

## IT'S BETTER TO BE A TRICKSTER THAN A MARTYR

Elizabeth Gilbert

There is a way to be creative that does not make a fetish out of suffering. There is an older way, a richer way, a more generative way—the way human beings had been making art for about 30,000 years, before Europeans started taking things all too seriously. This is **the path of playful collaboration with the mysteries of inspiration**. This is the path that says you are neither the slave to your muse, nor its master—but that you are its partner, and that the two of you (artistic mystery and you) can delight in each other. This is the path that says creativity is a weird but never-boring dance, and that you are allowed to actually enjoy it regardless of how it turns out. This is the path that focuses more on the wonderful strangeness of the process and less on the result. This is the path that does not worship suffering and torment, and does not respect the reality police who say that life is nothing but a grim march of pain.

This is the path of the trickster, not the martyr. **The trickster** (represented forever in world mythology as the fox, the crow, the coyote, the monkey) **sees through our delusions of seriousness and exposes the play underneath all our drama**. The trickster says, “You are welcome to die for your cause if you really want to, but I’m not here to spend my life suffering.”

If creativity is not the natural realm of the trickster, then I don’t know what is. Because **creativity should always look at the world sideways, backwards, upside down**. But something has been broken in our culture the last few centuries. Something has driven the trickster out of the art world, and creativity has been taken hostage by a cabal of very grim men who would rather be lions than monkeys. Screw that. Bring back the monkeys, I say. Leave the lions to their natural realm (politics and war, governance and dominance) but leave creativity to those of us who prefer to live playfully, in the light. Turn the arts back over to the foxes and the monkeys, who have always rightfully ruled the world of imagination and invention.

The trickster understands that **all this world is temporary, all of it is shifting, all of it is nonsense, all of it is fair game for delight**. The trickster never dies a grim death in a walk-up tenement while suffering romantically from tuberculosis. The trickster doesn’t compete, doesn’t compare, doesn’t beat his head against the wall, doesn’t wrestle demons, doesn’t try to dominate mysteries that were never meant to be dominated in the first place. The trickster just keeps on **playing**. The trickster is **slippery** and **sly, wry** and **wise**, always **looking for the secret door, the hidden stairway, the funhouse mirror, the sideways way of looking at things—and the trickster always endures**.

I choose the path of the trickster, not the path of the martyr. I choose it for my artistic life, and I choose it for my real life. It has made all the difference, believe me.