Modern Female Tricksters: Satirists or Satiric Objects?

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Modern Female Tricksters: Satirists or Satiric Objects?

by

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ABSTRACT:

The trickster figure is an archetypal character that can be found in the oral traditions of Native Americans, Greek and Roman mythologies and stories from Polynesia, Africa, the Bible, African American tradition and even in modern literature. This essay examines the female protagonists of Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm* as ideal prototypes of tricksters. In Loos' story, Lorelei jet sets around Europe tricking men into buying her diamonds and offering up engagement proposals throughout her journey. In Gibbons' story, Flora leaves her sophisticated urban world to enter another more primitive rural one in which she cleverly orchestrates the destinies of the people living on Cold Comfort Farm. Both of these women are resourceful and resort to trickery and deceit to achieve their goals. Lorelei and Flora both possess the traits of a trickster figure, but this essay also analyzes what makes these women "modern" trickster figures, different than the tricksters of the old patriarchal world. It also examines why it is important that they are female trickster figures rather than prototypical male trickster figures.

Both of these women are complex and become very ambiguous throughout the text. True to a trickster figure, they have a dual nature and the reader is constantly questioning each character’s nature and motives. This essay attempts to answer questions about their true nature: are these women evil and manipulative or are they small town girls trying to get ahead on life, or bored women looking for a purpose? Are they
intelligent or foolish? The real duality within these women lies in their position and role within the satirical text and simultaneously as women within their own societies. Are Flora and Lorelei the satirists or are they the satiric objects?
MODERN FEMALE TRICKSTERS:
SATIRISTS OR SATIRIC OBJECTS?

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Introduction:

What makes the trickster figure a fascinating character is its ability to stand the test of time, its ability to transcend cultures, and its ability to evolve with literary movements. From Greek mythology, to Native American folklore, to African American literature and into modern texts, cartoons and movies, the trickster figure continuously morphs in order to find a place in literature. Whether the trickster shows himself as a Norse god, a coyote, a signifying monkey, a silly rabbit, or even a woman, it is clear that this character is an important figure worthy of study. The trickster is a universal character type that has the ability to reflect each and every culture that it is a part of. In fact, Michael Carroll believes:

More has probably been written about trickster than about any other single category of character that appears in the myths and folktales of the world. In fact, tricksters are so ubiquitous that Jung (1970) has been led to conclude that they reflect an archetype buried in the mind of all human beings. (105)

William Hynes and William Doty trace the origin of the word back to eighteenth century to mean “one who deceives or cheats” (14) and in the nineteenth century it was used to “describe lying political opponents within the Whig party” (14). The term appeared in Brinton’s 1868 *Myths of the New World* (14) and is now used as a technical term for figures in literature. According to Hynes and Doty, today the term “has become so
familiar a designator that an author can refer to the trickster figure in Old Comedy of
Aristophanes and in Plautus and Terence, as well as in Renaissance comedy and
contemporary films or literature” (14).

The term “trickster” has a myriad of definitions and many scholars throughout the
years have added to or taken away pieces of this definition, frequently arguing about
whether the definition should be broader or more restrictive. Because the term, like the
trickster himself, is constantly changing, it becomes difficult to pin down an exact or
complete definition. Doty and Hynes point out “for over a century Western scholars have
treated the trickster figure as troublesome” (13) and Mac Linscott Ricketts declared that
understanding the trickster figure is “one of our most perplexing problems” (qtd. in Doty
and Hynes 13). It is important in this study to discuss some of the definitions and
characteristics of the trickster figure, but Felicity Wood, in her discussion of African
tricksters reminds us “if we try to pin down the trickster and define and interpret him, the
joke is on us” (84).

The trickster figure takes on many important roles in mythology, folklore and
literature. He, or she, takes on the role of exposing societal fissures. In Bei Cai’s essay
about the trickster woman, he describes the trickster as an “outsider to the establishment”
who “performs the social function of dispelling the belief that any given social order is
absolute and objective.” The tricksters use “their cunning intelligence and
resourcefulness to dispose social ills and transform communities” (278). The trickster
also takes on the role of entertainer, making us laugh as he or she “like a child reminds
adults how rigidly they have taken on a certain kind of order, the trickster reminds us
there is no single way to play” (Hynes 212). The trickster’s comic nature does not take
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away from Cai’s claim that tricksters are able to “disrupt societal hierarchies and subvert cultural conventions as they remake truth on their own terms” (278). In fact, Hynes and Doty “reject the common assumption that if something is comical or entertaining, it cannot represent socially significant material” (4). Tricksters also take on the role of forcing the reader to question his or her own beliefs about life and values. Joseph Campbell elucidates this in *An Open Life*:

> He always breaks in, just as the unconscious does, to trip up the rational situation.

He’s both a fool and someone who’s beyond the system. And the trickster hero represents all those possibilities of life that your mind hasn’t decided it wants to deal with. The mind structures a lifestyle, and the fool or trickster represents another whole range of possibilities. He doesn’t respect the values that you’ve set up for yourself, and smashes them. (qtd. in Hynes and Doty 1)

Because the trickster critiques society, makes us laugh and also makes us question our own belief systems, it seems natural for this character to show up in works of satire. George Test believes that the trickster figure was and is the basis of satire: “It is the satiric element in the trickster material that suggests that the trickster is a mythical source of satire” (42). Furthermore he states, “the trickster’s position in myth is a mirror image of the satirist’s position in society” (44). Based on these assertions, satire seems to be the best place to look for and examine the elusive and enigmatic trickster figure.

The satirical texts, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Anita Loos and *Cold Comfort Farm*, by Stella Gibbons both contain complex and comedic trickster figures in the characters of Lorelei and Flora. For some critics, applying the term trickster to these
women may be problematic. Most critics keep their study of trickster figures contained and focused, and feel that too many people are broadening the term. At one extreme, some anthropologists have “called for the elimination of the term ‘trickster’ altogether because it implies that a global approach to such a figure is possible whereas they find it appropriate to focus only upon one tribal or national group at a time” (Doty and Hynes 4-5). Elizabeth Ammons also reminds us that “tricksterism is not simply one brand of ethnic chic, to be ripped out (off) of particular cultural contexts and applied will-nilly to any and every text one wishes” (xii). Thus we must be careful and find a way to respect cultural origins. But, Ammons also points out that the “essence of tricksterism is change, contradiction, adaptation and surprise” (xii), so like the trickster itself, we must be willing to accept change and adaptation for the term as well.

Because the trickster figure is so rooted in ancient folklore and mythology, some may find it a stretch to apply the term and its characteristics to such modern texts as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Cold Comfort Farm*. Many believe that the trickster “represents an important but very primitive stage in the progressive or evolutionary development of humankind” (Doty and Hynes 8-9). But, Carl Jung and John Greenway would claim that the trickster develops and evolves over time just as cultures develop and change.

Historically, the gender of the trickster has been male, and thus labeling Lorelei and Flora as tricksters may be problematic for some. In Lewis Hyde’s essay on tricksters, he states that all standard trickster figures are male and that “tricksters belong to patriarchal mythologies, ones in which the prime actors, even oppositional actors, are male” (335). But, Andrew Wiget argues that such an assumption may result from “a
peculiar bias in the collection of stories. Males usually did the collecting and talked to male storytellers” (qtd. in White-Parks 2). Margaret Mills claims that women are natural tricksters. In fact, in Islamic literature the topic of women’s tricks is a popular one and “women are considered to excel even the devil himself in trickery” (238). Furthermore, it seems that the characteristics of tricksters lend themselves to the nature of women. For example, “trickery can be categorized as a weapon of the weak, and thus quintessentially of women” (Mills 240). Melissa Jackson’s article about female tricksters in patriarchal narratives claims that the trickster has “a low- or relatively low- social status, prohibiting gain or advancement through means available to others. Power or might is not at a trickster’s disposal, so [she] employs wit and cunning in devising a plot to achieve [her] desired end” (32). This wit and cunning is dramatically illustrated in the example of “Nushu”, a secret language traced legendarily to the Song Dynasty in China (960-1279 A.D). Nushu is said to have originated when a girl, taken as a concubine to the Imperial palace devised a secret code in order to communicate with her sister back home without the Emperor’s spies being able to read what she wrote. Remaining alive through the centuries, Nushu was used by women both to enter a world of story-communication they were denied by formal education and to express emotional ties among women (White-Parks 2-3). Thus, “the practice of Nushu illustrates how tricksterism can become a survival strategy through which oppressed groups or individuals may attain a certain degree of personal and political autonomy within the restrictions of an oppressive dominant system” (2-3).

The women in the Hebrew Bible, a patriarchal narrative that often places women in a position where they must resort to trickery, also fit this description as well, and thus
we can look to the Bible for some of our first female tricksters. Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban and wife of Jacob, becomes angry with her father for keeping money that belonged to her and Jacob. She wants to secure property rights and inheritance, but is unable to do so because of her status as a woman. She steals her father’s teraphim, household gods, and when asked for them, she places them under her seat and declines to rise because she is menstruating. She tricks her father into giving her the inheritance that she feels she deserves. Esther, a young Jewish woman living in exile in the Persian diaspora, ultimately saves the Jewish people from destruction through her means of trickery. She is able to disguise her own ancestry, make the King fall in love with her, and reveal, and stop, Haman’s plot to wipe out the Jews. Carol Meyers explains: “By astutely using her beauty, charm, and political intelligence, Esther saves her people, brings about the downfall of their enemy, and elevates her kinsman to the highest position in the kingdom” (76). When Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah is unjustly forced to live as a widow, she disguises herself in order to trick her father-in-law into having sex with her. Lot’s daughters fear for their future as Sodom is destroyed. They are concerned that there will be no men left to father their children, and their own survival, so they make Lot drink wine and use him to become pregnant. Both women bear sons, showing the success of their trickery. These women all take on classic characteristics of the trickster figure. They are champions of the less powerful (women) who take advantage of the powerful (men) using means of disguise and deception. One of the things that make the female trickster unique in comparison to the more common male trickster is the use of her own sexuality in her tricks. Like Loos’ trickster blonde, Lorelei, the female body proves to be a very useful tool in her bag of tricks. Both Lorelei and
Flora find ways to gain power through the use of trickery despite their status as women or outsiders.

Although, many critics may discourage this broadening of the trickster term to include characters such of Lorelei and Flora, Doty and Hyde make a good argument throughout their essay on theoretical issue to defend the use of these characters in this discussion. Like Doty and Hynes, I am “less interested in total typological consistency than in a matrix of interpretive possibilities” (25). Because these texts are works of satire, a common arena for trickster figures, and because the trickster evolves with society, and because women can also fit the trickster mold, it is possible to bring Lorelei and Flora into the conversation as trickster figures in modern satirical texts. Like Elizabeth Ammons, my goal is “to suggest and demonstrate a flexibility and adventuresomeness—neither being alien to trickster, of course—in approach, method, and style” (xi).

The female protagonists of Anita Loos’ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Stella Gibbons’ *Cold Comfort Farm* are the ideal prototypes of modern female tricksters. In Loos’ story, Lorelei jet sets around Europe tricking men into buying her diamonds and offering up engagement proposals throughout her journey. In Gibbons’ story, Flora leaves her sophisticated urban world to enter another more primitive rural one in which she cleverly civilizes and orchestrates the destinies of the people living on Cold Comfort Farm. Both of these women are resourceful and resort to trickery and deceit to achieve their goals. Lorelei and Flora embody many trickster-like characteristics, and at times they employ different features of the trickster. It makes sense that they would not share all of the same traits because they are in different cultures, thus they have different obstacles, different goals to achieve, and different societies to critique and expose.
Ultimately, they will use different strategies or tools, yet they both fit the prototype presented.

All of these unique characteristics will be discussed in detail for each character, but one of the features of the trickster that they both share is that of “boundary-crosser.” Trickster figures are known as border figures and they “are always on the boundaries, or peripheries;” this liminal position allows for “greater flexibility and mobility” (Wood 73). The trickster never really belongs to one society and may even wander aimlessly. They act as “change agents whose status as social outsiders and as cultural critics bestows upon them not only the power to defy oppressive social norms but also the creative power to reimagine new concepts of selfhood, gender and race relationship and community” (Cai 276). Lorelei and Flora both act as “social outsiders” throughout the texts. Lorelei comes from modest means in Arkansas, making her the social outsider in her new environment of high-class society, money, and education. She travels from New York to Europe and back, as she becomes a cultural critic of her current surroundings. Flora also spends her time in a community in which she does not belong or understand. Flora acts as the “social outsider” in the world of Cold Comfort Farm. But, because she is the outsider, she is able to expose the community of the farm, and the outsider’s inaccurate perception of this community throughout the story. Interestingly enough, these trickster women are almost mirror images of one another: a farm girl moving to the city versus a city girl moving to the farm and one not sophisticated enough versus the other too sophisticated for her environment.

Another characteristic that they both share, and one that is very important, is one of duality and ambiguity. Trickster figures are a bundle of paradoxes and contradictions
because they are meant to “represent the human race—‘a web of many-layered being’ and
the contradictory and anomalous aspects of ordinary life” (Cai 278). The polarities
present in the trickster figure are complex and it is interesting to note that British
psychotherapist R.D. Laing commented that “his own understanding of schizophrenia
was greatly enhanced by his study of trickster myths and that therapists of several other
schools of psychology have found the role of the psychotherapist-as-trickster to be
worthy of study” (Doty and Hynes 25). Michael Carroll believes that there are different
personalities present within the trickster: “the trickster seems to be the merger of two
independent personalities, one which is a ‘selfish buffoon’ of the Bugs Bunny variety,
and the other which is a culture-hero” (305). The “selfish buffoon” is the one who is
obsessed with satisfying his or her own desires and will go to elaborate lengths in order to
achieve his or her goals. The “culture-hero” is the one who is a “transformer who makes
the world habitable for humans by ridding it of monsters or who provides things that
make human society possible” (Carroll 305). Although Lorelei seems to be the “selfish
buffoon” who will create devious and long winded plans to get diamonds, she also finds a
way to rid the world of awful men, or at least make the reader aware of the shortcomings
of men in order to make society a hospitable place for women to live. Flora, on the other
hand, seems to be more of a “culture-hero” who provides important modern tools for the
Starkadders and makes society possible for them on the farm. But, at the same time, Flora
goes to elaborate lengths to get what she so selfishly desires (love connections, a
“normal” place to live, etc.) sometimes ignoring what others around her want or need.
Once again, the two women seem to mirror one another: Lorelei as selfish buffoon and
Flora as culture-hero representing both sides of the trickster figure.
Because of this dual nature, the trickster figures present readers with many questions. Is the trickster evil or good? Is the trickster intelligent or foolish? Should we laugh at the trickster or with the trickster? The trickster figure in a satirical text makes these questions all the more complex. Michael Siedel claims:

Satire may in one sense be intended to cleanse society of its hypocrisy, but in that process the satirist incurs the risk of transferring the disorder, dirt, and pollution to himself: the job of any cleanser, whether satirist or garbage collector, may take on itself the taint of others’ dirt. (qtd. in Koepping 192)

When the satirists get “dirty”, it becomes difficult to figure out if Lorelei and Flora are the satirists or if they are in fact the satiric objects.
Chapter I: Anita Loos' Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

The zeitgeist of the 1920s was one of frivolousness and excess, and the decade was marked by the breakdown of traditional values. Lorelei, like a true trickster woman, takes advantage of these fissures in American society and capitalizes on them through her charm. While doing so, she exposes and criticizes these societal issues. Lorelei Mouths a compendium of middle-class views and aspirations of the period, mutilating the languages of self-improvement; the power of positive thinking...temperance and antivice crusades; and even psychoanalysis -the latter culminating in her visit to “Dr. Froyd” in Vienna. (Hegeman 528)

Cleverly layered between her tricks and schemes are subtle and overt criticisms of society shrouded in innocent, playful narration. Lorelei, or Loos, mocks the follies of prohibition during her debutante party. Lorelei invites “Joe Sanguinetti, who is almost the official bootlegger for the whole Racquet Club” (105). When describing the party, she says “it was wonderful the way he [Joe] got all of the liquor to the party. I mean he had his bootleggers run up from the wharf in taxis, right to the apartment” (106-107). When the party gets out of hand:

The police have orders from Judge Schultzmeyer, who is the famous judge who tries all of the prohibition cases, that any time they break into a party that looks like it was going to be a good party, to call him up no matter what time of the day or night it is, because Judge Schultzmeyer dearly loves a party. (107)

The “prohibition” Judge stays all night, leaves at nine AM to go to court, and returns to the party and stays until he is unconscious and Lorelei says that she has to “drop him off at a sanitorium in Garden City” (108). She also pokes fun at the vices of the male
members of government when she says, “gentleman who work for Uncle Sam generally like to become romantic with girls” (26) and mocks senators when she comments on their vacuous reading habits: “a book of philosophy called ‘Smile, Smile, Smile’ which all the brainy senators are reading” (27). Through Lorelei’s comments and descriptions, Loos is satirizing prohibition, the hypocrisy of politicians, and the popular “new-age” self-help manifestos.

Lorelei’s ignorance of other cultures as she travels through Europe highlights the ignorance of all Americans. She has no concept of geography and history and feels that every place is a bore compared to New York: “I told him that if England was the same kind of a place that London seems to be, I really know to much to bother with such a place” (49). She cannot spell the Eifel tower: “Eyefull Tower” (54); she does not know who Napoleon is: “I asked the French Veecount what was the name of the unknown soldier who is buried under quite a large monument” (55); and she believes that Louie the sixteenth was “in the anteek furniture business” (62). She also mocks other cultures throughout her journey through Europe, exposing the stereotypes about different countries that were created by ethnocentric Americans. She comments on England’s obsession with titles, the French who seem to “squeal” when they speak and Munich’s false sense of artistic superiority: “if this is ‘kunst,’ the art center of the world is Union Hill New Jersey” (85). With these “silly” statements, Loos manages to present Lorelei as the object of laughter while also satirizing European pretensions. Through her “innocuous” comments, Lorelei’s skills as a trickster expose society for what it is. Like the mythological siren Lorelei, who lured men on the Rhine to their deaths, Lorelei lures men in with her beauty and trickery and is able to get them to tell her top government
secrets, buy her clothing and diamonds, take her to shows and dinners, and is even able to convince them to pay for her “pilgrimage” through Europe. Lorelei exposes the flaws present in her society through her trickery.

Besides excess, frivolity, and the breakdown in traditional values, the 1920s was a decade rife with paradoxes and duality. During this time period women were unsure of their roles and their positions in society. They were almost living in two different worlds and belonged to,

A work force that was independent but young enough to be malleable; [they were] sexual and yet not overtly sexually active or aggressive; consumerist enough to want to work but probably thinking more about marriage than about competing with men for position in the bureaucratic structure. (Hegeman 537)

Lorelei’s dual nature as a trickster figure plays into this confusing paradox quite well. When society is unsure of its own desires and needs, it can easily fall victim to deception. Lorelei “works” to find marriage and through her work she is able to expose the flaws in her society. But more importantly, she is able to take advantage of those dominant in society: men with wealth and power.

Lorelei’s trickster characteristics prove to be abundant and diverse. Besides the essential aforementioned ability to expose the fissures present in society, she also possesses some of the most basic and innate qualities of the archetypical trickster figure. In 1977 David Abrams and Brian Sutton-Smith conducted a study on the development of the trickster figure in children’s narratives. In order to conduct their study, they had to come up with a “trickster inventory” (31), a researched and developed list of common trickster traits throughout the centuries. This “trickster inventory” proves to be very
useful for other studies in trickster behavior as well. The inventory developed by Abrams and Sutton-Smith helps to pinpoint more of Lorelei’s trickster qualities. Some of the more unique qualities mentioned in this inventory include an “adventurous curiosity” and “sparkling vitality” (33). Lorelei possesses both of these qualities as she is always “seeking adventure, enjoys trying new things, has an enormous eagerness to learn... and always seems cheerful” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33). Lorelei always talks about getting “educated,” constantly tries to surround herself with “educated people” such as authors, filmmakers and artists, and looks at every adventure as an opportunity: “Here is the first real opportunity I have ever really had. I mean to go to Paris and broaden out and improve my writing” (17).

According to the inventory, one of the more common traits of trickster figures is that they have “a demeanor of childlike, innocent charm” (30). This regressive behavior is apparent in Lorelei’s character throughout the text. Susan Hegeman notices this as well: “Lorelei acts, writes and even dresses like a child- at one point going so far as to buy herself hats in the children’s department while on a shopping trip in London” (535). In fact, this childishness makes her a, quintessential example of that archetype of ‘20s femininity: the flapper. The very name “flapper” was coined to describe the long-limbed awkwardness of teenagers- and indeed its cultural significance seems to reside with its tendency to make women seem prepubescent- even neotenic. (536)

Along with her appearance, her actions also seem childlike. She gives “cute” nicknames to older male companions: “I told him I was not going to call him Sir Francis Beekman but I was really going to call him Piggie” (Loos 40). She calls Lord Cooksleigh “Coocoo”
and says, “I never even think of calling Mr. Eisman by his first name, but if I want to call him anything at all, I call him ‘Daddy’” (5). Using these nicknames and acting babyish with wealthy, older men, it ironically puts her in a place of power. Abrams and Sutton-Smith's inventory states that the trickster figure “seeks protection from others and expresses feelings of helplessness” (32). The men feel as if she is a child who needs protection and nurturing, thus when she asks for things, they feel inclined to “take care of her” as she is so helpless that she cannot take care of herself. This makes the men feel powerful and in their rightful place in a patriarchal society, thus, she is able to get what she wants. Lorelei knows this and she uses it to her advantage: “I always think that there is nearly always some gentleman who will protect two American girls like I and Dorothy who are all alone” (75).

Furthermore, in the “trickster inventory” it states that tricksters will “babyishly mispronounce words” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32) and Lorelei frequently misspells words in her diary, much as a child would do. She talks about “riskay stories” (13), seeing things at a great “distant” (21), discusses her past in which she was in “business colledge” (24), believes that meeting the District Attorney on the boat is “quite a co-instance” (26), is very “intreeged” by Paris and finds it “devine” (50-51), enjoys buying “safire” bracelets (55) and feels that money can make people have “ambishions” (69), just to name a few. This use of misspellings in her diary makes the readers feel as if she is childish or dense and once again it ironically places her at an advantage. Looking more closely, Laurie Cella believes that the purpose of these grammatical and spelling errors is to “put her readers in a position of false superiority comparable to Lorelei’s hapless suitors” (48). Thus, through her babyish misspellings, Lorelei is not only deceiving the
men she runs around with, but is also tricking the audience as well. If we believe that she is a “dumb blonde” then we cannot blame her for her actions: we can only feel sorry for her and agree that she needs to be protected and “educated.”

Another trait in the “Trickster Inventory” is that of narcissism. Tricksters tend to “brag and tell tall tales” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32). Lorelei brags about her own intelligence, sense of refinement, and writing ability throughout the story. Lorelei frequently tells the reader that she is more refined than Dorothy: “Dorothy speaks their own language to unrefined people better than a refined girl like I” (59) and she worries that Mr. Spoffard will “wonder what a refined girl like I was doing with a girl like Dorothy” (78). Lorelei also seems to tell tall tales specifically in regard to her past. Because this is something that she would like to hide, she goes out of her way to cover up the truth and makes it seem as if she were a victim of her situation. When she explains the attempted murder of Mr. Jennings, her boss, she obviously fudges the truth and claims that one night she found him with a girl “who really was famous all over Little Rock for not being nice” (24-25). Because she was “upset” by this, she claims that she broke into a panic, or as she puts it, “I had quite a bad case of histerics and my mind was really blank and when I came out of it, it seems that I had a revolver in my hand and it seems that the revolver had shot Mr. Jennings” (25). By telling the story this way, she is deceiving Major Falcon. This tall tale makes him think that she was just an innocent girl in the wrong place at the wrong time, rather than see the truth: she was a jaded woman acting on revenge. When she must explain her past to Mr. Spoffard, she puts on quite a performance and once again paints herself as the victim:
I had to tell Mr. Spoffard that I was not always so reformed as I am now, because the world was full of gentlemen who were nothing but wolves in sheep's clothes, that did nothing but take advantage of all we girls. So I really cried quite a lot. ... by that time even Mr. Spoffard had tears in his eyes. (92)

She lies and says, “I came from a very very good family because papa was very intelectual, and he was a very very prominent Elk, and everybody always said he was a very intelectual Elk” (92-93). She claims that it was reading about Mr. Spoffard himself that reformed her and then “Mr. Spoffard reached over and he kissed [her] on the forehead in a way that was full of reverance” (93). Through her tall tales, she is able to get Mr. Spoffard to feel sorry for her rather than cast her aside for her shameful past.

Part of a trickster’s narcissism, according to the “trickster inventory” is, “the exhibitionist desire to be the center of the stage” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32). Nothing displays this more perfectly than Lorelei’s decision to throw her own debut party. Her three-day party was a “great success because all of the newspapers have quite a lot of write-ups about my debut and I really felt quite proud” (106). Lorelei’s narcissism also includes her “boastful[ness] before adversaries” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32). When Piggie’s wife confronts Lorelei about the expensive tiara her husband had purchased, Lorelei has no problem boasting about her accomplishment and “win” as she makes fun of Mrs. Beekman’s appearance: “If you wear that hat into a court, we will see if the judge thinks it took undue influence to make Sir Francis Beekman look at a girl” (58). Lorelei brags about her own qualities, tells tall tales about her past, and boasts in front of her adversaries in due part to her narcissism. This characteristic marks yet another trickster trait that Lorelei possesses.
In order to achieve their goals, many tricksters will resort to crime. They will cheat or steal, ultimately displaying a lack of morals. Abrams and Sutton-Smith would call this trait “violation of taboo” (32). As a true trickster, some of Lorelei’s behavior can be considered unlawful. The most criminal act of all would be the event with Mr. Jennings in Arkansas. Although we only get pieces of the story from Lorelei’s confessions, it is clear that she shot a man and was put on trial for it. But she was able to fool the judge and the jury and was acquitted in three minutes. When she kissed the judge “he had tears in his eyes and he took [her] right home to his sister” (25). According to Lorelei, the judge was the man who got her a ticket to Hollywood. In true trickster fashion, it was because of her unlawful behavior, which in this case was shooting a man that she was able to move up in the world and go to Hollywood. Although convincing men to buy her thousands of dollars worth of diamonds isn’t technically a crime, she does whatever it takes to keep those diamonds, even if that means breaking the law. When she meets a dealer in unset diamonds on the ship back to New York, she spends the evening with him and claims that they “had quite a quarrel the night before we landed, so I did not even bother to look at him when I came down the gangplank, and I put the unset diamonds in my handbag so I did not have to declare them at customs” (100). It is not clear from Lorelei’s story whether or not he gave her the diamonds or if she stole them. What is clear is that she hid the diamonds in order to avoid customs, a clear violation of the law. Once again, by breaking the law, Lorelei is able to get what she wants.

Although Lorelei does not always commit crimes, she does display immoral behavior throughout. Lorelei spends the entire novel dating Mr. Eisman, but courts multiple men throughout. She “accepts” proposals for engagements, and then runs off barely saying a
word or leaving no word at all. When she gets Gerry to fall in love with her, she runs off to Paris on Mr. Eisman’s dime. When she gets Mr. Bartlett to fall in love with her and reveal government secrets, she tells him that she will get off the boat with him in Vienna, but instead she decides that she is going to “stay in [her] room until Mr. Bartlett gets off the ship in France, because [she] really does not seem to care if [she] never sees Mr. Bartlett again” (32). After Piggie falls in love with her and buys her a diamond tiara she “promised Piggie that [she] would always stay in London and [they] would always be friendly” only to state three days later in her diary that “Piggie does not know that we have gone, but I sent him a letter and told him I would see him some time again some time” (49). Lorelei is constantly breaking promises and lying to the men she tricks, running off before they can stake their claim on her. As Nick Carraway would say, Lorelei and Dorothy were “careless people, they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (Fitzgerald 188). Lorelei never looks back with regret upon the men that she leaves behind because, as a typical trickster, she is “ignorant of the effects of [her] immoral behavior. Through clumsy stupidity and [girlish] cuteness, [she] seems innocent of manipulative actions.” She also “seems without sensitivity for the feelings of others and seems not to suffer or feel remorse” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32). After she tricks Piggie into buying her a $10,000 diamond tiara, his wife confronts Lorelei and is very upset. Lorelei and Dorothy then boast about their successes in trickery and insult Mrs. Beekman to her face. Later, Lorelei says, “it seems that something either I or Dorothy said to Lady Francis Beekman seemed to make her angry” (64). Lorelei is oblivious to the damage she has caused in the Beekmans’ marriage. Even though Lorelei
commits crimes, acts immorally, and smashes up other people’s lives without regret, she never seems to suffer the consequences of her actions. According to William Hynes, this is yet another trait of the trickster: “the trickster often seems to operate within a perpetual bubble of immunity that protects [her] from the full weight of retribution” (40). Thus, Lorelei is free to continue her deceit and trickery without being punished for it.

Subterfuge is one of the more central and prominent characteristics of a trickster figure. Abrams and Sutton-Smith would label this characteristic as “pretense,” claiming that tricksters “feign different emotions and act out different roles” (33). The use of disguise and role-playing is something in which Lorelei excels. Laurie Celia notes, “the questions of imitation, masquerade, and performance are highlighted as central to Lorelei’s success within the economics of romantic illusion and fantasy” (51). Lorelei’s performance in the courtroom in Arkansas is enough to bring tears to the eyes of the jury and the judge and she plays the role of innocent victim well enough to receive an acquittal. When she meets Piggie, or rather seeks out the most well groomed gentleman in the room, she plays the woman that she knows he wants. When he laughs, she laughs, she “makes a fuss over him” (45) and tells him that he is good-looking. Piggie falls for all of this flattery and “really felt very very good to be such a good looking gentleman” (45). She plays to his narcissism when she convinces him that she needs a gold picture frame because “when a girl gets to know such a good looking gentleman as him she really wants to have a picture of him on her dressing table where she can look at it a lot” (46). Laurie Cella explains: “This type of seduction underscores Lorelei’s astute recognition of the frailties and foibles of (male) human nature. In a sense, Piggie is seduced by a fantasy of himself more easily than any image of Lorelei as a blonde beauty” (50). When she
convinces Piggie to dress up in his uniform she finally gets what she wants: “I really made Piggie feel quite good about his uniform because I told him I only felt fit to be with him in a diamond tiara” (48). She has played the part perfectly and achieves her pecuniary goal: “Lorelei constructs the image Beekman wants to see and turns this fantasy into a material reward for herself” (Cella 50). The ability to pinpoint exactly what a man wants to hear and ability to create the exact image he wants to see in himself is part of Lorelei’s master skill set.

Lorelei also puts on a disguise when she meets Mr. Spoffard on the train. She knows he is a “Prespyterian” (77), and that he “loves to reform people and senshure everything” (78). She uses this knowledge to her advantage and plays the part. She uses his favorite motto, and tells him that she “thought the civilization is not what it ought to be and we really ought to have something else to take its place” (78). As a model flapper of the 1920s, Lorelei transforms herself when she tells Mr. Spoffard, “I really felt just like his mother feels about all of the flappers because I am an old fashioned girl” (79). When she finally meets Mr. Spoffard’s mother, she dresses the part. She puts on “quite a simple little organdy gown that [she] had ripped all of the trimming off of, and [she] had a pair of black lace mitts and a pair of shoes that did not have any heels on them” (93-94). When she is introduced to his mother, she “dropped a courtesy” and discusses her distaste for flappers (94). It is Lorelei’s unique ability to transform, or shape-shift like the tricksters of myths and legends, that helps her achieve her goals.

Lorelei’s disguises and role-playing are just some of the tools that she uses as a trickster.
Lorelei's "games" and trickery are suffused throughout her story. According to Abrams and Sutton-Smith, a trickster "sets traps for others, dodges when chased so others will fall off of the 'cliff,' and gives false information" (33). Lorelei cleverly plans out her tricks to accomplish her goals. When she is on the ship to London, she is able to not only get Mr. Bartlett to fall in love with her, but she tricks him into giving up government secrets. She says, "I told him I would go to Vienna if I really knew it was business and not some girl, because I could not see how business could be so important." In order to get information out of him, she promises her companionship. She has no intentions of following through with that promise, but her trickery does work as he reveals "something about aeroplanes that everybody else seems to want" (31). Not only does she fail to come through on her promise, but she also delivers this secret information to Major Falcon, leaving Mr. Bartlett with nothing.

The game of the diamond tiara is by far the most complex and successful use of trickery in the text. When Mrs. Beekman sends her attorneys to retrieve the diamond tiara that Mr. Beekman purchased, Lorelei devises an intelligent scheme. She will put the $10,000 tiara in a safe, purchase a $65 imitation of the tiara and "let" Louie and Robber steal the fake one to give to Mrs. Beekman. In the meantime, she and Dorthy will get Louie and Robber to pay for them to go shopping and to go out on the town on Mrs. Beekman's dime. As the plot moves on, the scheme becomes even more intricate as she finds a way for each man to pay her thousands of dollars for the fake tiara, planting traps for them both. In the end, with her clever trickster skills, she finds a way to keep both the real and the fake tiara and make money off of the conspiracy. When Robber and Louie come to realize that Lorelei has conned the con artists, they are impressed. Lorelei says:
“we all seem to understand one another…I mean there seems to be something common between us” (72). Ultimately, as Laurie Cella points out, “Lorelei has more in common with swindlers like Robber and Louie than with the obtuse wealthy suitors who fall madly in love with the construction of beauty that Lorelei offers them” (51).

Lorelei’s proposal and marriage to Mr. Spoffard is all part of a grand scheme as well. In order to get his mother to approve, she disguises her true self, gets his mother’s lady servant out of the way, gets his mother drunk during a luncheon and convinces his mother to like her. With this approval she can go forward with the engagement. When she realizes that life with Mr. Spoffard is a bore, she sets up a plan to trick him into calling off the engagement only to find out that once again she needs him as part of an even bigger plan. When Mr. Montrose needs a backer for his movie deal and a woman to star in the movies, she runs to Mr. Spoffard and confesses and tricks him into believing that her “trickery” was a “test” of their love for one another, and voila, the marriage is back on. At the end of the story, Lorelei gets everything that she wants. Through her trickery, she ends up married to one of the wealthiest men in the Northeast and becomes a star in Hollywood films. Although Lorelei may seem like an innocent, silly, beautiful blonde, she has somehow managed to climb to the top with her trickster skills and in the process manages to “reverse affairs so that the villain ends up the fool” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 34). Lorelei is able to become more powerful than the patriarch and make the men look like fools in the process. Through Lorelei’s dishonesty and tricks, she is able to subvert patriarchal norms.

One of Lorelei’s most powerful tools is her sexuality. This is not listed in Abrams’ and Sutton-Smith’s inventory for two reasons. The first and most obvious reason is
because the inventory was created for a study involving young children, the second reason for its absence is because almost all of the most studied trickster figures in the past centuries have been male trickster figures. Not to say that men don’t have sexual abilities or wiles, but rather that it was never a tool that men were forced to use in their trickery. It also may not have been a tool that would be as successful as it is for someone like Lorelei. Lorelei as a female trickster figure brings a new trait, or tool, to the trickster definition: her irresistible sexuality. One can assume that Lorelei uses her sexuality to help her get dinners, trips, diamonds and engagements, but Loos only suggests this as a possibility. It is never mentioned explicitly that she trades sex for diamonds, but it seems that the hint or promise of sex is there, whether she does have sex with her wealthy suitors eventually or not. For example, when Mr. Beekman visits Lorelei in her hotel room for a cup of tea Lorelei has not bothered to get dressed: “I mean I really look quite cute in my pink negligay” (44). Before she even begins her plan to get Mr. Beekman to buy her a diamond tiara she greets him in her dressing gown. This entices Mr. Beekman from the beginning and makes it easier for him to be swayed later on. A similar scenario occurs when Mrs. Beekman’s solicitor shows up at the hotel and Lorelei answers his call in “her negligay as usual” (60). Robber is yet another man that she manages to trick quite successfully, and it all starts with the pink negligee again. It seems as if Lorelei could be described as a “professional woman” working for diamonds and tiaras. Hegeman suggests, “sex is her [Lorelei’s] business” (534). This connection of sex and work “may be related to an ideological transformation in the ‘20s in which sex was, in essence, being redefined as women’s work” (Hegeman 534). When effective birth control became available, women, for the first time, experienced freedom from the burdens of childbirth
and began to see sex as something other than a procreative act. Women’s role in sex was altered, and Lorelei uses this change to her advantage. Even the “advertising of the period supported the redefinition of women’s labor within the home to include the work of possessing and maintaining sufficient quantities of “It” (sexual charisma), to attract and hold the attention of their husbands” (Hegeman 535). Lorelei definitely has “It” and is able to attract and hold the attention of wealthy men who eventually offer themselves up as husbands.

Lorelei mentions many times that she allows men to “educate” her but never explains what that means. As the diarist, Lorelei has control over what she writes and she frequently “euphemizes anything even vaguely related to sex” (Hegeman 534). Lorelei’s use of sexuality and her sexual persona are enigmas:

Is she a sexual predator, or is she an innocent party; does she coax men into recklessness, or is she the passive object of their dangerous passions? This uncertainty is, in effect, a question about whether Lorelei works at seduction or somehow simply, passively, embodies sexual attractiveness. (Hegeman 534)

There is a duality present in her sexuality and this duality is typical of trickster figures and the 1920s. Lorelei reveals herself as a “sexless sexual creature” (Hegeman 535), and this is exactly the type of woman that these conservative, wealthy men are attracted to. The men raised in the largely sex-segregated world of the Victorian middle class may have found women “expressing sexual desire deeply perplexing” (Hegeman 535). Lorelei clouds her sexuality so that she does not “scare” the men with her overt sexual desire. Because Lorelei’s subtle use of sexuality misleads and confuses the reader, and most likely the men she deceives, it makes her sexuality that much more powerful. The men
will continue to play the game (paying the price for it along the way), and the reader will continue to read in order to see if sex is the end result. In the meantime, as the men continue to play and the reader continues to read, Lorelei holds the power.

When George Test says, “the trickster’s position in myth is a mirror image of the satirist’s position in society” (44), is he saying that the trickster figure acts as the satirist or that the satirist (the author) uses the trickster figure as the satiric object? The duality that is present within Lorelei as a trickster figure presents the reader with this same question. What is Lorelei’s role in the text? Is she the satiric object (the dumb blonde) or is she the satirist (the intelligent woman who makes everyone else around her the satiric objects)?

Dorothy constantly makes fun of Lorelei throughout the text, much to the amusement of the reader. Lorelei often has no idea that she herself is the object of the joke. When Mrs. Beekman threatens to ruin Lorelei’s reputation, Dorothy responds, “Lady you could no more ruin my girl friends reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet” and Lorelei feels “quite proud of Dorothy the way she stood up for [her] reputation” (58). When Lorelei comes up with the plan to dupe Mrs. Beekman’s solicitors, Lorelei writes:

[Dorothy] looked at me and looked at me and she really said she thought my brains were a miracle. I mean she said my brains reminded her of a radio because you listen to it for days and days and you get discouraged and just when you are getting ready to smash it, something comes out that is a masterpiece. (65)

Lorelei is unaware that Dorothy is shocked that Lorelei could come up with something so intelligent because Dorothy believes her to be so dumb that she was getting ready to
“smash” her. When Lorelei is plotting to end her engagement to Mr. Spoffard, Dorothy suggests marrying Henry “because she had an idea that if Henry married [Lorelei] he would commit suicide two weeks later” (115). Lorelei doesn’t even blink an eye at the comment and discusses her alternative plan that includes shopping on Henry’s dime. Dorothy’s character takes on the role of the reader, making fun of Lorelei and her stupidity throughout the text.

There are also times when people “use” Lorelei fairly easily. When Lorelei is on the ship to London she sees the District Attorney from her trial in Arkansas and becomes visibly upset. When Major Falcon witnesses this reaction, he rushes to her aid and asks her to tell him all about it. After Lorelei discusses her past Major Falcon says that it, was quite a co-instance because the District Attorney, who is called Mr. Bartlett, is now working for the government of America and he is on his way to a place called Vienna on some business for Uncle Sam that is quite a great secret and Mr. Falcon would like very much to know what the secret is, because the Government in London sent him to America to especially find out what it was. (26)

This is obviously no “co-instance,” and Major Falcon convinces Lorelei to forgive Mr. Bartlett and get him to talk to her. Before he sets up a meeting between the District Attorney and Lorelei, he buys Lorelei “quite a large bottle of perfume and a quite cute imitation of quite a large size dog in the little shop which is on board the boat” (26). After he buys Lorelei the gifts, she exclaims, “Major Falcon really knows how to cheer a girl up quite a lot and so tonight I am going to make it all up with Mr. Bartlett” (26). Lorelei comes through and gets Mr. Bartlett to expose government secrets and writes, “I think I will tell Major Falcon all about the airoplane business as he really wants to know...I
mean Major Falcon is always a gentleman and he really wants to do quite a lot for us in London” (32). To the reader, it is laughable how dense Lorelei is in this situation. With gifts and the promise of more gifts in London, Lorelei hands over top-secret government information acting as a treasonous spy without ever thinking that Major Falcon could be using her. Similarly, Mr. Montrose uses Lorelei without Lorelei suspecting a thing.

Because the impending marriage of Henry Spoffard and Lorelei is all over the news, it seems plausible that Mr. Montrose sought Lorelei out, “bumping into her” on a train. When Lorelei tells Mr. Montrose that she wants to call off her marriage he says, “It is really to bad… because Mr. Spoffard would be ideal to finance my scenario” and Lorelei says that “he had been thinking from the very first how ideal [she] would be to play Dolly Madison” (117). At the mention of this Lorelei rushes to save her marriage and Mr. Montrose gets a backer for his project. In these scenarios it seems that Lorelei is the target of the satire; the dumb blonde who doesn’t get the joke or pick up on the fact that people are using her. It is in this way that Wyndham Lewis explores Loos’ creation of Lorelei:

So what Miss Loos does is this: she makes fun of the illiteracy, hypocrisy, and business instinct of an uneducated American flapper-harlot for the benefit of the middle-class public who can spell, and say “intriguing” and “divine,” and who therefore are able to chuckle over the dish of bad grammar and naughtiness to their hearts’ content. (qtd. in Hegeman 528).

Thus it seems, at first glance, that Lorelei is in fact the “selfish-buffoon” trickster or the satiric object at which we, the readers, can laugh.
In Loos’ *Biography of a Book*, she explains what prompted her to write Lorelei’s story. As she sat on a train she observed a group of men catering to the every whim of the blonde woman traveling with them. Loos began to think about all of the blondes that she knew and “singled out the dumbest blonde of all, a girl who had bewitched one of the keenest minds of our era- H.L. Mencken” (xxxviii). The story became a mixture of fact and fiction and she wrote Lorelei as “a symbol of the lowest possible mentality of our nation” (xxxix). But even here the central question remains: Is she making fun of Mencken’s dumb blonde, painting her as the satiric object or is she making fun of Mencken for falling for the blondes’ tricks, painting her as the satirist? This woman was obviously able to convince (or trick) Mencken, “one of the keenest minds of our era” into falling in love with her. So isn’t she ultimately making fun of the stupidity of men, like Mencken, who are tricked into these relationships? We must remember that a trickster possesses a dual nature. As Lorelei is described previously, “the fool is an unabashed glutton and coward and knave, [she] is-as we say- a natural: we laugh at [her] and enjoy a pleasant sense of superiority” (Koepping 195). But, the paradox almost always surfaces when the fool:

not only shows society up for what it really is or seems to be behind the mask of surface pretense, of status and role, and of social game playing but also infers that the fool is at the same time perceived by every kind of audience as the alter ego of the spectator: He winks at us and we are delighted at the discovery that we also are gluttons and cowards and knaves. (Koepping 195)
We laugh at the fool (the satiric object) and then we laugh at ourselves because the fool is really the satirist making fun of society and we the readers. We laugh at Lorelei, but then we laugh at ourselves because Lorelei is in fact, making fun of us.

William Hynes believes that a good trickster can be, and usually is, a source of laughter, but we must respect the trickster’s skills and abilities:

We find the trickster’s antics amusing and laugh at the underhandedness of the tricks. If we approve only grudgingly, it is because we lack the respect for the trickster often found in cultures where there is great praise given to the combination of vital survival skill and hunting. (28)

So, yes, we can laugh at Lorelei, but we must respect her ability to survive in a world in which she does not truly belong. The world of money and class is not one that Lorelei was born into. Lorelei has mastered the skills needed to climb her way up in society. She “hunts” for money and class by using and tricking the men who can provide these things for her. Lorelei knows what she is doing. As much as we laugh at her stupidity, she artfully crafts her plans and sees them through to the end. When Mr. Spoffard gives Lorelei his class ring from Amherst instead of a diamond engagement ring she says, “I looked at him and looked at him, but I am to full of self controle to say anything at this stage of the game” (101). Lorelei knows that this is a game in which she has the upper hand and the power, and she knows how and when to play her cards. When she knew that he was going to propose to her, instead of letting him ask her, she says “it would be a quite good thing if what he wanted to ask me he would have to write down, instead of asking me, and he could not write it to me if I was in the same city that he is in. So I told him that I had to leave in five minute’s time… and I told him to write down what he had
to say to me” (96). She is smart enough to know that a person can always go back on his word, but if it is written down then he can’t ever claim that he didn’t propose. Once she tricks Mr. Spoffard into writing out his proposal she takes his letter to the photographers and has quite a lot of photographs taken “which could come in very, very handy if [she] did not marry Henry” (99). Lorelei understands the rules of blackmail and preserving what she has worked so hard for and we must respect her skills in this game.

Laurie Cella claims that what makes Lorelei’s character so appealing is “her ability to manipulate her own image, and effectively become mistress of her own grand confidence game” (47). It is truly her trickster skills that allow her to take advantage of each situation and “in effect, she is smarter than she looks, and she uses this to her rhetorical advantage” (Cella 47). According to Cella, Lorelei is not just a “blond spectacle” and her character merits “more critical and scholarly attention” (47). Lorelei becomes a powerful character despite her apparently powerless situation. She is a poor uneducated woman from Little Rock Arkansas, yet she is able to climb her way up to the highest social echelon by the end of the story. The fact that the trickster is also the narrator of the story makes her deceptiveness and dominance more powerful and effective. Written in diary form, it is up to Lorelei to decide what to put into the story and what to leave out. With this narrative control Lorelei is able to:

Frame her own performance rhetorically and thus to alter our perception of her parodic performance… Everything Lorelei chooses to include in her diary demonstrates her awareness of audience expectations and her subsequent disregard for these expectations. (Cella 49)
With this type of power it becomes very hard to tell where the tricks begin and where they end. According to Cella, the reader should think twice about laughing at Lorelei because “Loo’s girl is no fool” (49).

It is clear that Lorelei is a source of laughter, but she is much more than that. She is a capable woman intelligent enough to pull off masterful tricks. Like a true trickster, she possesses a dual nature. As Laurie Cella points out, “In [Lorelei’s] capable and confident hands, we participate in the joy that comes from [her] appropriation of the ‘blonde joke’” (60). Loos satirical work presents the audience with a trickster figure that is both the satiric object (the dumb blonde who we laugh at) and the satirist (who we laugh with as she exposes society’s flaws and men’s weakness).
Chapter II: Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm*

In the "rural" comic novel by Stella Gibbons, the protagonist, Flora Poste masterfully, and much to her own amusement, is able to completely transform the people living on Cold Comfort Farm in many different ways. She civilizes, modernizes and creates mobility for the Starkadders. Equipped with trickster-like tools and traits she is able to achieve a goal, which she set out to achieve from the beginning. Unlike Lorelei, Flora does not portray any "buffoon"-like traits, but instead uses carefully calculated moves that are intelligent and well thought out. Flora knows exactly what kind of woman she is and knows precisely what she wants in life. She likes "having everything very tidy and calm...not being bothered to do things...going for country walks and not being asked to express opinions about things (like love, and isn’t so-and-so peculiar?)" (12-13). She does not want to get a job, and instead insists upon living off of her relatives for as long as she can. She believes that "no limits are set, either by society or by one’s own conscience, to the amount one may impose upon one’s relatives" (13). With Lorelei, the reader is constantly questioning exactly what kind of woman she is, or what her goals are because Lorelei never discloses that information to her audience in her diary entries. Flora, on the other hand, lays out her plan straightaway:

> When I have found a relative who is willing to have me, I shall take him or her in hand, and alter his or her character and mode of living to suit my own taste. Then, when it pleases me, I shall marry. (14)

Although disguise and trickery are abundant throughout the text as she attempts to accomplish her goal, there is nothing artificial about her motives. She wants to find uncivilized people to civilize. To Flora, the project of disciplining the Starkadders is a
“harmless hobby” (Greenberg 107). She discusses her enjoyment of the game and remarks upon the social strategies she uses in conversation, stating that she gains “pleasure from bloodless intellectual games and contests” (Greenberg 107). Every conversation she has is one in which she is “jockeying for place, shifting about the pieces on the board before the real game [begins]” (Gibbons 82). She understands the art of conversation, knows what people are going to say before they even say it, and plans out her moves in response. Jonathan Greenberg notes that this “reduction of social exchange to strategic calculation wholly concords with Simmel’s analysis of metropolitan habits of mind” (107).¹ Flora feels most comfortable when she is playing the game and respects others’ ability to play the game as well. When she is following along with the hymn during Amos’ fire and brimstone sermon she approves of the hymn “because its words indicated a firmness of purpose, a clear plan in the face of a disagreeable possibility, which struck an answering note in her own character” (Gibbons 96). When Flora realizes that Aunt Ada Doom, another trickster female in this text to be discussed later, is playing a complex trickster-like game herself, Flora becomes competitive, but she also holds deep admiration for the old woman who has been successful in her own game for so many years. Flora sets out to civilize Cold Comfort Farm and with her practiced and proficient trickster skills she is able to do just that. At the end of the novel, as she surveys the scene she says, “I did all that with my little hatchet.’ And a feeling of joy and content opened inside her like a flower” (204).

¹ Simmel claims “the calculating exactness of practical life which has resulted from a money economy corresponds to the ideal of natural science, namely that of transforming the world into an arithmetical problem” (qtd. in Greenberg 107).
Like Lorelei, Flora uses her trickery in a setting in which she does not belong. Quite contrary to Lorelei’s background, Flora is a city girl who grows up with a private education and throughout the text she is living on Cold Comfort Farm with uneducated, rural folk. Flora is the civilized being living among the uncivilized. This is fitting for Flora as a trickster figure because according to Abrams and Sutton-Smith’s trickster inventory, most tricksters will maintain a “peripheral pattern of residence” (32). When Flora arrives at the farm she meets Judith and she thinks this is what “Columbus must have felt when the poor Indian fixed his solemn, unwavering gaze upon the great sailor’s face. For the first time a Starkadder looked upon a civilized being” (Gibbons 49). Cold Comfort Farm is as peripheral as it gets in relation to the metropolitan residence in which Flora grows up. According to Bei Cai, “trickster discourse creates a ‘Counter Universe’ at the margins that epitomizes a realm of emerging possibility that urges the audience to consider alternative social structures and human experiences” (277). Trickster discourse is essentially about “liminal phenomena- a state of transitions and change in the context of cultural ferment, where the usual social restrictions and status quo are in need of being revised creatively” (Cai 277). In this trickster discourse, the Starkadders are in need of change and Flora becomes “an agent of civilization” (Greenberg 112). Flora revolutionizes this primitive culture by bringing modern tools to the farm (a brush for Adam to wash dishes), bringing modern ideas about women and childbirth (teaching Meriam, the hired help, strategies to prevent pregnancy) bringing modern medicine (sending Judith away to a psychotherapist) and bringing the modern technological world

2 Flora also becomes an agent of civilization by “rejecting the misogynist characterization of the female as primitive, emotional, and outside of culture” (Greenberg 112). Greenberg discusses this feminist theory in conjunction with Rita Felski’s ideas about the gender of modernity in his chapter on Cold Comfort Farm.
to the farm (landing planes in the field). She brings ideas about Paris and fashion, the silver screen, and she transforms Elfine from an elfish, dreamy sprite into a modern woman ripe for marriage. She is successful in making Cold Comfort Farm a better, more modern place.

In some of the original trickster tales, “American Indian tricksters often impart medicine to the sick; give food, fire and tools; and grant success in hunting, gambling, love, and war.” Tricksters are committed to their “performance of good deeds” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33). Like Flora, “tricksters belong to no social group, yet they are permanently committed to the betterment of all human communities” (Cai 287). It is evident that Flora drives the process of evolution at the farm, but she does much more than that. She gives the Starkadders a new, positive outlook on life and marriage, and she shows them that they each have a purpose and part in the greater civilization outside of the farm. She is committed to the betterment of the community as she works hard to send Amos off to passionately preach his sermons across continents, send Seth to Hollywood to become a movie star and send Aunt Ada Doom to Paris to participate in a new and progressive world for women. Flora is able to bring light and laughter into a once cold, primitive land. Hynes notes, “The trickster is often associated with activities that center upon human creativity: the bringing of culture, laughter and business transactions, as well as opening of the doors of perception” (213). Flora, the trickster, is truly “an agent of creativity,” as she opens the doors of perception for the Starkadders.

Although all of this is very positive and gives the reader many laughs along the way, it is hard to ignore the colonial metaphor present. Greenberg notes that “as caricatures, the Starkadders show almost exclusively the comic face of the grotesque which, to recall
Ruskin’s formulation, embraces both the ludicrous and the fearful” (94) and the farm in is in need of reform, just as the natives are in need of reform. Greenberg also comments on the use of Flora’s disciplining and policing regimes that literary studies have come to associate with the social-discursive analyses of Michel Foucault. Every deviant, unruly, or dangerous practice, from incestuous sexuality to slovenly dress to regional habits of speech, is standardized, brought into line with Flora’s own metropolitan, bourgeois norms. (94-95) Regardless of the motive or tone of the actions, it is clear that Flora does, in fact, succeed in civilizing the people and bringing culture. At the end of the novel Flora looks around and notes:

There they all were. Enjoying themselves. Having a nice time. And having it in an ordinary human manner. Not having it because they were raping somebody, or beating somebody, or having religious mania, or being doomed to silence by a gloomy earthy pride, or loving the soil with the fierce desire of a lecher, or anything of that sort. No, they were just enjoying an ordinary human event, like any of the other millions of ordinary people in the world. (217) Although some of Flora’s civilizing actions can be considered questionable, there is no doubt that she, “the trickster [,] contributes substantially to the birth and evolution of culture” (Doty and Hynes 23).

Flora’s position as an outsider in this space allows for great flexibility and mobility for her within the text. Like a true trickster, she is able to cross many physical and social boundaries throughout her process. Wendy Parkins expands spheres in which Flora
moves between to include more than just physical space. In Gibbons’s novel, Flora “moves back and forth between not only different kinds of spaces and places but different forms of sociality and subjectivity and different senses of time associated with different locations” (Parkins 79). Gibbons sets the novel in the near future and at times Flora seems to be in an archaic primitive world (using a twig to wash dishes), other times she seems to be in the future (with video telephones and convenient airplanes) and sometimes it seems as if Flora is present in both an archaic time period and a futuristic one simultaneously. This “time-travel” is inconsistent with her physical travel and can become quite confusing. This complexity between space and time was something that was prevalent when modernism flourished in the early part of the twentieth century. The society at the time was “in the space between a still usable classical past, a still indeterminate technical present and a still unpredictable future” (Parkins 79). Being stuck in this temporal limbo is a feeling that many readers in the early twentieth century would be feeling, but Flora, like a true trickster, is able to “move effortlessly between these locations [and time periods] and enables many of the farm’s inhabitants to do the same” (Parkins 87). Much like the text itself, this era put people in “an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, [and] transformation of ourselves and the world” (Parkins 81). This was a time of movement, speed, and cars:

The repetition of images of the car and the airplane in modernist art not only testified to a cultural preoccupation with new forms of transport…but also made a connection between new forms of mobility and modern subjectivity. (Parkins 81)

Gibbons is able to reflect these sentiments through Flora’s journey through space and time. New opportunities within the work force, education, and politics became available
for women in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. This was a time in which women could travel among different societal spheres and the Flapper was born: "The new feminine type that emerged in the 1920s was constantly in movement and required cars, trains and planes at her disposal" (Parkins 81). Using a trickster figure, a character type that thrives on mobility, would have been particularly appropriate during this era. Furthermore, with the increased mobility of women, creating a female trickster figure was even more fitting. This new sense of mobility gives women, like Flora's character, more power and more success. In turn, this also gives Flora more power and success in her trickster behavior. This text and this time period "repeatedly associated an increased sense of empowerment and self-formation with increased mobility" (Parkins 81). As Flora moves from the city to the country, mixing the past and the future, she gains power as a woman and a trickster. It is with this power that she is able to succeed in her plan of civilization.

Like Lorelei, Flora has myriad characteristics that make her a true trickster woman. Besides her ability to "colonize" and her empowering mobility, many other trickster characteristics show up in her personality as well. Flora's narcissism is apparent immediately upon her introduction in the novel. According to Abrams and Sutton-Smith, many tricksters display signs of narcissism. They have an "exhibitionistic desire to be the center of the stage and are boatsful before adversaries" (32). As we get to know Flora in the beginning, she says that she "dined quietly with intelligent men: a way of passing the evening which she adored, because then she should show-off a lot and talk about herself" (Gibbons 27) and later in the text when Mr. Mybug is introduced, she instantly writes him off as someone who "would probably fall in love with her" (76). After speaking with
McDonald 40

Amos about his religious fervor "she was proud of herself at the conclusion of her speech. It had, she thought, the proper over-subtle flavor, that air of triumphantly pointing out an undetected and perfectly enormous sin lying slap under the sinner's nose" (91). She congratulates herself on her trickery often and she looks down upon the Starkadders as uncivilized beings and insists on her own proper manners as the only dignified way to live. Her narcissistic behavior only adds to her ability to be a successful trickster.

Flora also displays a sense of what Abrams and Sutton-Smith would characterize as, "individualism." She "acts without allies and often seems an intruder" (32). Throughout the text, Flora plans and conducts all of her trickery almost solely on her own. She does bring in some people (the Hollywood producer, the psychotherapist, Claude, Richard Hawk-Monitor) to help her, but it is her own idea to bring these people in and in fact, besides Claude, they are all a part of the trick as well. These "allies" are not really allies at all, but in fact people whom Flora uses as part of her deceit and they are being deceived, on some level or another, in the process as well. Unlike Lorelei, who has Dorothy to bring into her tricks and games, Flora does it all on her own. To the readers, and even to some of the characters, Flora is an intruder in a place in which she does not belong and even Mrs. Beetle refers to her as "Miss Interference" (Gibbons 73). Along with her individualism, Flora possesses "adventurous curiosity. [She] seeks adventure and enjoys trying new things" (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33). Entering a world in which she has no understanding, Flora goes to great pains in order to understand this obscure place and its inhabitants. This amuses Flora and she takes great pleasure in trying something different. Whenever she is asked to do something new, Flora claims she is
“willing to try anything once” (Gibbons 63). Coupled with this adventurous curiosity is her “fearless daring. [She] taunts adversaries and is not afraid to rush into places that seem dangerous,” much like “Bugs Bunny [approaching] the villain, saying ‘What’s up Doc?’” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33). As her plan is unfolding,

Flora was quite enjoying herself. She was mixed up in a good many plots. Only a person with a candid mind who is usually bored by intrigues, can appreciate the full fun of an intrigue when they begin to manage one for the first time. If there are several intrigues and there is a certain danger of their getting mixed up and spoiling each other, the enjoyment is even keener. (109)

Flora goes toe-to-toe with Aunt Ada Doom, willingly enters Amos’s dog-kennel or “chapel” that smells of gas to listen to his descriptions of hell and sins, and climbs the fence using the bull-fork to let out the bull, Big Business, a feat no one has even attempted for a very long time. Because Flora is independent, curious and fearless, she is able to accomplish her games and trickery with ease throughout the text.

Through the course of her games and trickery, like Lorelei, Flora does “violate the taboo” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 32). She discusses birth control with Meriam, the hired girl, she frequently lies and even plans to resort to crime if necessary. When Amos writes a letter about leaving the farm to his son Reuben, she says, “It’s a pity he says ‘the old place’ instead of ‘the farm’, but if any question ever arises, we can always do a spot of forgery, and write in ‘the farm’ instead” (Gibbons 198). As a trickster, Flora uses “pretense” when she “talks in different voices, mimics actions of others, feigns different emotions and acts out different roles” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33). Flora is able to put on disguises and play appropriate roles for different situations in order to achieve her
desired goal. When she sets out to find a family to “civilize” and live off of, she uses pretense in her delivery: “The oleaginous sentences flowed easily from her pen during the next hour, for she had a great gift of the gab, and took a pride in varying the style in which each letter was written to suit the nature of the recipient” (Gibbons 20). When she writes to the bachelor uncle in Scotland she is “sweetly girlish, and just a wee bit arch,” and for the cousin in South Kensington she writes a “distant, dignified epistle, grieved yet business-like” (20). She even changes her voice in order to get to the root of the mystery surrounding Aunt Ada Doom. To make Reuben feel more comfortable in divulging information she, “patiently dropped into Starkadder” in her speech and dialect (Gibbons 118). Greenberg examines Flora’s ability to hide her own emotions and states that Flora “determinedly keeps her cool amid the astonishing and outrageous excesses of life at Cold Comfort” (108). Flora is able to restrain herself in speech, regardless of her own feelings, and deliver the perfect oration necessary for the situation. During her conversation with Judith about Meriam’s recurring pregnancies, Judith claims that this annual birthing process is a part of nature that women cannot escape. This is not something in which Flora agrees: “‘Oh can’t we?’ thought Flora, with spirit, but aloud she only made such noises of tut-tutting regret as she felt were appropriate to the occasion” (Gibbons 64). Flora does have emotions, but she is very careful about hiding those emotions. Greenberg points out “To say that Flora…regards social relations as a game is not to say that she cannot experience heightened emotional states, only that she makes every effort to avoid such heightened states or to restore herself to a state of calm” (108). When Mr. Mybug asks Flora if they could dine together in Town sometime, Flora replies, “‘That would be delightful’ thinking how nasty and boring it would be” (Gibbons
When Seth is discussing his misogynistic views on women and his passion for the talkies, “Flora nodded, displaying courteous interest, but showing nothing of the plan which had suddenly occurred to her” (84). It is not that she doesn’t take offense to or have a reaction to what he is saying; instead, it is that she has controlled herself and her emotions in order to carefully construct and carry out her plans. Flora’s greatest skill is her ability to hide who she really is throughout the text. Because she so often represses emotional reactions and hides her motives so artfully, the reader is also confused about what kind of person she is. It is through her pretense that she is able to continue with her tricks and not let others become privy to her plans, including the reader at times.

Flora’s mastery in trickery is displayed through the intricate plans and subterfuge that she is able to deploy throughout the text. Flora “descends on her country cousins with good humor and some dismay, and then cleverly orders their lives, in much the same way a novelist orders reality” (Ariail 72). Flora sets out right away to alter the lives of each and every member of the Starkadder family. In order for Judith to be happy, and Rueben to get control of the farm, she must first get rid of Amos: “She was sure that Amos’s religious scruples were likely to be in the way when she began to introduce the changes she desired to bring about at the farm, and if she could get him out of way on a long preaching tour her task would be simpler” (Gibbons 90). She plays into his religious fervor knowing that “religious maniacs always derived considerable comfort from digging into their motives for their actions and discovering discreditable reasons which covered them in good, satisfying sinfulness in which they could wallow to their heart’s content (90-91). She tells him that he must be “prepared to sin in order to save others” (91) among other sly suggestions in order to spark his religious soul, and she ends up
tricking him into leaving the farm to spread his word globally: “‘Aye, there’s truth in what ye say. Maybe it is me duty to seek a wider field. I mun think of it’” (91). With Amos’ departure, Reuben can take over the farm and Flora brings Judith to a psychotherapist who will take her away for six months for treatment. Flora’s grandest plan is the one that involves marrying Elfine, the wild natured, poetry writing, and nymph-like creature, to Richard Hawk-Monitor of the hunting gentry. She must transform Elfine in order to trick Richard into falling in love with her. While looking at Elfine, Flora thinks, “the effect of a well-cut dress and a brushed and burnished head of hair might be miraculous. Flora could have rubbed her hands with glee” (Gibbons 127). Flora relishes this task and decides that “Elfine must be transformed indeed; her artiness must be rooted out. Her mind must match the properly groomed head in which it was housed...She must learn to be long-limbed and clear-eyed and inhibited” (129-130). Flora devotes her entire being to this plan and “for three weeks she forced Elfine, as a gardener skillfully forces a flower in a hothouse” (134). She understands Elfine’s interests and uses that knowledge to convince Elfine to change. At the end of the project, “Flora was satisfied. She had done what she hoped to do. She had made Elfine look groomed and normal, yet had preserved in her personality a suggestion of cool, smoothly-blowing winds and of pine-trees and the smell of wild flowers...An artist in living flesh could ask for no more” (146-47). With her skills, Flora is able to completely transform Elfine and to manipulate the situation in order to convince Richard Hawk-Monitor to marry Elfine.

Her next plan is directed at the brooding Aunt Ada Doom, her trickster adversary. Flora knows that at some point she will have to “invade the enemy fort” (Gibbons 86)
and have a “show-down with Aunt Ada” (133). Like Flora, Aunt Ada Doom has one goal in mind and uses her clever trickster skills in order to achieve that goal. Her goal: to keep all of the Starkadders on Cold Comfort Farm. Ada Doom uses “exaggerated expressions,” (Abrams and Sutton-Smith 33) and feigns madness in order to reach her goal. Greenberg points out that “the blasts of emotion emanating from the matriarch are interpreted as tools of domination” (109). Interestingly it is Aunt Ada’s outpouring of emotion that allows her to deceive others, whereas, it is Flora’s restraint of emotion that drives her trickery. Aunt Ada’s voice emerges in the middle of the text to explain her trickery:

You told them you were mad. You had been mad since you saw something nasty in the woodshed, years and years ago. If any of them went away, to any other part of the country, you would go much madder. Any attempt by any of them to get away from the farm made one of your attacks of madness come on. It was unfortunate in some ways but useful in others…And seeing that it was because of that incident that you sat here ruling the roost and having five meals a day brought up to you as regularly as clockwork, it hadn’t been such a bad break for you, that day you saw something in the woodshed. (Gibbons 115)

Aunt Ada uses her own trickster skills to “rule the roost” for over seventy years at the farm. She “transforms her own vague sense of injury (from seeing something nasty in the woodshed) into a tyrannical ability to subject others to her will” (Greenberg 109). Flora recognizes right away “if she intended to tidy up life at Cold Comfort, she would find herself opposed at every turn by the influence of Aunt Ada” (Gibbons 57). As a trickster herself, Flora immediately recognizes this behavior: “It struck her that Aunt Ada Doom’s madness had taken the most convenient form possible” (119). When Aunt Ada makes her
surprise appearance downstairs to initiate “the counting” of the Starkadders, Flora observes as everyone acts as puppets and Aunt Ada pulls the strings. Flora knows that Aunt Ada is deceiving everybody and claims, “if Aunt Ada was mad, then she, Flora, was one of the Marx Brothers” (171). It is soon after this that Flora decides to make her move: “In a few seconds she had her plan clearly in her head, with every detail as distinct as though the scheme had already been carried through” (207). She sends a telegram requesting the “latest number vogue also prospectus hotel miramar paris and very important photographs fanny ward” (207). We are not able to see Flora’s trickster skills in action, as she, armed with Vogue, Paris hotels and photographs of the famous flapper and fountain of youth, is locked in a room with Aunt Ada Doom for hours on end. As one trickster battles the other, the family and the reader wait anxiously to see who emerges victorious. After what seems like ages, Flora appears in the living room, tired from her trickery and states there will be no trouble at the wedding and that there will be a big surprise. The surprise awaiting is the appearance of Aunt Ada Doom at the wedding reception and the arrival of a plane to take Ada to Paris. Aunt Ada Doom,

thanked Flora for the hundredth time for pointing out to her what a nice time was had by Miss Fanny Ward, who looked so much younger than she really was… and emphasizing what a pleasant life could be had in this world by a handsome, sensible old lady of good fortune, blessed with a sound constitution and a firm will. (222)

Flora has done the unthinkable; she has tricked the old woman into surrendering and giving up her game, by moving to Paris and leaving the farm herself. With her deft skills of trickery, Flora is able to transform the lives of every single Starkadder she has come in contact with, even her trickster rival, Aunt Ada Doom. Flora uses all of her trickster skills
in order to achieve her goals of civilization and defeat her trickster competitor. She uses her confidence, her powerful mobility, pretense, and socially strategic game playing to complete the transformation.

Beyond her trickster characteristics and game playing, like Lorelei, and other trickster figures, Flora has a dual nature, as does Gibbons' trickster discourse. A paradox arises when analyzing Flora and *Cold Comfort Farm* in terms of modernity. In many ways, Flora is "the representative of modernity and progressive thinking. She shows the Starkadders the attractions of modernity, aeroplane and car travel, London fashion houses, and psychoanalysis, and as a result, they leave the farm one by one" drawn to this modernity that Flora embodies (Hammill 845). But, Flora herself refuses to take up a career and plans to live with relatives instead, "a choice which was not characteristic of the forward-looking, unmarried woman of the 1930s" (Hammill 845). If Flora were the representative modern woman, then she would join the emerging female work force rather than retire in marriage. Flora's plan to "tidy up" other people's lives makes reference to the heroines of Jane Austen, "a particularly bourgeois fantasy of domestic control" (Parkins 88). Thus, "in representing the modern woman as agent, *Cold Comfort Farm* relies, paradoxically, on a female drawn from the past" (Parkins 88). This duality presents a problem in which we, as the readers, are unclear of Flora's position in the text. But, like a true trickster, Flora presents a dual nature that solidifies her title as trickster.

The most prominent ambiguity relates to Flora's role as a trickster in a work of satire. When studying Lorelei's role in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and Flora's role here, the question presents itself: is Flora the satiric object or is she the satirist? There is evidence to support that Flora is, in fact, the object of ridicule. She is described as "the Local
Busybody... who interfered with other people’s lives” (Gibbons 232) and “except for the fact that she was larger, she reminded [Claud] of a mosquito” (207). When she decides on her plan to live off of her relatives, she exclaims, “I think we ought to dine out- to celebrate the inauguration of my career as a parasite” (15). When Reuben thanks her for everything that she has done at Cold Comfort Farm, she replies, “My dear soul, don’t name it. It’s been the most enormous diversion to me” (211). With these textual references it appears that Flora is representative of the “bored housewife.” In fact, Flora isn’t even married, making this characteristic even more complex. Gibbons uses Flora to mock and criticize the woman who does not keep up with the times and progress to the modern working woman, such as Gibbons did as a journalist. If left to their own devices, these bored women will feed off of their relatives, interfere in others’ lives, and shake up tradition and culture merely as “a diversion.” And, they will do it all with a sense of snobbery and entitlement. When Flora is looking for a place to live she says, “I cannot share a bedroom, so that disposes of Aunt Gwen” (Gibbons 23) and she feels it impossible to live in her bedroom at Cold Comfort Farm if the curtains are not properly washed. At times throughout the text, the reader can’t help but scoff at the expectations and petty issues that amuse and infuriate this “bored woman” with nothing better to do than move to a farm and take control of its inhabitants in true “colonial fashion”.

With many metaphors of colonial encounters: the Starkadders as savages, Flora’s repeated references to Columbus, and comparisons of Flora to Florence Nightingale, it is easy to paint Flora as the “quasi-imperialist” (Greenberg 95). She enters a land of savages and begins to “tidy-up” and civilize the natives. Flora “herself is satirized for these missionary tendencies” (Greenberg 95). Here, Gibbons uses Flora as the subject of
ridicule. She depicts Flora as the imperialist or missionary, true to the time period of the novel, who believes that what she is doing is for the good of mankind when in fact, like the colonialists, she is interfering where she does not belong.

In the end of the novel, Gibbons appears to use Flora as an object of ridicule once again. She is the typical, old-fashioned woman who runs off with a husband in a “happily ever after” marriage plot reminiscent of Jane Austen’s novels. Throughout the text, Flora presents herself, at times, as a modern woman, without the need for male companionship. But, in the end, she still ties herself down to a man. Furthermore, Gibbons writes that Flora, “like all really strong-minded women, on whom everybody flops, adored being bossed about. It was so restful” (Gibbons 232). What appears to be a mockery of the woman who only pretends to be strong and ends up living her life bossed around by a man, may, in effect, be quite the opposite in reality. According to Greenberg,

Flora agrees to be bossed around by Charles for the simple reason that Gibbons/Flora has already exerted such mastery in designing Charles as the cliché of the perfect husband. Charles is a machine Flora has built, another modern appliance- like the new brush she gives to Adam to replace the thorny twig he uses to clean the dishes- that can relieve her of one more wearying task of domestic management. (113)

In this case, Flora is not the satiric object, but rather the manipulator and creator of the clichéd husband. Looking at it from this perspective, Flora becomes the trickster, transforming her surroundings, and her men, to her liking. She ultimately becomes the satirist who mocks the cliché husband and the novels in which this “marriage bliss” is ubiquitous.
Looking at Flora as the satirist, there are many instances in the text in which she is the one who mocks others or groups of people. Flora sneaks in judgment about the hunting gentry and Americans simultaneously: “Flora knew her hunting gentry. They were what the Americans, bless them! call dumb. They hated fuss. Poetry bored them. They preferred the society of persons who spoke once in twenty minutes. They liked dogs to be well trained and girls well turned out” (Gibbons 112). She mocks the rising modern trend of psychotherapy and the role of the psycho-analyst when she describes Dr. Mudel:

It was one of his disagreeable duties as a State psycho-analyst to remove the affection of his patients from the embarrassing object upon which they were concentrated; and focus them instead, upon himself... But while they were focused upon himself, he had rather a thin time of it and earned every penny of the eight hundred a year paid to him by a judicious government. (201)

Flora/Gibbons ridicules the overpaid therapists, who really have a “thin time of it” and relish in their own narcissism. She mocks the “progress of cinema as art” movement (93), German high-brow films (89) and continues to attack the film industry in her description of Hollywood producers and Beverly Hills (94). She satirizes the people who attend these films and those that “appreciate” them: “supposedly forward-looking urban modernists are in fact represented as precisely those “overcivilized people” who promulgate the value of the rural and the primitive and write the very novels that Gibbons spoofs” (Greenberg 101).

According to Greenberg, Gibbons’ experience as a reviewer of these rural novels may have prompted her mockery: “The rural novel, infused with Gothicism, had become so well known a set of conventions that not only can Gibbons count on her readers getting
her references but Flora herself can know in advance exactly how her cousins will conform to generic expectations” (96-97). The regional or rural novel came into existence in England as the industrial movement began. The novels acted as a “nostalgic response” to the change, as well as a documentation of the transition that most people found to be difficult. The farm at which Flora finds herself is a “catchall of regionalist themes and images, motives, characterizations, and prose styles- all stood on their heads, turned inside out or blown out of proportion” (Ariail 64-65). Flora remarks, “it was true that in novels dealing with agricultural life no one ever did anything so courteous as to meet a train” (Gibbons 26) and she can guess ahead of time that her cousins are named Seth and Rueben. Upon hearing about Aunt Ada Doom, Flora says, “Mrs. Starkadder was the Dominant Grandmother Theme, which was found in all typical novels of agricultural life” (57) and after Claude visits the farm and hears the stories he exclaims, “My dear, why all this Fall-of-the-House-of-Usher stuff?” (153) in order to exacerbate and mock quintessential Gothic and agricultural themes. Through her writing, Gibbons also parodies the narrative descriptions of rural novels. She mimics the landscape description of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence and she also attacks D.H. Lawrence: “[Gibbons] not only parodies his prose style but also satirizes his ideas about gender and sexuality” (Hammill 833). She does this through her prose and through the creation of the character of Mr. Mybug, over exaggerating his sexual fantasies and observations of phallic expression in nature. Both Flora and Gibbons are successful in parodying the rural novel popular in modern England.

3 For direct comparisons of the landscape narrations and her discussion of the inversion of these portrayals see Jacqueline Ann Arial’s essay, “Cold Comfort from Stella Gibbons” (66-67).
There is evidence to support that Flora is the satiric object and there is evidence to support that she is, in fact, the satirist. Flora’s dual nature, typical of a trickster, leaves the reader to question what her role is in this satiric text. Is she the local busybody, bored with her life, attempting to “colonize” the natives (satiric object), or is she the character who, through her trickery, points out the outlandishness of popular rural novels and novelists within “highbrow” society through a “middlebrow” text (satirist)? In true trickster fashion, similar to Lorelei, it seems as if Flora is both the satiric object and the satirist.
CONCLUSION:

William Hynes states, “although there are various real-life, twentieth-century tricksters, more often than not the tenor of their character tends not to be as rich, multivocal, or polychromic as that of mythic tricksters” (204). Based on the study of Lorelei and Flora as tricksters, I could not disagree more. These modern tricksters are rich, multivocal and polychromic and this is mainly because of their gender. The fact that these tricksters are women is what makes this figure that much more multifaceted and intriguing. Lorelei and Flora are complex characters and through their trickery they are able to reflect women’s place in society during the 1920s and 1930s. The original female tricksters of the Hebrew Bible and the Chinese women of the Song Dynasty were powerless living in a patriarchal world and were forced to resort to trickery in order to gain power. Their trickery reflected their place in society. There was nothing complex about it: Rachel, Esther, Tamar and Lot’s daughters had no choice but to find some power in a world run by men. Lorelei and Flora, through their trickery and characteristics, reflect their places in society as well, but like women’s place in the 1920s and 1930s, their characters are complicated.

Both Lorelei and Flora are paradoxical characters and, as discussed, their dual trickster nature becomes perplexing at times. As Bei Cai points out, “instead of viewing their contradictory and complex qualities as problematic, some scholars welcome that as a functional property that allows tricksters to be the embodiment of all complementary opposites” (278). The complementary opposites that these women embody are those that are present in society at the time. With the changes in women’s role in home and the workplace during the 20s and 30s, birth control and the rise of the Flapper, women were
caught between two worlds. Should a woman be a mother and housewife or a working
woman? Should she value traditional styles of feminine dress or should she become more
sexualized? Even the Flapper style and demeanor was paradoxical: an androgynous,
childlike woman. In the 1920s and 30s, the woman was stuck in limbo. She was
presented with opportunities to progress, but at the same time, was pressured to remain in
the domestic sphere as well. She was encouraged to be confident and sexual, yet also
chastised for dismissing traditional female roles and flaunting their sexuality. It was
tough for women to find a role “in the ambiguous atmosphere of the 1920s, the future
beckoned women even as tradition bound them” (Clements 459).

After the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, Elizabeth Breuer stated in 1925
that, “feminism had reached an awkward age” (qtd. in Clements 427). Breuer believed
that it was a feminist age in which “women [were] trying to straddle two horses and ride
them both to a victorious finish” (qtd. in Clements 427). One horse was a career and the
other horse was family and children, “which she cannot leave behind if she is to be happy
as a woman.” The ability to ride both horses was extremely difficult, but the women who
managed to do both “had made life a more free, a more noble thing” (qtd. in Clements
427). Lou Hoover, wife of Herbert Hoover, aimed this message at young girl scouts. She
believed that girls needed to “learn domestic skills (an affirmation of women’s traditional
role) and prepare for careers and roles as citizens (an affirmation of their new, public
role)” (Clements 452). The messages delivered by Lou Hoover and Elizabeth Breuer may
have worked for them, but for many women of the time period, “it simply exacerbated
tension between duty and opportunity” (Clements 459).
Women needed to find some way to navigate this dual sphere or ride both horses, and Lorelei and Flora found a way to do it. Their tricks and their characters are dual in nature and thus they are able to fit in with and succeed in this contradictory world for women. They are able to play both female roles simultaneously, thus they live a “more free and noble life.” Lorelei acts sexual, yet still presents herself as the childlike woman that men are looking for. She is very intelligent, yet presents herself as unintelligent and easily manipulated. Flora refuses to get a job, moves to the country alone and takes control of an entire “civilization” and still ends up traditionally getting married happily ever after. What Lorelei and Flora show us is that in order to succeed in this changing world for women, women must have the ability to live in both female spheres at once. They are both the satirist and the satiric object because until women’s true place in society is solidified, Lorelei and Flora have to use their trickery and duality in order to survive in this dichotomy.

The trickster figure has been present and studied for centuries and is an archetype that is complex and constantly changing. As society and civilization change, the trickster will change with it. With each change in culture, and more importantly with each change in women’s place in society, a new female trickster will emerge in order to show women how to navigate the new world. These female trickster figures are more than just objects of laughter or fatuous characters; they are the representations and reflections of women in their present societies. Historians can look to these satirists/trickster figures to study women’s roles in society and women can look to these characters for guidance in navigating this ever-changing world for women.
Works Cited


