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Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective. Edited by Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1995. 201 pages. $35.00 cloth.

As scholars begin to explore more comprehensively the concept of the "trickster" in literature, Ammons's and White-Parks's *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Per spective* makes a major contribution to the study of tricksterism, multicultural literature, and literary criticism. In this volume, ten essays are presented that provide insight into the multifarious character of the trickster and its manifestations within a variety of cultural writings.

The essays introduce their readers to the turn-of-the-century Native American, African-American, Asian-American, Mexican-American, and Euro-American writers and suggests a new approach to reading and evaluating those texts. Contrary to the widespread use of realism, naturalism, and modernism in analyzing and understanding literature at that time, the essayists examine their texts through the concept of tricksterism.

Authors in *Tricksterism* have creatively moved the interpretation of the trickster from the social sciences into literature. The trickster refers to a complex character who is known for his humor, trickery, shape-shifting, and crude and contradictory behavior. In an attempt to understand native life and culture, social scientists have been studying the trickster figure, found in many Native American stories, since the late 1800s. Social scientists have also noted its similarity to other figures located in traditional cultures throughout the world.

Similarly, in an effort to understand the multicultural writers at the turn of the century, the essayists have discovered many of the elements of the trickster, such as a trickster figure and trickster narratives, in their critiques. Commonly found in their analysis are the exhibition of trickster characteristics such as shape-shifting, disruption, rebellion, liberation, and chaos.

Through the application of tricksterism to the works under study, voices that have historically been silenced arise. The book asserts and supports the contention that, since the trickster opposes and disrupts dominant norms, writers who use trickster figures or trickster narratives are able to write from the outside of society. The authors maintain that this allows one to write from a position of marginality and provide different worldviews. Under

the trickster analysis, multicultural literature is read so that stories of struggle, resistance, rebellion, creativity, continuance, and survival are present.

The essays in *Tricksterism* are as assorted as the trickster itself and focus on various aspects of tricksterism. One of the most intriguing and ingenious pieces in the collection is Yuko Matsukawa's "Cross-Dressing and Cross-Naming: Decoding Onoto Watanna," which examines the writings of Edith Eaton, an Anglo-Chinese writer who creates a Japanese identity for herself and writes under the name Onoto Watanna. Matsukawa argues that, through the creation of a Japanese identity, Edith Eaton becomes a trickster as she crosses cultural lines of ethnicity and authenticity. The claim is well supported, since Matsukawa demonstrates how, through deceptive performance and narrative—a trickster quality—Eaton is able to move in and out of many cultures and to shape-shift into various forms. The author critically explores how Eaton goes beyond adopting a Japanese name to writing about Japanese life and culture, dressing in Japanese clothes, and orientalizing the bindings of her books.

Eaton, Matsukawa argues, is as cunning as a trickster in the creation of her Japanese identity, playing a language game in choosing her pen name. Onoto is Japanese, and Wantanna is a combination of Japanese and Chinese ideograms. Wantanna, if pronounced in Japanese, means "to cross" and "name." These meanings, the author asserts, suggest that Eaton's name allows her to cross/pass into another culture, which is a trickster quality.

Why Eaton chose to define herself as Japanese is unclear yet important. The significance of her trickery is that it allowed her to tell stories of a life at the margins of society and to challenge the assumptions of ethnic identity and authenticity. Eaton's deceit and re-creation of self are specific trickster elements. Matsukawa's work is clearly presented and supported, extremely interesting, and well worth reading.

Another review that is equally thought-provoking yet not as imaginative is Karen Oakes's' "Reading Trickster; or Theoretical Reservations and a Seneca Tale." Oakes presents her work in a very orderly fashion. The essay is broken into three parts: (1) "A Social Science Reading of 'Twentgowa and the Mischief Maker,'" (2) "An Argument against Postmodern Theory: Trickster in Academe" and (3) "Twentgowa as Theory: Toward Trickster Reading." Oakes's analysis of the Seneca tale "Twentgowa and the Mischief Maker" is good social science reading but is not unique.

I agree with Oakes's assumption that "Twentgowa" is easily understood by Western readers if set within the social sciences. A social science reading, however, is contrary to the trickster spirit. Oakes recognizes how the trickster challenges the norms of society and defined truths, yet her analysis is to the contrary. Instead of challenging and liberating native stories through her examination, she supports the dominant society's claims of native representations and categories, which creates uniform interpretations.

Part 2 of Oakes's article encourages the use of social science in reading native literature and discourages the use of postmodernism. This section is very engaging but will attract only those who are familiar with literary theory and criticism. For anyone interested in literary debates and native literature, I highly recommend reading this review. In this section, Oakes outlines her opposition to native writer Gerald Vizenor's contention that the use of postmodern theory "liberates imagination and widens the audiences for tribal literatures" (p. 138). She also argues against Vizenor's declaration that reading native literature through the social sciences is suspect because social science theories "constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism, and the politics of academic determinism and the narrow theologies deducted from social science monologues, and the ideologies that arise from structuralism have reduced tribal literatures to an objective collection of consumable cultural artifacts" (p. 137).

Oakes further condemns Vizenor's postmodern approach because she believes it to be academic elitism: He speaks in an exclusive language only understood by Vizenor and other academics. That may be true, but social science jargon is also elitist. What is important in this debate, however, is not what interpretation to use but that it demonstrates the various means of analysis. Personally, I am tired of social science interpretative analysis, and I welcome with open arms the use of postmodernism because, to me, the trickster is postmodern—wild, imaginative, creative, and forever changing.

In addition to the theoretical argument of analysis, the most significant aspect of the book is its use of tricksterism in interpreting turn-of-the-century literature. In an age of multiculturalism, it is essential that we attempt to hear and understand the words of the past, and I invite and appreciate the authors' suggestion that early works be read through the various manifestations of the trickster—trickster narrative strategies and trickster characters—

so that new, more rewarding perspectives of literature can be obtained. In the trickster mode, let us be disruptive to the normal ways of seeing and understanding the world around us and encourage wild and unusual ways of analysis. In this light, I welcome *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature* as a contribution to Native American studies, multicultural studies, literary studies, and literary criticism.

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