

# Fox Mulder As A Trickster

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## The Trickster Archetype in Myth and Folklore

In folklore, mythology, and religion, a trickster is perceived as a divine being, woman or man, or an anthropomorphic creature that plays tricks or, in most cases, flouts societal norms and displays unorthodox behaviours in view of Lewis Hyde, a trickster as a “boundary-crosser” who regularly violate the principles of natural and social order, mischievously upsetting ordinary life and then re-creating it on a new foundation (Hyde, 1998). Often, breaking and bending of rules assumes a form of thievery and tricks, with tricksters showing signs of foolishness, slyness or both.

## Characteristics of Mythical Tricksters

Tricksters openly mock and question authority, with a large number of them being male characters who enjoy boasting and playing tricks on both gods and humans. On his part, Williams Hynes, in his book *Mapping the Characteristics of Mythical Tricksters*, outlines that tricksters have ambiguous personalities, play tricks, imitate the gods, engage in bricolage, are shape-shifters, and situation-invertors (Hynes, 2009). This essay examines the character of Fox Mulder through the lens of Hynes and Hyde’s theories with the view of uncovering whether he fits the characteristics of a trickster put forth by the authors.

## Mulder as a Cultural and Mythological Hero

To begin with, throughout the series, Mulder imitates the gods and wears a number of masks that seem to elevate him into a cultural hero. In most of his journeys and quests, Mulder is always likened to mythological creatures that, in some instances, affect a transformation, whether it is a dying and resurrecting being like Jesus Christ or the Holy Grail’s Parsifal, or the Navajo’s monster slayer (Delasara, 2013). By equating himself to these personalities, Mulder mocks various cultures and beliefs that perfectly fit into the trickster archetype Hynes put forward. He acts as the authority on religion and indentifying his character with Christ via parallel incidents like crucifixion and resurrection, Mulder becomes the alchemic force that inspires change (Hynes, 2009). The twist that arises thereafter is that as much as he wants to become the messiah, his hubris fails to allow him to reach the destiny he aspires to, forcing him to transform into a destroyer rather than a healer. His actions in the final episode, ‘The Truth’, ultimately make him the trickster that both Hynes and Hyde envision: a boundary-crosser and imitator of the gods.

## Boundary-Crossing and Rejection of Authority

As mentioned by Hynes and Hyde, Fox Mulder falls into the trickster narrative because he often flouts the law in his investigations of the X-Files. Although he represents a force for change, he continuously upsets the status quo through his actions. While his peers mention that almost all incidents have simple explanations, Mulder refuses to accede to this school of thought (Garcia, 2017). In such situations, he intentionally breaks or bends social rules by ensuring his investigations go beyond what is needed for any particular case in a bid to satisfy his never-ending hunger for knowing more. From his past encounters, he understands that he cannot believe the plain explanations given to him by his superiors and colleagues (Hyde, 1998). His disregard for authority and eccentric personality make him believe that he is working on uncovering the truth about what happened to his sister and in the identification of government conspiracies. For example, he fails to obey and follow instructions given by an instructor at the FBI department. The instructor requests Mulder to stop investigating individuals at X-Files, but Mulder chooses to ignore his directions by carrying out his paranormal investigations.

## Intelligence and Professional Identity

Fox Mulder is portrayed as an Oxford-educated psychologist who is hired by the FBI as a behavioural profiler. Here, he becomes the golden boy. Prior to joining the bureau, Fox is depicted as having graduated from college when he was only 21 years old. In view of Hyde and Hynes, a trickster ought to have some sort of intellectual prowess, and *X-Files* outline this by portraying Mulder as an honours student and a successful person in the FBI (Delasara, 2013). However, Mulder's ambiguous personality and engagement in bricolage force him to accept his work as an investigator, but instead, he dedicates himself to discovering "the truth" and proving to his peers that his fascination with aliens is valid. He is enthusiastically persuaded that there is "something out there," whether it is the existence of aliens, a federal conspiracy, or both. However, his propensity to shift shape prevents him from remaining objective in his work, forcing him to attach emotions and feelings to investigations that require logical thought (Hynes, 2009). He has a valid case, but as he says, "A person cannot deny the things I have seen or uncovered, but not for long since many people know what is taking place out there. And nobody, not even the government, has control over the truth."

## Dual Personality and Deceptive Behaviour

Fox's dual personality also comes into play in situations where his personal life greatly affects his work life. Despite being very committed and dedicated to the X-Files, he immerses himself in porn and engages in different acts of deception, which alienate him from his peers at the FBI as well as his partner Scully (Garcia, 2017). Mulder is aloof, has a sarcastic sense of humour, and displays unprofessional behaviour that worries Walter Skinner and other FBI personnel. He lets personal issues

affect his judgment, and his emotional obsession with paranormal cases becomes severe through the series, owing to Scully's kidnapping and ensuing cancer besides his sister's abduction. Mulder often loses his temper whenever Scully is in the picture multiple times; he becomes aggressive in his sorrow and open about using physical force (Hyde, 1998). Besides, he has a tense relationship with his parents, thanks to the X-Files, and after his father's murder, he spends the next few years fighting with his mother about her knowledge of his father's involvement in a government conspiracy.

## Mulder's Quest to Expose the Truth

He tries to become the saviour of humanity by exposing the truth regarding the extra-terrestrial invasion of Earth. His fascination led him to ignore FBI objectives and work hard to paint the government in a negative light as responsible for his sister's abduction and the possible colonization of Earth by aliens (Delasara, 2013). What is more, Mulder is portrayed as able to get himself out of any difficult situation by finding clear-cut solutions. Even though he comes across a number of threats by ignoring warnings from Walter Skinner, he proceeds to follow his beliefs, and in the end, he creates an ally for Skinner (Garcia, 2017). Overall, the depiction of Mulder as an individual who works outside the scope of the status quo, his slyness, the dishonourable ditching, the propensity of his actions to flop on him, the perception by his colleagues that he is stupid and a bit weird, his hyper-sexuality, and fascination with porn, even his often erratic conduct and stance are all components of his performance as a trickster.

## References

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