Dr. Emily Zobel Marshall

Lisette: [00:00:00] Hello everyone. Thank you again for joining us. On another interview with a storyteller on the Tales from the Hearth podcast. Today I am joined by Dr. Emily Zobel Marshall, who is a professor at Leads Beckett University, has been a full-time lecturer at the School of Cultural Studies there since 2007.

Emily is also an expert in the role of trickster figures in the literatures and cultures of Africa and its diaspora, and has published widely in this area. Most recently, American Trickster, trauma tradition and Briar Brer Rabbit, and the one that first brought me to her insights in AN'S journey, a story of Jamaican cultural resistance.

Emily, thank you so much for joining me. I'm excited to have you here. Can you [00:01:00] tell me a little bit more about who you are and actually what has brought you to your illustrious titles and your great works of writing?

Emily: Thank you for that introduction and it's a real pleasure to be here with you and I've always been fascinated by the trickster figure and my heritage is half British, half Caribbean.

So when I was growing up, my French Caribbean mother used to tell me stories of Anansi and of Bre Brer Rabbit and is cunning trickster figures. They would turn the tables on the power for using their brains rather than their Braun. So using their, their wisdom and their cunning and their silver tongue rather than any muscle.

They tend to be small animals. The trickster characters, and I was always fascinated by that. And I think for children, those stories. Really connect because the children in an adult world are always trying to find ways to duck and dive and find ways around the, the kind of power of adults, right? How to get away with things and how to have fun, how [00:02:00] to disappear from the surveillance of adults.

I loved those stories as a child. And then when I was doing my degree, I decided to do my dissertation on the Anansi Folk Tales and look at their role in Jamaica and look at their. Roots as well in specifically in Ghana because many of those stories in Jamaica came from Ghana. And as I was doing my dissertation, I realized that there was a real gap in research, and very little had been done

connecting up the stories to their African roots and then also to looking at their role in Jamaican culture.

So even though, and Anansi was celebrated as a Jamaican cultural hero, there wasn't a great deal of research about this trickster figure. So when it came to for me to do my PhD, I, I went to uni and I never really wanted to leave the campus life, but when I came to do my PhD, I returned to the idea and I structured my PhD around that research.

I spent three months in Kingston traveling around interviewing people to find out more about the role of [00:03:00] anan in contemporary culture, and then that became, The basis of my first book, one that you've read, and then after that I went on to look at the bra Brer Rabbit stories that have quite a different cultural

Lisette: trajectory.

There's another book I read recently. It was for a workshop called Trickster Makes the World, and it really fed off of what I was reading when I read Anansi journey Is. This archetype of the trickster really does have a special place in various cultures and has a special role for those who might not be familiar with Anci or Briar Brer Rabbit or even quite really understand which trickster characters they might be familiar with.

I'm going to switch up this beginning a little bit. Normally when I ask someone on, I give them a five minute storytelling challenge where they just. You know, on the spot. Tell a story in five minutes. So what I'm going to ask of you is if [00:04:00] you can choose any Anansi Tale, Briar Brer Rabbit tale and give it doesn't have to.

Perfect. Just to give us a sense of who and what kind of character this is.

Emily: So this is called My Old Riding Horse. And it's Anansi story, but there is also a Brer Brer Rabbit version of it, and it gives you a little flavor of the kind of tricks that Anansi plays and as we'll go on to discuss you further, I'm sure, is that these stories acted as a kind of wishful fulfillment for enslaved people.

So it's very much about turning the tables on powerful characters and dominating them. Anansi lives in a forest and in the forest. Tiger is king and tiger is always making fun of Anansi. Tiger says that Anansi's the smallest and weakest spider in the forest A and nobody is scared of Anansi, and yet when he roars, the [00:05:00] ground shakes and Anansi starts to challenge.

Tiger and he calls the animals in a forest to him and he says that actually tiger is lying and that he and Anansi is king of the forest and that tiger is making all these claims, but is in fact just his old riding horse. Tiger is incensed and sets off to Anansi's house. He reaches Anansi's house. And he knocks on the door.

He says, what have you been saying? Or these lies about me. Come and tell the animals of the forest that these are untrue. Come and tell them that I am king. And I see he's in his house and he says in a very weak voice, tiger. I'm poorly, I'm sick. I can't rise from my bed. Otherwise, I would come to the clearing and not tell the all the animals that these are lies.

So Tiger's furious. He says, what am I gonna do? What can I do? What can I do? He says, I will bring you to the clearing then, so that [00:06:00] you can tell them. So Anansi says, the only way you could possibly do that is to let me ride on your back. Tiger. So Tiger gets down and Anansi brings his blankets out the house and he drags his feet and he looks awful, and he climbs on tiger's back and off they go.

Galloping through the forest or ca cantering. I'm not sure quite how you describe a tiger running very fast to the clearing. And as we're going along, tiger hears a little voice in his ear, and it's Anansi and Anansi says, tiger, I can't possibly hold on any longer. I'm slipping. I'm foiling. I'm going to die.

I'm gonna die before we get there, and I'll never be able to tell them. So Tiger Stops says, what is it now? So Tiger said. So Anansi's just perhaps just a little, I need a cushion, just a little cushion so that I can sit more comfortably on your back. Just gimme a little cushion. So Tiger gets a little cushion and he puts it on his back and Anansi sits on a cushion and off they set through the forest, running toward the clearing.

And then Anansi again in Tiger is there. Stop. Tiger. [00:07:00] Stop. I please. You stop. I'll surely die before I get there. You are running too fast. I need some weight to tell you that you're running too fast. Just break me off a little branch. Just a little branch. I'll just hold it in my hand and then maybe if you are going to, I could just give you a little tap and if you're going to fast, then I can give you one tap.

So he breaks off a little branch and off they go. And Anansi again in Tiger is there. Tiger. Tiger. I need his way of slowing you down. He's still too fast. Just a little rope. A little rope. Just a little rope around your nose. That's all I need. Tiger gets the rope, puts it around his nose and Anansi's, there he is, flopped on his back.

And they finally reach the clearing. And in a clearing, all the animals of the forest are gathered and tiger runs into the clearing. And as they run into the clearing, and Anansi sits up his back straight and he's sitting on his cushion and he has the reigns in his hand and he has his riding crop on the side and proud as anything he says to the animals.

You see what I tell you, [00:08:00] tiger is just my old riding horse. And that's the, that that's like the flavor of the sort of tricks of dominance and Anansi place. And it's always on the ego of the powerful, their ego becomes their achilles heel, their pride or their greed, and then he'll manage to find a way in.

But I like that story because it's the idea of the kind of the dominance and the turning of the tables. And actually to riding your oppressor in that way.

Lisette: Yeah, it's, that's something, I love an Anansi stories. I love tricksters. I regularly, whenever I, I'm watching a new television show or a movie, when there's a trickster character or archetypal character, that's usually, it ends up being my favorite character and I think it's, Because there is this sense of subversion.

I don't have to predict what they're going to do because, and that what's brings spice to the story. It brings a sense of, you kind of wanna root for them even if they're doing something that's [00:09:00] dastardly or you, you feel like you want the tables to be turned. My next question is actually about what brought you to this field of study and these types of stories you mentioned how.

In your family, you growing up you heard these stories. What is it about storytelling and why do you study this?

Emily: I think there must be a part of me that also, like you say, I'm drawn to the triston. Maybe I quite, I have some of those tricks to qualities myself and I think. What also really fascinates me is that in all the indigenous cultures, we find the trickster figure study of the tricks to archetype, and I think it's really part of our human world.

We have to adhere to certain social rules and structures of how to behave, whereas the trickster is allowed to do anything. The Trexan knows no bounds they can in. African religions, the trickster can sleep with Aditi daughters. He there, there is nothing [00:10:00] the trickster can't do. So the trickster breaks free from the rules and the boundaries and the of human society.

And I think that because we all have to adhere to these rules as human beings of behavior, we like to escape into the fantasy of a trickster. It allows us. A release. And so I think indigenous cultures throughout time across the world, sometimes it's cross-cultural fertilization, but sometimes there isn't these tricks that are very similar.

We find them in Inuit traditions, in African traditions, we find them in Native American traditions. And it's to do with that desire to escape the boundaries in of the human world in that fantasy. But then, My argument in Anansi's journey is that, and in the Bare Brer Rabbit book is that in, when human beings are not living in a society where they are free or that then those stories are not just fantasies anymore, but they actually become a strategy for survival.

They become, they're actually inscribed with practical. [00:11:00] Methods for people to use in their everyday lives to gain some kind of power and freedom. So it depends on the context in which those stories are told. It was at the larger interest in freedom, oppression, and resistance that fascinates me and the way that the tricks team will use.

Any means necessary to carve themselves a space and also operates outside of any kind of Christian framework. So it's not the, uh, moralistic good and bad. We don't interpret the tricks to, within that kind of moral framework. It's a far more complex and sophisticated way of thinking about the world.

Something that might be good in one situation, so is some is different than another in times of oppression you have to use. All the strategies available to you to survive.

Lisette: I actually really loved this when I read in this journey, and you also touched upon this in American trickster, is this transition [00:12:00] between the types of stories that are in the of origin in Ghana, right?

That where originated the quality of those stories and some of the lessons from those stories. Changed when they came to the US in the mouths, in the storytellers that were forcibly brought to the new world. What happened in that transition and how the stories themselves changed to fit the

Emily: circumstance?

There's change in a number of ways. Anansi in Ashanti culture. So Ashanti, uh, an ethnic group that live in Ghana, in West Africa. The Ashanti folk tales were the dominant folk tales that were brought over to Jamaica and many of the other

islands as well. And those particular stories are based on a, a Ashanti religious thought.

So Anansi is a kind of intermediary figure. Who steals things from the sky. God yami the deity and brings him down to earth for humankind, [00:13:00] but does this often inadvertently brings wisdom. He brings good things, he brings stories. He's the king of all the worlds stories, but he also brings diseases and serpents.

But he's allowed to do anything he likes. He sleeps with namas daughters, as I said before. He has a penis, which is 12 foot long and he can break it off and impregnate 12 women at the same time. There's quite a lot of kind of masculine, macho, very gendered thrust to these stories in Ashanti context and, and as he's a me intermediary figure, there aren't any shrines to Anan, but he's very much like a part of that.

And you would tell Anansi Stories as a group and often being a good storyteller, you have afforded a particularly kind of high position in Ashanti. Society and an Anansi storyteller could criticize but subtly criticize their group within the context of Anansi's story. So could say something bit cheeky about the chief could say something about the system that was not going right, but [00:14:00] within the context of an Anansi's story, when the stories come to Jamaica, Nime doesn't feature anymore.

There's not the really that religious. Element and Anansi becomes more man and less spider. So he's depicted as a spider in the shanty stories. In the Jamaican stories, he's depicted much more as a man. Sometimes he wears a top hat. Sometimes he wears like a coat and tails. Sometimes his star is a walking stick, and the tricks that he does are pitted against masa or master the plantation boss, and all sorts of elements of plantation life enter into.

The stories, the torture techniques that enslaved people had to endure. The whip, you know the chains that are in there and Anansi is trying to find ways to steal food to survive. It's burning. McCain Fields is stealing. Masa's wife. Yeah, there's exactly. Instead of stealing yamas, what daughters, he has a family trying to kill sheep and his family to survive.

And trying to break things, just trying to break things up often create a kind of [00:15:00] anarchic scene that which really borrows away at the system from within. And then there's all sorts of food stuffs and Jamaican food stuffs and Jamaican plants and flowers and that enter into the stories as well. So it very much then becomes a story of the enslaved person pitting, no wits against their oppressors rather than being.

Incorporated into a cult, a functioning culture in the Ashanti context.

Lisette: This is something that I really found so powerful about this type of storytelling and how storytelling can evolve. We're often, especially in Western culture, and for me at least speaking from us, Based cultures, a lot of the stories that we hear, talk tales, Greek myths, they're often whitewashed in a way where they're stripped of any controversy.

Do you mention in Anansi's journey that. Modern day Jamaica culture and its [00:16:00] relationship to a Anansi stories has a bit of that tension between whether or not, and you mentioned this before, these are not moral tales in Anansi's journey in particular, ed, we see the same thing with Briar Brer Rabbit. Lot of these types of tricks, types of subterfuge, types of breaking anarchy is.

Rooted in survival and user survival techniques, how does that impact the broader culture, like mental understanding of the world and how to operate in it? And you mentioned in an Anansi's journey that there's, there is controversy around that. And much like in American society, Briar Brer Rabbit has a very controversial route of how Briar Brer Rabbit's been depicted in popular culture To get into this.

Moral gray area around tricksters, especially en unci, Ry Brer Rabbit, where this gray area truly comes forward a as a conflict in modern culture. Yeah, that's a really

Emily: great question. The stories they entered into the nursery of white [00:17:00] settlers in Jamaica and Crays in Jamaica, and they will often water down. So if a black.

Nanny would tell white children Anansi story. There was a kind of watering down that might have happened in a nursery context, and then they were collected by various folklorists that tended to be white British folklorists. So those stories, the way they were transcribed, were sometimes the more violent elements become edited out of the stories or the sexual elements edited outta the stories.

But in Jamaica, we had a robot lash against the stories in the nineties. Where a woman called Pauline Bain said they should ban the Anansi stories because actually Jamaica is a place which suffers from a lot of gun violence, from gangsterism, from greed, from this kind of heightened sense of individuality.

You get everything you want for yourself at the expense of others, and these are the roots of everything that's. Bad about Jamaican society. So she said that we shouldn't be teaching those stories in our schools, that [00:18:00] they should be a ban on the stories. But actually the argument against that is that the Anansi stories are not telling you to behave like Anansi.

They're a FA form of mental training and that children are. Actually quite sophisticated in a way that they understand and interpret folk tales. The Ansys stories can also tell you how not to be the Jew, how not to be proud and not be like snake and get tied around a bamboo pole because you're showing off that you're the longest animal in the jungle.

It's about using your brains. It's not necessarily doing always as Anansi does. And a whole idea to ban a photo. You can't do, you can't ban me, but they will always be told. But what we find in Jamaica is actually that those tricks of cunning, of survival, of resistance against. Unjust power is still celebrated.

Anansi's considered a national hero. When I went there to do my research, everyone had an Anansi story to tell me whether it's in academics, the maroons, who are the descendants of enslaved people, taxi drivers, school children. They love Anansi. They find the story so. [00:19:00] Funny. They're laughing in there as they tell me the stories.

She's really alive. That's culture is re is very much alive and applauded. Whereas in the American context, there's been a real rupture in terms of how the trajectory of the bra Brer Rabbit stories, the bra Brer Rabbit is a Brer Rabbit an an is a spider. But the similarities amongst the stories, The bra Brer Rabbit stories come from, some of them are from West Africa, but a lot of them are from East and Central Africa.

They come from the hair stories, but he's interpreted as Brer Rabbit in an American context. The enslaved people brought those stories over to the US and they were told in very much the way that Anan stories were told. One of the things that we find in the US is there is less movement of. African people into the plantations throughout the period of slavery.

So in some ways there's less of a kind of renewal of African culture, whereas in the Caribbean, because the conditions are so harsh and there isn't a, the, the. Population doesn't reproduce [00:20:00] itself, sorry to have to use that language, that there are new slaves coming from Africa and bringing a lot of their African cultural traditions with them right until the end of the period of enslavement.

So in America, there's less of that link with the traditional African stories. So some of those. African elements, they get lost much more quickly in the American Brer Rabbit stories. Then what happens is that Joel Chandler Harris in the 18 hundreds in the 1880s, a white folk glorious. He takes down the stories from in the mouths of plantation slaves, and he publishes several collections.

He becomes very well known. He does it in the vernacular of African Americans, and he does this very carefully. He's very much committed to this kinda authentic voice, but he creates a frame narrator. What he does is create a kind of Uncle Tom figure called Uncle Remus. Uncle Remus is telling Bre Brer Rabbit stories to a little white boy, and he's a kindly man who has been enslaved [00:21:00] and was very happy with the system of slavery.

It treated him well. So we see a hugely problematic racial stereotype. So what happened with Brer Rabbit is that actually. The stories then became, in a way, a vessel for racist caricatures. So the very culture that there was meant to be a culture of resistance and survival then becomes a, a stick, uh, which to beat African Americans down and embed stereotypes into people's consciousness.

Lisette: Definitely wanted to bring that up. It's only been in the last couple of years that I've, I even watched a Song of the South, especially in the United States. We are not given the context of where these stories were coming from. When I watched it as an adult with that context, it was shocking to see that it, it is so blatant in American culture of this.

Victim blaming or putting that whitewashing of history on a character that [00:22:00] is meant to be subversive or has that inherent subversive nature to it? You mentioned in Jamaica there was this pushback against a Anansis stories for moralistic reasons, and in the US. Recently with the Song of the South, that did come back into popular consciousness recognizing with the Black Lives Matter movement with a lot of the Oscars so white in terms of broader storytelling culture, how we have whitewashed, what could be considered radical stories.

How have you seen your research shift in especially post pandemic years, and how these. Figures have reemerged have been changed much like they have been changed in previous decades and centuries. Do you see any kind of shift in how an Anansi stories and how Briar Brer Rabbit or other trickster tales in, in the Western hemisphere or in the African diaspora, how they have changed and if they are changing?

[00:23:00] Yeah.

Emily: Another really great question. I haven't been back to Jamaica for a while, but the story, people still tell and Anansi stories, there's still new additions of Anansi. Coming out interpreted in all sorts of different ways. I think that what's particularly been interesting is looking at programs like American, gods Neil Gaiman, Netflix version of American Gods, and I'm actually doing a bit of research at the moment where I'm reading Neil Gaiman's American Gods novel, and then comparing it to the depiction of Anansis and Anansi appears in three episodes of the Netflix American Gods.

Drama and it's really interesting. Neil Gaiman in his American, God said Anansi, he has incredible strength and he's a bit of a, a rebel, but he's not a revolutionary character. But the way that he's been interpreted in the Netflix series is that he's radical. He's an absolute. Speaks, he's a speaker of truth, but he's also like an agent of rebellion and revolt.

He arrives on the the ship [00:24:00] with enslaved people crossing path through middle passage, and he tells them to burn the ship down and he tells them your history will be a history of suffering if a hundreds and hundreds of years. By doing that, he rouss them into rebellion, so that version of Anan. Is full of the energy of the original trickster figure.

Apparently the actor was saying that it's the Black Lives Matter movement. Really was, that was happening at the time of the filming. Actually really inspired him to try and bring that revolutionary energy to the character on screen. Always kind of new manifestations. There's always changes. That's a wonderful thing about folk tales, about stories that people will bring to the table.

I, in terms of rare Brer Rabbit. There are some fantastic black writers like Tony Morrison, like Ralph Ellison, like Nella Larson, who've reclaimed the tricks to figure, you know, and again, applauded this, the en naic and revolutionary energy of Bra Brer Rabbit in their writing. We don't end Bra. Brer Rabbit [00:25:00] story with Song of the South.

Thank goodness he needs to be reclaimed. Obviously C can use 'em as commentary for contemporary culture, but links them back to the original stories. One of the things that I'm trying to do at the moment in my, the current piece of research that's about to be published is looking at how Beatrix Potter, the English storyteller, how Peter Brer Rabbit stories are actually embedded in those bra Brer Rabbit stories.

But no one ever talks about it because it's another form of cultural appropriation of black culture. I think stories are always a adapting, they're always changing. You can take from stories, but you should acknowledge your sources. When we

Lisette: talk about what's radical or revolutionary, it's the root. The root gives that energy.

I've seen the American gods, that one scene on the boat with Anci and, and the people being brought through the middle passage was so powerful. It went viral. I remember as I recall, and Orlando Jones is the actor who plays a Anansi. I remember reading or [00:26:00] watching his take on how powerful that moment was to perform.

I believe he also contributed some of the writing too, which was, I believe another controversy that he was not appropriately. Credited for the writing that he did for a Anansi for that show, which is other level of, again, appropriation and lack of acknowledgement of black contributors and creatives and storytellers.

I've started to also look out for depictions of Anci, Breyer Brer Rabbit, especially trickster figures from the African diaspora, because how they're being treated. Have you watched Random Acts of Flyness? It's on H B O, the latest season. It's very abstract. It's very surrealist. So each season has a different storytelling formula.

The last season does include a regular character, a man dressed up as a Brer Rabbit, and it's a recurring theme. And again, Random Acts of Flyness is written and produced by black creatives. Terrence Vance is the program creator. You can watch the season [00:27:00] separately from the other seasons, different sets of stories, but the last season really has actually a cohesive narrative.

And there is that trickster. Character. That's what I'm

Emily: looking at the moment in music, in song, in dance, in writing on the screen. I want to find as many contemporary versions of Anansi and Brer Rabbit as I can. So actually, if any of your listeners

Lisette: they have, if they've seen or heard any, We'll collect them and I'll make sure to actually link some of these things that we have mentioned already.

Some of these stories and writings that we've mentioned already in the show notes for other people to link to, to reference. A lot of the people that are listening are the they themselves story tellers. And I think this is something that, and this comes to my next question, which I myself, I consider myself a storyteller by vocation.

That's what I wanna do. It's the type of craft I want to curate. And. Talking about the, this avoiding of the whitewashing of, and part of that is actually acknowledging reveling in the radical [00:28:00] nature of this archetype. Tricksters tend to be also storytellers. There's, there's a linkage, but between telling of stories, telling of truths, and the trickster archetype.

For me, one of the reasons why I created this podcast in particular is, Trying to understand and get a clearer view of what the role of a storyteller or trickster is in our society. What would you, as someone who has spent a lot of time with these characters, figures, and these stories, would you say is the role?

Of trickster storytellers in the modern society, their roles

Emily: change depending on the context and depending on the people that tell the stories. So the role of the trickster, and I think the role of all oral stories really is dependent on the needs of the people that tell the stories. At that particular time in history, for example, I was talking about the Ashanti context in the Ashanti storytellers where the roots of the [00:29:00] Anansi stories start.

Now, you could argue that the trickster in that context tests the boundaries. Of a shanty culture, but maybe by testing them we also strengthens them. You go there in fantasy, you go there through the medium of the story, through the medium with the imagination, but you break the rules. You say things that you're not really meant to say or you revel in the scandalous.

We're like carnival and, but then. You come back to the status quote. This is in a context of a society with compliant members in to a degree, I say compliant members, but when you enter into the context of enslavement, we have a monstrous, a foreign system. So where at no point do the enslaved fully accept.

Their conditions. I would challenge the idea that there was ever a point where somebody would accept their conditions of enslavement. So those stories then perform a type of psychological training to actually enact some of the things that Anansi does on a plantation. And they can be things like breaking [00:30:00] machinery, rubbing salt into wounds, setting the cane fields on fire, pretending that the masters, you let the masters.

Cows out of his field by mistaken, they trampled his bests canes. You look at Planter's Diaries, there's a particular planter called Matthew Lewis and he writes his diaries about this time in Jamaica and you can see that his, the enslaved people on the plantation are running rings around him, tricking him.

He says, oh, this, they know I'm a benevolent master, but as soon as he arrives, There's, it's just a catalog of ways in which that he is, his power is being undermined and there's a system of surveillance as well, and I think that's applauded in the announce His stories, and Anansi is a spider lives up on the roof, but always watching.

You can't see him, but he can see you. Slaves that were in a domestics sphere. Were always passing on messages to enslaved people. In the fields, there's a chain of surveillance. You, you think that the surveillance is all, is the whites watching, [00:31:00] watching enslaved, but there's the other way around as well.

And so all of those ways of gaining power become at, at the core of the stories in that context, they become both practical and psychological methods of resistance and survival. So, Whatever the context, the story fulfills the need, and I think that's what's so wonderful about storytelling. And not only that, but it's also a way to preserve history, especially in a predominantly oral culture.

It's a link to the past and sitting around a fire at the end of a brutal day's work, enslaved people could connect back to their. Roots understand more about the culture from which they came through the media of these stories. So there's this very strong historical and cultural kind of fulfillment too that's to be gained I think, in those oral storytelling sessions.

And there's always this sense, isn't there, that, uh, in, in academia, this more challenge now that something which is oral is not as much of a reliable [00:32:00] historical resource. As the text, and I would obviously challenge that the oral histories are just as important as textual histories. This is a,

Lisette: this is actually a subject I really find interesting because there are instances, there are recorded instances where oral traditions across the world have been seen as reliable sources of history.

I can't give specifics, but I remember reading, and this is something that I find very interesting, like what is this aspect of oral like speaking to other people, and this is one of the reasons I named this Tales from the Hearth, is that the

Hearth Fire does evoke. Oral storytelling traditions, and there is something about oral storytelling.

Also the revitalization of oral storytelling within podcasts of what does that need serve in the context of, again, folklore society, history, building storytelling. What is the nature of oral tradition, oral storytelling that is so [00:33:00] captivating, that is powerful.

Emily: And I think the beauty of it is that often oral tradition is passed down, isn't it?

From generation to generation. And each generation can bring something to that story and can adapt it to their particular world and bring characters in and adapt it to their significant historical events in their time. But I think we, as human beings, we are born into stories. Like we tell people every day the stories of who we are.

Everybody will have. A story that they tell people when they first meet them about their lives. I was born here and then I had this kind of upbringing, and then I studied to hear whatever it might be. But it's a narrative that you've created around your life and it's that narrative that incen you. How you've shaped your very identity is through that story that you tell you don't write it down.

It's an oral story. And our identities, I think, are created in that narration of stories in that, or oral storytelling. And I think that we. Still will turn to those stories [00:34:00] to try and understand more about where we fit into our society as a whole as well. What is the story that a society tell a about themselves?

What is the story about the, that a group say, tell themselves If you change the story, you change the narrative, you can and it has incredible potential. Revolutionary potential. So I think that's the potency of stories and it's just as relevant to date as it was centuries ago, truly

Lisette: encapsulates that same power of Anansi stories and these trickster stories.

It's that potential for change of truth, of identity, of understanding of these are such wonderful tools for us as humans to be able to use and examples. To, to look towards, especially in a time where many of us are seeking change and, and connections with other people. Absolutely. Oh, I have one last question, and

it is, in as archetypal storytelling way, it's the first question [00:35:00] that I ask, which is, why are you so interested?

In studying these stories and these archetypes,

Emily: it's to do with the way that they've spoken to so many different cultures around the world. But also I think that I'm fascinated as well by our will to survive and to resist. I want to try and always step away from the idea of victim or from the idea of somebody you know who accepts their oppression, that there's something hard built in us to find strategies.

To be able to borrow the system from within and weaken it in in that way. If we can't borrow it from the outside, we borrow it from within, and it's that, that I like to tap into. The other thing that I love about these tricksters in particular is that often the way in which they orchestrate their tricks is through language.

Through telling stories themselves. And you said about how they were the storytellers, the trickster are also storytellers themselves, so it is [00:36:00] both Anansi Andre Brer Rabbit have a silver tongue, and it's through words and through their way with words, through their linguistic agility that they're able to turn the tables.

And in many ways that's a reflected, even in the, I was telling you about the planted diaries in Jamaican, Jamaican planted diaries, you can see the stories that the enslaved people are telling him that the lies. That they're telling him to enable them to get a little bit more food, to get a bit of time off work.

So it, and they're very convincing in black diasporic cultures, this real celebration of language. You see it in hiphop, you see it in rap, you see it in storytelling. You see it when you interview people in Jamaica, in African American culture and a real sort of natural ability to be able. To hold an audience and to tell a story.

And I think that it's, that celebration of words, of the linguistics of that is also so important and so central to, to these tricks, to figures that that draws me so [00:37:00] much.

Lisette: Thank you. This was an excellent interview, an excellent. Story that we just unfolded, and I hope that it inspires those who are listening.

It's definitely inspired me working with that trickster energy to change things that need to be changed or to inspire change that needs to be inspired with this

wrapping up. Thank you again. And to anyone listening, of course you can. Buy any of Dr. Emily Zobel Marshall's books on Amazon. I've been able for those who are use Amazon, uh, you can find 'em at other book retailers.

I highly recommend. They're great books, great reads, even if you're not an academic. These are great stories, great books, so I highly recommend them and I look forward personally to seeing your news research as well in the future.