

Jungian feminisms and the postmodern female trickster

Luna Pereira Gimenez* 

Abstract

This article aims to address issues surrounding the postmodern woman from a post-Jungian and contemporary perspective, focusing on the archetypal concept of the trickster. To this end, Jungian theory is critically examined with the intention of producing knowledge that is current and aligned with contemporary needs. Guiding this reflection are questions such as: Does the archetypal trickster energy manifest specifically in women? What would characterize a woman's attitude as trickster-like? What has the imagination of the female trickster created, and what does it continue to produce? The postmodern female trickster, as presented in this article, emerges as a force for cultural transformation. Her authority and agency in creating imagery, her ability to use humor, and her refusal to adopt the role of victim as a subversive tool are distinctive traits. This work highlights the importance of women speaking about their realities and themselves through their own imaginaries, thereby fostering transformation. Ultimately, the activism of the female trickster and the resulting cultural change play a significant role in postmodern feminism. ■

Keywords: female trickster; postmodernity; post-Jungian feminism; gender.

Received: 09/30/2024

Approved: 03/12/2025

Revised: 04/06/2025

How to cite: Gimenez LP. (2025).

Jungian feminisms and the postmodern female trickster. JINGUIANA, 43, 1–9.

<https://doi.org/10.70435/junguiana.v43.106>

Financing: No funding to declare.

Conflict of interest:

No conflict of interest to declare.



* Independent researcher. São Paulo, São Paulo. Brazil. Psychologist and Master in Clinical Psychology (Center for Jungian Studies) from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. Coordinator and mediator of study groups on gender at the Center for Post-Jungian Practices and Studies. Researcher with an emphasis on gender studies, feminism and ecopsychology. Co-founder of the feminist collective Apotecárias.

Feminismos junguianos e a mulher trickster pós-moderna

Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo tratar das questões acerca da mulher pós-moderna sob uma perspectiva pós-junguiana e contemporânea, abordando o conceito arquetípico de trickster. Para tanto, a teoria junguiana é abordada de forma crítica com a intencionalidade de produzir conhecimento atual e coerente com as necessidades contemporâneas. Como norteadoras desta reflexão, algumas perguntas foram feitas: a energia arquetípica trickster se manifesta de forma específica na mulher? O que denunciaria a atitude da mulher como trickster? O que a imaginação da mulher trickster produziu e continua produzindo? A figura da mulher trickster pós-moderna, como apresentada neste artigo, emerge como uma força de transformação cultural. Sua autoridade e agenciamento na criação de imagens, sua capacidade de usar o humor e a recusa em ocupar o lugar de vítima como ferramenta subversiva são características distintivas. Este trabalho evidencia a importância de que as mulheres possam falar de suas realidades e sobre si mesmas, a partir de seus próprios imaginários, e com isso promover transformação. Por fim, o ativismo da mulher trickster e a consequente mudança cultural desempenham um papel significativo no feminismo pós-moderno. ■

Palavras-chave: mulheres trickster; pós-modernidade; feminismo pós-junguiano; gênero.

Los feminismos junguianos y la mujer trickster posmoderna

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo abordar las cuestiones relacionadas con la mujer posmoderna desde una perspectiva posjunguiana y contemporánea, centrándose en el concepto arquetípico de la trickster. Para ello, la teoría junguiana se analiza de manera crítica con la intención de producir un conocimiento actualizado y coherente con las necesidades contemporáneas. Para guiar esta reflexión, se plantearon algunas preguntas: ¿La energía arquetípica de la trickster se manifiesta de manera específica en la mujer? ¿Qué caracterizaría la actitud de una mujer como trickster? ¿Qué ha producido y sigue produciendo la imaginación de la mujer trickster? La figura de la mujer trickster posmoderna, tal como se presenta en este artículo, emerge como una fuerza de transformación cultural. Su autoridad y agencia en la creación de imágenes, su capacidad para usar el humor y su rechazo a asumir el rol de víctima como herramienta subversiva son rasgos distintivos. Este trabajo destaca la importancia de que las mujeres puedan hablar de sus realidades y de sí mismas desde sus propios imaginarios, promoviendo así la transformación. Finalmente, el activismo de la mujer trickster y el consecuente cambio cultural desempeñan un papel significativo en el feminismo posmoderno. ■

Palabras-clave: mujeres trickster; posmodernidad; feminismo posjunguiano; género.

Introduction

This article is part of the result of years of studies on the psychology of women in society, from the perspective of analytical psychology. Several paths have been followed, and to create a focus in this

article, I will use the postmodern feminist theme, along with an archetypal symbolic amplification of the trickster.

The archetypal expression of the trickster does not fit into the traditional category of heroin or villain

and possesses the ability to assume the identity of any gender, according to its convenience. This flexibility is a distinctive characteristic that places it in a liminal position. The trickster often deals with the tension arising from conflicts by revealing an absence of morality, using doses of humor and comic relief. Its nature challenges binary and moral understanding, inspiring discomfort and catalyzing processes of transformation.

The trickster represents a stage prior to discriminating consciousness, allowing for broad fluidity. Although the questions posed by the trickster may initially seem simple and childish, a more careful analysis, combined with openness to the cunning inherent in this innocence, enables reflection without adherence to automatic patterns of repetition, ultimately leading to new answers.

This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of this archetypal figure and its impact on contemporary psychology and culture.

As guiding questions for this reflection, the following were posed: Does the archetypal trickster energy manifest in a specific way in women? What would characterize a woman's attitude as that of a trickster? What has the imagination of the female trickster produced and continued to produce?

Post-Jungian Feminisms

Feminism, by proposing changes in the reality and social and cultural conditions of women, simultaneously exerts influence on society as a whole. When analyzing feminism in the postmodern context, it is imperative to emphasize some intrinsic characteristics of postmodernity. This involves not only considering the fundamental collective needs for equality of rights but, above all, paying attention to the diverse demands of society, with special attention to differences, whether between men and women or even among women themselves. In this sense, embracing the diversity of experiences within gender groups becomes crucial, recognizing that women's experiences may vary substantially due to factors such as social class and sexual orientation. Therefore, postmodern feminism critiques

essentialism, which tends to attribute essential and universal characteristics to groups of individuals based on gender. Moreover, postmodern feminism highlights the need to deconstruct rigid and binary identities, such as masculine/feminine.

It is also relevant to consider the aspect of postmodernity concerning the production of scientific knowledge. In this context, the prevailing scientific paradigm is no longer based on positivism. The current paradigm assumes that all knowledge is simultaneously individual and social, considering the local and cultural context. Postmodern knowledge production rejects the binary logic reduced to oppositions, seeking to understand interrelations, ambiguities, and multiplicities in all their complexity.

The influence of postmodern thought in psychology, particularly in analytical psychology, has led to theoretical revisions that have opened space for the coexistence of critical discourses of the classical theory formulated by Jung. However, these discourses maintain continuity and recognition of classical theory, thereby their authors are identified as post-Jungians by Samuels (2024). According to the author, Jungian theoretical productions can be classified into different schools, including the developmental, archetypal, and classical schools. In this context, both postmodern feminism and post-Jungian approaches question grand generalizing narratives, including those of a historical nature that have often marginalized or silenced the contributions of women and feminine perspectives. Both seek to challenge these narratives and give visibility to voices and experiences that have been neglected and suppressed (Tancetti and Gimenez, 2022).

Some post-Jungians have revisited the conception of the anima and animus archetypes, as well as the psychological dynamics related to men, women, non-binary people, and their identities and interactions. They recognize that although Jung introduced an innovative view of gender in psychology, he was also influenced by his social context and the norms of the time.

Susan Rowland is an author who has played a significant role in post-Jungian studies, notably within the scope of Jungian feminism. She is recognized

for exploring the intersections between analytical psychology and feminist issues, aiming to examine how the theory can be applied to analyze women's experiences and gender dynamics.

In her book *Jung: A Feminist Revision*, published in 2002, Rowland introduced the concept of “goddess feminism” to describe the approach adopted by a number of Jungian thinkers regarding female psychology and the feminine. These authors¹ emphasize the association of the principle of Eros with the principle of the feminine. In the context of Jungian goddess feminism, as described by Rowland, there is an appreciation and revival of aspects culturally grouped and called feminine. In this sense, the figure of the woman tied to the feminine in this binary perspective remains linked to more unconscious, wild dimensions connected to the principle of Eros. This association between the feminine and Eros perpetuates a subordinate position of women in relation to aspects traditionally considered masculine, especially in a patriarchal society like ours, which privileges consciousness and reason—often associated with Logos—as superior functions (Gimenez, 2018).

Consequently, a biased view of women's psychology is established, in which, when directly related to the feminine aspects, the woman is defined and limited in terms of opposition and inferiority to reason and masculinity. Thus, the woman is often conceived as a personification of the anima under the classical Jungian perspective, perpetuating patterns of symbolic and cultural inequality.

The works of Susan Rowland, including *Jung as a Writer* and *Jung: A Feminist Revision*, exemplify her contributions to the field of post-Jungian feminism and the expansion of analytical psychology, in order to incorporate more diverse and inclusive perspectives on gender. This is achieved by maintaining a critical stance and a distance that does not entirely detach from the foundations of Jungian theory. Thus, Rowland (2002) conducts an analysis of Jung's work

from a feminist perspective, identifying areas where he may have perpetuated gender stereotypes or neglected the voices and contributions of women. She investigates how Jungian archetypes and concepts can be reinterpreted in light of feminist needs and explores how Jungian theories can contribute to the development of a more inclusive psychology capable of addressing the complexity of gender identities, giving voice to the experiences and histories neglected in the history of psychology, and developing more inclusive and sensitive models for psychotherapeutic practice and analysis.

Rowland's (2002) critique highlights the importance of incorporating a historical and material understanding of the development of knowledge and Jungian theory, considering aspects such as: when it was written, by whom, and for whom this content is intended. This perspective is aligned with the approach presented by Tannen (2007) and in the article written by Rowland, which explore the imaginal field especially present in productions made by women and for women (Tancetti and Gimenez, 2024). The postmodern context and the various currents of feminism are in a constant process of revision and complexity. Within it, distinct realities of women's experiences, as well as their oppressions, discourses, and agendas—simultaneously complementary and dissonant—converge, dialogue, and deconstruct one another.

To cope with this constant revision and the concomitant need for social context transformation, the archetypal figure of the trickster emerges as a fertile concept for the symbolic amplification of feminist dynamics in postmodernity.

The Postmodern Trickster

As an archetypal manifestation, the trickster continues to emerge through the ages. Although it represents a force prior to human consciousness, its defining characteristic of adapting and influencing culture, as well as its inclination toward unrest with

¹ These thinkers include M. Esther Harding, Sylvia Brinton Perera, Christine Downing, Marion Woodman, Linda Leonard, Qualls-Corbett, Jean Bolen, and Whitmont, all of whom Rowland cites as developing works that expand on Jung's ideas.

established norms, aligns with the contemporary understanding of the postmodern era. Therefore, it is essential to understand how this symbol manifests in the present day. By navigating the realm of the unconscious, the trickster attitude encourages the individual to adopt a creative approach and embrace impermanence in conventional contexts, thus fostering a willingness for transformation.

Women who personify the trickster play the role of messengers, bearers of information from the collective unconscious regarding the construction of identity and subjectivity. These new and emerging energies are available to be considered and incorporated into the understanding of contemporary society.

Some Characteristics of the Postmodern Female Trickster

Tannen (2007) explores the archetypal figure of the trickster from the perspectives of post-Jungian and postmodern theories in the book *The Female Trickster: The Mask That Reveals*. Traditionally, the trickster is a character who challenges social norms and established values, using humor and irreverence to subvert. In the contemporary context, this archetype can be examined through post-Jungian psychological theories, which recognize the complexity of the human psyche and the influence of the collective unconscious.

The postmodern trickster adopts subversive and transformative attitudes, which can be considered revolutionary in cultural and psychological realms. This transformation occurs alongside the construction of an identity that rejects the role of victim imposed by previous social standards.

The differences in the characteristics attributed to the trickster figure in postmodernity, when compared to past representations, can be directly linked to the imagination of women, a theme that will be explored in more detail throughout this text. Other prominent characteristics of the postmodern trickster, according to Tannen (2007), are authority, autonomy, agency, refusal to be a victim, humor and the role of social worker.

Authority: is not simply power, but the capacity to be the genuine creator of images within one's own imaginative world. This is tied to psychological health, as it allows one to maintain identity in liminal territories. The word "authority" shares a semantic root with "authentic" and "author," reflecting the idea of being a creator. The definition of authority has evolved over time, shifting from "competent" to "genuine" by the late 18th century.

Autonomy: with linguistic roots similar to "authority", means having the freedom to consciously choose one's intentional behavior. This capacity for self-determination and self-governance is crucial for the successful formation of identity. For women, this implies having absolute control over reproductive decisions, for example. Autonomy requires the ability to make responsible, ethical, and clear decisions, and is seen as a prerequisite for the development of an authentic and independent identity.

Agency: The word *agency* comes from the Greek root "gen", which means persuasive power. It refers to the ability to act powerfully. It is both a mode of action and the ability to act on behalf of others, much like an agency acts on behalf of clients. This implies that those who possess an agency

also have power and freedom of physical and psychological movement within their culture. Agency involves understanding movement as action and how to employ that action powerfully.

Social Work: Tannen (2007) compares the role of the female trickster, understood as an agent of cultural transformation, with the work performed by a social worker. In this sense, Andrew Samuels (2002) argues that Western culture urgently needs what he calls a trickster leader, which reflects the social work aspect of the trickster. He connects the emerging female trickster figure with social work and collective action, highlighting its relevance as a catalyst for cultural and social changes.

This examination underscores the intersection of the trickster archetype with modern feminist and postmodern ideas, especially in how the figure of the female trickster engages with cultural transformation, social activism, and the restructuring of identities.

We observe signs that the way the psyche has developed in Western societies tends to drive the emergence of more female trickster leaders. Sometimes the trickster enters the political arena with an exaggeration, transgressing what is prescribed for women. For example, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo helped overthrow the Argentine Junta by gathering, dressed entirely in mourning garments, in Buenos Aires' central square. Another area where we can observe tricksters in leadership roles is in the environmental movement. The equivalence of women and nature, or the earth, can be (but not necessarily) one of the most oppressive equivalences for women when culture and power are then in the hands of men. However, when the equivalence between woman and nature is exaggerated and parodied, as in some forms of ecofeminism, a new form of energy becomes available for politics. The list of contemporary tricksters is almost endless. Perhaps some would say that the very struggle for autonomy that characterizes every woman's life in Western (and indeed non-Western) societies already makes them a trickster. Perhaps. But the most important point is that the blatant political tone of the trickster corroborates the argument with which we began: cultures need trickster leaders. (Samuels, 2002, p. 110-111)

Refusal to be a victim: Tannen (2007) argues that this refusal is a distinctive feature of the postmodern trickster, who moves away from the victim identity towards a notion of self-determined individuality through cleverness. This involves shifting the focus from trauma to the possibility of addressing the incongruity of life that may lead to it. The author illustrates cleverness as an aspect in which humor is used to hypothetically resolve a complex problem, shifting the perspective from victim to authority.

An example of this refusal to be a victim is how women in literature stopped writing from a place of confinement and began rejecting that status, seeking independence and authority through writing and

dreaming new realities for themselves. However, telling the story of a woman or placing female characters at the center of a narrative is not enough to constitute a feminist approach in literature. It is important to note that a feminist and postmodern approach to literature requires contextualizing the speaker's position in analyzing the text, as well as engaging with the questioning and deconstruction of patriarchal power structures in the social context. For Tannen, postmodernity and feminist epistemologies face similar issues arising from post-colonialism and post-structuralism: who said it, and with what intention? In which historical period, and resulting in the advancement of which theory?

Humor of the female trickster: Humor plays a crucial role in characterizing the postmodern trickster, serving to break through the barriers of rational consciousness, introducing unconscious and creative elements while also generating significant emotional impact. Historically, humor has been used as a tool to address delicate themes such as sexuality, mortality, and other tragic aspects of human existence. For the trickster, the use of humor in ambiguous and challenging contexts represents a strategy for dealing with these challenges while also finding pleasure in this approach. This form of humor can serve as a gateway to exploring complex issues, including taboos, facilitating dialogue on deeply relevant topics.

From the perspective of Jungian psychology, humor is seen as a creative force often kept in the unconscious until it is expressed. Jung recognized humor as a fundamental component of creativity, emphasizing that creating something new is not simply the result of intellect, but is, in fact, the product of the playful and creative instinct that emerges from an internal need. For Jung, play plays an essential role in integrating serious work and playful creation, thus laying the foundation for creativity.

The humor characteristic of female tricksters, in particular, adopts a subversive approach, challenging the choices and hypocrisies of figures of power, as well as their adherence to the social status quo. This humor challenges authority and causes discomfort for those who value order, making the

postmodern trickster a figure seen as more challenging and, consequently, more threatening to society.

The trickster energy resurfaces in the postmodern world. In this context, female tricksters can be considered a product of the confluence of these various feminist waves. Their imagination and actions are intrinsically linked to cultural transformation. When the world is turned upside down, they challenge the idea of a correct position. Reconsidering the meaning of trickster is the first step in understanding how the postmodern trickster articulates and subverts the dominant models of femininity.

The Imagination of Women Transforms the World

“I dream the world, therefore the world exists
as I dream it.”

— Bachelard (1996, p. 152)

The possibility for women to conceive themselves as the subjects of their own narratives and lives has the potential to generate new images and metaphors capable of transforming the status quo. Metaphorical images represent a space where tensions between opposites are manifested, creating a fluid zone that transcends fixed meanings. It is in this metaphorical space that the trickster finds her place. This image encourages consciousness to surpass boundaries and limits, challenging the structural patterns that organize the world. Tannen (2007) uses the term “imagination” to describe this awareness of the dual potential to transform the world through metaphorical images.

According to Stein (1993),

Transformative images are metaphors that engage and capture. Witnessing the transformative process to which they are subjected is a special experience. At the moment such images appear, they capture individual consciousness, transforming it temporarily and dramatically over time, making them irreversible. This occurs because such images

reflect emerging psychological contents in a person’s life, giving them a form. (Stein, 1993, p. 41).

The ability to create new configurations is a manifestation of the psyche seeking to realize infinite potentialities. When these new images appear in popular culture, they indicate that archetypal psychic energy is emerging to the forefront of consciousness, sprouting from the fertile collective unconscious. True revolution occurs when these images are integrated into culture because for centuries our culture has been shaped by men’s imagination and addressed to them.

During the hegemony of patriarchal consciousness, women’s sense of reality was often questioned. Hillman encourages us to work with images, and Jung states that “imagination is an autonomous and primordial psychic activity in all humanity” (Jung, OC 11: par 845). However, to imagine autonomously, one must be the subject of their own life. In the introduction to the book *“The Way of All Women”* (2017) by Mary Esther Harding, Jung concludes that while it is true that men “understand nothing of the psychology of women as it truly is,” it is even more surprising that women “do not know themselves” (Harding, 2017).

How could women know themselves if, for so long, they had no opportunity to imagine a space where they could connect and explore their own spheres of images as authors of their own lives?

The trickster energy through the imagination of women contains nothing less than the revolutionary possibility of a complete transformation of the consciousness of the world we live in (Tannen 2007). Tannen demonstrates this transformative attitude with the studies of Jungian analyst Marion Woodman about the “emerging archetype of the virgin” in postmodernity, using examples such as Cyndi Lauper and Madonna. Woodman’s description of these singers, who express rebellious attitudes, sexuality, eroticism, sensitivity to everyday and social issues, reveals the trickster nature of these women. Woodman characterizes them as “virgins eternally pregnant with new possibilities” (Woodman 1985). The manifestation

of the postmodern trickster is brought into the world through the imagination of women.

Final Considerations

The figure of the postmodern female trickster, as presented in this article, emerges as a force for cultural transformation. Her authority and agency in creating images and her ability to use humor as a subversive tool are distinctive characteristics. Female tricksters have challenged social norms, imagined new possibilities, and contributed to a more inclusive and diverse society. Postmodern feminism, by emphasizing the diversity of women's experiences and rejecting gender essentialism, has played a fundamental role in redefining gender narratives. This critical approach, allied with post-Jungian currents in analytical psychology, has allowed for a profound revision of the understanding of anima and animus archetypes, as well as gender dynamics.

Today's female tricksters are all those who can conceive of their own lives, and in doing so, transform culture. They are among us, and they are us. They can be observed in their feminist attitudes, in the subtlety of intelligent humor, or in the sharpness of acid humor. The female trickster embodies and promotes transformation both in her individual life and in the collective consciousness and culture. She

becomes the embodiment of a woman who refuses to reproduce social patterns and roles and to be a victim. Women's imagination has generated, conceived, and shared with other women images that emphasize authority, empowerment, and autonomy.

Cultural transformation is the game of the female trickster. She can use humor, satire, and irreverence to question and destabilize power structures. Female tricksters challenge established norms and promote the deconstruction of patriarchal power structures. It is important to note that the postmodern female trickster is not a single, fixed representation but rather a multifaceted figure that can be interpreted and reimagined in various ways. She reflects the search for a more complex and empowering representation of women that recognizes the diversity of women's experiences and questions traditional gender limitations.

Finally, the activism of the female trickster and the consequent cultural change play a significant role in postmodern feminism. It seeks to transform gender norms through artistic expressions in literature and media, recognizing that cultural change is an essential part of the struggle for equal rights and the recognition of differences between genders and among women in a complex and diverse postmodern context. ■

References

- Bachelard, G. (1996). *A Poética do devaneio*. Martins Fontes.
- Conradie, P. W. (2022). Conceitos teóricos: definindo o trickster. *Revista Odisseia*, 7(1), pp. 1-13.
- Ferreira, V. (1988). O feminismo na pós-modernidade. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 24, 93-106.
- Gimenez, L. P. (2018). *A Mulher Contemporânea e o Feminino: um estudo com mulheres inseridas no mercado de trabalho* (Dissertação de mestrado). Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo.
- Harding, E. (2017). *The way of all women*. Shambhala Publications.
- Jung, C. G. (2000). *Os arquétipos e o inconsciente coletivo*. Editora Vozes.
- Jung, C. G. (2008). *Psicologia da religião ocidental e oriental*. Editora Vozes.
- Rowland, S. (2002). *Jung: A Feminist Revision*. Blackwell.
- Samuels, A. (2002). *A política no divã: cidadania e vida interior*. Summus.
- Samuels, A. (2024). *Jung e os pós-jungianos*. Editora Vozes.
- Stein, M. (1993). *Solar Conscience: An Essay on the Psychological Foundations of Morality, Lawfulness, and the Sense of Justice*. Chiron.
- Tancetti, B., & Gimenez, L. P. (2024). As mulheres Trickster: novas imagens femininas e perspectivas emergentes na cultura contemporânea. In FARIA, D. L.; MENDES, D. C. *O trickster na contemporaneidade: Sua presença no mito, na cultura e na clínica*. Editora Vozes.
- Tancetti, B., & Gimenez, L. P. (2022). Feminismos Pós-Junguianos: Revisões Das Teorias Clássicas E Novos Despontes. In Franco, C. (2022). *Psicologia pós-junguiana e debates contemporâneos de gênero e sexualidade*. Editora Atena.
- Tannen, R. S. (2007). *The female trickster: the mask that reveals, post-Jungian and postmodern psychological perspectives on women in contemporary culture*. Routledge.
- Woodman, M. (1985). *The pregnant virgin: A process of psychological transformation*. Inner City Books.
- Woolf, V. (2014). *O valor do riso e outros ensaios*. Editora Cosac Naify.