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Signifying the Liminal and Simian: Liberating Agency of Tricksters in Ethnic American Novels

A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English

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Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that Mr. Sarbagya Raj Kafle has completed this thesis entitled "Signifying the Liminal and Simian: Liberating Agency of Tricksters in Ethnic American Novels" under my supervision. He has prepared this thesis for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master of Philosophy in Arts (English) from Tribhuvan University. I recommend this for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis titled "Signifying the Liminal and Simian: Liberating Agency of Tricksters in Ethnic American Novels" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Sarbagya Raj Kafle has been approved by undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores ethnic American novels—Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada*, Louis Erdrich's *Tracks*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*—to trace the construction of trickster characters and discourse. Reed exploits multiple trickster heritages and signifying NeoHoodoo discourse in his novel through anachronistic conflation of time and profusion of intertextual details. Similarly, Erdrich's novel depicts how the transitional setting of the novel, behavior of the principal characters in the period of stress and loss, and the cultural options they opt for their survival under duress dub them into the liminal tricksters. Likewise, Kingston's novel presents a simian protagonist to maintain the revisionist or counterculture tendency and to establish trickster discourse that signifies upon the seminal literary and mythical repertoire and denies any form of reductive stereotypes. Construction of such trickster figures and trope confers the same agency upon these authors to liberate ethnic American writing from the received images of stereotypes and to forge a transformed cultural and literary expression of ethnic Americans.

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Introduction

Trickster Narrative and Ethnic American Novels

> *The tale of the trickster, picaro, or rogue is one of the oldest and most persistent cultural pattern or negation and one of the oldest of narrative forms. For centuries he has, in his various incarnations, run, flown, galloped, and most recently motorcycled through the literary imagination and much of the globe*.
>
> (Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess" 158)

At the 23rd International Colloquium on Communication, San Francisco, held from 29 July to 2 August 2012, Elizabeth C. Fine presented a paper on demonstrators' use of trickster mask that has become an iconic hallmark of "the Anonymous and Occupy movements" (1). Her explanation behind the use of trickster mask is that "it embodies the very essence of [the trickster] archetype and the potential of ordinary people to take part in the movement against oppressive forces, oligarchic corporatism, corrupt politician, and police brutality" (1). From creation myths to the pop-culture to the demonstrations of the present day, tricksters have always remained fascinating figures in every society. Such a pervasive occurrence of trickster in socio-cultural discourse vouches for its ample presence in literary narratives. Ethnic American fiction is not an exception in this trend for it is very rich and varied in the exploitation of archetypal trickster figures. This study also looks into the trickster narrative of ethnic American literature. The spotlight of this work falls on three segments of the Ethnic American literary terrain—African American, Native American and Chinese American. The novels from each terrain I have taken into consideration are Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Louis Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fakebook* (1989).

The focus of this research on the three writers of diverse background may look odd at a glance. These writers included here are completely different in terms of racial and historical

background. Reed is often blamed to be misogynist in his critical orientation, Kingston a feminist and Erdrich yet different from both of them. However, they share contemporaneity, i.e. they are writing in the same era—post World Wars time. Further, their mode of writing can be grouped together under the banner of postmodern writing. Still, it should not be thought that they are following the formalist or post-structuralist mode of postmodern discourse and its non-referentiality. These writers represent their ethnic position as opposed to hegemonic and racist white American mainstream culture, though they take recourse to postmodern signification. Therefore, they are not just dependent upon European derivation of postmodern; rather they bring their own ethnic and cultural repertoire and its signifying discursive pattern and talk-stories of traditional folk tales and mythologies to redefine their unique edition/version of discourse. In this process, the trickster becomes a handy tool for these writers to forge their respective ethnic American identity which is undergoing a transformation thereby boosting the bricolage spirit of the trickster and intermingling trickster agency at the discursive level of the novels.

Before delving into the analysis of the novels of these three writers, I want to trace how different scholars have written about the trickster, which resists any attempt of definition, both as a character and as discursive trope. The legacy of trickster is so protean and pervasive that every culture has own specific tricksters form creations myths to literary works to the concurrent popular culture.

Discussion on trickster in academic field begins with Anthropologist Paul Radin. In the prefatory note to his book *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956), Radin writes that tricksters "belong to the oldest expressions of mankind" (ix). Tricksters' presence is so pervasive that one finds trickster myth "in clearly recognizable form among the simplest aboriginal tribes and among the complex. We encounter it among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Semitic world" (Radin ix). Radin points that

laughter, humor, and irony permeate everything trickster does. However, such laugher is often tempered by the awe and some useful message that the believers find in it. Complex and illusive trait of the trickster is suggested by Radin when he asks, "How shall we interpret this amazing figure? Are we dealing here with the workings of the mythopoeic imagination, common to all mankind, which at a certain period in man's history, gives us his picture of world and himself" (x)?

Joseph Maurone heavily borrows from Paul Radin and Lewis Hyde to talk about the nature of the trickster. Maurone writes:

> There is a character called the Trickster who plays a crucial role in much of the world's mythology and folklore . . . The trickster is usually found at the boundaries or crossroads, sometimes navigating them, sometimes creating them. He is a mischievous troublemaker, simultaneously attempting to help and hinder. He is said to be both clever and a shameless fool. And he goes by many names, including Coyote and Wakdjunkaga in Native American stories, Loki in Norse Mythology, Prometheus and Hermes in Greek Mythology, Brer Rabbit in the folklore of the United States, Monkey in Asian stories, and Ehsu, Thlokanyana and Legba in African American stories." (229)

Like Radin, Maurone poses a question that hints at the definitional problem: "How can we provide a clear definition of an archetype that seems, by its very nature, to elude such clarity" (320)? Nevertheless, taking the words of Allan Combs and Mark Holland, Maurone says, "trickster is an 'archetype whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere'" (230).

In the postscript entitled "On the Psychology of Trickster" to Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, renowned theorist of psychoanalysis Carl Gustav Jung points at the haunting presence of the phantom of trickster figure "[i]n picaresque tales, in

carnivals and revels, in sacred and magical rites, in man's religious fears and exaltations." (200). For Jung, trickster is an "archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level" (200). Jung points that, like many other myths, the reason behind the preservation and development of trickster myths is "it was supposed to have therapeutic effect" for it "has a direct effect on the unconscious, no matter whether it is understood or not" (207). But Jung finds it very difficult to explain because people have contrary tendencies to "get out of the earlier condition" and "not to forget it" (207). Such contrary tendency can be taken as the reason behind the modified presence of trickster in the literary writings.

Further, in "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," William J. Hynes outlines six characteristics "as a modest map, heuristic guide, and common language for the more complex individual studies of particular tricksters within specific belief systems that follow" (Hynes 33). Warning readers not to take this six-fold typology as ultimate and unified definition or theory, Hynes proceeds to enumerate the features: "At the heart of this cluster of manifest trickster is (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Flowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation inventor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur" (Hynes 34). Hynes reiterates that a trickster does not necessarily have all these features. It also does not mean that there are not other features beside these six.

Even before Hynes, in her article ""Tolerated Margin of Mess": The Tricksters and His Tales Reconsidered," Sarah Babcock-Abrams attempts to elucidate the paradox of trickster on a cross-cultural basis. She thinks, "No figure in literature, oral or written, baffles us quite as much as trickster" (147). She adds, "The tale of the trickster, picaro, or rogue is one of the oldest and most persistent cultural pattern or negation and one of the oldest of

narrative forms. For centuries he has, in his various incarnations, run, flown, galloped, and most recently motorcycled through the literary imagination and much of the globe" (Babcock-Abrams 158). Identifying trickster as an embodiment of "all possibilities" and "paradox personified," Babcock-Abrams enumerates sixteen features a trickster may have. Some of the features included are: independence from and ignoring of temporal and spatial boundaries, inhabiting crossroad or thresholds, involved in scatological or corpophagous episodes, exaggerated sexuality or libido, indeterminant in terms of age or sex, human-animal dualism, and so on. All in all, dialogic phenomena of trickster phenomena that embody the fundamental contradiction of our existence are "resistant to monological interpretation" (Babcock-Abrams 161).

On the other, African American critic Henry Louis Gates and Native American critic as well as novelist Gerald Robert Vizenor considers trickster more as discursive or rhetorical strategy than simply a character in a narrative. Commenting on the Pan African Esu and its derivation Signifying Monkey, Gates suggests that the latter "exists in the discourse of mythology not primarily as character in a narrative, but rather as a vehicle for narration itself" (688). He adds that Signifying Monkey as a trickster trope "subsumes other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, litotes, and metalepsis . . . To this list, we could easily add aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis, all of which are used in the ritual of signifying" (686-7). Similarly, Vizenor contends, "the tricks in seven words, is to delude historicism, racial representations, and remain historical" and "trickster liberates the mind in comic discourse" (*The Trickster of Liberty* xi). Vizenor develops the concept of comic *holotrope* to refer to the trickster trope and says the "trickster then is a sign, a comic and communal sign, and a discourse in a narrative with no hope or tragic promises ("Trickster Discourse" 285).

Further, Elizabeth Ammons' introduction to *Tricksterism in the Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective* (1994) opens with a very concise remark—

"Trickster disrupts" (vii). Ammons instantly reminds the readers that this disruption is "normal," "part of the order," and it "fits within the pattern." (vii). Drawing upon Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and especially Paula Gunn Allen, she writes that "trickster is the presence "who is male and female, many-tongued, changeable, changing and who contains all the meanings possible within her or his consciousness" (vii). Heavily critical of the turn-of-the-century scholarly trend to define United States literature in terms of literary Eurocentric "paradigms of realism, naturalism, and modernism" (vii), Ammons concentrates on "the concept of trickster. . . that brings into view authors, texts and traditions ignored until very recently or, if mentioned, denigrated, dismissed, misunderstood" (vii). Ammons thinks one of the ways to *destroy* the narrowness of the academic construction of turn-of-the-century American literature is to go for the trickster that offers a plot different from the so-called "master narratives" or realists, naturalists, and modernists (viii). Ammons contends that the trickster and trickster energy embodies "a principle of human rebellion and resistance that exists both within a protagonist/antagonist framework and within a totally different context, one in which the disruly the transgressive is accepted as part of the community's life" (ix).

What Elizabeth Ammons suggested about trickster—trickster disrupts—in 1994 was hinted by Karl Kerenyi far earlier when he wrote a commentary on Radin's book accepting the request of the publisher. Karl Kerenyi juxtaposes the Greek trickster god Hermes against the Native American trickster hero in "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology." Kerenyi writes, "Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function is in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted" (185). Though Kerenyi sounds biased while considering Greek mythological trickster figure more meaningful and universal than Native American trickster, his observation about mythical

trickster figure is noteworthy. He writes that mythical trickster "could be defined as timeless root of all the picaresque creations of world literature, ramifying through all times and countries, and not reducible to a merely literary entity; a being who is exalted above the petty limitations of mortal trickster" (176). Kerenyi's remark paves way for addressing the ramifications of trickster figures even in literary writings. Ethnic American literature, especially fiction, has been one area for such trickster manifestation.

Klara Szmanko is the one who has carried out notable attempt to study trickster in ethnic American literature. Her seminal work *Invisibility in African American and Asian American Literature: A Comparative Study* considers tricksterism as a strategic tool for those who are powerless. She writes, "Tricksterism is a technique of survival in a hostile environment. Being confronted with a more powerful opponent, a trickster cannot rely on traditional methods of struggle. Tricksterism does not entail an open confrontation. In order to outsmart an enemy, a trickster has to resort to unconventional tactics like wit, deceit, mask and signifying" (43-44).

Being mindful of these diverse views on trickster figures and trickster trope, this work intends to analyze the trickster agency in *Reed's Flight to Canada*, Erdrich's *Tracks* and Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book.*

The first chapter focuses on Ishmael Reed's fifth novel *Flight to Canada* with emphasis on a few questions—Why does Reed create slave characters whose name and behavior take recourse to African American trickster heritage and beyond? What is the effect of Reed's "creative anachronism" or "conflation of time"? Why does Reed bring such a diverse array of intertexts? What does it mean to Reed to write such a novel?—to trace out Reed's signifying gesture of Neo-HooDoo aesthetics conveyed through the trickster agency. In the formation of slave characters Reed gives continuity to the African American trickster heritage that includes guile, cleverness and wit for survival. However, violent ways and moral

decay of slaves presented in the novel undo the romanticized progress and moral scruples attached with the slave narrators who forged their freedom. The creation of slave characters, whose name and actions take recourse to African American trickster heritage and beyond, enables Reed to craft Neo-Hoodoo aesthetics that signifies upon the genre of slave narratives and thereby debunks the stereotype of margin associated with African American writing. For Reed, temporal crossroad of anachronism and eclectic intertextuality allow liberating agency to make burlesque reversals and juxtaposition. Plethora of intertextual references imbued with humor and satire is another instance of signifying. Similar tendency is evident in the extra-narrative components of the novel—disclaimer, epigraph and dedication. Thus by writing a novel which creates characters drawing on African American trickster heritage and beyond, uses creative anachronism, blurs the generic boundaries, and brings in eclectic intertextual references, Reed formulates Neo-HooDoo aesthetics that resisters signifying trickster discourse. Reed's signifying discourse in this novel aims to destroy the stagnant, sterile and hypocritical images imposed upon the society. Thus, like a signifying trickster, giving signifying looks in multiple directions through *Flight to Canada*, Reed stands out as a trickster author.

Likewise, second chapter analyzes Erdrich's novel *Tracks* to explore the significance of transitional setting of the novel, behavior of the principal characters in the period of stress and loss, and the cultural options they opt for their survival under duress. Based on Victor Turner's notion of liminality, the chapter tries to trace the nexus between the liminality and trickster. It shows that the cultural situation depicted in Erdrich's *Tracks* is quite liminal for Native Americans as are going through a sort of cultural chaos. In such liminal stage, the characters of the novel devise their own way of survivance. Their options range from mystic-militant resistance to wholesale assimilation to strategic adjustment in changed circumstances that dub them into liminal tricksters in various ways. Despite raw strength and mystic

ambience to terrorize other and transgress gender demarcation, Fleur (who adopts the first option) is after all unable to hold on to her beloved tribal land. Fleur's antithesis, Pauline exhibits her liminal and trickster features in terms of her mixed-blood background, inveterate lying, self-perception as a scavenging crow and a new door, and unusual self-mortification yet retaining unchristian qualities. Despite Pauline's apparent success, her option of complete assimilation into the encroaching culture as a solution to come out of liminal crisis is not promising one because her conversion marks a cultural suicide. Nanapush takes the third alternative way in the time of crisis. Fleur and Pauline exhibit the extreme possibilities a liminal being can go through the liminal period. Both of them exhibit trickster qualities a liminal being develops, but that is not enough for the meaningful survival. To rule out the sense of loss and defeat, Erdrich presents a third and more viable option through the character of Nanapush. As a champion of possibility, Nanapush is the one who saves last Pillager, snares Morrissey for the dignity of Margaret, guides Eli in hunting and winning Fleur's heart, courts Margaret even in his old age, uses his skill to read and write to safeguard native culture and regain the lost land. The way Nanapush-the-trickster merges the opposing the ways of Fleur and Pauline, Erdrich also has presented opposing narrative views in her novel. Such parallel position of the characters and the discursive aspect of the novel redefine the role of Erdrich as a trickster author in this novel.

Similarly, third chapter explores how, in *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston exploits the simian trickster spirit in order to liberate Chinese American identity from the sickening stereotype of the mainstream as well as the separatist tendency of absolutist like Frank Chin. It shows her revisionist and counterculture tendency through the footloose pacifist protagonist Wittman Ah Sing, who resembles various figures from the Western as well as Eastern literary and mythological repertoire. Kingston's simian trickster emerges from the textual parameters of the novel at least in three ways: signifying upon the seminal literary and

mythological sources, denial of any reductive or fixing sort of interpretation, and the trickster discourse that ensues from these two. Kingston's trickster protagonist and narrative bear the trickster's mediating feature as both of them oscillate in the series of contradictions like pacifist and warlike, visible and invisible, masculine and effeminate, suicidal footloose and community making bricoleur. The textual structure and the predicament of the Wittman parallel each other. Her protagonist is the contradictoriness personified; so is the narrative of the novel in terms of the merger of writerly and speakerly language. Thus, this chapter concludes that the act of writing such novel with a trickster protagonist has actually endowed the interstitial as well as liberating agency of trickster upon Kingston herself.

Finally, the forth chapter sums up the preceding three chapters tracing the patterns of trickster agency in these novels that ultimately confer the same trickster agency upon Reed, Erdrich and Kingston.

Chapter 1

"giving them signifying looks": Neo-HooDoo Trickster in Reed's *Flight to Canada*

Ishmael Reed, who is renowned for his "iconoclastic career with a series of parodic novels" and his lampooning against "any attempts to impose artistic orthodoxy on African American writing" (Wallenfeldt 62), published his fifth novel *Flight to Canada* in 1976. The novel recounts the escape of three plantation slaves Stray Leechfield, 40s and Raven Quickskill by tricking their master Arthur Swille. Though other two are happy in their neo-salve state, Quickskill reaches his dreamland Canada with his Native American paramour Princes Quaw Quaw Tralaralara only to be disillusioned. The novel reaches its apogee with the arrival of Quickskill back the plantation to write the biography of Uncle Robin, another slave, when the latter has already maneuvered to kill Arthur Swille and inherit his property using his unexposed literacy. In this novel, Reed becomes anachronistic to mingle his time of 1960s and 70s with the scenario of antebellum America he is looking at.

Going through *Flight to Canada* is something like walking along the path that ramifies into countless directions. Nevertheless, this chapter concerns with a couple of issues or questions in general: Why does Reed create slave characters whose name and behavior take recourse to African-American trickster heritage and beyond? What is the effect of Reed's "creative anachronism" or "conflation of time"? Why does Reed bring such a diverse array of intertexts? What does it mean to Reed to write such a novel?

The root of African American tricksterism can be traced back to their origin place Africa. In Africa, legions of animal trickster tales were in fact circulated and handed down the generation orally as a means of survival in the adverse climate and meagerly yielding typography of the continent. Later, when these Africans were brought to America and enslaved, they retained the practice of telling animal trickster tales because their needs, despite the changed circumstance and locale, were more or less similar even amidst the

plenty of production as they were just bonded means not the owner of the product. In his extensive analysis of the trickster tales and tricksterism of African Americans, John W. Roberts points that the "wisdom of the trickster's approach to material acquisition and physical survival was not lost in enslaved Africans nor unrelated to recurrent situations faced by them" (Roberts 37). Roberts adds, "Despite their importance as model of behavior, the animal trickster tales of enslaved Africans were not intended to provide a literal guide for actions in everyday life, but rather served as an expressive mechanism for transmitting of cleverness, guile, and wit as the most advantageous behavioral options for dealing with the power of slavemasters in certain generic situations" (37-38). The same guile, cleverness and wit have been maintained in the formation of characters and narrative in many literary works of African Americans.

In case of *Flight to Canada* (hereafter referred as *Flight* in in-text citation), the slave characters—those who escape from as well the ones who remain at Arthur Swille's plantation—use various tricks to outsmart their master. One of the three escapers, 40s' escape is quite a violent one. According to his master Arthur Swille, "40s wiped me out when he left here. That venerable mahogany took all the guns, slaughtered my livestock and shot the overseer right between the eyes" (*Flight* 35). After the escape, 40s lives in a houseboat down near a river surrounded by guns. When Quickskill goes to warn him about the ongoing slave hunt of Swille via Nebraska Traces, 40s brags, "I got all these guns. Look at them. Guns everywhere. Enough to blow away any of them Swille men who come look for me. I don't need no organization. If I was you, Quickskill, I'd forget about this organization" (*Flight* 78-79). Violent way of 40s is modeled after Nat Turner, who was the leader of 1831 Negro insurrection, in Southampton, Virginia, that took the life of at least fifty-five Whites (Gray 22). Turner was ultimately apprehended from his hiding place, tried, and given death penalty. However, in the following century, different radical and revolutionary movements

like Black Panther, Black Power and Black Arts Movements made him a "guiding hero" (Gibson, n. pag.). At the end of the novel, Uncle Robin's remarks, "Yeh they get down on me an Tom. But who's the fool? Nat Turner or us? . . . Now Nat's dead gone for these many years, and here I am master of a dead man's house" (*Flight 178*). With this reference to Nat Turner, Reed's critical attitude to the radical ways of Black Power (Rushdy105-106) comes into picture. Rather than taking a solely militant ways of Turner, through Robin and Raven, Reed suggests that tricks of language and appropriation of the available means, be that black stereotype or anything, is better solution. Thus, Reed is critical of not only the whites, but also the African American historical or political heritage.

Stray Leechfield forges even more violent and dramatic escape. Instead of following the old way of stealing a couple of chickens, this field slave "had taken so many over a period of time that he was over in other county, big as you please, dressed up like a gentleman, smoking seegar and driving a carriage which featured factory climate-control air conditioning" (*Flight* 36). Leechfield had set up his own poultry business and kept a white slave. He had built own dummy to give an impression that he was still in the field. He even stabbed Swille's men and fled on a white horse furling his cape in the wind. He makes porn pictures and avails himself for the paid submissive role in order to make money to buy his freedom from Swille. The advertisement in the paper was like this: ""I'll Be Your Slave for One Day." Leechfield was standing erect. In small type underneath the picture said: "Humiliate me. Scorn me"" (*Flight* 80). For Leechfield, it is his freedom. His name Stray Leechfield—*stray* means having no home and having wandered away from home and *leechfield* is indicative of squalor that leaches out—and fugitive-stage activities undoes the romanticized moral scruples and progress of the slave narrative writers who fashioned their freedom in the history of slavery. Leechfield's act of keeping white slave or white Jewish subordinate Mal Leer is an instance of slave reversal. Leechfield had done herculean task

while escaping from his slave status at Swille's plantation. Now he enjoys the reversal of the same slavery. He has white slave and uses the modified form of same slavery to earn money. Creating such a character, Reed is laying bare the discrepancies within African Americans. The case of 40s and Leechfield also debunks the myth of morally upright fugitive slaves.

One of the slave characters who remains at Swille's castle and ultimately tricks him mortally is Pompey. While talking with his wife Judy, Uncle Robin describes Pompey like this: "The boy's fast, he's so fast that some of the people are talking about him in two places at the same time. He's a good voice-thrower too. . . . He can do impersonations too. He got whole Swille family down pat. He can do all of the men and women, and the dead ones too. His room is full of all kinds of animal and reptile and bird masks" (*Flight* 175). With this information about Pompey revealed at the end of the novel, readers can figure out what is exactly happening while Ms. Swilles' deceased son comes to talk with her in the spooky guise of crocodile with human head. Similarly, it helps us to figure out sense of the event in which necrophilic and incestuous Swille is pushed by his late sister Vivien's ghost in the fireplace that consumed him to death. Though it is just implied, we can be sure that Pompey the impersonator and voice-thrower must be there.

The most cunning of them is Uncle Robin, who pretends to know nothing but is actually playing the trick not only cajoling and stealing one of the gold bags given to Abraham Lincoln, but also devising a secret project of feeding Swille a kind of slow poison, coffee matte, instead of slave mother's milk, which, Swille thinks, "is supposed to reverse the aging process" (*Flight* 47). As said by Whitehouse slave Moe, Robin seems to be "the cleverest of them all" (*Flight* 40) though he cannot prove it. Moe says, "it seems to me that you're pretty simple. I don't know what gives me the notion that you are more complex than you seem" (*Flight* 39). Unlike 40s and Stray Leechfield, Robin wears the attire of Uncle Tom and maneuvers his trick playing upon the stereotypes given to blacks by the whites. But

Robin is very different and clever enough to convince the white intellectuals, who believed in Samuel Cartwright's theory about Negro inferiority in terms of intelligence. While reading out the Swillle's will paper, actually made by Robin himself, the white judge asks Robin a question, "According to science Robin, the Negro doesn't . . . well your brain—it's about the size of a mouse's. This vast undertaking. Are you sure you can handle it? Juggling figures. Filling out forms" (*Flight* 167). Then very cleverly, Robin replies, "I've watched Massa Swille all these many years, your honor. Watching such a great genius—a one-in-a-million genius like Massa Swille—is like going to Harvard and Yale at the same time and Princeton on weekends. My brains has grown, Judge. My brains has grown watching Massa Swille all these years" (*Flight* 167). However, the trickster quality of these characters does not emerge just from African American heritage.

Uncle Robin's name signifies upon the character Robin from John W. Page's 1953 pro-slavery novel *Uncle Robin in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston*. On the other, his name also connotes European folk and historical figures like benevolent Robin Good Fellow and Robin Hood. More significantly, Native American mythology regards Robin as the cultural hero created by Raven to please the people with its whistling song (Swanton 85). According to the myth, Robin got its red breast by fanning flames of a campfire to save Native American man and a boy (Cooke 24). In this novel, too, Raven Quickskill is going to recreate Robin's life by writing Robin's biography. Thus, Reed's recourse to trickster character does not confine itself to only African American heritage.

Swille's trusted bookkeeper Raven Quickskill's character also transcends that singular feature. Like Uncle Robin, he uses the trick of writing or literacy as tool to devise his way to freedom un/like Douglass. His poem "Flight to Canada" gave him fame and money for the expenses to freedom, but it also created access for Swille's agents to trace his whereabouts. Regarding his name, Robert Elliot Fox writes, "Raven is synonym for black, but the raven

also figures significantly in various Native American myths—especially those of the Tlingit people of Alaska—underscoring Reed's concern with multiculturalism" (342). Fox adds, though Raven reminds us of Poe's poem "Raven" and its theme of ontic denial, his poem serves the theme of denial to "slavery and all that is anti-life" (342-343). Bird imagery refers to Charlie Parker, nicknamed as Bird or Yardbird, "one of the prime exemplars of neohoodooism" for Reed (Fox 343). Quickskill's affair and involvement with Native American woman Princess Quaw Quaw Tralaralara and his attempt to make her see through her white husband Yankee Jack's plunder of Native American heritage also suggest possibility and necessity of African American solidarity with other minority people like Native Americans to fight the appropriation of their culture by the Whites.

The confluence of the African, Native American, and other culture marks the eclectic NeoHooDoo discourse often lauded by Reed as he said in his poem NeoHooDoo Manifesto: "Neo-Hoodoo is borrowed from Haiti, Africa and South America. / Neo-HooDoo comes in all styles and mood" (qtd. in Schmitz 126). In his interview with John Domini, too, Reed states, "Afro-American . . . implies an international culture. I call it vodoun, "VooDoo", because this is what vodoun does, it mixes many traditions. It may have an African base, but it is adaptable, eclectic. It's able to blend with Christianity, with Native American forms; it is syncretic" (Domini 34). His drawing on multiple cultural repertoires is so inclusive that even the trickster heritage of white literary canon is a matter for Reed's use. Reed actually denies marginalization of literary works of African Americans or any other "ethnic" American culture and literature. Therefore, in another interview with Kevin Bezner he clarifies, "I'm writing out of not only Native American and African American folklore, but also out of Mark Twain, especially Huckleberry Finn, where you have the trickster and the sense of absurd in life. You find that in African folklore. So I'm writing out of that classical American tradition" (Bezner 110). Reed's recourse to or appropriation of multiple as well as multicultural sources

is a strategy of reversal and resistance to White supremacist cooptation to undo the stereotype imposed upon the African Americans.

Thus, creation of slave characters whose name and actions take recourse to African Ameican trickster heritage and beyond enables Reed to craft NeoHooDoo aesthetics, signify upon the genre of slave narratives and romantic notion of freedom of slave, and thereby debunk the stereotype of margin associated with African American writing.

Reed's Neo-HooDoo discourse and its syncretic nature traceable in the formation of characters through the merger of multiple cultures is also manifest in the treatment of temporal dimension in the novel. Using the form of slave narrative, i.e., neo-slave narrative, the novel toggles between the historical phases spanning the time of a century—a fugitive slave of 1860s flies to Canada via jumbo jet of 1960s or 70s. Why does Reed play with temporal dimension? In his interview with Robert Grover, Reed reveals how he got the nonlinear sense of time. One of the reasons Reed plays with the temporal dimension is his reading of the chapter called "Tradition and Contemporary Function" from Maya Darem's *The Divine Horseman*. Referring to this text, in his interview with Robert Gover, Reed says, "I was reading an article about the African sense of time. They don't have linear sense of time. . . . Past, present and future function at the same time" (Gover13).

That is why, Reed mixes the things of technology of post civil rights America with the antebellum American scenario. As mentioned in the opening poem, Quickskill escapes to Canada via jumbo jet (*Flight* 3). Swille is "scheduled to helicopter up to Richmond" (*Flight* 22). Swille uses telephone to call Lee when there was unexpected fire while he was talking with Lincoln at his house (*Flight* 30). Uncle Robin uses the same phone to order supplies for the week (*Flight* 40). Quickskill receives a phone call from Carpenter at Manumit Inn (*Flight* 87). Leechfield has sophisticated automobile with climate-control air conditioning, power-lock doors, six-way power seat, power windows, white-wall seats, door-edge guards, bumper

impact stripes, rear defroster and soft-ray glass; poultry business, and daguerreotype camera to make porn pictures (*Flight* 36, 71). Quickskill and Quaw Quaw watch Lincoln's assassination at Ford Theatre live on TV while they are in intimate situation. Swille orders Mammy Baracuda "to tell them to warm up the chopper for [his] trip" (*Flight* 109). What is the effect of Reed's "creative anachronism" or "conflation of time"?

In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale refers such mixture of materials across the temporal dimension as "creative anachronism" (93). According to McHale, such "Anachronism in material culture is rare even among the postmodernists" (93). However, "exceptions occur" with Reed because in his Fl*ight to Canada*, "twentieth-century technology (telephone, television, automobile, aircraft) is superimposed on nineteenth-century history" (McHale 93). In the same line of thought, Timothy Spaulding adds that, incorporating such temporal incongruities into his novel, "Reed links the impulses behind the American slave system with the ways contemporary mainstream culture appropriates, commodifies, and consumes black identity and African American aesthetic production. The conflation of time allows Reed to draw an explicit connection between the original slave narrators and contemporary black writers" (26).

Reed declares himself as "history bluff" and "[was] always . . . fascinated by it" (Domini 35). However, his fascination lies on the "stuff that established historians left out of their work." Furthermore, his approach to historical past is in tune with *vodoun* in which "the past is contemporary" (Domini 35). In the article "A tolerated Margin of Mess," Sarah Babcock-Abrahams enumerates sixteen general features that a trickster figure is likely to have. The first feature she highlights is that tricksters "exhibit an independence from and an ignoring of temporal and spatial boundaries" (159). The second feature she points focuses on how tricksters "tend to inhabit crossroads, open public places . . . doorways, and thresholds" (159). In Reed's *Flight to Canada*, one of such crossroads is at the temporal level. The play of

past and present that forms a sheer anachronism actually creates temporal crossroad, where Reed the trickster juggles with historical dimension. Reed behaves like one of the Voodoo gods, Papa Ghede, who waits at the crossroads to take souls into the afterlife and back to life. Similary, Reed brings the soul of ante/postbellum past—Douglass, Nat Turner, Lincoln, Stowe, Slavery, Civil War, etc,—into the post Civil Rights era of 1970s and also inserts the materials of the post Civil Rights era into the antebellum past.

Quickskill's question "*Who is to say what is fact and what is fiction?*" (*Flight* 7) obliterates the totalizing tendency of the official history. He adds, "*Strange, history. Complicated, too. It will always be a mystery, history. New disclosures are as bizarre as the most bizarre fantasy*" (*Flight* 8). Such blatant attempt to blur the boundary between history and fiction has two-pronged significance. Firstly, it establishes the discourse of New Historicism. In the introductory chapter of *The New Historicism* edited by himself, Harold Aram Veseer contends, "New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on question of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives" (ix). Secondly, this new historicist boundary breaking and intrusion across the doctrinal demarcations is in consonance with disruptive nature of the trickster. Elizabeth Ammons' terse statement "trickster disrupts" (vii) easily encapsulates the spirit of new historicist discourse. Karl Kerenyi also suggests that features of trickster can be summed up as "the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries" (185).

Obviously, the spirit of disorder and boundary breaking leads to the disrespect for authority, be that historical, political or literary. During the pillow talk with his wife Judy, Uncle Robin comments on the ongoing television broadcast of Emancipation Proclamation. Downing the glass of champagne, Robin blurts, "Won't do us any good. He [Abraham

Lincoln] freed the slaves in the regions of the country he doesn't have control over, and in those he does have control over, the slaves are still slaves. I'll never understand politics." (*Flight* 59). The words of Robin come here as a way to undo the deified image of Abraham Lincoln, who is ever lauded in the pages of history for his great humanitarian contribution in freeing slaves of America. Though the action of freeing the slave took place, the motivation was more of a political tactic to weaken the South than to free the slaves. A quick glance over the mid section of the Emancipation Proclamation easily unpacks the intended tactic. When Lincoln declared the freedom of slaves in the ten states—Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia—he made it clear that several places within these states would not fall under the effect of this state decree. Lincoln declared, "excepted parts are for the present left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued" (Lincoln 619).

Lincoln is ridiculed, insulted, and lectured for refinement by Swille when Lincoln goes to him to ask economic help for the Union. Though it sounds apocryphal, Lincoln's request to Arthur Swille for economic aid for the Union in war and latter's generosity of giving gold sacks on the one hand and lack of enthusiasm in Uncle Robins about the emancipation justifies the conclusion Professor Trudier Harris comes to. Harris contends, "Reed debunks the myth that Lincoln was cut above others or that the mythology surrounding his signing of the Emancipation Proclamation should hold undue sway in the lives of African Americans" (Harris 489). It further replicates the political ambience rife with support and criticism of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was able to garner the almost-entire-support of the people of color in 1964 presidential election owing to the nomination of the pro-slavery figure George B. McClellan from the Democrats. But before McClellan's nomination, Lincoln was heavily criticized by blacks, including *New Orleans Tribune* and Frederick Douglass for his "rigid enforcement of Fugitive Slave Law" (McPherson 302-3). Therefore,

cunningly docile and self-deprecating Robin's lack of excitement hints at the Lincoln's leadership as just the less worse, but not the cherished one.

It is quite ironical that Swille, a typical Southern planter and Lincoln, leader of anti-slavery Northern Union, show interest in each other. Lincoln goes to Swille and asks for economic aid for the war against South and Swille gives him gold as an investment for profit. For Swille, anything or anybody is commodity. Therefore, he even dares to buy Lincoln. On the other, Lincoln's visit to Swille's place is his political intrigue with Southerners. Lincoln quietly listens to the humiliating remarks of Swille in a very docile manner. He even implies that he will not go against Swille's wish. However, Lincoln turns out to be a trickster or player as Reed has suggested in giving the title of the second part of the novel—"Lincoln the Player" (*Flight* 43). Lincoln is not the lone target of Reed's ridicule. The leader of Southern Confederates, Jefferson Davis, is similarly made the butt of satire.

During the Civil War, Jefferson Davis was the Confederate counterpart of the Union leader Abraham Lincoln. A man with greater military than political orientation, Jefferson Davis' leadership could not secure the victory for the Southern Confederates. Reed amplifies satire and mockery used in the portrayal of Lincoln to talk about Davis. Reed writes, "Jefferson Davis is captured, disguised in his wife's hoops, shawl and rainproof coat. Davies' Defenders say it's a lie. Historians still debate it" (*Flight* 142). He adds that for the people like Davis, "It wasn't the idea of winning that appealed to them. It was the idea of being ravished" (*Flight* 142). He associates Davis with South's "decadent" writes Scott, Poe and Tennyson who envisioned the "romantic theme of fair youth slumbering . . . daydreaming . . . [and] struck down" (*Flight* 141-42).

Not only the political figures like Lincoln and Jeff Davis are the target of trickster's disruptive mockery against authority, Quickskill the trickster's equally belligerent sarcasm is launched towards the mainstream critics and literary figures. Quaw Quaw expresses her

disgust about America and appreciates visionary view of high modernist poets and her professors. "This country is violent, just like my Columbia professors said. They said it had no salvation. They said they didn't expect most of us to live our lives in this cacophonous rat trap." She continues, "Ezra Pound was right. 'A half-savage country.' That's what it is, a half-savage country" (*Flight* 104). Her naïve words simply provoke Quickskill to unmask the flipside of the matter. Quickskill replies:

> [Ezra Pound] hardly ever spent time in this 'half-savage country'. . . His mind was always someplace else. That was his problem, his mind was away somewhere in a feudal tower. Eliot, too. 'The Fisher King.' That's Arthurian. How can anybody capture the spirit of this 'half-savage country' if they don't stay here? . . . I don't even see how you can call them Union poets. They hated America. Eliot hated St. Louis, How can someone hate St. Louis? How the fuck can someone hate St. Louis? I mean, W. C. Handy; the Jefferson Arc. They were Royalists." (*Flight* 104)

Quickskill is commenting upon the mainstream American literary figures. He equates them with the nature of Master Swille who is always obsessed with Arthurian legend and Europe and hates America. In the same way, high modernist poets like Eliot and Pound have detached themselves from their specific location. They hated America, but still liked to enjoy the title of being Union poets. It is the fault of the interpreters like that of Quaw Quaw's Columbia professors. Raven provides very insightful definition of poetry, "Poetry is knowing. When I wrote something I knew" (*Flight* 104). Quickskill is echoing Ralph Ellison's counter argument against Hayman at this point. Ellison writes that a literary piece is always related with "living human being, in a specific texture of time, place and circumstance who must respond, make choices, achieve eloquence and create specific works of art"

(Ellison 101). Ignoring the specificity of people and place, neither the interpretation nor creation of a literary piece can be good.

Though Quickskill vociferously attacks Pound and Eliot, the latter also mirror his early infatuation to Canada. Nevertheless, there is a vast difference between these white high modernist authors' choice and Quickskill's compulsion. This parallel situation evokes the spirit of "playing dozens," a cultural phenomenon popular in adolescent African American boys that marks their transition into manhood through the vulgar rejection of effeminizing "tutelage of their mother" (Abrahams 213). Among African American slaves, big momma or mammy has a dominating presence. As Trudier Harris writes, mammies "are more likely than the others to be 'ideal servants,' the mammy figures traditionally identified with southern plantation households. These women usually compromise everything of themselves and of their connection to black community in order to exist in the white world" (qtd. in Wallace-Sanders 16). Because of her special position, mammy has greater privilege and authority among the slaves. She is supposed to have effeminizing control over the black males. Mammy Baracuda is a typical Southern mammy in Reed's novel. She gets special favor from her Master and she is busy all the time giving orders in her Master's palace. To overcome the emasculating and infantilizing tutelage of such mammy, black boys try to assert their masculinity and manhood by scolding each other's momma while playing dozen, which consists sounding, gestures and signifying as its part. At another level, the role of big momma is here taken by mainstream high modernists and biased intellectuals like that of Columbia professors and the naïve Blacks or marginal ones, as represented by Quaw Quaw, who unthinkingly endorse the infantalization, reappropriation and cooptation of the Whites mainstream. Thus "playing dozen"—even retaining its diction of using vulgar words like "fucking"—signifies upon the high modernists and so-called intellectuals as well as own African American discursive trend.

This form of "sounding," i.e. verbal attack, against the sweeping appropriation and cooptation takes place even more conspicuously when Quickskill exposes Harriet Beecher Stowe's intellectual theft and piracy of Josiah Henson's life story to produce one of the foundational American literary pieces. Quickskill out rightly condemns Stowe as "*Naughty*" one in charge of "*robbing*" Josiah Henson's story, his "*gris-gris*" or "*Etheric Double*" (*Flight* 8), and making "enough money on someone else's plot to buy thousands of silk dresses beautiful home" that resembled "A Virginia Plantation in New England" (*Flight* 9).

Stowe's usurpation of Henson's story without paying him is her attempt of enslaving him at discursive level, a different mode of continuity to Henson's erstwhile physical enslavement. Glenda R. Carpio considers the matter rather harshly as a form of prostitution. For Glinda, "Henson . . . is enslaved physically and reenslaved discursively when Stowe usurps his story, renames him Uncle Tom, and finally resells him on the literary market for her own economic profit and literary posterity. Stowe thus prostitutes Henson's story in a manner remarkably close to Leer's pornographic selling of Stray's body" (137). Reed's own bitter experience of being tried on the court and denied to continue the publication of their *Yardbird Reader* magazine had actually made Reed feel the same. Even in post Civil Rights society, people like Reed and Al Young, keys to the publication of *Yardbird* magazine, felt being enslaved by the court's "Sparrow Decision." In his interview, Reed expresses his bitter feeling thus: "It [court decision] says if you get into a corporation with the people who are incompetent, they can take your books . . . money, . . . energy, . . . effort—and that's a slavery" (Nazareth 127). Giving the example of Henson to Stray that has strong resemblance of his own life experience, Reed shows how the legacy of slavery and cooptation has been going on in various guises with, more or less, same underlying pattern of appropriation. By "corporation," reed means not only the peculiar institution of slavery, but also the entire American society that operates in the principle of the exploitation of the minors.

By presenting the case of Columbian professors and Stowe's stealing of a black man's story, Reed makes an attempt to provide "another side, another point of view" to debunk the wrong interpretations" of American history (Nazareth 122). Reed says, "We've been lied in this country. One of the reasons of political leadership is so bad is educational system. . . . The treatment of Indians has been distorted; the treatment of blacks has been distorted" (Nazareth 122). For that reason, Reed develops a "new forms of journalism" or fiction writing that "mixes up the fictional with the real" as done by William Wells Brown (Nazareth 119). For Reed temporal crossroad of anachronism and intertextuality allows liberating agency of making such juxtaposition.

It is not only the different eras of time that Reed brings together, he also brings together numerous literary and historical allusions using the style of eclectic intertextuality. These allusions are not just inert signals. For instance, Reed's narrators are vociferously and derogatively critical of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Unmistakably deified figure Abraham Lincoln is the butt of stringent satire. By writing *Flight to Canada* in the style of "neo-slave narratives" that "assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (Rushdy 3), Reed keeps his novel in conversation with the whole gamut of African American slave narratives. Here "conversation", which is borrowed from James Paul Gee, means "themes and topics as they are appropriately discussable within and across Discourse at a particular time in history, across a particular historical period, within a given institution or a set of them, or within a particular society or across several of them (Gee 37). Such conversation is traceable in the intertextual allusions in the novel that ranges from Harriet Beecher Stowe, to Fredrick Douglass to Josiah Henson, to Nat Turner to William Wells Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and so on.

The novel opens with a poem by the key character Raven Quickskill entitled "Flight to Canada." Quickskill writes

> Dear Mass Swille:
>
> What it was?
>
> I have done my Liza Leap
>
> & am safe in the arms
>
> of Canada, . . . (*Flight* 3)

The phrase "Liza Leap" in the third line of this poem evokes the famous scene from chapters seven and eight relating with the escape of a young slave mother Eliza and her son across the surging Ohio River as mentioned in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

> The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it; but she staid there not a moment. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake;—stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing upwards again! Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till, dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank. (86)

Though Quickskill is vociferously critical of Stowe and dares to dub her as "*Naughty Harriet*" (*Flight* 8) in charge of stealing and appropriating the life story of Josiah Henson, in the opening poem, his metonymic reference to Eliza's feat through the phrase "Liza Leap" sounds relatively positive one. For Quickskill, the flight to freedom is no less daunting than that of Liza crossing the Ohio River surging with ice chunks. Further, destination of Liza also parallels the destination of Quickskill. In *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe quotes a Presbyterian clergyman of Ohio: "I know all about that for I got the story from the very man that helped her up the bank. I know it is true, for she is now living in Canada" (22). The way Liza's quantum leap took her to Canada, Quickskill's jumbo-jet flight would take him in the *safe* arms of Canada.

Howsoever the poem assures the safety of Quickskill in Canada as he dreams, this sense of euphoria is undercut by his experience when he reaches Canada. In the first chapter following the poem, Quickskill says, "Little did I know when I wrote the poem "Flight to Canada" that there were so many secrets locked inside its world" (*Flight* 7). After Princess Quaw-Quaw's sensational tightrope walking episode over the Niagara Falls, she and Quickskill were talking over a dinner at Victoria Garden Restaurant. Carpenter, another African American who had come to Canada prior to them in pursuit of freedom, joins them. Quickskill recognizes him and inquires about the bandages on his head. Carpenter replies, "Some mobocrats beat me up . . . Left me unconscious. I was going back to the hotel after being denied this room I wanted to rent" (*Flight* 159). Utterly surprised, Quickskill asks, "In Canada? You were denied a room?" (*Flight* 159). Carpenter further says, "Man, they got a group up here called the Western Guard, Make the Klan look like statesmen. Vigilantes harass fugitive slaves, and the slaves have to send their children to school where their presence is catcalls and harassment. Don't go any farther, especially with her, they beat up Chinamen and Pakistani in the street West Indians they shoot" (*Flight* 160).

Carpenter's experience is not different from the experience of a fugitive slave named Williams from William Wells Brown's 1853 novel *Clotel; Or President's Daughter*. Williams escapes to North with Clotel. Brown writes, "And even the slave who escapes from the Southern plantations, is surprised when he reaches the North, at the amount of and withering influence of this prejudice" (172). In *Clotel*, Williams was ordered out off the first class carriage and forced to ride "on a goods' box in the luggage van" (Brown 172) owing to the Jim Crow. Quite parallel is the situation of Carpenter in the Canada of Reed's novel. Carpenter was not only denied a room he wanted to rent at Victoria Garden Restaurant, but also beaten by the mobocarats and left unconscious. Nevertheless, Brown's novel depicts Canada as fugitive slave friendly. Clotel's daughter Mary's lover George "arrived in Canada,

and took up his abode in the little town of St. Catherine's, and obtained work on the farm of Colonel Street. Here he attended a night-school, and laboured for his employer during the day. . . . Besides doing his best to obtain education for himself, he imparted what he could to those of his fellow-fugitives about him, of whom there were many" (Brown 230).

What Brown regarded as a boon or heaven for a fugitive slave is no more so in *Flight to Canada*. Quickskill recalls the Canada of *Clotel* and asks, "But what about St. Catherine's? William Wells Brown told me that he had gotten a number of slaves across to St. Catherine's, where they found rewarding careers" (*Flight* 160). Then Carpenter shows a photo of St. Catherine and undoes the illusions of Quickskill saying, "Americans own Canada. They just permit Canadians to operate it for them" (*Flight* 161). Carpenter's words disenchant Quickskill. What he envisioned about freedom, equality and even imagined privilege as fugitive slave gets shattered because Canada is no more different from America. What he considered "safe" in the arms of Canada is just another version of Swille's plantation for, like Swille, Canada also exploits and whips the fugitive slaves and other minorities like West Indians, Chinamen and Pakistani. In a very multicultural spirit, Carpenter shows his solidarity with other oppressed minorities. In this way, the euphoric sense of achievement evoked by "Liza Leap" and "safe arms of Canada" is pulverized by the sordid experience of trials and tribulations of racial biasness, torture and brutality. Hence, these references are burlesque reversals. They are not here to reinforce the theme of freedom, rather to poke fun at the shallow rendering of the historical truth in the texts of white author like Stowe as well as black author like Brown.

The allusions proceed further. Third stanza of the poem draws our attention to additional imagery of running slave.

> Traveling in style
>
> Beats craning your neck after

> The North Star and hiding in
> Bushes anytime, Massa
> Besides, your Negro dogs
> Of Hays and Alllen stock can't
> Fly (*Flight* 3-4)

The haunting memory of laceration and the suffering that a runaway slave had to undergo comes with these poetic lines. On the one hand, The North Star reminds the way running-slave used to have sense of space and time while running at night. At this point, the reference takes us to Brown's novel *Clotel* which mentions how the runway slaves were "led by the North Star" (Brown 164) in their way to freedom. On the other hand, it also refers to the nineteenth century abolitionist paper, started by Frederick Douglass in 1848, which kept on being published until 1851 when it merged with the Liberty Paper to be named thereafter as Frederick Douglass' Paper.

Direct reference to Douglass occurs in the novel in another place. "Raven was the first one to write and the first to run away. Master Hugh, the bane of Frederick Douglass, said, "If you give nigger an inch, he will take an ell. If you teach him how to read, he'll want to know how to write. And this accomplished, he'll be running away with himself"" (*Flight* 14). The idea of slave literacy and its devastating consequences for the plantation owner is further reinforced when Swille says to Lincoln,

> And the worst betrayal of all was Raven Quickskill, my trusted bookkeeper. Fooled around with my books, so that every time I'd buy a new slave he'd destroy the invoices and I'd have no record of purchase; he was also writing passes and forging freedom papers. We gave him Literacy, the most powerful thing in the pre-technological pre-post-rational age—and what does he do with it? Uses it like that old Voodoo—that old stuff the slaves mumble about.

> Fetishism and grisly rites, only he doesn't need anything but a pen he has shaped out of cock feathers and chicken claws. Oh, they are bad sables, Mr. Lincoln they are bad sables." (*Flight* 35-36)

This expression of Master Swille shows how the slaves used various tricks to survive and escape the atrocity of the slave master. Here Reed is reworking on the narrative of Frederick Douglass:

> Master Hugh Auld says to his wife about teaching Douglass like this, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* best nigger in the world. Now if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him disconnected and unhappy." (1903)

Allusion to Douglass and his literacy as a tool of freedom and proof of the humanity of the slave is paralleled in the novel in the act of Quickskill and Robin. However, their concern is to use literacy as a trickster's tool. Quickskill as well as Raven use their literacy to not only outsmart and mortally destroy their Master, but also to inherit the latter's property.

Thus, the reference to the white as well as black writing comes in the novel. Whether it is Black or White, intertextual references are imbued with the strong sense of humor and stringent satire imbedded in Reed's strategic repetition. In this connection, it is important to bring the observation made by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. In his 1983 article, ""The Blackness of Blackness": A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey," which reappears in his 1988 book *The Signifying Monkey* in expanded form. Gates writes, "The ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black as simianlike, the Signifying Monkey—he who dwells at

the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever embodying the ambiguities of language—is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, repeating and simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act" (686).

The discursive features of Reed's *Flight to Canada* dovetail the trope of "repetition and revision" as suggested by Gates. In the style of Signifying Monkey, Reed debunks perceived and static Uncle Tom image of blacks and creates just opposite figure like Raven Quickskill that gives continuity to the multivocality of the trickster of African-American heritage with additional tinge from Native American trickster heritage as the name Raven Quickskill suggests.

Furthermore, in the first chapter of the novel, Reed alludes to Edgar Allan Poe. Quickskill says,

> *Why isn't Edgar Allan Poe recognized as the principle biographer of that strange war? Fiction, as you say? Where does fact begin and fiction leave off? Why does the perfectly rational, in its own time, often sound like mumbo-jumbo? Where did it leave off for Poe, prophet of civilization buried alive, where according to witnesses, people were often whipped for no reason. No reason? Will we ever know, since there are so few traces left of the civilization the planters called "the fairest civilization the sun ever shown upon," and the slaves called "Satan's Kingdom." Poe got it all down. Poe says more in a few short stories than all of the volumes by historians.* (*Flight* 10)

In a very new historical manner, Quickskill questions the authenticity of history. In this section of Reed's signifying narrative, we can find the confluence of two references: Poe's short story "Cask of Amontillado" and novel *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. In the story "Cask of Amontillado" Poe's narrator avenges his bullying friend Fortunato by burying the latter alive in the catacomb (Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" 214). That is why,

Quickskill calls Poe a prophet of civilization buried alive. Dark, sadistic atmosphere of Poe's story parallels the lifestyle and ending of Master Swille, who represents the entire antebellum Southern aristocracy. In his 1982 interview with Peter Nazareth, Ishmael Reed confesses that decadent reality of South comes into picture in the works of Poe for he "has a lot of dungeons and torture chambers and incest . . . a society that's rotten to the core" (Nazareth 119). But the sense of thrill lasts no longer when Reed brings Poe into this novel because Reed's parody of Poe "drag[s] the wolf on stage to burlesque the howl" which is supposed to "curdle the blood" (Nazareth 120) of reader in the stories and poems of Poe.

Further sardonic reference goes to Poe's poem "Annabelle Lee" in highlighting Arthur Swille's abominable relation with his deceased sister Vivien. Poe's poem presents a love affair between a boy and Annabelle Lee "In a kingdom by the sea" (Poe, "Annabelle Lee" 441). She dies and the boy's final wish is to die and to be united with his beloved's sepulture by the sea. He says,

> I lie down by the side
> Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
> In her sepulchre there by the sea—
> In her tomb by the side of the sea. (Poe, "Annabelle Lee" 442)

However, this tragic love is signified upon while presenting the necrophilia and incestuous desire of Swille for his late sister Vivien. The will of Swille, dabbled by cunning Robin, makes vulgar mockery of Poe's poem. The will says, "And my final request may sound a little odd to the Yankees who've invaded our bucolic heaven, but I wish to be buried in my sister's sepulcher by the sea, joined in the Kama Sutra position below . . . that we may be joined together in eternal and sweet death" (*Flight* 168-169).

Commenting upon the context of African American satirical novels, Dickinson-Carr Darryl writes, "signifying plays a number of different roles" (29). She focuses on two major

ones: first, the "representations of joking relationship and dialogues between characters that allow for thinly veiled (if veiled at all) critique of issues;" second, the "subtler form of signifying occurs intertextually" (Darryl 29). Regarding the first, Reed's novel maintains sense of humor from the beginning to the end. Likewise, in the case of intertextual signifying *Flight to Canada* far exceeds even Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. To decipher the intertextual signifying, readers need to have due knowledge of African American history, contours of slavery and freedom, slave narratives, black writing as wells as Euro-American white mainstream literary and critical trends.

Thus, the invocation of references is just the instance of "signifying" to use Henry Louis Gates' words. According to Gates, African American writing's one inherent feature is signifying upon its own tradition as well as the Western tradition. Tracing the African American root of signifying, Gates suggests that "the Signifying Monkey exists in the discourse of mythology not primarily as a character in a narrative but rather a vehicle of narration itself. . . . The Afro-American rhetorical strategy of signifying is a rhetorical practice unengaged in information giving. Signifying turns on the play and chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendent signified" (688). Therefore, references to Stowe, Brown, Douglass, Lincoln, Poe, and so on are also chiasmus, a form of signifying. Reed maintains similar tendency even in the disclaimer, epigraph and dedication of the novel.

Mocking or parodying gesture of signifying occurs in the novel form the very disclaimer itself: "This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental" (*Flight*, copyright page). The writer, who has been playing and signifying in every possible ways, does not simply have only legal reason to use such disclaimer. Rather as postmodern writer, Reed is using it to the parodic effect. Giving example of disclaimer in Max Apple's *The Oranging of*

America and Other Stories, Brian McHale argues that such disclaimer "loaded with mimetic pre-conceptions . . . is an obvious target of postmodern parody, so it comes as no surprise to find postmodernist writers prefacing their anti-mimetic works with mock disclaimers" (84). Reed's this novel is also anti-mimetic and it plays "with possibility of transworld identity" (McHale 84) and inserts the realworld figures into the fictional situation not for the sense of realism and universality, but for debunking that.

Another noticeable and illusive thing in this novel is its epigraph. Reed has taken an enigmatic and sinister epigraph, "Evil dogs us," from James Bertolino's poem "Where Do We Go from Here" collected in his 1975 anthology *Making Space for Our Living*. In a very ominous tone, the poem maintains that people are constantly followed by the evil forces of life though they are running harder to create and capture beautiful moment "over the hills" (Bertolino, n. pag.). In the same manner, Quickskill and other slave characters are constantly haunted and dogged by the evils of slavery in different forms, whether they realize it or not, even after their escape. At another but parallel level, African American writing has also been dogged by the evils of mainstream appropriation, cooptation, and lingering inertia of Uncle-Tom-syndrome and romanticized notion of traditional slave narrators. Reed's signifying NeoHooDoo discourse in *Flight to Canada* is an attempt to undo that.

Following the mocking disclaimer, Reed makes strange dedication in *Flight to Canada*. He does not dedicate it to any relative, friend or ideal person, rather to a fictional or mythical character form Leslie Marmon Silko's eponymous prose poem "The Skeleton Fixer's Story." As mentioned in the poem, there is the Old Man Badger, a.k.a. the Skeleton Fixer, who travels from place to place searching for skeleton bones, "words like bones" (Silko 200), and rekindles life in them. He is collecting Old Coyote Woman's bones with great care because he knows "things don't die— / they fall to pieces maybe, / get scattered and or separate" (Silko 201). He breathes life into the bones collected and then Old Coyote Woman

jumps up and runs off without thanking him. "But he never has stopped fixing / the poor scattered bones he finds" (Silko 202). This reference may sound senseless as Reed's novel is so much centrifugal or scattering in its signifying gesture in countless direction. Nevertheless, when we look at Reed's Neo-HooDoo aesthetics and sheer intertextuality bound by anachronism and signifying grammar, we can see that Reed, like Skeleton Fixer, is putting together the scattered bones of words, images, and figures across literary, cultural and historical domain infusing them with new meaning and color. Skelton Fixer keeps on collecting and giving life to bones. Reed-the-Fixer also keeps on putting together diverse allusions "with care," with sense of humor added, producing literary works like *Flight to Canada* whatever the consequences are. Reed's protagonist Quickskill also does the same thing in the novel, though his writing sometimes puts him in trouble. In addition, this dedication to the figure from the Native American literary source is Reed's one way of collecting bones/words. Thus, the Skeleton Fixer underlies Reed's style in the novel.

Quickskill's view about writing and its use trespasses the traditionally observed generic boundary and shades more light on Reeds' discursive strategy. "While others had their tarot cards, their ouija boards, their I-Ching, their cowrie shells, he had his 'writings.' They were his bows and arrows. He was too much against slavery that he had begun to include prose and poetry in the same book, so that there would be no arbitrary boundaries between them" (*Flight* 88). Quickskill's merger of poetry and prose breaks the traditional generic boundary. But mentioning of this fact is interpretation of the writing process—a form of metafiction. Quickskill parallels Reed the novelist's technique of inserting poetry in the fictional narrative. Further, writing has magical quality for Quickskill. It applies to Reed too. For Quickskill, "His writing was his HooDoo. Others had their way of HooDoo, but his was his writing. It fascinated him, it possessed him; his typewriter was his drum he danced to" (*Flight* 89). Just like the trickster god Esu bridges the world here and hereafter, Quickskill

and Reed use writing to fuse different genres (breaching the boundaries), temporal dimension and eclectic intertextuality.

Consequently, we arrive to one of the questions we have raised at the beginning—what does it mean to Reed to write such a novel? By writing a novel like *Flight to Canada* in which he creates slave characters drawing on African-American trickster heritage and beyond, uses creative anachronism, blurs the generic boundaries, and brings eclectic intertexts, Reed formulates his Neo-HooDoo esthetics. Here this esthetics also registers signifying trickster discourse, which includes Reed's satire, reversals, soundings, etc. all aimed to destroy the stagnant, sterile, and hypocritical images imposed upon the society. Reed uses his writing for that purpose. In fact, like a signifying trickster, Reed is "giving . . . signifying looks" (*Flight* 148) in multiple directions and stands out as a trickster author, who is not only critical of hegemonic white mainstream culture but also of the discrepancies of own African-American culture.

Chapter 2

Erdrich's Liminal Tricksters in *Tracks*

Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks* recounts the incidents that have grave consequences for the Native Americans, especially the Anishinabe (also known as Ojibway or Chippewa) tribe in fictional place Matchimanito, which resembles North Dakota, spanning the time between 1912 and 1924. In a very Faulknerian fashion (Rainwater, "Louis Erdrich's Storied Universe" 273), the story is narrated by two characters Nanapush and Pauline Puyat, who have completely opposing viewpoints. Full blooded but ageing Nanapush and Young Fleur align themselves to protecting the Anishinabe culture and land. Whereas, mixed-blooded Pauline is in the track of converting herself and the Native Americans into Christians. In his attempt to convince his granddaughter, Lulu, from marrying Morrisey and justify her mother Fleur's way to desert her, Nanapush narrates the troublesome past of the community in general and Kashpaw and Pillager families in particular. This chapter focuses on the following questions: What does the transitional setting of the novel imply? How do the main characters behave in this period full of stress and loss? What cultural options do they opt for their survival under duress?

In his narratives, Nanapush talks about treaty and government papers mentioning their no specific names. In the first chapter, he says, "we signed the treaty and then a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers, what descended from the north in 1912 seemed impossible" (*Tracks* 1). He adds, "I refused to sign the settlement papers that would take our woods and lake" (*Tracks* 2). Once we contextualize the novel in Native American history, it becomes clear that the fateful treaty and government paper Nanapush repeatedly refers is Dawes Allotment Act 1887. Giving historical background for Erdrich's novels, Lorena Laura Stookey mentions that the Allotment Act "was specifically designed to encourage Native Americans to abandon their traditional hunting and gathering practice in

favor of finding ways to use their land for profitable enterprises" (72). Originally, the Act "provided that Native Americans needed to pay no property taxes during an initial twenty-five-year trust period. *Track*'s opening scene set in 1912, marks the end of that period of grace" (Stookey 72).

With the end of that quarter-century period of grace, Native Americans were in problem and most of them lost their land in desperation. As the novel mentions, the adverse climate, lack of food and epidemic consumption coincide the problem the Allotment Act poses. As Nanapush puts,

> Starvation makes fools of anyone. In the past, some had sold their allotment land for one hundred poundweight of flour. Others, who were desperate to hold on, now urged that we get together and buy back our land, or at least pay a tax and refuse the lumbering money that would sweep the marks of our boundaries off the map like a pattern of straws. Many were determined not to allow the hired surveyors, or even our own people, to enter the deepest bush. They spoke of the guides Hat and Many Women, now dead, who had taken the government pay. (*Tracks* 8)

Nanpus's words depict the various attempts of Native Americans to survive the nature and government induced calamities. Some exchange their land with meager amount of food and drinks, some who want to keep their land even take recourse to trick and supernatural beliefs to keep the land grabbing agents at bay.

The time is transitional for the old values and ways of life are no longer effective. There is division among the Native Americans. Contradictory viewpoints of the two narrators also mark that rift. Even the amicable bonds between the families fall apart as they deceive each other in pursuing the means to claim their portion of land. For instance, money collected for the Kashpaw and Pillager land is deceptively put only on the Kashpaw land as "Nector

and mother [Margaret] paid that money down on the Kashpaw allotment" (*Tracks* 270). As Nanapush points out, Anishinabe people's "problem came from living [not the spirits of the dead], from liquor and the dollar bill" and they "stumbled toward the government bait, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step" (*Tracks* 4). In the Ojibwa culture that relies on oral form of expression, only very few of them understood the writing on the papers. Therefore, "Some signed their land away with thumbs and crosses" (*Tracks* 99).

Thus, encountered with encroaching mainstream culture that comes for religious and economic expansion, Anishinabe society is forced to go through the rigmarole of contact zone. To use Victor W. Turner's term, it is the "limnal" period of cultural stress and confusion for the Native Americans. In Turner's words, "The attributes of liminality or liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner, *Ritual Process* 95). He defines the term "liminality" as a destructive as well as creative in-between or transitional phase that an individual, society or a nation undergoes while growing up or observing rituals or in times of revolution or cultural clash. While analyzing the narrativity in relation to the liminality and marginality of Erdrich's novels, Catherine Rainwater talks about *Tracks*, emphasizing the "two narrators' . . . struggle with the liminality in their effort to leave behind early lives in favor of others they have chosen" (Rainwater, "Reading between the Worlds" 405). However, while tracing "the liminality and marginality [that] pervades all of her works" (Catherine, "Reading between the Worlds 406), Catherine does not trace the nexus between liminality and trickster.

Turner also suggests that "Tricksters are clearly liminal personalities (threshold people or edge man)" whose "unaccocmodated nonlogical character issues in various modes

of behavior: destructive, creative, farcical, ironic, energetic, suffering, lecherous, submissive, defiant, but always unpredictable" (Turner, "Myth and Symbols" 580). Further,

> It is true that in certain trickster myth cycles, (especially in North America), the later tales describe the structuring of the trickster's life and activities: he marries, settles down, has children, obeys kinship and affinal norms, etc., but there he resembles the initiand who leaves the liminal scene and is "aggregated" once again to society. The unpredictable liminal *persona* becomes predictable again in terms of the norms and classifications of profane society. The interstructural transition stage is over. Creative chaos has become created cosmos. (Turner, "Myth and Symbols" 580-81).

In Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, the cultural situation is quite liminal for Native Americans in the sense that they are going through a sort of cultural chaos. In such liminal state, the characters of the novel devise their own way of "survivance" to use Gerald Vizenor's terminology that means not just a mere survival but also "an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance" 11). In this process, their options range from mystic-militant resistance, to wholesale assimilation, to strategic adjustment in new situation that dub them into the liminal trickster in various ways. Let us trace how the key characters use their tricks in response to this situation of liminal limbo.

The only character around whom the narratives of both Nanapush and Pauline revolve is Fleur Pillager. Nanapush says that Fleur is the pivotal point and "the funnel of our history" (*Tracks* 178). The image of funnel is very apt not only to suggest the central position of Fleur in the narrative segments of the novel but also to imply the dwindling number of Anishinabe people due to consumption and other various factors that ensued with their encounter with white people. After Moses Pillager, she is the last Pillager to survive and to be rescued by

Nanapush. Fleur devises her own one-man-army sort of mystic and militant resistance to cope with the liminal period of Anishinabe survivance. Initially her ways work out, but later she seems to lose that potency and control over the situation. Moreover, her lonesome and wanderlust nature, her transgressive behavior in terms of gender demarcation, and resilience underscore her trickster personality.

Fleur is seen alone most of the time. Though she has a family with a daughter, except in the intermittent presence of the company, she is alone. Even in the presence of other, she is mostly alone in her ways and action. When the novel opens with the narrative of Nanapush, he gives graphic account of rescuing Fleur from the mouth of death. In his very first description, too, she is alone and suffering from the fatal blow of consumption that had already claimed all her family members. Nanapush recalls the moment, "I flung the door wide. It was eldest daughter, Fluer, about seventeen years old then" (*Tracks* 2). No sooner had she recovered from the consumption at the cabin of Nanapush, Fleur again, "returned to the Matchimanito and stayed there *alone* [my italics] in the cabin that even fire did not want" (*Tracks* 8).

Even Pauline Puyat's narrative confirms Fleur's lonesome nature: "But then after the second return, and after old Nanapush nursed her through the sickness, we knew they were dealing with something much more serious. Alone out there, she went haywire, out of control. She meshed with evil, laughed at the old woman's advice and dressed like a man" (*Tracks* 12). The motif of being alone is very dominant pattern that manifests in the life style of Fleur from the inception to the end of the novel. This lonesome feature coincides with one of the basic features of native-American trickster, be that Wakdugkaga, coyote, etc. Lonesome nature of trickster figure is manifested in mythical or tribal tales as well the literary texts. Erdrich portrays the same tendency even in the portrayal of her trickster character.

Such lonesome nature helps in increasing Fleur's mystic aura. She acts in such a way that people and agents, who come to collect tax or fee of Pillager allotment land, believe that she is a "witch woman" (*Tracks* 162) working with Manitous and Misshepeshu (lake man). They go crazy, gamble with the ghosts, eat roots, and even end their life (*Tracks* 8-9). Pauline's remark hints at the mysterious aura that Fleur generates because of her unusually resilient nature. Fleur's life itself has been oscillating between death and life. It has added additional mysterious aura in her life. Her repeated revival from the jaw of death—be that in sickness, throes of delivery, or suicidal drowning—is no less than a life lived after death. "First time she drowned in the cold and glassy waters of Matchimanito, Fleur Pillager was only a child. Two men saw the boat tip, saw her struggle in the waves" (*Tracks* 10). In this case, Fleur survives, but the two rescuers die later. People think that they died because of Fleur. There is similar another incident.

> The next time she fell in the lake, Fleur Pillager was fifteen years old and no one touched her. She washed on shore, her skin a dull dead grey, but when George Many Women bent to look closer, he saw her chest move. Then her eyes spun open, clear black, agate, and she looked at him. "You take my place," she hissed. . . . Soon after that we noticed Many Women [and guides or agents, who went to collect tax on Fleur's land,] changed. (*Tracks* 11)

Even in her suicidal act, she appears as if she is playing possum. Similarly, at the delivery of her first child Lulu, "they were sure Fleur was dead, she was cold and still after giving birth. But then the baby cried. That, I heard with my own ears. At that sound, they say, Fleur opened her eyes and breathed" (*Tracks* 60).

Constant oscillation between death and life, almost a mediator like role between the realm of death and life endows a liminal personality in Fleur that goes in tune with the features of trickster heritage. Such unusual resilience, despite the sporadic interruption of

death's attack, be that suicidal or accidental, has bestowed the mystery and awe in the personality of Fleur. It has unmistakable link with her family heritage and the place on Matchimanito lake, where lies her cabin that incites similar mystic ambience. Nanapush describes the location thus: "The water there was surrounded by the highest oaks, by woods inhabited by ghosts and roamed by Pillagers who knew secret ways to cure or kill, until their art deserted them" (*Tracks* 2). Pauline also reinforces, though with contempt for waterman, the mystic ambience that surrounds Fleur. "Men stayed clear of Fleur Pillager after the second drowning. Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the waterman, the monster, wanted her for himself" (*Tracks* 11).

Mystic ambience generated through Fleur's personality and the place around her cabin including the lake turns them into manitou. In *Ojibway Ceremonies*, Basil Johnston suggests that the term *manitou* means "mystery" and it "could be applied to natural settings which had some special atmosphere about them, or to plants, whose powers of growth and healing were mysteries. It could also be used to refer to the men and women who possessed power that could not be truly explained" (30). James B. Jeffries also iterates, "Although it [manitou] has this broad reference, in its common usage Natives reserve the term for those who are especially powerful" (483). In this sense, Fleur and her place on Matchimanito lake also stand out as *manitou*, for both incite mystery.

Fleur's lonesome nature, unusual resilience, and mystical nature cumulatively work to forge her character that goes beyond the conventional gender role endorsed by the society. In a way, she is contradiction personified, just like a mythological trickster figure. Fleur's way of going haywire messing with waterman, laughing at the old woman's advice and dressing like a man (*Tracks* 12), shows a disregard for typical gender pattern. According to Linda S. Walts, the author of *Encyclopedia of American Folklore*, "Trickster can defy, defeat the host society's standards of common sense and right conduct. In so doing, they capture the interest

of audiences satisfied by the inversions, power plays, and wit of such tales of contest" (390). Fleur also retains the defying nature of trickster through her daunting, dashing and domineering ways.

Fleur resists and transgresses conventional gender roles through her robust *male-like* behavior. Her involvement in the card game with males at Argus when she goes there to earn money for her land is a matter of shock for everyone. Pauline says, "Women didn't usually play with men, so the evening that Fleur drew a chair to the men's table, there was a shock of surprise" (*Tracks* 18). Fleur not only plays with her fellow male workers at the meat shop, but also tricks them out by winning "one dollar [each day], no more no less" (*Tracks* 21). Undermining Fleur's skill at card game, Tor, one of the male players, makes a very humiliating remark about Fleur, "Well, we know one thing . . . the squaw can't bluff" (*Tracks* 20).

Tor's snappy remark encapsulates the gross patriarchal mind setup that sees woman never up to the mark with men. First, the underlying assumption of the remark is that, as a woman, Fleur cannot be able to show confidence to mislead others, especially males. Second, the term "squaw" is heavily gender-loaded word. It refers to North American woman, especially wife. For these men, Fleur is no more than a woman, an inferior biological being. Her winning of their money is unbearable to them, not just because they lost and she walked off with their hard-earned money, but because they lost it to a "squaw." Troubled thus, to change the pattern of her play, the men changed the amount of ante in the game. But beyond their expectation, finally, she won all the money. When she goes out with the money, "they drank, steeped in the whisky's fire, and planned with their eyes things they couldn't say aloud" (*Tracks* 21). It is their plan to attack Fleur physically, i.e. to put it bluntly, to rape her. It is their macho mentality to consider a woman not more than a submissive creature and flesh. When they found one not confirming to their expectation, then they go ahead to tame

her. These three men unite and ravish her brutally. The act is implied in the narrative of Pauline: "The men saw, yelled, and chased her at a dead run to the smoke house. . . . That is when I should have gone to Fleur . . . those yells from Russell, Fleur's hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language and our names repeated over and over among other words" (*Tracks* 26). Thus, using their ultimate male coercive means, they try to tame or discipline Fleur's defying nature.

At this juncture, the violent rape of Fleur presumably implies that her attempt to transgress traditional gender role is permanently curbed. But it is not quite so. Subsequent to the raping event, Pauline describes, a huge tornado that causes devastation in Argus. In this incident, the rapists happened to be locked into the meat-preserving locker and two among the three are found dead. Only one survived but his limbs had to be amputated for good. Though Pauline mentions it as the act of mysterious tornado, it is not difficult for the readers to make connection with previous rape and the death of these rapists. Their death looks like the after effects of their attack upon Fleur. It is just like the case with Agents and George Many Woman. Much later, Pauline reveals that it was not Fleur but herself, who shuts the locker. Still, people and readers find that "fair-minded disaster" that causes extreme damage to the Kozka's Meats (*Tracks* 29) seems to be the result of the Fleur's witchery through her invocation of wind Manitou.

In the liminal frame of cultural encounter, Fleur takes recourse to the traditional ways of inflicting fear and intimidation that comes down to her form Pillager heritage of bear clan. Pauline says

> Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through

> the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person. (*Tracks* 31)

Not only at this observation of Pauline, throughout the novel, there is a plethora of animal imagery while describing Fleur. For instance, while rescuing Fleur form consumption, Nanapus finds that "she was wild as filthy wolf, a big bony girl whose sudden bursts of strength and snarling cries terrified the listening Pukwan (*Tracks* 3). Nanapush's graphic description about Fleur is not out of contempt for he was there to save her life. What could be the reason behind the use of such animal imagery to describe Fleur? Before addressing this question, let us see how another narrator Pauline Puyat perceives her. In her first narrative section, Pauline describes Fleur. Though Pauline is notorious for lying, owing to her family line, her perception of Fleur sheds some light to understand Fleur's character. Pauline says, "Some say she kept the finger of a child in her pocket and a power of unborn rabbits in a leather thong around her neck. She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out hunting not even in her own body . . . By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough" (*Tracks* 12).

In both narrators' description, we can find the act of transferring the attributes of animal on Fleur. No doubt, there is a huge gap in the tone of the two narrators. Nanapush is referring to the wildness of filthy wolf to emphasize agility, eruptive force and awesomeness of Fleur even in mortally ill condition. Nanapush is referring to the skills specific to animal that Native Americans try to emulate and hone for survival. In Ojibwa tradition, they believe that different animals have different skills from Kitche Manitou. "The bear received strength . . . wolf fidelity; the fox resourcefulness; the owl care" (Johnston, "The Nature of Animals" 46-47). Thus, form Anishinabe or Ojibway perspective, using the strength and courage of bear and perseverance and guardianship of wolf (Johnston, "The Nature of Animals" 53), Fleur is determined to safeguard her land and cultural heritage. But Pauline's description

dubs Fleur into a superstitious nocturnal medicine woman. Nonetheless, such descriptions, whether to elevate Fleur's strength and ingenuity or to reduce her to a superstitious woman, expose Fleur's half-human and half-animal dimension, at least at the metaphorical level. This human animal duality yoked together or subsumed in the character of Fleur also reflects the feature of tricksters who are mostly depicted as half-animal and half-human figure in Native American folk tales. Thus, Fleur's human-animal merger indicates her liminal personality of the trickster.

On the other, portrayal of Fleur as bear woman endows her great power of healing and "renewal and seasonal change" (Lynch 10-11). Still her inability to redeem her land due to the deception of Nector and Margaret in the novel shows another side of the bear which is often depicted in trickster tales, as "slow thinking, gullible creature that inevitably loses to the trickster animal such as coyote" (Lynch 11). Nevertheless, in his book *Reading the Fire: The Traditional Indian Literatures of America*, Jarold Ramsay points out that "the partial animality of the Trickster expresses itself in his [or her] basic intolerance of domesticity in any form: he [or she] is like one of his [or her] animal totems, essentially a self-reliant lover, a potentially disruptive outsider in his [or her] appetites and capacities even when he [or she] is temporarily domiciled" (Ramsey 32).

Thus, Fleur's "raw power" (*Tracks* 7) accompanied with some traces of trickery is not sufficient to retain her land. That is why, she has to disappear from her place landless and homeless. The reason her ways do not work well is her complete reliance on the old ways. She communicates comfortably with the things of past, but is not conversant with the things of present. She uses old ways to fight the new enemies. To some extent, she succeeds. Agent, Jean Hat, George Many Woman, White men in Argus, Morrissey, Lazaree are the ones put off by her ways. But her threat does not completely dissuade the Morrisseys and Lumber Company to come over and claim her land. That is why she has to pony up her place and

leave. However, if we look at the pattern of her actions, we can be optimistic that she will be back with regained strength and new ways. Its hint is already felt when she sends her daughter Lulu to boarding school before she carries out her final act of partially sawing the trees surrounding her cabin and summoning the wind to fell the suspended trees creating huge loss for lumber company.

Though her intention is to stick to the land, which has been inhabited by her family, to safeguard it, she happens to be in constant move, wanderlust indeed. She moves to Nanapush, then to Matchimanito, then to Argus, then to Matchimanito, and finally disappears from the scene as the land is lost to lumber companies. Whatever is the reason, the circumstances and deceit of own kind make her a person on the move. At this point, comes a picture of Fleur that befits another facade of trickster. Despite her strength, mystic ambience to terrorize other, ability to keep males under her domineering and emasculating shadow, she is, after all, unable hold on to her beloved Matchimanito land. Here a trickster is tricked. She goes away or disappears from the scene to reappear in other sequels of Erdrich's novel. Nevertheless, this failure marks a liminal transition. She is forced to take another way, i.e. to send Lulu to government school. It is implied that Fleur, as Nanapush also does, has been able to see through the inefficiency of old ways, medicine and maneuvers in the face of lumber companies and government papers. Though she goes away, she seems to have realized the point Nanapush has actually come into in using his skill of reading and writing to lead his people and on the way of regaining the lost allotments.

Thus, in the time of crisis, Fleur acts as a door, a liminal metaphor, but that door only opens to the past or old ways. Therefore, she fails at the end of this novel despite the great loss she causes to the invaders. However, the failure of her tricks does not completely erase her significance because she is the funnel of tribal history as well as narrative hinge for both pro-tribal like Nanapush and pro-assimilationist like Pauline.

Pauline Puyat is antithesis to Fleur in many respects. Fleur sticks to her native land and culture but Pauline, contrarily, deals with liminal confusion of the time by deserting her culture and assimilating in the encroaching white culture and Christian religion. Pauline exhibits liminal and trickster features in terms of her mixed-blood background, inveterate lying nature, self perception as a scavenging crow and a new door different from Fleur, unusual mortification yet retaining unchristian qualities (of gluttony, jealousy, revengefulness, perception of her new god as weak and liar). Despite her contradictory features, by the end of her portion of narrative, i.e. chapter 8, she is no longer in liminal limbo because she becomes an initiand who aggregates into the Church as a nun and leaves the reservation to be a Christian teacher of children in the white city Argus.

Puyats "were mixed-bloods, skinners, in the clan for which the name was lost" (*Tracks* 14). While going away to white town Argus in time of epidemic consumption, Pauline told her father that she might not come back for she wanted to be like her "mother who showed half-white" and even more she wanted to be like her "grandfather, pure Canadian" (*Tracks* 14). For Pauline, "to hang back was to perish" (*Tracks* 14). She even would not speak native language, rather use English and see through the eyes of outsider (*Tracks* 14). Like Nanapush and Fleur, "Pauline was the only trace of those [skinners] who died and scattered (*Tracks* 38). As Nanapush remembers, "Pauline was different from the Puyats, who were always uncertain people, shy, never leaders in our dances and cures. She was, to my mind, an unknown mixture of ingredients, like, pale bannock that sagged and hardened. We never knew what to call her, or where she fit or how to think when she was around" (*Tracks* 38-39). This confusion about Pauline in the part of Nanapush is due to her mixed-blood, which is also a hallmark of liminal quality that always obliterates any attempt of final definition or categorization. So does a trickster.

Pauline's overall pattern of her behavior depicts that she is an emissary of cultural suicide from Native American perspective. Her mission is to metamorphose Native American culture into Christian. Her justification for joining the convent is: "I have no family . . . I am alone and have no land. Where else would I go but to the nuns?" (*Tracks* 142). Before the epidemic consumption, Pauline flees to Argus to be white nun. After the fateful tornado and death of three men in Argus, she returns to reservation and is taken in by Bernadette Morrissey as her assistance in her mission to look after the dying people (*Tracks* 54). Her involvement in helping the dying people also metaphorically suggests her role as a mediator or door that leads to the end of life, i.e. also the end of Anishinabe cultural existence. When Eli brings Pauline to help Fleur in the delivery of the first child, Nanapush's evaluation of her is insightful: "she was useless—good at easing the souls into death, but bad at breathing them to life, afraid of life in fact, afraid of birth, afraid of Fleur Pillager" (*Tracks* 57). No doubt, the person who really murders another person is Pauline. She is the one who locks the freezer that kills two men in Argus, who kills Napoleon, who wants to abort her child form Napoleon to enter the convent. She could have helped in saving Fleur's second baby by fetching the medicine on time. She is not a healing force, rather an annihilating agent.

For Pauline, "It was clear that Indians were not protected by the thing in the lake or by other Manitous who lived in the trees, the bush or spirits of animals that were hunted so scarce they became discouraged and did not mate" (*Tracks* 139). Therefore, she believes, "There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus lockers. Not Fleur Pillager" (*Tracks* 139). The door of traditional Native American spirituality and medicine used by Fleur is no longer an option for Pauline. Her "another door" paves way to complete abandonment of native culture and admission into the white Christian culture. Pauline herself says "Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth" to suggest her white bloodline. But, at the same time, it

also means ineffaceable grip or traces of Native American blood as well as culture upon her. To efface the influence of her traditional upbringing and fully aggregate into the Christian life, she undergoes rigorous and ridiculous mortification. For instance, she wears undergarments form potato sack, shoes on the wrong feet, puts burs in armpits of her dress, screw grass in her stocking and nettles in band, grows nails too long until it ached, does not wash herself, defecates only twice a day, brakes ice with bare fists, and so on. Her rechristening with "fit" name, Leopolda, has sense of violation of frozenness and numbness that comes through the image of fist breaking the ice. Howsoever she denies her Native American side to attain sainthood at nunnery, her unchristian side is equally evident in various ways.

Neophyte Paulien is inveterate liar like a trickster. Fleur says, "Puyat lies" (*Tracks* 38). Nanapush adds, "Because she was unnoticeable, homely . . . Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage" (*Tracks* 39). Nanapush thinks "She was born a liar, and sure to die one. The practice of deception was so constant with her that it got to be a kind of truth" (*Tracks* 53). For her even her new god is "the Author of All Lies" (*Tracks* 158).   Initially, she has left her tribal reservation to be a nun. But comes back only to be jealous of Fleur and lust for Eli. Though she hates her tribal way, she uses the same—buys love medicine from Moses Pillager to bewitch Eli into having sexual liaison with Sophie Morrissey—to avenge the jilted feeling and to create conflict between families. Even more, her voyeurism enflames her bodily pleasure and she finds Napoleon as a solution. Another contradiction, she feels that her haunting guilt of murdering three white men in Argus has been lifted by her murder of Napoleon. After Argus mishap, she says, "I was cleft down the middle by my sin of those days in Argus, scored like a lightning struck a tree" (*Tracks* 195). But she overcomes such sense of guilt when she mistakenly murders Napoleon: "I had committed no sin. There was no guilt in this matter, no fault. How could I have known what

body the devil would assume" (*Tracks* 203). Further, Pauline-the-neophyte compares herself with Christ as well as Moses Pillager. When she rolls in slough mud coating her entire body to hide her nudity after murdering Napoleon, she feels that she is "dressed in earth like Christ, in furs like Moses Pillager, draped in snow or simple air" (*Tracks* 203). Such oscillatory and contradictory features underscore her liminal and trickster character.

Though her mission is to be Christian, as a trickster she is ready to use even her tribal ways at her disposal if that befits her purpose. Her self-perception as crow Manitou of Anishinabe/Ojibway heritage is another example. According to Ojibwa folklore, Andek/crow was without purpose when the Great Spirit crated the flyers of creation. The crow moves here and there in pursuit of purpose. Finally, he turns out to be a good adviser for the animals in trouble. The story depicts crow as "our traveling companion . . . always reminding us that with work and dedication the purpose you look for is always ahead of you" ("An Ojibway Legend-Andek" 10). Similarly, Basil Johsnston, in the forth chapter "The Nature of Animal" of *Ojibway Heritage*, writes that by keeping animals captive for some time and defeating Anishnabeg people who come to pursue the animals, crows bring animals and men into negotiation and restore the honor and respect of animals in life and in death (56-57). But Pauline's self-perception as crow simply distorts the tribal notion of benign crow Manitou. Commenting upon Pauline's habit of living off their scraps, Nanapush says, "She was the crow of the reservation" (*Tracks* 54). While watching Mary Pepewas, who was taking the last gasp of life, Pauline feels that "hand over hand, I could have drawn her back to shore, but I saw very clearly that she wanted to be gone. I understood this. That is why I put my fingers in the air between us, and I cut where the rope was frayed" (*Tracks* 68). Pauline is just opposite of Nanapush who is trying to repair the ends of fraying rope. After Mary's death, she perceives herself, "I knew that after I circled, studied, saw all, I touched down on my favorite branch and tucked my head beneath the shelter of my wing. . . . After that, although I kept the

knowledge close, I knew I was different. I had a merciful scavenger's heart" (*Tracks* 68-69). In Ojibway culture, crow is for life, but Pauline-the-crow is for death. She scavenges on not only the scraps of food, but also the souls of the deceased natives in order to "fetch" their souls to her new Lord (*Tracks* 140). Such insertion of Native American images into Christian sphere distorts both of her origin and target culture. It just intensifies her contradictory personality.

Anything that is associated with Native American is evil for Pauline. All the Manitous and Lake Man Misshepeshu are the various guises of Satan for her. Later, she becomes so much fanatic about her new religion that she regards Fleur as an agent of Misshepeshu and Nanapus as a mocking and tormenting pagan fiend (*Tracks* 143-144) "informed by Satan" and "sent to [her] to test [her] resolve" (*Tracks* 150) . Considering herself as an agent of Christ, who is weak tame newcomer and needs help, Pauline finds herself in competition with Lake Monster's agent Fleur. Pauline's Christ is "lamblike and meek" (*Tracks* 195), but she is "His champion and His savior" who "was armored . . . with the cunning of serpents . . . with skill to win forgiveness . . . cleft down in the middle by [her] sin of those days in Argus" (*Tracks* 195).

In chapter 8, last of her narrative segments, Pauline ventures to Matchimanito lake for the last time to hunt the enemy of Christ, Misshepeshu. She "would repudiate her former life" completely abandoning "this lost tribe of Israel" (*Tracks* 196). Then she "would be free of Nanapush, the smooth-tongued artificer" (*Tracks* 196). She goes into the lake stealing the leaky boat of Nanapus. Many people watch her from the shore with apprehension for the boat is going to sink. While sinking in the lake, she sees Fleur in "Her heavy black clothes, her shawl, the way she held herself so rigid, suggested a door into blackness" (*Tracks* 200). As Peauline stood before Fleur's sight, Pauline thinks, Fleur turned slowly and the hinges creek. Pauline regards Fleur as such a hinge and door that leads to darkness and evil. However, it is

clear that, at the discursive level, Fleur emerges as a narrative hinge or fulcrum. Somehow, Pauline reaches the shore only to confront the monster in the guise of a man. She strangles him to death with rosary (*Tracks* 201). But it turns out to be Napoleon Morrissey who had impregnated her. Without feeling any guilt, she drags his dead body in a bush behind Fleur's cabin. However, people think it is also the work of Fleur.

Pauline is assured that her deed has "tamed the monster that night, sent [it] to the bottom of the lake and chained [it] there" (*Tracks* 204). She considers arrival of surveyor's crew to Matchimanito and measurement of the land as a proof of her deed and the work of Christ. She further eagerly anticipates that

> The land will be sold and divided. Fleur's cabin will tumble into the ground and be covered by leaves. The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers' low voices, or the vision clear to see the sill shadows. The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, return from the government school blinded and deafened [to native ways of life]. (*Tracks* 204-205)

Such complete annihilation of native heritage and possibility of its renewal is the long cherished wish of Pauline who is waiting for the "turning, a gathering, another door" (*Tracks* 139). Things happen as Pauline expects. Pauline's Journey comes to a full circle when she is "assigned to teach arithmetic at St. Catherine's school in Argus" (*Tracks* 205). Even before the consumption of 1913, when she had left reservation for Argus, she had thought she would not return to the reservation. But circumstances brought her back. Again, she goes to Argus, but as a transformed one. Though she does not like children, she hopes to overcome that habit and is determined in her mission to mold them into her own image. She is also given a new name, Leopolda. Her so-called "fit" name cracks in her ears like a fist through ice (*Tracks*

205). The renaming marks her complete transformation and assimilation into the white Christian culture.

Compared to Fleur, Pauline appears to be successful in her mission. But what has she achieved by negating her original self and space? Her engagement in displeasing job, crackling icy coldness that comes with her so-called fit new name, and her ambivalence towards native Manitous belie her success and satisfaction. Therefore, Pauline's option of complete assimilation into the encroaching culture as a solution to come out of liminal crisis is not promising one. Fleur and Pauline show trickster features to some extent, but not as much as Nanapush does.

Narrator as well as character Nanapush takes the third alternative way in the time of crisis. Fleur and Pauline exhibit the extreme possibilities a liminal being can go through the liminal period. Both are not suitable options because one is steadfast to the ways that are not effective enough to grapple with the modern enemy, and the other follows wholesale cultural abnegation or, to put brusquely, a cultural suicide. Both of them exhibit trickster qualities a liminal being develops, but that is not enough for the meaningful survival. In this connection, to rule out the sense of loss and defeat or "victimry" to use Vizenor's word, Erdrich presents a third and more viable option through the character of Nanapush.

If we take the metaphor of door to refer to these characters, Fleur is such a door that only opens inside the native culture, Pauline is the one that is only suitable for escaping outside the native culture. Thus, both doors do not function well. However, Nanapush is such a door that opens both ways with the ability to safeguard the native space and culture using the techniques of the encroaching culture. Nanapush's role is like that of a door, symbolic liminal zone, that marks the border as well as the connection. In the fifth chapter of the novel, Nanapus recalls, "I took my chair to the window for the fading light and looked at some catalogues and some letters from the land court that had come by mail. A system of post was

still a new and different thing to Indians and I was marked out by the Agent to receive words in envelopes. They were addressed to Mr. Nanapush" (*Tracks* 97). Thus, Nanapush has been elected as the mediator, a door, between the natives and the outsiders.

In addition, Nanapush's name itself evokes the Chippewa trickster figure "known as Nenabush, Nanabozho, Wenebojo, Manabush, Manapus, and other variations" and depicted "as a sly trickster, a foolish bufoon, or a culture-hero." (Bastian and Mitchell 128). Drawing on Ridie Wilson Ghezzi, Bastian and Mitchell add that Nanabush is

> a cultural hero who transformed the world after a great flood, interceded between the gods (or spirits) and mankind, and taught important life skills to the people. As a trickster, however, Nanabush exemplified the type of actions and attitudes to avoid. Thus the narratives of the Nanabush cycle were meant to educate the entire society by illustrating what was moral and what was considered immoral behavior. (Bastian and Mitchell 210-11)

Mythological trickster-transformer role of Manabojo resonates not only in the name Nanapush but also in his behavior. The way Nanabozho transformed the world after a great flood, Erdrich's Nalnapuhs is busy in sustaining and transforming the Anishinabe culture after the devastating disaster that Native American faced due to disease, cold, and encroaching government policies.

Nanapush the trickster as a "champion of possibility . . . epitomize[s] resistance and survival" and also steals, lies, and lusts and in the process shapes and endows the world (Babcock and Cox 95-96). In addition to his name, Nanapush's role as trickster and savior surfaces in the novel at different levels: while saving the life of Moses Pillager and last Pillager, Fleur; while comically avenging the Clarence Morrisery and Lazarre using nonviolent snares for the dignity of Margaret Kashpaw; while guiding Eli in hunting moose beating the drum in telepathic way; while adopting Fleur and secretly giving his family name

to her daughter Lulu; while courting Margaret keeping his legacy of satisfying three wives; while utilizing the skill to read and write to safeguard the native culture thereby opening a door for new transformed way of cultural sruvivance.

Regarding his name, Nanapush recalls how it is associated with trickery, survivance and something irresistible. His father had said, "Nanapush. That's what you'll be called. Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush. Because it has to do with the something a girl can't resist. The first Nanapush stole fire. You steal hearts" (*Tracks* 33). In his recourse to parental authority to convince Lulu, who also bears the same name from him, we can sense the mythological status of Nanapush. The way the Western mythological trickster figure Prometheus took trouble to steal fire for the sake of common people, first Nanapush stole fire for the Native Americans. That ancient humanistic impulse comes down to the novel's character Nanapush as corroborated by his act non-violent snaring of Morrisey to keep the honor of Margaret Kashpaw. Similarly, various methods to gather food, save other's life and land show his skill of survival as a trickster.

Nanapush's act of advising Eli to win and re-win the heart of Fleur resembles the character of Ojibwa mythological trickster and hero Manabozo. Laura Makarius writes that "several men came to ask the hero [Manabozo] to confer them the power to conquer women, luck in hunting, luck in games of chance, or the ability to cure the sick" (Makarius 75). Nanapush also walks in the steps of Manabozo and helps Eli not only to win Fluer but also to hunt the moose in telepathic way in time of food crisis. Further, his irresistible ability to steal the hearts of woman is proved by the fact that he had three wives and he is still courting Margaret Kashpaw in his old age. One does not have to rely only on words of Nanapush to know about his personality. Pauline Puyat's words, though expressed with hatred towards him, also confirm the irresistible and trickster personality of Nanapush. She confesses, "it was easy to imagine he had once been as fine-looking as people said, with a way of satisfying

wives" (*Tracks* 144). Her criticism of Nanapush lays bare her unchristian facade though she is going through the unusual mortification to be just the opposite. She wishes to "be free of Nanapush, the smooth-tongued artificer" (*Tracks* 196). There is reason behind Pauline's contempt for Nanapush. "He had manufactured humiliations, traps. He was the servant of the lake, the arranger of secrets. Not one flare of belief [Christian] lit his mind and he laughed too much, at everything, at me. For that I had no stomach, no forgiveness" (*Tracks* 196-197).

Silver-tongued Nanapush, even more significantly, resembles Erdrich's grandfather. In 1987 interview with Erdrich, Joseph Bruchac mentions that he has noticed very "strong storytelling voice, a voice connected to the past," of her grandfather in her writing (Bruchac 97). Erdrich agrees and adds that her grandfather was funny, charming, interesting and very intelligent (Bruchac 98). She confesses, "I always loved him and when you love someone you try to listen to them. Their voice comes through" (Bruchac 98). No doubt, Erdrich's loving silver-tongued grandfather permeates in the textual parameter of *Tracks* through the smooth narration of Nanapush which is seasoned with trickster's humor and craft. Going to her grandpa is not, for Erdrich, an escape from the present, but "It's running home, not running away from home" (Bruchac 95). Here we come across a problematic question. What does it mean when Erdrich is "running home" by writing the novel like *Tracks*, where her characters are deracinated from their land and home? However, something hopeful can be figured out from this apparent defeat and displacement of Nanapush and Fleur from their home. There is an indication that their running is not an epitome of defeat, rather a symptom of transitional or liminal stage that makes character opt for a new transformed way of life to survive the adverse circumstance and to claim their lost home in changed scenario.

Referring back to the adverse winter of 1912, Nanapush says, "On the reservation, where we were forced close together, the clans dwindled. Our tribe unraveled like a coarse rope, frayed at either end as the old and new among us were taken. My own family was

wiped out one by one leaving only Nanapush" (*Tracks* 2). The image of a coarse rope frayed at either end is apt not only to portray the dwindling of particular tribe, but also to suggest the predicament of the majority of Native American people and culture sandwiched by the nature and government induced calamities—snow, consumption, unfair treaties, lumber companies, government policies. Despite that, sagacious Nanapush tries to put together the remnant of the "frayed rope." For that reason, he considers himself a "vine of a wild grape that tied the timbers and drew them close" (*Tracks* 33). Indeed, unlike Pauline who is committed to "cut where the rope was frayed" (*Tracks* 68), Nanapush acts as a vine to bring together mother and daughter, Kashpaw and Pillager family, and finally the native land and culture through the use of pen and papers of mainstream culture.

Nanapush's transgressive nature is evident in his gender perception too. Majority of Native American tricksters are presented as very potent male. Nevertheless, their manhood is put under erasure as they at times are found to be quite effeminate, with female attributes and sometimes under the shadow of women. Trickster problematizes traditional gender role blurring the conventional male-female demarcation. So does Nanapush. The first one to question Nanapush's manhood is Margaret, who was so furious to know that Nanapush had helped her son Eli to be united with Fleur Pillager. She scorned Nanapush calling him, "Old man [with] two wrinkled berries and a twig" (*Tracks* 48). Though he suggests "A twig can grow," she replies "only in spring" (*Tracks* 48). No doubt, in his spring or his youth, he had "satisfied three wives" (*Tracks* 41), but now he lacks that physical virility. Such exchange of dialogue imbued with vulgar and explicit sexual is also another dimension of trickster character.

Emasculation of Nanapush does not stop here. Further emasculation of his manhood takes place when Clarence Morrisey and Lazrre avenge Eli's act of deflowering Sophie Morrissey by tying both Nanapush and Margaret and balding the latter. Nanapush's tactful

verbal threat, let alone physical strength, could do nothing to save Margaret from humiliation. Nanapush recalls that utterly embarrassing situation in a very lamenting tone: "I could do nothing. It is embarrassing for a man to admit his arms have thinned, his capacities diminished, and may be worse than that, his influence over the young of the tribe is gone for good" (*Tracks* 109). Despite his failure to save her, he feels under the mercy of Margaret because she was kind to him, "never blaming me or mentioning my embarrassment, saving my pride before the boy" (*Tracks* 116). Thus, Nanapush, who was so famous for his crafty way and potency, is now under the mercy of Margaret to insulate his shame.

Further complexity over the conventional gender role of Nanapush is realized in his poignant survey of his own life in which he considers himself a woman.

> Many times in this life, as my children were born, I wondered what it was like to be a woman, able to invent a human from extra materials of her own body. In the terrible times, the evils I do not speak of, when the earth swallowed back all it had given to me to love, I gave birth in loss. I was like a woman in my suffering, but my children were all delivered into death. It was contrary backward, but now I had a chance to put things into proper order. (*Tracks* 167)

The expression of Nanapush is not different form the sentiment of a mother. He felt so when Lulu came to his cabin from Matchimanito with frost bitten feet and almost on the verge of collapsing her life to death. Though he had cunningly given her his family name, he is now going to take the role of a doting mother and reverse the process that death had done to his bygone children.

Such oscillation between two polar opposite zones of gender makes the character of Nanapush "retain something of that duality, namely ambiguous and equivocal character" (Levi-Strauss 441). Here also lies the "trickster's ability to confound established cultural categories such as hero, fool, rogue—even human and animal, male and female—means that

the trickster and his literary manifestations can cause us to question the validity of perspective that places categories in opposition" (Gutwirth150). Such ambiguity is in consonance with the liminal phase of contact zone that the Chippewa people of Turtle Mountain went through in their confrontation with white Christian mainstream Americans.

According to William J. Hynes, the last of the six-fold features a trickster may have is "sacred-lewd bricoleur" (Hynes 42). With reference to Levi-Strauss, Hynes defines bricoleur as a "fix-it person noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution. Because the established definitions or usage of categories previously attached to the tools or materials are suspended for the bricoleur, these items can be put to whatever inventive purpose is necessary" (Hynes 42). Nanpush's use of church materials like Father Damien's piano string and the act of confession at the confession box for sacrilegious purpose endows Nnapush a quality of bricoleur. While trying to find an apt rope to snare Morrissey, Nanapush had encountered a problem. However, like a bricoleur, he comes out with a unique solution.

> I pondered this closely, yet, even so, we might never have found the answer had I not gone to Mass with Margaret in that interval, and grown curious about the workings of Father Damien's pride and joy, the piano in the back of the church, the instrument whose keys he breathed on, polished, then played after services and sometimes alone at night. I had noticed that, when playing, his hands usually stayed near the middle, so Nector and I cut our wires from either end. (*Tracks* 119)

Later, when Nanapush is about to exchange the vows at church though he had already started relation with her, Father Damien asks him to make, at least, a confession. However, this very spiritual act of confessing the guilt or sin provides him an opportunity to make fun of church affairs and to defame Morrisey and Lazaree by making the topic of snaring them public.

About his relation with Margaret, he goes so much in detail that Father has to cut him short and revelation of the theft of piano string makes Father awestricken (*Tracks* 123-124). Another time too, Nanapush uses church for similar purpose. Tribe's policeman Puckwan Junior carries out investigation on Napoleon's death. For this, he starts spying on Nanapush and Margaret. One day Nanapush goes to church with Margaret. As a bricoleur, he uses confession to defame Puckwan. Knowing the presence of Puckwan sidling outside the confession box to eavesdrop his confession, Nanapush speaks aloud revealing Puckwan's autoeroticism (*Tracks* 216). Doing so, Nanapush not only makes people like Clarence Morrissey and Puckwan crestfallen, but also makes fun of church affair by cunningly bringing lewd matter in sacred sphere just like a trickster. Later, it helps him to be the leader of his community by defeating Puckwan. Nanapush seems to commit to the Christian ways by attending the mass and confessing, yet he does not commit to it because he uses the church affair against his enemies including the church itself. Thus, Nanapush exhibits a fundamental trickster agency—he commits to something, yet he does not.

The time of cultural strife or change in case of Anishinabe people is also quite liminal. There is a failure of old ways, failure of Nanapush and Fleur to save their land. Fleur's departure from the scene also marks this failure. However, this failure also paves way for new way, forced though, of survivance in a changed context. Going through this betwixt and between process, the character like Nanapush is ready to forge the new way of life—i.e. he uses his reading and writing skill, that he had had from Jesuit learning and unlearned to be leader of community on the way to retain the lost land and culture and family (of Lulu). Fleur's sending of Lulu to school before she moves away also hints at the necessity of new way for survival. This necessity comes into picture in the mind of characters when they pass through the liminal phase of gray zone of cultural survival.

Nanapush always sides Fleur. Still he notices failure of "old ways" (*Tracks* 177) and reckons that she "had failed too many times" and "staggered beneath the burden of life" (*Tracks* 178). Therefore, she has to move away. However, in such point of crisis of liminal proscenium, a trickster juggles successfully (Babcock and Cox 97). As Franchot Ballinger and Gerald Vizenor put, "standing at the brink between tribal tradition modern colonial America seeing all of its imbalance, they challenge us to dive. The challenge accepted, we discover that the inspiration and power of life are in the world of contraries, the trickster's world" (59). No doubt, Erdrich expresses that inspiration and power through Nanapush. A person with "Jesuit education in the halls of Saint John" (*Tracks* 33), with the experience of being "marked by Agent to receive the words in envelopes" (*Tracks* 97), and with the "reputation as a government interpreter" until anti-government trick is revealed and his job is gone (*Tracks* 100), Nanapush never tried to assimilate in the other culture like Pauline. He denied to give his name to church census (*Tracks* 33), never believed in ink and papers, but believed "land is only thing that lasts life to life" and boasted "Indians are like forests" (*Tracks* 184). Initially, he even does not heed to Father Damien's advice to step forward for the leadership position (*Tracks* 78) because he saw invisible trap in such bureaucratic positions. Such ways cannot save his home and land, let alone Fleur's.

However, he does not disappear the way Fleur does. He lives with Margaret and goes to church, not out of faith but for her company. He comes to the point of accepting Father Damien's advice: "I should have tried to grasp this new way of wielding influence, this method of leading others with a pen and piece of paper" (*Tracks* 209). That he tries and succeeds too. Even in the absence of Fleur, with the help of Margaret and Father Damien, he "wrote letters, learned to send them" (*Tracks* 225). In this process of dealing with papers, he sees the changing destiny of "forest like" Indians into the "pressed trees":

> once the bureaucrats sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians, the papers starts flying, a blizzard of legal forms, a waste of ink by the gallon, a correspondence to which there is no end or reason. That is when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed tress. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match. (*Tracks* 225)

To deal with the problem inflected upon the Indians by the pen and papers, he decides to use the same pen and paper. Therefore, he becomes a bureaucrat himself winning the post of village leader because that "was the only way that I could wade through the letters, the reports, the only place where I could find a ledge to kneel on, to reach through the loophole and draw you home"(*Tracks* 225). Using the same paper and the name he had cunningly given to Fleur's daughter, he is able to take Lulu back from the government school. His act of telling entire portion family and tribal story is to unbrainwash Lulu form the impact of school and correct her view about her mother Fleur. Hence, the character of Nanapush denies the notion of defeat and victimry often associated with Native Americans. Rather, he is champion of survival and resistance—survivance.

Thus, in the time of liminal situation, Fleur and Pauline provide polar opposite and extreme form of reverting to the past and total annihilation of the past. Both options would invite problems. However, Nanapush is the person who is actually the confluence of both polar opposite tendencies, i.e. the true trickster who can juggle between such liminal stress. Underscoring the liminal feature, which is in tune with socio-political ambience the Native Americans were undergoing at that time, Nanapush, Fleur and Pauline exploit the trickster strategy in their own ways to forge survival. Erdrich running home encounters characters running away from home at the cross road, which is her novel *Tracks*. At that crossroad,

author the trickster oscillates and tries to change the whole mode of Native American writing celebrating the Native American trickster heritage. The way the characters are in the process of transformation, Erdrich and her writing help in transforming Native American fiction writing, going beyond the burden of overwhelming defeatism and tragic atmosphere. The case of Fleur and Pauline is the hallmark of defeatism, a stereotype given to the Native Americans. However, Erdrich undoes that through the character of Nanapush the trickster.

At the discursive level, Erdrich's way of presenting the story from two completely different perspectives alternately creates a constant narrative borderline in the novel, as the characters of Pauline and Fleur/Nanapush do. This narrative and perspectival borderline replicates the liminal period resulting from the contact between natives and encroaching forces. Presentation of such opposing views in her novel parallels her discourse with the trickster characters. Thus, Erdrich's role turns out to be a trickster author in this novel. Through her strategy of merging liminal narrative structure and liminal trickster characters and setting, Erdrich is trying to liberate the stereotype of defeatism often imposed upon the Native Americans in their literary representation.

Chapter 3

Kingston's Simian Trickster in *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*

In his "The Most Popular Book in China," Maxine Hong Kingston's contemporary Frank Chin vociferously decries her for conforming "the white fantasy that everything sick and sickening about the white self-image is really Chinese" and thus serving "the white ego" (Chin 28). Chin draws parallel between French-Chinese Smith Mei-jing's autobiography *The Unmanly Warrior* and Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Chin argues that Mei-jing distorts the French history and mythology about Joan of Arc to placate the Chinese readers and does a great disservice to the French history and mythology. Similarly, Chin contends, Kingston also writes about Fa Mulan, a Chinese mythological woman warrior, making an epic scale violation of Chinese and Chinese American "historical facts and legendary heroes" (Chin 27). Even in his earlier 1991 article "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," first anthologized in *The Big Aiiieeeee!* and later in *A Companion to Asian American Studies* (2005), Chin has criticized Kingston and other calling them "the first writers of Asian ancestry" who "so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history" (135).

Despite such attack that comes down to the level of "hate speech," Kinston says, her novel *Tripmaster Monkey* (hereafter referred as *Trip* in in-text citation) is actually "a kind of big love letter" (Blauvelt 81) to Chin. Even the subtitle of the novel *His Fake Book* tends to answer Chin's blame. However, Kingston's goal is not just to have "word war" (Yin 325) with Chin, rather exploit the simian trickster spirit in order to liberate Chinese American identity from the sickening stereotype of the mainstream as well as the separatist tendency of the absolutist like Chin and others. She expresses her revisionist and counterculture tendency through the footloose pacifist protagonist Wittman Ah Sing, who resembles various figures from the Western as well as Eastern literary and mythological repertoire.

Kinston's simian trickster emerges from her novel at least in three ways: signifying upon the seminal literary and mythological sources, denial of any reductive or fixing sort of interpretation (ambiguity/contradiction)—warlike-pacifist, invisible-visible, macho-effeminate personality, disruption personified—, and the trickster discourse that ensues from the former two.

Kingston's protagonist Wittman Ah Sing is also a merger of Eastern or Chinese mythic-cultural figures and 1960s US street—"the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of Monkeys" (*Trip* 33). He is a multivalent mediator who ceaselessly points to or signifies upon the copious allusions form both Eastern/Chinese and Western mythical, literary and cultural repertoire. Therefore, as Helena Grice puts, the profusion of details makes the novel so much "dizzying blend of literary sources" (78) that can be described as allusive as well as illusive (81).

Eastern or Chinese references include four seminal novels of epic stature. Besides these, Kingston also brings into the Hindu reference when she describes the rehearsal activities of Wittman's play, "Hanuman, the white monkey, swings in and out of the windows" (*Trip* 290). Hanuman is Hindu monkey god who is initially mischievous, immensely powerful, exemplar devotee of Lord Rama and also known as crisis redeemer. Hanuman's reference reinforces the simian motif of the Chinese Monkey King—Hanuman as Hindu cousin of Chinese Monkey King. Beside the latterly appearance of Hanuman image, Kingston's more detailed and structurally parallel recourse lies on the four classical Chinese texts: Wu Cheng's *Journey to the West*, Luo Guanzhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong's *Water Margin* (a.k.a. *The Outlaws of the Marsh*), and Cao Xqueqin's *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Kingston's characters in *Tripmaster Monkey*, especially Wittman Ah Sing, resembles key figures from these Chinese texts. Regarding *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Wittman is

modeled on the novel's young protagonist Jia Baoyu who is fond of music and poetry. The way Jia Baoyu is married to one cousin despite the fact that he loves to be with another one, Wittman also marries Tana though he actually wanted Nanci. Similarly, Whittman shares some features of Wu Song (a.k.a. the Pilgrim) from *The Outlaws of the Marsh*. Before he slays a fierce man-eating tiger at Jingyan Ridge, Wu Song is fascinated by the sign by the door of a tavern—"*Three bowls and you can't cross the ridge*" (Nai'an and Guanzhong 220). Out of curiosity, he starts drinking and downs eighteen bowls. Wittman, too, arrives in a hippy party without any prior intention, but to remain sober in the party whole night he just drinks coffee after coffee. Similarly, very overtly, Wittman parallels Guyan Yu from *Romance of Three Kingdoms* and Sun Wokung (Monkey King) from *Journey to the West*.

In addition to the similarity in character formation, Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* follows the discursive pattern of traditional Chinese storytelling already incorporated in these four Chinese classic texts. Each chapter of these texts culminates with direct address to the reader in which the narrator—modern equivalent of this technique of genre consciousness is metafiction—urges the reader to go through the subsequent chapters to know about the further development of the events. We can notice how the first chapters of the each text close.

> If you want to know what success he had in cultivating his conduct, you must listen to the explanation in the next installment. (*Journey to the West* 21)
>
> What calamity was impending is not as yet ascertained, but, reader, listen to the explanation contained in the next chapter. (*Dream of Red Chamber* 25)
>
> Dong Zhuo's fate will unroll in later chapters. *(Romance of Three Kingdoms* 26)
>
> Why? Read our next chapter if you would know. (*Outlaws of the Marsh* 11)

Such attention paid to the listener by the storyteller is now rendered in literary narratives too. Kingston's novel also invariably observes this technique in the each chapters of the novel.

The first chapter of the novel, "Trippers and Askers," wraps up with the narrator's comment as well as the urging for the reader as follows. "Our Wittman is going to work on his play for the rest of the night. If you want to see whether he will get that play up, and how a poor monkey makes a living so he can afford to spend the weekday afternoon drinking coffee and hanging out, go on to the next chapter" (*Trip* 35). So do the other chapters.

Simian motif, for Kingston, is not only available in Chinese classics, but also in the whole milieu of 1960s in America. Kingston's simian figure is not something defunct and lost in the mist of the past, rather it is the product of "the specificity of the literary form" (Ellison 101) of her time and it does not "slight the specific literary form involved" (Ellison 111). In her *MELUS* interview with Marilyn Chin, Kingston says that Monkey spirit is so much mischievous and resilient spirit not just in Chinese literary tradition, but also in 1960s America. She adds, "The reason this is all set in the Sixties, too, is that the monkey was here, in the Sixties. Abby Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg, you know? They were monkey spirits, trying to change the world in costumes and street theater" (Chin, Marilyn 61). Wittman is equally a product of beat or hippy subculture of 1960s America.

In addition, the Western or other references include African American Signifying Monkey (as suggested by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), Walt Wittman, Jack Kerouac, Hollywood movies, etc. Likewise, Kingston's confession of the influence of Mark Twain, Louis Erdrich and Toni Morrison and the like also validates traces of various characters and style from literary predecessors in her novel *Tripmaster Monkey*. Kingston is very much impressed by Twain's attempt of writing Mississippi accent and black accent. She also loved to write about Chinese people with accents. She appreciates the style of Toni Morrison and Louis Erdrich (Ziqung 22). Twain's legacy is evident in Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* not only in her attempt to retain Californian Chinese-American accent, but also, even more prominently, in the creation of trickster protagonist. No wonder Wittman's one of the tendrils grips the

trickster trend of growing Huck Finn and Tom Swear. Further, Wittman shares the African-American heritage of trickster—the Signifying Monkey and its numerous manifestation like that of Invisible Man of Ralph Ellison and Raven Quickskill of Ishmael Reed.

Neither of these two broad areas of references is rendered intact. They are changed and appropriated the way the narrator of the Chinese talk-stories revises and modifies the story each times s/he tells it. With this lack of intactness, the sacred aura of the mythic allusion no longer remains. Therefore, Kinston's protagonist Wittman represents that Simian King who is the fusion of both the East and West: Sun wo King of *Journey to the West* as well as the tripmaster of 1960s American beat/hippy subculture. Therefore, as Wittman succinctly announces, he is "really the present-day USA incarnation of the King of Monkeys" (*Trip* 33). Wittman's simian incarnation does resemble the mythical Monkey King form the novel *Journey to the West*. Helena Grice points that the "frame narrative of *Journey to the West* provides both the skeletal outline of Wittman's play and a useful metaphor for the figure of Wittman himself" (74). She adds, "Wu Chenge's sixteenth-century novel *Hsi Yu Chi/Journey to the West* features as an unusual hero, 'Monkey Sun', a monkey figure hatched from a stone egg and gifted with magical powers by a Taoist master (Grice 74). Heroic Monkey King, no longer bears that mythic heroism and strength when he is adapted and translated into American Monkey King by Kingston. Her simian protagonist not only resembles a sacred tripmaster monkey for the holy monk Tripitaka to India, but also an American tripmaster of 1960s "who suggests safe trips for the people [who could be on acid] and guides them and keeps them from flipping out" (Seshachari 104). Sometimes, Kingston too liked to be "the one who would not take drugs" and be the tripmaster to "make sure they were safe" (Seshachari 104).

Kingston's American edition of Monkey is inflected hugely by the Western or American things. First, his name and egalitarian spirit comes from the quintessential

American poet Walt Whitman. In this connection, James T. F. Tanner makes a case of Whitman's influence "via character analysis of the protagonist (Wittman Ah Sing), study of the allusive chapter titles, and examination of the overall thematic thrust of the book" (Tanner 61). Further, Tanner wants to show how Wittman Ah Sing "has absorbed and internalized the democratic message of American greatest poet" (70). There is no doubt that Tanner's study is well supported and grounded. Nevertheless, he seems to overlook the function of Kingston's strategic repetition as "critical signification," to borrow Henry Louis Gate's words, in the novel. Kingston's aim here is not to make exact replication of any of the sources, rather to signify these sources and endow the liberating trickster agency to her protagonist. Thus, these above myriads of references turn out to be signification, an inevitable feature of trickster trope.

Maxine Hong Kingston's simian trickster, embodied in her protagonist Wittman Ah Sing, poses a Chinese American counterpart to African American Signifying Monkey. For Henry Louis Gates, Signifying Monkey is a character residing in mythologies as well as a trope or "rhetorical strategy" (Gates 688). Gates explains that the "trickster figures . . . are primarily mediators and their mediations tricks" (Gates 687). Kingston, too, through her protagonist, is mediating diverse, ancient as well as contemporary, sources in this novel. Such mediating trickster denies any reductive or fixing sort of interpretation. Kingston's trickster protagonist and narrative bear that feature as both of them oscillate in the series of contradictions like pacifist and warlike, visible and invisible, masculine and effeminate, suicidal footloose and community making bricoleur.

Kingston's act of writing the novel *Tripmaster Monkey* parallels the situation of trickster who is supposed to be "sacred-lewd[/profane] bricoleur" (Hynes 34), a contradiction personified. In the hands of Kingston, Chinese mythology no longer bears the pristine and intact sacred stature. Rather it manifests on the protagonist who is toggling in the liminal

zone of his identity as Chinese American. The mythology evoked has no longer any spiritual aura. Another contradiction is even more evident when Ah Sing is staging a play and arguing against war and violence, i.e. pacifism with mythic references, which celebrate wars and conflicts.

In the party thrown by his newly married friend Lance Kamiyana and the latter's bride Sunny, as mentioned in the chapter 'The Winners of the Party," Wittman grabs the opportunity to present the rehearsal of the his dream play. Just like Gwan Goon, whose role he acts out, Wittman sets down his cup and "takes out a sheaf of manuscript, the text part of his play" (*Trip* 134). Then

> Taking the stance of Gwan Goon the Reader, who read in armor during the battle, who read to enemies, who read loud when no one listened, Wittman Ah Sing read. He held his papers as Gwan Goon held his soft-covered book rolled in his sword hand. His left hand stroked his beard. His intelligent head was turned in a reading me-ay, black eyebrows winging in thought. Whether or not a listener sat with his knee-to-knee, Wittman sat bent-knee kung fu position. The man of action aggressively reads and talks. (*Trip* 134)

Obviously, Kingston here makes referential recourse to the fourteenth century Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that deals with a series of never ending epic-scale wars. Gwan Goon, also named as Gwan Yu, is one of the three heroes—Liu Bei, Gwan Goon and Zhang Fei—who swear in the peach garden behind Zhang Fei's house to assist the state by quelling the yellow-scarfed rebellion led by Zhong Jue, who entitled himself "Wise and Worthy Master" and dreamed of the empire (Guanzhong 9). The three heroes coincidently meet in one inn and knowing that they shared the same pursuit, they take oath of brotherhood.

Wittman resembles Gwan Goon in many ways. His long hair, beard, and body cut, which is larger than the average Chinese people are, remind us of the ancient Warrior Gwan Goon. The warrior, as sketched in *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, "had a huge frame, long beard, vivid face line an apple, deep red lips. He had eyes like a phoenix's and fine bushy eyebrows like silkworms. His whole appearance was dignified and awe-inspiring" (Guanzhong 14). In addition to the physical cut and gesture, Wittman's wandering lonesome life is also similar to that of Gwan Goon. In Guanzhong's novel, after Lui Bei and Zhang Fei's entreaty, Gwan Goon replies, "I am a native of the east side of the river, but I have been fugitive on the waters for some five years, because I slew a ruffian who, since he was wealthy and powerful, was a bully. I have come to join the army here" (Guanzhong 14). Wittman's recitation of the part of Gwan Goon also includes the description that the warrior was "a huge and mighty man" whose "times are bad," condition is like that of "wandering tramp" and had been "a fugitive wandering the roads and rivers" (*Trip* 140). Thus, Wittman's life parallels Gwan Goon's life in many ways.

Significance of the subtext of the *Romance of Three Kingdom*, and even more specifically of the three warrior brothers including Gwan Goon, becomes more evident when Wittman calls for the active resistance to the cultural hegemony evoking the belligerent and never-genuflecting spirit of ancient warriors. In the performance of his dream play in the last section, "One-Man Show," Wittman encourages his people saying, "We are the grand children of Gwan the Warrior" (*Trip* 319). His stress on this ancient martial legacy of his Chinese ancestors is one strategy to come out of the humiliating and sickening impact of racism that has led Chinese-American even to deny their real self and identity. Therefore, he suggests his people not to let racist mainstream "people take the fight out of our spirit and language" (*Trip* 319) of Chinese American people. He wants his people to be able to assert

their self just like the invincible and fearless Gwan Goon and call oneself as "I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I-warrior win the West and the Earth and the universe" (*Trip* 319).

However, this recourse to violent and war-savvy figures and myths do not provide an everlasting and impenetrable veneer to maintain the physical belligerence in the part of Kingston's protagonist. Despite many similarities with the arch-warrior, Wittman bears the fundamental difference. While addressing his people as well enemies, Gwan Goon has his weapon just like an appendage. But, "fool for literature" (*Trip* 128), Wittman's weapon is his manuscript, his pen or his art of literature. In the party, Wittman holds the manuscript paper of his play out, the way Gwan Goon lifts his "moon-carved broadsword" (*Trip* 140). Wittman's pacifist orientation looms large in this difference, an extended chiasmic reversal. Even in this most warlike reference, it becomes evident what Wittman says in the moment preceding the rehearsal scene of three warrior's oath: "I, a pacifist person" (*Trip* 137).

Pacifism is so deeply entrenched in Wittman that he does not just mouth it, rather puts his words into the practice of everyday life. While Wittman the salesman is selling toys at a toy store, there comes a grandma with her grandson and asks for a toy gun for her kid. Against the business and his job ethics, he denies selling the war toys. When the old woman insists and asks him "Are you one of those people against war?" (*Trip* 47), he replies, "Yeah, I'm against war toys. I'm anti-war. I'm looking after your grandkid better than you're going to let him grow up to be a draftee" (*Trip* 47). Himself a draft-dodger, for Wittman, "[t]he only wrong job would be where you have to be cooped up by yourself making some evil item, such as a bomb part and never meet anybody" (*Trip* 46). Here Wittman contradicts his warlike appearance and lonesome nature.

Furthermore, Kingston's Anti-war stance, especially against US involvement in Vietnam, surfaces in the novel in the telephone conversation between Wittman and his mother, Ruby Long Leg. As Wittman is going to stage "A Pear Garden in the West," he

pleads his mother to come with aunties forming the (anti-)War Bond show to participate in his dream play. His mother regrets her past involvement in the "historic War Bonds Rescue China act" (*Trip* 269) because she "wasn't thinking" (*Trip* 270) at that time. Now she is out and out against war: "But now you're draft-age I'm not sending you off to Viet Nam. I'm not helping drop the H-bomb. Don't you think about Viet Nam? What's the matter for you? You're too carefree, like your father. I want you to run for Canada. Go" (*Trip* 270). Wittman assures her, "I do think about Viet-Nam, Ma. I'm against it" (*Trip* 270). Rather he entreats her to forge an act for his play so that the audience can "see through the [ongoing war] propaganda" (*Trip* 270). Whitman adds, "Ma, if you can stir up a war with your dancing, you can stop one, right? Why don't you and the aunties make up an Anti-war Bond show, and see what happens? If it doesn't work, I'll go to Canada" (*Trip* 270). Wittman is draft-dodger but not an escapist. He wants to remain in the US and work against any form of war.

Kingston also had tried to escape the turmoil of pro-Vietnam propaganda of US government and aggressive anti-war protests of students, basically in Berkeley. She had thought of escaping to Japan the way her character Ruby has suggested her son Wittman to go to Canada. Ultimately, she moves just to Hawaii. Though she leaves Berkeley, the war unrest does not leave to haunt her. Thus,

> Unable to escape the war, Kingston and her husband plunged back into their antiwar activities, including counseling veterans who had gone AWOL (absent without leave). She went back to work, teaching English and language arts to high school and adult students. Most importantly, she began to sit down and write about herself, her family, and the Chinese American experience. (Abrams 12)

Results are her semi-autobiographical works *Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, and fictional work *Tripmaster Monkey*. Thus, her engagement with the real-time turmoil remained very productive.

Wittman is a mouthpiece for Kingston to forward her own pacifism. Kingston is mindful of the various erstwhile and ongoing peaceful movements of the 1960s. In the rehearsal of the peach garden oath in the party, the three guys taking the role of the three warriors, the discourse of peace is able to smash the mythic war metaphor as it is imbued with the reference to various peaceful strategies used by different rights or political movements. A chunk of rehearsal dialogue goes this way. When Wittman Goon says, "In war, we will fight side by side," his war promise is overridden by the discourse of peace as his friend Lance the Lui Pei, in response, chimes, "Whenever we find a sit-in, we'll sit. A salt march along the coast? We'll march. A spinning wheel, we'll spin" (*Trip* 144). While rehearsing the play that is full of war and violence, the actors reveal pacifist spirit. Lance's use of words like "sit-in," "salt march" and "spinning wheel" in place of war, suggests that Kingston is mindful of the nonviolent struggle of South Asian leader Mahatma Gandhi against British Raj.

Further, Wittman wants "to save the world from the bomb" (*Trip* 241). He says "No guns. No bombs" because he is "using [his] deepest brains to ban bombs" (*Trip* 143). His nonviolent and antiwar attitude manifests in the novel prior to this pacifist promise. Once he accompanies his woman coworker, Louise, for presentation out of the toy store. In the cab, Wittman knows that "the Navy is sailing home to San Francisco, and Louise and wahines will be at Naval Air Station Alameda to greet them" (*Trip* 56). Then, Wittman asks her, "Can she f]uck the war out of them [i.e., armies]?" Getting angry, she reprimands Wittman, "What did you say? Hey, don't talk dirty. I just date them. That's all" (*Trip* 56). Wittman's apparently whimsical but very thoughtful reply unfolds this way: "As long as nice girls like you think

that men look cute in uniforms, they're going to keep warring and killing" (*Trip* 56). Thus, Wittman looks deep into the everyday behavior of man and woman that might cause or curb the war. His pacifist concern is jut to curb the possibility or continuity of war by any means.

Therefore, whatever references and performance of war take place, they are just the fake ones and intended to avert the real war.

> Our monkey, master of change, staged a fake war, which might very well be displacing some real war. Wittman was learning that one big bang-up show has to be followed up with a second show, a third show, shows until something takes hold. He was defining a community, which will meet every night for a season. Community is not built once-and-for-all; people have to imagine, practice, and recreate it. His community surrounding him, then, we're going to reward and bless Wittman with our listening while he talks to his heart content. Let him get it all out, and we hear what he has to say direct. Blasting and blazing are too wordless. (*Trip* 306)

Who speaks here? No doubt the woman narrator of the novel, who is encouraging, motivating and commenting on our protagonist Wittman. She highlights Wittman's diehard pacifism. She also reveals that he is no longer running away from his own self and people, rather forming a community, which would definitely take a long and sustained participation of the people and their ability to imagine and recreate themselves to be a part of a community transcending the limits of the stereotypes imposed or self-imposed upon them.

In addition to the warlike-pacifist contradiction, the novel also deals with another contradictory theme of visibility and invisibility. Using of imagery of fog, metaphor glass, cloak of invisibility, and lit up cityscape at night, Kingston forges the theme of invisibility and visibility in *Tripmaster Monkey*.

> Toady Wittman was taking a walk on a path that will lead into the underpass beneath the gnarly trees. In fact, the park didn't look half bad in the fog beginning to fall, dimming hillocks that domed like green-grey moons rising and setting. He pulled the collar of hi pea coat higher and dragged on his cigarette. He had walked into the park hardly seeing it. (*Trip* 4)

Many a times Wittman is lonesome. What is the significance of such lonesomeness, aloofness, instability? Does it mean his dynamicity? In his footloose and aimless (at the beginning) loitering, is he running away or to? If away, from what? If to, towards what? What does he feel or do in these moments of lonesomeness? One thing is he contemplates suicide—as used in the racist movies that stereotype and emasculate Chinese Americans.

Wittman wants to be visible as well as invisible. He feels invisible and at least his vision of self (or his communal self) is blurred the way the atmospheric image of "fog" blurs the vision. In the opening scene his ambling through the fog is symbolic of his lack of clarity and even more importantly, his ambiguity about own existence/ontology as Chinese American—what sort? Wittman also wants invisibility as a strategic tool for laying bare the racist paranoia and bigotry of the mainstream community—e.g. he even warns people in restaurant cracking racist jokes. Getting paranoid by such behavior, Wittman "wish[es] for a cloak of invisibility" so that he could "hear all the jokes they tell at the parties that [he is] not invited to" (*Trip* 316). Just like Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Wittman wants to utilize invisibility as a tool to fight racism that has rendered people like him invisible. As Ralph Ellison puts, "America is a land of masking jokers. We wear the mask for the purposes of aggression as well as self-defense" (Ellison 109). Wittman too seems to have internalized this notion and wants an invisible mask or cloak for self-defense as well as to fight against the racist majority. In the same line of thought, Klara Szmanko adds, "invisibility is not only a burden but also carries a hidden possibility . . . a wellspring of creativity" (8). She further

says, "It also opens the door to the world of tricksterism. . . . In order to outsmart an enemy, a trickster has to resort to unconventional tactics like wit, deceit, masking and signifying. Invisibility is a prerequisite of tricksterism" (43-44). That is why, Wittman wants to have a cloak of invisibility.

Wittman quite often puts on "his spectacles that blurred everything" (*Trip* 44) from his vision in the surrounding. It reinforces the atmospheric image of the winter fog that reduces visibility. His stroll in the fog and wearing of metaphor glass thus cumulatively stand as a metaphor for his desire to be invisible and detached. Similar pattern is traceable when he sits in the aisle seat behind the driver discouraging the arrival of anyone on the seat beside him. "Wittman was one of the first passengers to board, and chose the aisle seat behind the driver. He threw his coat on the window seat to discourage company, stuck his long legs out diagonally, and put on his metaphor glasses and looked out the window" (*Trip* 73). He even disdains the Chinese American girl who comes to sit beside him and denies his own origin identifying himself as Japanese American.

However, later he extols or exults what he actually is—fifth generation of Chinese American—and even exhorts his people against self-denial. Initially, he does not think seriously about self-assertion. Once jobless and depressed, Wittman is strolling alone for he has nowhere to go and nobody waiting for him. He tends to brood, "And what for had they set up Market Street? To light up the dark jut of land into the dark sea. To bisect the City diagonally with a swath of lights. We are visible. See us? We're here. Here we are. What else this street is for is to give suggestions as to what to do with oneself" (*Trip* 67). Thus, in his observation of the nocturnal cityscape swathed in light, Wittman feels that the lit up city is saying, "We are visible. See us? We're here." Though Wittman is not clear enough about that self-attention, symbolically it foreshadows his burgeoning desire to come out of the

invisibility. The shift is something like the song "Something about Me" from the Asian American protest music album *A Grain of Sand*.

> I looked in the mirror
> And I saw me.
> And didn't want to be
> Any other way.
> Then I looked around
> And I saw you
> And it was the first time I knew
> Who we really are? (Iijima *et al* 4)[1]

In his encounter with FOBs (fresh off the boats, i.e. recent immigrants) and the girl in the bus, Wittman is actually looking at himself, a form of psychological projection of self-negation and hatred. Such chronic inferiority complexity was rampant among the immigrants and other marginal people like African American, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. Chinese Americans were not an exception. Later, the identity politics and various rights movements of the 1960s came up with the slogan and spirit of self-assertion and self-extolling. So does Wittman Ah Sing at the end of the novel. He stresses that the color of common man is yellow. The way black became beautiful for African Americans, Yellow became wonderful for Chinese Americans. While rehearsing his dream play, Wittman exhorts the participants, "I have been requesting my actresses to take off their false eyelashes, to go on bare-face and show what we look like. I promise they will find a new beauty" (*Trip* 312). That new beauty is nothing but self-correction of erstwhile negative

[1] William Wei, a prominent Chinese American historian, also quotes this song as an epigraph to his first chapter, "Origin of the Movement," of the book *The Asian American Movement* (1993) on page 14.

perception and projection of the Chinese American self. In this way, invisible yellow now yearns for self-extolled visible yellow.

Thus, the invisibility is not his ultimate goal. It is just a temporary tool. What he aims for is visibility. He wants visibility to stand and have identity in terms of space, time and culture for the people of his type whose existence is overlooked by the overwhelming racist society. Wittman's stage rehearsal and the performance of the play is, then, one act of coming out of that invisibility and lonesomeness to an all-embracing communal existence, where they would be extolling "yellow is beautiful" the way African Americans were volubly doing so through Black Civil Rights Movements, Black Arts Movements and Black Power. However, Wittman's way of self-extolling is not secessionist nationalist, rather a cultural nationalist who does not deny other's respectful existence. His multicultural spirit is corroborated by the presence and participation of the people of all colors in his play.

Another contradiction in the novel is it blurs the gender boundary presenting contradictory protagonist who is both masculine and effeminate. Though this novel has a male protagonist, it is populated enough with women characters. Once, Wittman takes his newlywed wife Tana to meet his mother. His mom and aunts send a volley of comments, worries and expectation towards him. He feels so much subsumed by his women company that he ineffably says, "O King of Monkeys, help me in this Land of Women" (*Trip* 184). Wittman is writing and staging the acts of play full of virile and macho warriors and himself plays the role of such characters. Nevertheless, he is miserable in the company of women.

Even before taking Tana to meet his family, Wittman tells her "a wedding story from the tradition of heroic couple [—Lui Pei and Lady Sun from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*—] on the battlefield that will turn you into Chinese" (*Trip* 172). According to the story, Lady wants to be Lui Pei's "marital" as well as "martial" partner (*Trip* 172). They get married and Lady Sun "gets her husband to sword fence with her everyday acquiring his

abilities" (*Trip* 173). One day, Lui Pei's lifelong enemies surround him and as "[a] man with a gift of tears, [he] weeps in front of [his] wife" (*Trip* 174). In such time of trouble, Lady Sun appears on a warhorse "fully armed, silver from head to toe," draws her sword and demands "whom do I fight?" (*Trip* 175). Omniscient narrator comments, "Wittman thought that with this story, he was praising his lady and teaching her to call him Beloved. Unbeknownst to him, Tana was getting feminist ideas to apply to his backass self" (*Ttrip* 175). Thus, though Wittman began storytelling to establish his heroic macho personality projecting himself upon the warrior Lui Pei, its effect is exactly the opposite. He happens to portray himself as a weak lachrymose guy and his wife Tana as warrior woman.

This gap between Wittman's expectation and the actual effect as suggested by the narrator allows the reader to perceive the struggle between the protagonist and the narrator. In her *MELUS* interview with Marilyn Chin, Kingston herself points at this tension:

> [The narrator] is actually pushing Wittman Ah Sing around, telling him to shut up. She gives him various girlfriends; she gives him different difficult human situations to contend with. And, as I was writing along, I saw that she has a personality. First of all, the omniscient narrator is a woman. . . . Remember, in the Monkey story, as Kuan Yin takes a rock and throws it on top of the monkey for 500 years? I felt that as narrator kept him in place. So I was beginning to see that my narrator is Kuan Yin, and she is very merciful. (Chin, Marilyn 88)

The wrapping line of the novel also reinforces the narrator's manipulation of the protagonist. "Studying the mightiest war epic of all time, Wittman changed—been!—into a pacifist. Dear American monkey, don't be afraid. Here, let us tweak your ear, kiss your other year" (*Trip* 340).

Thus, this emasculation of Wittman in terms of gender parallels with the racial emasculation he faced in his high school days. Recalling the moment, he confides Nancy, "I did my bearded American guys with a lot of facial hair to cover up my face and my race" (*Trip* 26). At a glance, putting the macho masculinity of Wittman under erasure, Kingston seems to validate Frank Chin's charge of man-hater and race-betrayer against herself. But such analysis does not hold ground because Wittman's oscillating gender status also qualifies him with contradiction-personified feature of trickster. Still, Kingston is able to signify, albeit gently and with immense sense of humor, upon her rival literary critic Frank Chin. The subtitle of the novel, *His Fake Book*, and Wittman's staging of fake wars in his play register that nexus. At another level of subtext, the character of Wittman—a poet, aspiring the career of playwright and actor, trying to rescue the heroic Chinese tradition from the fake writers—is modeled after Frank Chin.[2] However, as Hsiao-Hung Chang rightly puts, "Kingston's superb manipulation of her most vocal critic by turning him from a combat-ready warrior to a peace-loving pacifist poses more challenges to critics than would a mere act of revenge or wish-fulfillment (22). With the spirit of merciful goddesss Kuan Yin, author-narrator, "[s]imultaneously chiding and sympathizing with her protagonist, . . . positions herself in the (post)gender and (post)ethnic mapping of minority literature by complicating gender ambiguity with ethnic ambivalences" (Chang 22).

It obviously dawns to the reader that Kingston's writing of *Tripmaster Monkey* is an answer to Frank Chin's belligerent attack on her for the wishy-washy and misogynist portrayal of Chinese American man. Her protagonist Wittman is bold enough and dares to

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[2] In her book *Asian American Literature* (2008), Bella Adams also begins her description of Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* in this way: "Kingston's satirical and polemical novel *Tripmaster Monkey* begins with the cowboy-booted, suicide contemplating, draft-dodging Chin-inspired protagonist Wittman Ah Sing encountering various characters in San Francisco of the late 1960s" (117).

speak out, threaten the crackers of racist jokes, marry white girl, and kick his job of salesman, and so on. However, if we read between the narrative structure, which is double—Wittman and omnipresent female narrator—Wittman is tweaked and controlled by the author narrator. He is in a way surrounded by female characters and emasculated at least in the narrative structure.

Further contradiction is realized in the novel in footloose protagonist's oscillation between suicidal urges and spirit of counterculture and community making bricoleur. The reference to Rilke's text evokes Wittman's gloomy side. "This walk was turning out to be a Malte Laurids Brigge walk. . . . There is no helping what you see when you let it all come in" (*Trip* 4). What does the narrator mean by this? Here the novelist evokes the parallel predicament between the protagonist Malte Lurid Brigge of the Rainer Maria Rilke's 1910 novel *The Notebooks of Malte Lurid Brigge* and Wittman. Just like the narrator of Edgar Allan Pope's story "The Man of the Crowd" makes nocturnal stroll observing through the city, Rilke's Malte is observer of the city and its people. These protagonists let "it all come in" (*Trip* 4) into consciousness while observing the cityscape. Michael Hulse, the translator of Rilke's novel, very succinctly sumps up the brimful of observation eponymous narrator Malte makes of the Paris city. Malte sees a woman at the corner, a crutch carrying man, a woman pushing a red barrel-organ on a hand-cart, shopkeepers, a man selling cauliflowers from a barrow of vegetables, patients waiting, women feeding the birds, a man with St Vitus's dance, and the blind newspaper-seller , etc. ("Introduction"). Hulse opines that these "paraded ‘transients’, simply by lacking their names and identities, have the effect of shading Rilke's named narrator with colorlessness" ("Introuduction").

Like Malte Lurid Brigge, at the opening scene of the novel, Wittman is strolling in the "cold, . . . down side of the year" attired in cowboy boots, pea coat with its collar pulled higher, (*Trip* 4) and letting in sights and sounds of San Francisco city all into his

consciousness. He "considered Suicide every day" and "entertained it" (*Trip* 3) the way Rilke's twenty-eight years old Brigge broods, "The dying will have their away" (Rilke, sec. 6). Further, the nameless people of Wittman's observation are: a pigeon and a squatting man, both puking; a Chinese dude from China followed by wife busy coaxing kids with sunflower seeds and by granny; a man and a dog at a conservatory; a Blackman pushing a shopping cart; illiterate newspaper salesman; some children climbing rocks; a dead body covered with a rag under a bush; and so on (*Trip* 4-7). Though Wittman sneers at the people's anonymity and so-called civility, his perception of them actually underscores projection of his own self upon them. His lonely and indecisive condition is reinforced by the Hamletian dilemma he undergoes while riding minibus, "I can't go on, I go on" (*Trip* 7).

This invocation of Rilke's pessimism and nihilistic suicidal urge does not continue with Wittman in the novel. Later, it becomes clear why Wittman is feeling so at the beginning. It is because the American mainstream culture and popular culture treat and depict Chinese American in that negative light—ever failing, suicidal and sickening stereotype. Wittman is not going to imbibe passively such stereotyping of Chinese Americans. His rage against the negative cultural conditioning of Chinese Americans and cause behind it is articulated well in his "One Man Show":

> They have an enslavement wish for us, and they have a death wish, that we die. They use the movies to brainwash us into suicide. They started in on us with the first movies and they're still at it. D. W. Griffith's Broken Blossems, originally entitled *The Chink and the Child*: Lillian as the pure White Child, Richard Barthelmess as the Chink, also called The Yellow Man. They were actually about the same age. The child has a drunken father, so the Chink takes her into his house to protect her. One moonlit night, she seems to be asleep in a silk Chinese gown. He yearns for her. . . . He kills himself. The Yellow Man

> lusts after a white girl, he has to kill himself—that is the tradition they've made up for us. We have this suicide urge and suicide code. They don't have to bloody their hands. Don't ever kill yourself. You kill yourself, you play into their hands. (*Trip* 319)

Wittman is against such cultural castration. Therefore, he has married a White girl Tana. Even more, he dares to date another Chinese American girl after the marriage. His *unusual* marriage and audacious dating are gestures to set an example to un-brainwash his people who are accustomed with such TV shows and movies to believe that "Chinese look so alike, we ourselves can't tell the difference between the man and woman. We're deballed and other-worldly, we don't have the natural fucking urges of the average, that is the white human being" (*Trip* 320).

In addition, Wittman points out how such popular culture outlets distort the matter to enslave the Chinese American and to suit the purpose of the White mainstream. For example, Wittman mentions, in *Vertigo* movie, a Chinese American woman Kim Novak is rescued by a White American man James Steward. The latter tells the woman he rescues, "Chinese say if you rescue someone, you're responsible for them forever" (*Trip* 320). This saying is not really a Chinese saying, but an effective ploy to demand the woman's unquestioning subservience to him. Similarly, TV episodes and movies show some "Hop Sing" with his bent back following a white man like a tail to become the latter's slave. Kingston, through Wittman, actually wants to undo such genuflecting tendency as realized in character of Hop Sings, less-than-average manhood of Charlie Chan and old futs' fustian adherence to now-redundant Confucian codes.

Wittman recites poetry to impress Nancy. His poems express grudge over the stereotypes given to Chinese Americans. Her response is, "You sound like . . . Le Roi Jones. Like . . . like Black" (*Trip* 32). Unimpressed, Nanci leaves. Alone and enraged by her remark,

Wittman says, ""Call me Ishmael." See? You pictured a white guy, didn't you? If Ishmael were described—ochery ecru amber umber skin—you picture a tan white guy. Wittman wanted to spoil all those stories coming out of and set in New England Back East—to blacken and to yellow Bill, Brooke and Annie. A new rule for imagination: The common man has Chinese looks" (*Trip* 34).

Wittman's subversive and anti-stereotype poetry makes him sound like the Black Arts Movement and Black power movement of 60s, which extolled African American self as done by Amiri Baraka and Malcolm X. Picking the spirit of time, as a fifth generation of Chinese American of 1960s, Wittman dislikes Nanci's act of having makeup for theater acting that gave her "a cute Irish nose" and some adjustment with her eyes (*Trip* 24). He even promises to write a play for Nanci in which "the audience learns to fall in love with you for your ochery skin and round nose and flat profile and slanty eyes, and your bit of an accent" (*Trip* 27). However, Nanci's remark assumes only black and white duality of America and systematically excludes the rest like Chinese Americans. Nevertheless, Wittman, in a way, shows solidarity with African Americans like Ishmael Reed, who shows his solidarity with Native Americans as expressed in *Flight to Canada*. This "call me Ishmael" makes wish for a unique solidarity among the Native Americans, African Americans and Chinese American.

Thus, with his belligerent-pacifist nature, desire to be invisible as well as visible, and assertion of macho-masculinity which is tempered or put under erasure time and again by the author-narrator, Wittman exhibits his mercurial character, which is in consonance with the trickster figure. Shifty nature of trickster trope and life of the protagonist Wittman Ah Sing is encapsulated by the "magic pole" which is "in its toothpick state that the King of Monkeys keeps hidden behind his ear" (*Trip* 32). The way the magic pole shifts its shape from tiny toothpick to walking staff to sky-piercing tower and back again, the protagonist as well as the subject matter of the novel is so diverse and centrifugal that it refuses any form of reductive

or closed interpretation. Kingston is against any sort of such reductionism and stagnant notion of life. So does a trickster.

In addition to this, the Monkey King of *Journey to the West* is capable of seventy-two earthly transformations. In his rehearsal of the play, Wittman shows his funny face toward the audience and says, "Monkey changes seventy two ways. Been! Monkey Bird. Monkey fish" (*Trip* 256). Life of Wittman is also full of transformations. Earlier, he used to dope, now he does not. Initially he hates FOBs, is suicidal, desires invisibility, moves alone. Later, he extols Chinese-Americanness, forges community through his play and strives for visibility. It is apparent that just twenty-three years of age, Wittman will keep on transforming himself and his community as he grows on. Thus, this multiple transformation ability of the Monkey King evoked in the rehearsal reinforces the theme of irrepressible and irreducible spirit of the trickster.

In her interview with Nicoleta Alexoae Zagni, Kingston says, "By the time I got to *Tripmaster Monkey*, I wanted to break away from the Chinese myths and dialect and to write this American slang" (Zagni 103). For her, the Chinese myth no longer has intact sacred aura. Rather she thinks that, in order to be relevant and continue to exist, myths should be refurbished and reinterpreted. In the same interview Kingston adds,

> I take liberties with the myths or alter them because I want to show how they change and I don't want to freeze them into one definitive version, which is my writing. I want to leave all kinds of doors open so that the readers can read my version and then make up their own version next. This is why I called *Tripmaster Monkey* "His Fake Book," because this is a fake book, just as jazz musicians have fake book. You hear a version of the music, and then you go out and make your own music. (Zagni 102)

Such continual revisionist attitude of Kingston is iterated by her character Wittman in *Tripmaster Monkey* when he wants to use "street-strutting language" and "be the first bad-jazz China Man bluesman of America" (*Trip* 27). By investing ever modifying and adjusting spirit of the Jazz and ceaselessly transformative spirit of mythic Monkey King upon her protagonist Wittman Ah Sing, Kingston herself exhibits ceaselessly transformative nature of trickster. However, this transformation act is not done with any serious planning and premeditation, rather with a comic and humorous spirit of the trickster. Therefore, in her interview with Marilyn Chin, Kingston says, "Somehow we are going to solve the world's problems with fun and theatre. And with laughter" (90).

Another feature of trickster is it lives on scraps. Despite the adventurous references—Supermonkey of *Journey to the West* and the tripmaster of 1960 American beat/hippy subculture—Wittman is just a "poor monkey [who] makes a living so he can spend the weekday afternoon drinking coffee and hanging out" (*Trip* 35). Furthermore, "Cloths are not problem. He'd found his Wembly tie on a branch of a potted plant in front of the Durant Hotel, and an Eastern school tie hanging on a bush on Nob Hill. Coats are left on fences and wristwatches inside of shoes at the beach" (*Trip* 68). Jobless and lonesome Wittman survives on the scraps available just like the trickster figures. It is what we call the "bricoleur" feature of trickster. So does Kingston's protagonist. Wittman's living on scrapes coincides with Kingston's discursive style of relying on scraps of literary allusions.

Drawing on Levi Strauss' definition of the term "bricoleur," William J. Hynes states, "The bricoleur is a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution" (Hynes 42). In this sense, Wittman Ah Sing also exhibits bricoleur features in his act of survival collecting scraps of clothes and watches by the tree and beach, using his tie to fix the bicycle on the wall of toy store for display, using party thrown by others for his rehearsal of the play. Even more than Wittman, the novel's

author Kingston's discursive strategy observes bricoleur feature conspicuously. She uses mélange of sources to forge the narrative and trickster character. She is not concerned about intact rendering of the sources as expected by the critics like Frank Chin; rather she feels free to distort the matter just like the trickster. Thus, her discursive strategy is like that of "sacred-lewd bricoleur," an important feature of trickster as Hynes suggests.

The complexity of the text, at the both structural and lingual level, is useful to suggest the cryptic and endlessly signifying nature of trickster trope. William J. Hynes puts, trickster figure is "fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality" (Hynes 34). Wittman's character is also ambiguous and anomalous personality. He contemplates suicide, but later exhorts against such portrayal of Chinese Americans; lauds for pacifism, but takes recourse to references teeming with violent characters and acts; denies his Chineseness and also voices yellow is beautiful; tries to be macho male but is emasculated in the company of women and controlling narrator; and so on. Such evidences show that Wittman's position is quite marginal or interstitial for he is all the time oscillating in-between these contradictions. Such interstitial position—neither here nor there—is the true liminal zone for a trickster. So is the case for Wittman. Here, as Anne Doueihi suggests, "The illusion of a clear, unique referential meaning given by the rhetorical body of the discourse is precisely what the trickster, as discourse, is able to conjure forth, with our unprotesting and willing occlusion" (198).

To quote Anne Doueihi once again, "The features commonly ascribed to the trickster—contradictoriness, complexity, trickery—are the features of language of the story itself. If the trickster breaks all the rules, so does story's language; it breaks the rules of storytelling in the very telling of the story" (200). Kingston's use of trickster trope and character fits Doueihi's observation. The textual structure and the predicament of the Wittman parallel each other. Protagonist is the contradictoriness personified; so is the narrative of the novel in terms of the merger of writerly and speakerly language. Kingston, on the one hand,

has crossed the generic boundary of conventional novel writing bringing style and expression of Chinese storytelling and giving it a shape of written novel. On the other hand, if we look at the flip side, Kingston has transgressed the oral convention of Chinese storytelling by scripting the talkstories and publishing them in the form of novel. Since the novel goes beyond the accepted trend of the novel narrative, the generic convention is disrupted as per the spirit of the trickster text. The tendency of boundary breaking in terms of generic convention is not an isolated instance in Kingston's this fictional work. Even her previous two interrelated autobiographical works, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, take recourse to fictional method thereby breaking the established generic convention of auto/biography. Her tendency of going beyond the generic boundary continues even in her first fictional work *Tripmaster Monkey*, albeit differently. The act of writing such novel with a trickster protagonist has actually conferred the interstitial as well as liberating agency of trickster upon Kingston herself.

Conclusion

"Only looking back there is a pattern": Liberating Agency of Trickster

Louis Erdrich's one of the two narrators in *Tracks*, Nanapush, says, "Only looking back there is a pattern. . . . Only after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking in his chair the design springs" (*Tracks* 34). As a reader, when we look back at these three novels of Erdrich, Reed and Kingston, we can perceive a pattern springing. The agency of trickster appears looming large. Trickster characters and tropes stand out as a liberating agency not in traditional heroic sense, but in its ability to forge new way of survivance and literary expression breaking the conventionally received generic, gender, racial and temporal boundaries, and establishing signifying or dialogic discursive structure in the narratives.

In Reed's *Flight to Canada*, Quickskill involves with Native American Princess Quaw Quaw and Carpenter shows emotional solidarity with Hispanic and Asian Americans who are misbehaved in white-owned Canada. In Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, Wittman shows his solidarity with the people of multiple races as shown in his playacting scene. Likewise, in Erdrich's *Tracks*, Nanapush, though waffles initially, makes a strategic accommodation of the Christianity and bureaucratic positions and papers. These trickster characters' actions cumulatively hint toward the acceptance of multicultural existence without losing the sense of own ethno-racial self-respect. It marks these three ethnic American authors' acceptance of plurality underscored through polyvalent personality of trickster protagonists.

In doing so, they obliterate the conventionally received boundaries in terms of genre, gender and history. All of the three novels discussed here transgress generic demarcation. African American singing and storytelling heavily relies on oral expression that follows the call-and-response technique. Its written expression is always transgressive in nature. So does

Reed's *Flight to Canada* in rendering trickster tales' derivative form of neo-salve narrative. Merger of the prose and poetry also breaks generic line in Reed's novel.

More conspicuously, Chinese storytelling and Native American storytelling give primacy to speakerly aspect. Both Kingston and Erdrich insert speakerly quality in their writerly genre of novel. For this, Kingston wraps each chapter following the style of Chinese storyteller. Likewise, Erdrich presents one narrator (Nanapush) telling the family and tribal story to his granddaughter and the other narrator (Pauline) directly talking to the reader. At the temporal level, Erdrich is not that much transgressive. Kingston dilutely disturbs temporal dimension in fusing the ancient mythic simian feature as well as counter-culture spirit in 1960s USA in her protagonist to dub him as "Present day Monkey King of America." Its extremity is there with Reed in his creative anachronism and conflation of time, which inserts the images of 1960s or 70s back into the Antebellum America. In terms of gender, Erdrich's Nanapush is effeminized, whereas Fleur is masculinized. So is the case on Kingston's Wittman who is cornered by other women characters and omniscient woman narrator. Taking recourse to such trickster agency which is fond of disrupting the boundaries ceaselessly, these three ethnic American authors establish signifying and interstitial or liminal discourse.

Evoking the spirit of Signifying Monkey and replicating its discursive trope, Reed signifies upon history, literary history, both white mainstream as well as African American writing. The eclectic references mostly rely on burlesque reversals that permeate humor and stringent satire. Thus, references to Stow, Brown, Douglass, Uncle Tom, Poe, Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, etc. are just significations. So is the case with disclaimer, dedication and epigraph of the novel. Similarly, Kingston's novel is also full of myriads of references that range from ancient mythic texts to contemporary popular culture like TV shows and movies. However, like Reed, Kingston's aim is not here to make exact replication of any of the sources, rather to signify upon them the way Chinese Monkey King's African American

cousin Signifying Monkey does. It just endows the liberating agency of the trickster to her protagonist as well as the narrative of the novel.

Merger of the East and West, past and present, masculine and feminine, old and new creates a liminal threshold in which the key characters of these three novels play comfortably because they bear the trickster quality. Signifying trickster of *Flight to Canada*, liminal tricksters of *Tracks* and simian trickster of *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* cumulatively endow trickster agency upon the respective authors. Using the same trickster agency, these authors try to liberate ethnic American writing form the received images of stereotypes, and defeatism, and they voice for a new transformed cultural and literary expressions of ethnic Americans.

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