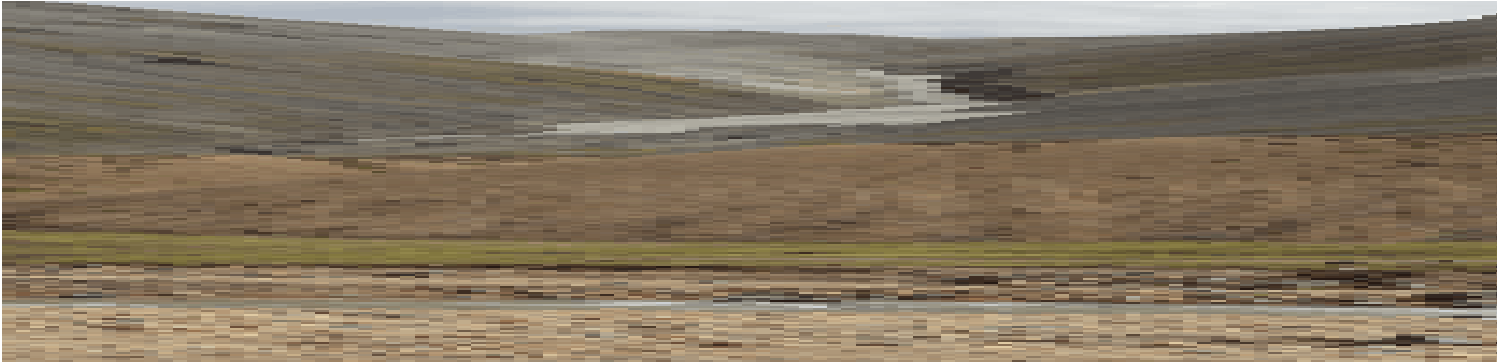
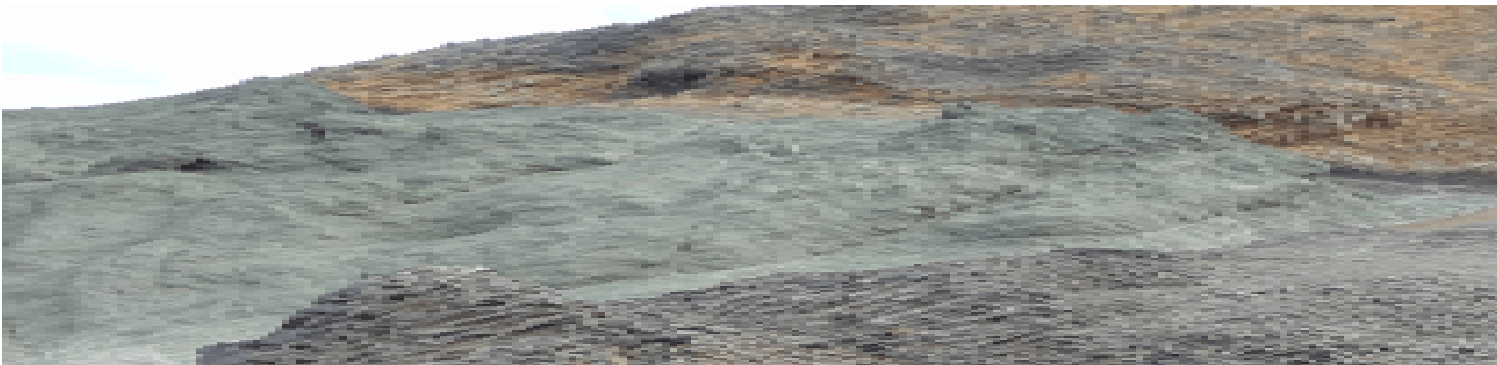
Scholars attribute the agent of psychic confusion to various sources. For Lacan, there is the notion of rupture, the destruction of either unity or individuation, the recognition that each inheres in the other and that the unity (our reality) is already characterized by rift and division. Insofar as we need archetypes, the trickster personifies this factor, the agent who subverts categories.

Here are some pictures of the Icelandic sublime, a landscape in which to contemplate the flows and fissures of psychic reality.

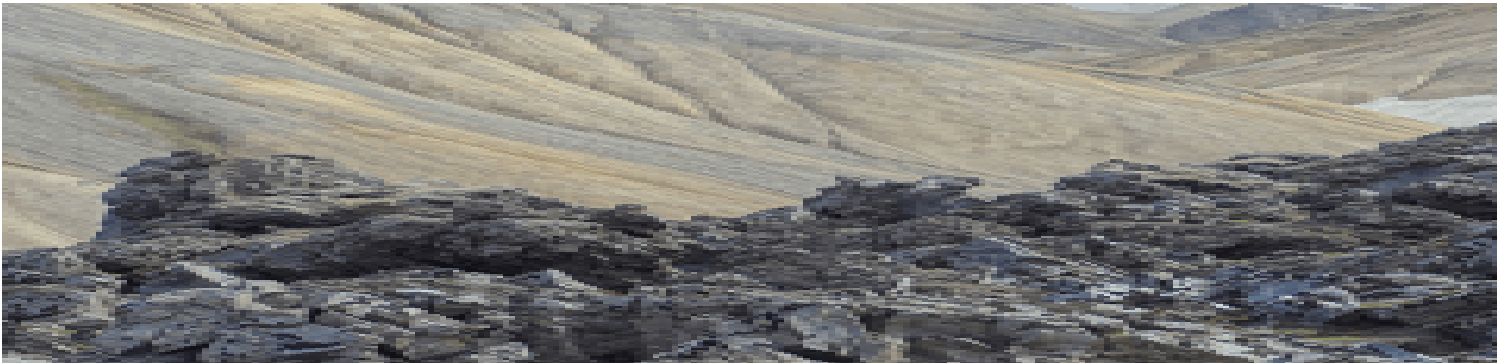


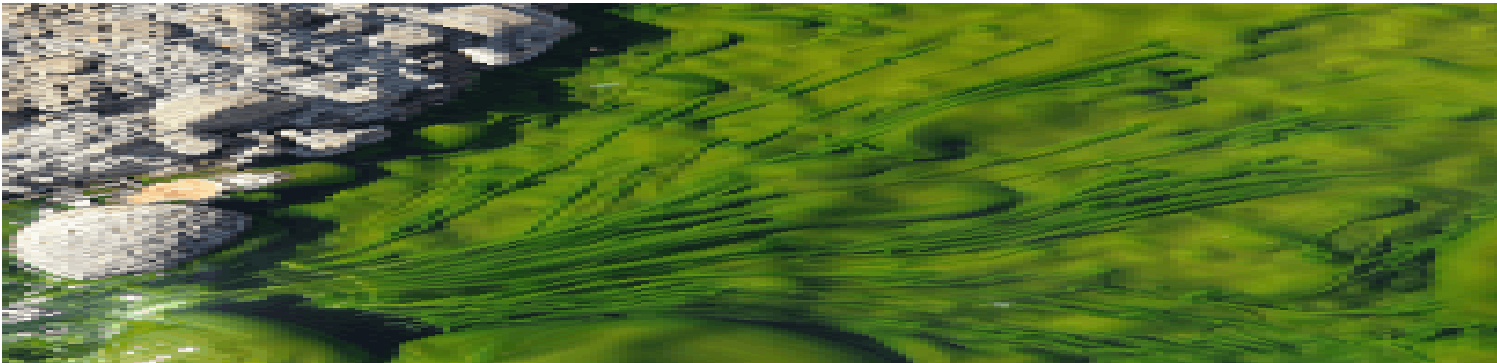
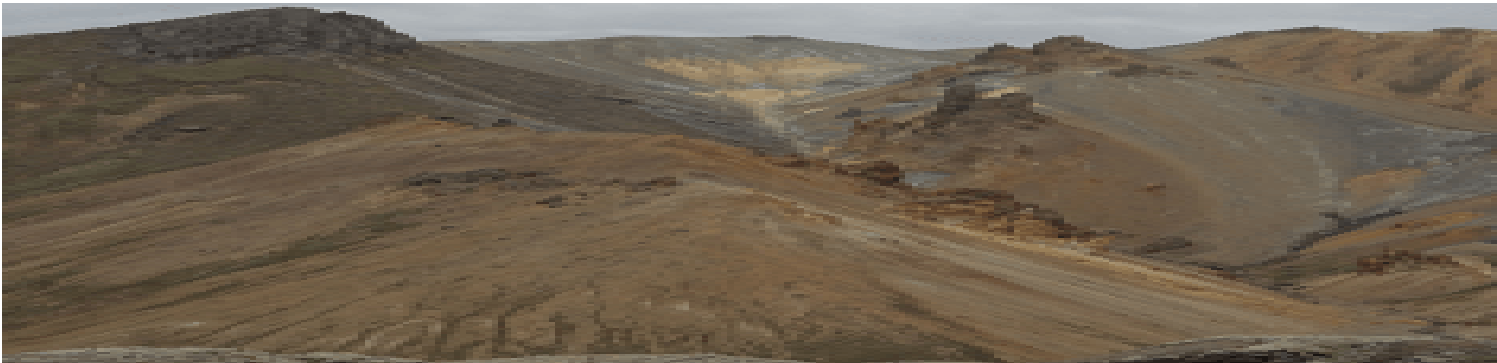


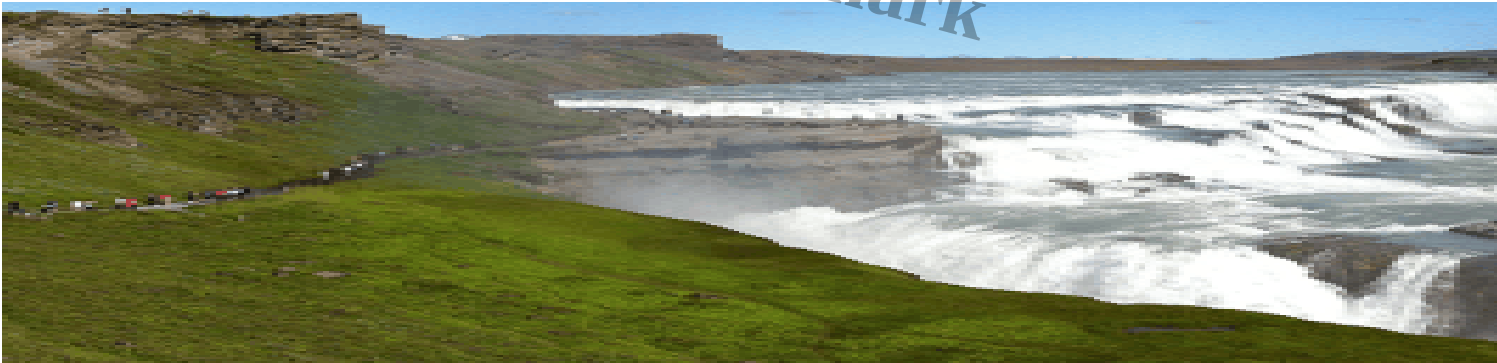
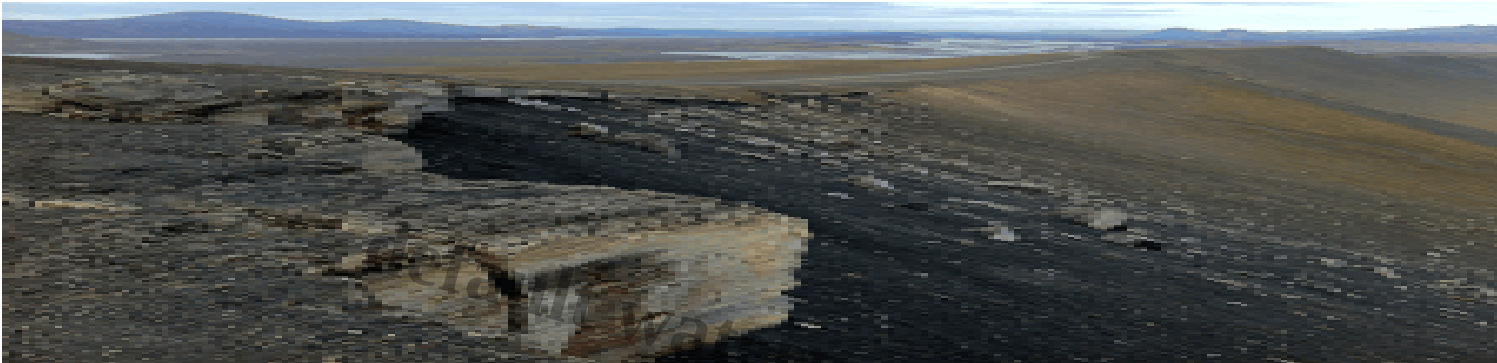














References

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Here's a quote about Loki from the saga by Icelandic Medieval lawyer Snorri Sturlson, available online <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/pre04.htm>

XXXIII. Also numbered among the Æsir is he whom some call the mischief-monger of the Æsir, and the first father of falsehoods, and blemish of all gods and men: he is named Loki or Loptr, son of Fárbauti the giant; his mother was Laufey or Nál; his brothers are Baldr and Helblindi. Loki is beautiful and comely to look upon, evil in spirit., very fickle in habit. He surpassed other men in that wisdom which is called sleight, and had artifices for all occasions.



Category

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2. Karl Jung
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4. saga
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