



## The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Narrative

By David Williams

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### The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Narrative By David Williams

Until recently, scientific and literary cultures have existed side-by-side but most often in parallel universes, without connection. *The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Nature* by David Williams addresses the premise that humans are a biological species stemming from the long process of evolution, and that we do exhibit a universal human nature, given to us through our genes. From this perspective, literature is shown to be a product of our biological selves. By exploring central ideas in neuroscience, evolutionary biology, linguistics, music, philosophy, ethics, religion, and history, Williams shows that it is the circuitry of the brain's hard-wired dispositions that continually create similar tales around the world: "archetypal" stories reflecting ancient tensions that arose from our evolutionary past and the very construction of our brains. The book asserts that to truly understand literature, one must look at the biological creature creating it. By using the lens of science to examine literature, we can see how stories reveal universal aspects of the biological mind. The Trickster character is particularly instructive as an archetypal character who embodies a raft of human traits and concerns, for Trickster is often god, devil, musical, sexual, silver tongued, animal, and human at once, treading upon the moral dictates of culture.

Williams brings together science and the humanities, demonstrating a critical way of approaching literature that incorporates scientific thought.

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## The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Narrative By David Williams Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

David Williams tricks the reader into following in his fleet footsteps into the land of neuroscience, evolution, music, and other seemingly non-literary areas in order to flesh out something important about our evolutionary brains, namely our propensity for weaving stories. (Peter Swirski, author of "Of Literature and Knowledge: Explorations in Narrative Thought Experiments, Evolution, and Game Theory")

In *The Trickster Brain*, David Williams brings together the seemingly incompatible worlds of neuroscience, anthropology and literature with wit and scholarly flair. Williams does not shy away from the more contradictory elements of human nature in this ambitious book, and he leaves the reader with the knowledge that our own brains are tricking us into a better understanding of our most elemental natures. (Kayt Sukel, author of "Dirty Minds: How Our Brains Influence Love, Sex, and Relationships")

Taken as a whole, *The Trickster Brain* can be admired for its lofty goal, which is to connect a kind of cross-culturally realized narrative element to the biological design and function of the human brain. Folklorists may also admire Williams' willingness to work across disciplinary lines. (*Journal of Folklore Research*)

#### About the Author

**David Williams**, PhD, has been a writer-in-residence at a number of universities and colleges, including Knox College and the Metropolitan State College of Denver. He is also an Emmy winning songwriter, cartoonist, and string musician with many CDs to his credit. Currently, he teaches in the Writing Program at the University of Colorado Boulder.

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##### **Cynthia Campbell:**

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**Eileen Moore:**

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