

Gender and Ethnicity in *Love Medicine, Beloved, and Tripmaster Monkey:*
His Fake Book

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Introduction

Women's and ethnic literature has finally been accepted into the American literary canon.¹ As a result, the question of whose hands literary criticism should be placed in is now being raised. Are women ethnics more capable than white male critics of reviewing, analyzing, and criticizing their own literature? In other words, how influential are race and gender in fully understanding an American ethnic woman's novel?

Both feminist and ethnic critics disagree over the answers to these questions. In her essay "Toward a Women's Poetics," Josephine Donovan, for example, addresses the influence of gender in women's literature. She argues that one must have a knowledge of women's experience and practice in order to understand women's art. The branch of feminist critical theory that she supports is called cultural feminism, which views women as a separate culture with its own customs, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics (100). She lists six conditions that have shaped women's experience and practice in most cultures. First, women as a group have been oppressed, and they share a psychology with other oppressed groups. Also, women have traditionally remained in the domestic sphere. Their housework, or labor, is repetitive, static, and cyclic. Their work is also interruptible because their husbands' and children's needs and projects come before their own, which gives them a sense of uncontrol. Whereas the male in a capitalist culture creates objects for exchange, the female creates objects for use, which results in different epistemologies between men and women. All women share the same physiological experience of menstruation, and most also share childbirth and breast-

feeding. Not only do women bear the children, they also must rear them. Finally, girls' and boys' psychological maturation process is different. Girls develop emotional and interdependent traits while boys develop independence and restraint of emotions. Because a women's poetics must be grounded in the experience and practice of women, Donovan believes that only women can fully comprehend a woman's novel. Therefore, Donovan places great importance on the gender of the reader trying to comprehend a woman's novel.

Not all women critics, however, accept Donovan's feminist theory. In her study Pocahontas' Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture, Mary Dearborn, for example, finds more similarities than differences between the writings of ethnic males and females. She contends that when one looks at American writings in their cultural context, the similarities of being Americans outweigh the differences of being male or female. For example, women's and men's works are indebted to the same literary forms, structures, and traditions. Also, male and female ethnic writers share many of the same themes in their writings, such as generational conflict and the process of Americanization. Consequently, Dearborn downplays gender differences and privileges cultural similarities.

Scholarship has also addressed the relationship of ethnicity and literature. In her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith implies that only members of the same ethnic group can fully appreciate and understand its literature. For example, black women's experience consists primarily of political, social, and economic restrictions. Their knowledge of oppression far exceeds the white woman's. Black women

have been denied more rights and suffered harsher racism than women of any other ethnic group. As a result, these women share the same language code, style, and aesthetic concept in creating literature because they share a common experience. Because they share a language code and experiences, ethnic minorities are better able to judge their "own" works than are mainstream readers.

On the other hand, in his book Beyond Ethnicity, Werner Sollors explores the importance that both ethnicity and a common American culture play in the reading of ethnic literature. Sollors makes a distinction between "descent" and "consent." He describes descent as emphasizing hereditary factors and consent as stressing one's ability to choose a culture as a free agent (6). He argues that ethnic texts result in a combination of descent and consent factors. Although ethnic groups share their own personal language code and experiences, ethnic literature explores themes, practices literary techniques, and reflects literary movements which are common to the Western literary tradition.

This thesis investigates the problem of reading women's and ethnic literature by exploring three American novels written by ethnic women: Beloved (1987), by African-American novelist Toni Morrison; Love Medicine (1984), by Native American novelist Louise Erdrich; and Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (1989), by Chinese-American novelist Maxine Hong Kingston. All three of these accomplished women writers have won popular and critical acclaim. Morrison won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 for Song of Solomon and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 for Beloved. She has won two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Erdrich is also winner of the national Book

Critics Circle Award for Love Medicine. Kingston has won the National Book Critics Circle general nonfiction award and the American Book Award for nonfiction. Since all three novels are recent works (published within the last six years), they have received relatively little literary analysis.

By researching and exploring these three works and drawing on current ethnic and feminist criticism, I have made three important discoveries. First, I realized the impossibility of ignoring or downplaying the ethnic factors found in novels by minority women writers. Familiarity with Asian, Native American, and African legends and traditions was a must if I wanted to gain a better understanding of these works.

Next, I discovered that the feminist aspects of these novels could not be ignored as well. Some of the women in the novels exhibit conditions that Donovan says shape women's experiences and practice. They bear children, breast feed, and do domestic chores. Extreme social, political, and economic oppression of women is also evident.

However, although ethnic and feminist factors play significant roles in these three works, I discovered that the American culture reflected in these works outweighs the ethnic and gender differences. Although the writers come from three different ethnic backgrounds, they are all Americans sharing a common cultural experience. They grew up in the United States, they attended American schools and universities, they read American and English literature, and they were influenced by the same American and Western authors.

By presenting examples of ethnic and feminist aspects of which the reader of these novels should be aware, I will show that these aspects are important in better understanding these works, and by extension, other

works by ethnic women writers. However, I will also show that the books' American and Western qualities are more important than their ethnic and feminist ones.

Chapter 1 *Love Medicine*

Louise Erdrich was raised in North Dakota. She is of German-American and Chippewa descent. She currently resides in New Hampshire with her husband Michael Dorris and their five children. She has written several books.

Erdrich centers Love Medicine, the first book in a trilogy exploring the Chippewa experience (Beet Queen and Tracks are the other two), on the death of June Kashpaw and how that death affects her friends and family on the Chippewa reservation in North Dakota.² The novel covers a period of fifty years. During this time, we see the maturation of both June and those with whom she comes in contact through the eyes of eight different narrators.

Some of Erdrich's characters fulfill the gender-based stereotypes of man's and woman's "place" in society. Marie Kashpaw not only bears a houseful of children herself, but she takes in orphans as well. After her sister Lucille dies, Marie raises her daughter June as one of her own. She fulfills the role of the nurturing mother who takes care of her family. Her husband Nector Kashpaw supports the family by working odd jobs, and he has very little to do with his children.

Erdrich, however, demonstrates the failure of exclusive male roles--especially that of the warrior--in modern Chippewa culture. In traditional Chippewa culture, the main role of the warrior is protecting the tribe. Gordie Kashpaw does not have the traditional outlets that his ancestors had for war; therefore, he takes up the white ritual of boxing. This does not satisfy him, however, and he vents his frustrations on his wife June. King

Kashpaw brags of his exploits in Vietnam, but his wife says he never got off the West Coast. Henry Lamartine, Jr., who actually fought in Vietnam, refuses to talk about his experiences, which eventually shatter his psyche and drive him to suicide. Foreign "white" wars and boxing fail to replace the role of the warrior in these men's lives (Barry 124).

Erdrich challenges culturally constructed gender roles and creates androgynous characters. Eli Kashpaw likes to spend time with his brother's children, and he teaches them how to carve, listen to birdcalls, and whistle on their fingers like a flute. He eventually adopts June Kashpaw and raises her by himself. He becomes both a mother and father to June. He takes her hunting some days and nurses her when she is sick. Similarly, Lipsha Morrissey sweeps and cleans on the reservation, roles usually assigned to women. He also performs the feminine ritual of caretaking. He is at Grandma Kashpaw's beck and call, and he takes care of Grandpa when he begins to lose his mind. These men exhibit characteristics that Donovan says shape women's experience and practice, not men's.

Lulu Lamartine does not exhibit the traditional wife and mother roles. She is known on the reservation as a flirt. Her three oldest sons are Nanapushes. The next oldest are Morrisseys who take the name Lamartine, and the younger Lamartines do not look anything alike (LM 76). Likewise, June Kashpaw also does not fulfill the culturally constructed role of wife and mother. She marries Gordie Kashpaw, and they are constantly separating and coming back together. She is not always there to take care of her son King. She gives her second son to Marie to raise. She fails at traditionally feminine jobs such as a beautician, secretary, clerk, and waitress. Because these characters either defy their culturally

constructed gender roles or fulfill both gender roles, they do not support Donovan's cultural feminist theory, which views women as a separate and distinct culture with its own customs and practices. Instead, they support Dearborn's view that men's and women's similarities outweigh their differences.

In addition to gender-related issues, Erdrich's novel contains certain ethnic factors that cannot be ignored, such as oppression, family ties, religion, and sense of time. She demonstrates how the Chippewas have been oppressed by whites. Nector Kashpaw states that "Death was the extent of Indian acting in the movie theater" (LM 90). He is invited to pose for the painting "Plunge of the Brave." After asking the reader to remember Custer's saying--the only good Indian is a dead Indian--Nector adds that "the only interesting Indian is dead, or dying by falling backwards off a horse" (LM 91). Erdrich also reveals how the government oppresses the Chippewas by slowly taking away their land. The government orders Lulu Lamartine off the land of her forefathers to build a factory--a factory which produces bangle beads and plastic tomahawks (LM 223).

The Chippewas learn to distrust not only the government, but all white people. Gerry Nanapush tells Lipsha that he only trusts Indians, especially his relations. He confides to King his plans to escape from prison, not knowing that King is an "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside) (LM 259). Although King is a Chippewa, he informs the authorities of Gerry's escape. The inside of him was "white"; therefore, he was not to be trusted.

In addition to experiencing oppression, the Chippewas develop ties which differ from those of the Western tradition. Erdrich does not base

familial ties in the novel on the nuclear family of the Western tradition. Instead, she emphasizes tribal kinship systems. Marie adopts June and Lipsha and raises them as her own. The idea that biological children are somehow superior or preferred over other children who belong in a nuclear family is a Western-European idea, not a Native American concept. The Native American "family" allows for various ties of kinship--including spiritual kinship and clan membership--joining the individuals living together in one house (Rainwater 418). Erdrich makes it extremely difficult to trace and remember the direct lines of descent among family members because the biological ties are not as significant as other ties such as spiritual, friendship, and love (Rainwater 420).

The shamanic religion is another important ethnic factor in this novel. Shamanists believe that good and evil spirits roam the world and can be summoned by inspired priests. When June dies, "the pure and naked part of her went on . . . June walked over [the snow] like water and came home" (LM 6). Her "home" could be a Christian heaven or her reservation, "where her spirit, according to Native American beliefs, mingles with the living and carries out unfinished business" (Rainwater 408). After June dies, her husband Gordie thinks that she comes back to visit him in the shape of a wounded deer. Lipsha explains the difference between the God in the Old Testament and Chippewa Gods, such as Nanabozho and Messepeshu. He states that their gods are not perfect, but they come around and do favors if you know how to ask in the right way (LM 195). However, he explains that the proper way to ask favors was lost when the Catholics became a dominant religion in the region.

The Chippewas also believe in the power of love medicines. Lipsha represents the medicine man on the reservation. He is born with the

"touch," or the power to heal. However, when he takes a shortcut in preparing his grandparents' love medicine, his grandfather dies. The traditional love medicine calls for goose hearts. Lipsha, however, substitutes store-bought turkey hearts for the goose hearts. When his grandfather chokes on the love medicine and dies, Lipsha feels responsible for his death because he did not use the right ingredients.

The Chippewas' sense of time is another ethnic factor inscribed in Love Medicine. Erdrich uses cyclical as well as chronological time in her novels. She does not base her novel on the notion of plot as consisting of a beginning, conflict, rising action, resolution, and ending. It is almost impossible to give a plot summary of Love Medicine because the novel has eight narrators and covers a period (not in chronological order) of fifty years. Western ideas of linear time must be added to Chippewa ceremonial time, which is cyclic rather than linear, accretive rather than incremental, and which makes few distinctions between momentous events and daily, ordinary events (Rainwater 416).

Although Erdrich's novel contains gender and ethnic-related issues, it cannot, in the final analysis, be categorized as either a woman's or an ethnic novel, for it blends the ethnic and the "American." In other words, the novel is an example of cultural syncretism, for it combines and fuses both cultures. Though she includes shamanism, Erdrich also uses numerous biblical allusions to the Christian religion. Marie grows up with Catholic and Native American religious beliefs. Her name itself comes from the virgin Mary. She wants to be a nun as a child, and she goes to the Sacred Heart Covenant for awhile. When June goes to live with Marie, her only possession is a string of Cree beads, which Marie keeps after June leaves. The Cree beads support the shamanic part of Marie, who is both a

sorcerer and healer (Rainwater 412). The Cree beads, however, could also symbolize a Catholic rosary.

Love Medicine also employs the Christian symbols of Easter and the resurrection. June dies at Easter, and she is depicted partly through reference to Christian resurrection and partly through references to Native American religious beliefs concerning the place of spirits among their families and tribes (Rainwater 409).

Erdrich also employs Christian allusions in her chapter titles: "World's Greatest Fisherman," "Saint Marie," "Flesh and Blood," "Crown of Thorns," and "Crossing the Water". These titles lead the reader to expect the story to unfold in a Christian framework, but this is not always the case. For example, the world's greatest fishermen could refer to Jesus and his disciples, who were "fishers of men," or it could refer to the Chippewas, who have a reputation of being some of the nation's best fishermen.

Erdrich is undeniably influenced by American authors such as Herman Melville. Thomas Matchie, in his article "Love Medicine: A Female Moby Dick," explores the similarities found in these two novels. The two books have similar episodic or disjointed structures, and the only book Nector Kashpaw reads in high school is Moby Dick. Sometimes he calls himself Ishmael. Throughout the novel, the same motifs (e.g., water and fishing; wildness among the males; the importance of the heart; the alternating realities of life and death; concern with the colors white and red) appear again and again (479). Erdrich obviously had Melville in mind when writing her novel.

Love Medicine, then, supports the theories of both Dearborn and Sollors. It illustrates their thesis of cultural fusion--that the importance of being American outweighs the gender and ethnic factors. Although the

novel contains elements dealing with Sollor's "descent" factors (Chippewa legend and tradition), it also contains many "consent" factors, such as Christianity and the influence of American and English authors.

Chapter 2 *Beloved*

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her grandfather was convinced that no hope whatsoever existed for black people in America. His wife, however, believed that everything could improve by placing faith in Jesus. Morrison's parents also had conflicting attitudes. Her father believed that the morals of white people would never improve, while her mother believed that the white people could change for the better. Morrison admits growing up in a racist household and having contempt for white people (Iannone 60).

She graduated with honors from high school and attended Howard University, where she changed her first name to Toni. She received her masters from Cornell, where she wrote a thesis on the theme of suicide in William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. She is now an editor at Random House. In addition to Beloved, she is also the author of the Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, and Tar Baby.

Beloved is based on the story of a nineteenth-century slave woman named Margaret Garner who fled Kentucky and escaped to Ohio (a free state in 1855) with her four children. She then killed them rather than allow them to be returned to slavery. In the novel, the murdered daughter Beloved comes back to haunt her mother, Sethe. Morrison explores how a mother could commit such a horrible act, and then she shows how Sethe must live with her decision.

Sethe grows up on a plantation called Sweet Home. She has a kind master, who allows her to marry another slave named Halle. The master dies and is replaced by "Schoolteacher," a cruel man who horribly abuses

the slaves. The slaves eventually try to escape but are caught and punished. Halle disappears, and Sethe flees while she is six and one-half months pregnant. One month after her escape, Schoolteacher comes after her and her children. Sethe gathers her children and runs to the shed, where (like Margaret Garner) she slits one child's throat and attempts unsuccessfully to smash her newborn daughter's head against the wall. Schoolteacher returns home without her, considering her insane and no longer productive.

After she is released from jail, she returns to the home of her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs dies, Sethe's boys run away, and Sethe is left with only her daughter Denver and the ghost of the child she was able to kill in the shed. Twenty years later, the spirit returns in the form of a twenty-year-old woman named Beloved, who drains the life from Sethe until the ghost is run off by the women of the community.

Like Love Medicine, Beloved contains many of the conditions that, according to Donovan, shape women's experience and knowledge. These conditions include oppression, domesticity, physiological experiences, and psychological maturation. The most evident condition that shapes the lives of women in Beloved is the mother-child relationships.

The novel centers on the relationship between Sethe and Beloved. Sethe tells Beloved many stories about how much she loves and cares for her. Sethe risks her life by escaping from the plantation in order to give her daughter her milk. Sethe waves flies away from the infant while she works in the grape arbor, and Sethe becomes hurt whenever she sees her baby bitten by a mosquito. Whenever her family is low on food, Sethe nearly starves to allow Beloved to eat all she desires.

Beloved's sister, Denver, loves to hear the story of when her mother's feet were so swollen she thought she could not take another step. Denver kicked in her womb and forced her to go on. In a sense, Denver saved her mother's life by pushing her towards freedom and not allowing her to give up.

Another important mother-child relationship is the one between Sethe and her mother. Sethe's mother is only allowed to nurse her for two weeks. After that, their only interaction occurs when her mother points out a circle and a cross burned into her skin below her breast. She tells Sethe that if anything ever happens to her, Sethe would know her by this mark. Because Sethe is not marked, she feels she has no tie with her mother. Eventually Sethe's mother is hanged, probably caught trying to escape the plantation. Sethe cannot believe her mother could have run away from her. "This cycle of mother-daughter loss, perceived abandonment, betrayal, and recovery is inherent in and characterizes each mother-daughter relationship in the novel" (Horvitz 158).

The relationship between Baby Suggs and her son Halle is the only one which shows a son's loyalty to his mother. Halle rents himself out to other plantations for five years in order to buy his mother's freedom. Halle is the only child Baby Suggs is allowed to keep. The seven others were sold to other masters.

Not only do mother-child relationships shape the lives of the women in this novel, but they are also subject to even greater oppression than the male slaves. Whereas all slaves are overworked and punished, the females suffer even more abuse. They are raped. They are not allowed to fulfill their role as a nurturing mother. Baby Suggs states that "a man ain't nothing but a man. But a son? Well now, that's somebody." If this is true,

then it follows that a daughter is nobody (Flower 212). However, Morrison shows that daughters are important in the novel.

Beloved contains two physiological experiences that strongly shape the lives of the women in the novel--childbirth and breastfeeding. Sethe repeatedly refers to the account of the birth of Denver and the pain she went through. She also continually refers to one scene that is extremely important to her, but has not been sufficiently emphasized by the critics: the scene in which the schoolteacher's nephews steal Sethe's milk. One holds her down while the other one suckles her full breasts. This act affects Sethe more than her beating because they steal something from her that she holds in the highest regard--nourishment for her child.

Although Sethe displays the stereotypical nurturing mother figure at times, she does commit an act which defies this role: she kills her daughter. Rather than giving her up to the schoolteacher, she takes away the life that she gave. Sethe's mother also killed her children, except Sethe. Sethe's mother was raped many times by the crew on her passage across the Atlantic. She was also raped by white men after she arrived in America. She threw all her children away nameless except for Sethe, and to her she gave the name of the black father.

Not only does Beloved contain many gender-related issues, but it also contains many ethnic issues. First and foremost, Beloved deals with the oppression inherent in slavery during the mid-nineteenth century. Morrison dedicates her novel to the sixty million and more who died during and after the trans-Atlantic journey, and she describes in detail the horror that the slaves had to endure once they reached America. The physical, psychological, and emotional abuse the slaves suffered has affected black culture even to this day.

Slavery greatly damaged, if not destroyed, the family institution. I have already described the destruction of the mother-child relationships. Slave husbands and wives were also separated. If a master was kind enough to allow his slaves to marry, they were often sold off and separated, nonetheless. Some slaves who were married lived on different plantations. For example, Baby Suggs and her husband made a pact. Whichever one had a chance to escape would do so, regardless whether they were alone or together. Her husband had the chance, and she never heard from him again.

In Beloved, the slaves try to refrain from loving, because their children, parents, or friends could one day be sold and separated from them forever. Paul D explains that “for a used-to-be slave woman to love . . . that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit . . . so when they broke its back . . . maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one” (Beloved 164). Paul D also says he no longer has a heart. Instead, he has only a “tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut” (Beloved 113). He condemns Sethe for loving too much; her love is “too thick.”

Not only do slaves suffer from emotional abuse, but they suffer from physical abuse as well. When the slaves at Sweet Home are caught trying to escape, each one suffers horribly. Paul D is bridled and must wear a bit in his mouth. Sixo is burned at the stake and then shot in the head. Another is hanged and has his hands and feet cut off. The nephews dig a hole in the ground for Sethe’s extended belly, place her into it, and then whip her on the back. Paul D explains the horror of being chain-ganged

with forty-six men. They were beaten, underfed, covered with filth, exhausted, and sick. They slept in locked boxes in ditches for months.

In addition to describing how slavery affects black culture in America, Morrison also shows how the blacks eventually lose their ties to their mother country, Africa. Sethe remembers her mother and Nan (her nurse) talking to her in a language she understood when she was a child but could neither recall nor repeat now (Beloved 62). The language her mother speaks is native African, and the words "link Sethe back both to her mother and to her mother's land, the place where women gathered flowers in freedom and played in the long grass before the white men came" (Horvitz 159). Sethe also remembers her mother dancing juba, like the antelopes in Africa. "Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope . . . They shifted shapes and became something other" (Beloved 31). Morrison also includes, at the beginning of each of the novel's three parts, pictures of African masks.

Karla Holloway describes Beloved as an "accomplishment of a text that is African in concept, history, and story" (180). Although Beloved has deeply rooted gender and ethnic-related issues which should be emphasized and taken into consideration when reading the novel, it also contains American issues that must also be emphasized. Morrison wrote the novel in the English language, not the language of her African ancestors. Beloved contains themes that are common to all human experience (e.g., love, freedom, and suffering), not just the African experience. The title of the novel has its origins in Christianity, not in an African religion. Morrison quotes Romans 9:25, which says, "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." She also alludes to Song of Solomon 6:3, "I am my beloved's,

and my beloved is mine." Sethe continually refers to Beloved as hers (Beloved 214).

Jewell Gresham writes that "though Morrison's first offering in Beloved is to black people, her ultimate gift is the historical illumination by which the nation can see past the barriers of mythology . . . She is treating the past and present in which the loss of millions of black children (and adults) haunts the nation no less than the impassioned spirit of Beloved haunts those at 124 Bluestone" (119). Slavery was not a black problem; it was--and is--America's problem. The nation must face its past in order to see beyond the barriers that have been put up. How can one face or explain the beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police officers when many white Americans cannot even deal with the fact that slavery existed in America for centuries?

Morrison is trying to deal with this problem by resurrecting the past in Beloved. She demonstrates what slavery did to black people physically, mentally, and emotionally. She also shows the effect of slavery on the white people. They are the ones who develop animalistic characteristics--not the black slaves. This book was not written for blacks alone, but for all of America.

Holloway believes that Morrison "writes a story that defies Western structuration. Derivation becomes an accomplishment of omnipresent memory" (180). The style in which Beloved is written is magical realism, in which the function of the narrative is to create rather than represent the real world (Collins 260). Magical realism is not used by black authors alone, but also by authors from the United States and especially Latin America. For example, American authors such as William Faulkner (on whom Morrison, we recall, wrote her MA thesis) in Absalom,

Absalom! use the past and present, ghosts, and mysteries in their novels (Flower 212). Therefore, Beloved exemplifies, rather than defies, Western structuration. Like Love Medicine, Beloved illustrates Dearborn's and Sollors's theories of cultural syncretism.

Chapter Three *Tripmaster Monkey*

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in Stockton, California, in 1940. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1962. One year later, she married Earll Kingston, an actor. They have one son, Joseph Lawrence, a musician. She and her husband now live in Oakland, California. In addition to Tripmaster Monkey, she is also the author of the highly acclaimed The Woman Warrior and China Men.

Her first novel, Tripmaster Monkey, is the story of Wittman Ah Sing, a fifth generation Chinese-American Berkeley graduate, English major, and playwright.³ The setting is the 1960s, a time of hippies, free love, and drugs. The novel encompasses two months of Wittman's life. During this time, Wittman falls in love with Nanci Lee, marries Tana on Coit Tower, visits his mother and aunts in Sacramento, searches for and finds his grandmother in Reno, gets fired from his job at the toy store, files for unemployment, and produces an epic drama based on The Three Kingdoms, in which everyone he has met in the last two months plays a part.

Few examples exist in this novel that support Donovan's list of conditions that shape women's experience and practice. The women that Wittman encounters break away from the culturally constructed view of a woman's place in society. Wittman's own mother, for example, is a Flora Dora showgirl who bears him backstage in vaudeville and keeps him in a theatrical trunk. John Leonard describes Wittman's mother and female relatives as the "hidden matriarchy at the heart of Chinese society" (771).

His mother and aunts defy their culture's submissive roles for them in their society.

Wittman's wife Tana holds different views about the wife's role in a marriage. She tells him that she wants to be married to him but does not want to be the wife. Her idea of a perfect proposal from a man is "Tana, let me be your wife" (TM 272). After he proposes to her, she wants to propose to him by getting down on her knee, offering her hand, and giving him a diamond ring. Clearly, both she and Wittman's mother defy their society's gender-based roles.

Kingston introduces her readers to Chinese culture by including the language, history, literature, religion, and customs of China in her novel. Tripmaster Monkey contains Chinese words that are sometimes translated and sometimes are not, words such as saang-hsu lo, geisha shtick, saw, deen, moong cha cha, ngow, knog, bok guai, sanpaku, pahng yow, etc. Wittman also explains the symbol for the Chinese word "I-warrior" and the symbol of the component of words dealing with fighting and weapons.

Kingston draws heavily from the literature of the Chinese and incorporates it into her novel in various ways. The epic drama that Wittman writes and produces is a reenactment of The Three Kingdoms, a historical narrative which describes a revolt against the military dictatorship of Ts'ao Ts'ao. It covers the hundred years from 184 to 280 A.D. and describes the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wiu. It opens in the last decades of the four-hundred-year Han dynasty. The Emperor's ruling circle became corrupt and oppressive, and Liu Pei (whom Wittman refers to numerous times throughout the novel) gathered an army to fight the rebels. He failed to restore the Han lands, but he came to symbolize Chinese resistance to foreign invasion (Roberts 22).

Mahjongg, a famous Chinese game that Wittman's mother and aunts play, is found in Tsao Hsueh-Chin's Dream of the Red Chamber, one of the greatest of all Chinese narratives. It describes the life of two great households in Peking. The central theme of the novel is the love of Pao-yu and his cousin Black Jade, but it also concerns the complex life of these two palaces during the feudal monarchy of the eighteenth century.

The actors in Wittman's play represent the 108 bandit heroes found in the Water Margin, another famous Chinese narrative which describes the heroic exploits of the peasant army led by Sung Chiang during the Northern Sung dynasty (Yuan-Chun 90). Wittman himself symbolizes the Monkey King (one of the most popular figures in Chinese literature) who brought back Buddha's Sutras from India in Wu Ch'eng-en's Journey to the West. Kingston begins each of her chapters with a picture of the "Master Tripitaka," which is taken from a picture found on the title page of Journey to the West.

Wittman also teaches the reader the religion and customs of the Chinese. He discusses Confucism, Taoism, and Buddhism. He explains how his ancestors "had worshipped winged dragons--Mo'o the terrible lizard god, phoenixes, the Garuda, Horus" (TM 104). When Wittman introduces Tana to his family, the reader learns the game of mahjongg. When his relatives compliment Tana's appearance, she thanks them. Wittman tells us that she "hadn't yet learned that compliments need to be denied and returned" (TM 181). Wittman satirizes Nanci Lee's rich Chinese-American relatives by saying "the most Chinese thing they do is throw the headdress ball" (TM 12). Not only does Wittman explain Chinese customs, but he dispels myths and stereotypes as well. For example, it is not a custom for Chinese women to walk behind men. He call this belief a base stereotype

(TM 28). He hates the line in Vertigo in which James Stewart says to Kim Novak, "Chinese say if you rescue someone, you're responsible for them forever" (320). The only Chinese people who say this are in the movies, not in the real world, he complains.

Although Wittman is descended from the Chinese, he is a fifth-generation American, and he wants everyone to know this. He hates being called Chinese, a chinaman, and an oriental. Chinese-American is inaccurate--"as if we could have two countries" (TM 327). He finally decides that he likes Chinese American, without the hyphen, so that "American" is the noun and "Chinese" acts as the adjective. Throughout the novel, Wittman proves that he is as American as James Dean. He is a reader of Whitman (thus his name), Pound, Eliot, Steinbeck, Twain, Stevenson, Ellison, Wright, and Baldwin. He sees American movies such as Gone with the Wind, Psycho, Rebel Without a Cause, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, and the Wizard of Oz. He listens to American songs such as "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." He watches American television shows such as "Alfred Hitchcock," "Leave It to Beaver," and "Howdy Doody." Almost every page of the novel makes a reference to an American play, author, book, actor, movie, singer, or song. Therefore, when John Leonard states that one must have a background in Chinese literature and history in order to get a tenth as much out of Kingston's novel as she has put into it, I must disagree. One could easily enjoy the novel by having only a background in American literature, history, and culture. But to fully understand and appreciate the novel, one must be able to decode the Chinese as well as the American signs.

Anne Tyler states: "that Wittman is Chinese gives his story depth and particularity. That he's American lends his narrative style a certain

slangy insouciance. That he's Chinese-American, with the self-perceived outsider's edgy angle of vision, makes for a novel of satisfying bite and verve" (46). Kingston excels at blending the Chinese and American. For example, the title of the book is both Chinese and American in origin. Wittman acts as an American "hippie" tripmaster, "a friendly guide to the stoned in their travels through acid-time" (Leonard 769). He is also a symbol of the Chinese Monkey King, the Master Tripitaka, who brings the Buddhist scriptures from India. Wittman Ah Sing's name is also a blend of Chinese and American. "Wittman" alludes to the American author Walt Whitman. "Ah Sing" looks and sounds Chinese, but it is not a Chinese name. It comes from the phrase "of thee I sing" in "My Country Tis of Thee." Finally, the climax of the novel, the production of Wittman's remake of The Three Kingdoms, "will bring together Kerouac's America with his own imagined China: Flying horses and warriors meet hippy dreams" (Gerrard 28).

Conclusion

After studying these three novels and drawing on current ethnic and feminist criticism, I have concluded that the American and Western influences reflected in these works play a significantly greater role than their feminist and ethnic influences. The novels have been influenced by and compared to many American and English works. They explore themes, practice literary techniques, and reflect literary movements that are common to the Western literary tradition. Although knowledge of Chinese, Native American, and African legends and customs is a must in order to fully appreciate these works, and by extension, other works by ethnic writers, they are accessible to all literate Americans and are fine examples of what Sollors means when he asserts that "ethnic" literature is culturally syncretic.

Notes

1 Ethnic literature will be defined as those works "written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups" (Sollors 7).

2 Love Medicine will be abbreviated LM.

3 Tripmaster Monkey will be abbreviated TM.

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