



## A Comparative Study on Parody in *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*

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### Abstract

In *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (TM)*, parody as a distinctive writing technique is unfolding in front of readers, which effectively functions in developing the plot and serving for the theme of the novel. The thesis aims to carry on a comparative study on the parody employed in *TM* from the following two perspectives: parody on the Beat Generation and *On the Road* as well as parody on Sun Wukong and *Journey to the West*.

**Key words:** Parody; Comparative study; The beat generation; Sun Wukong; Culture assimilation

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### INTRODUCTION

The essence of the term parody is imitating a certain kind of writer in their thoughts or dictions and making some appropriate improvement in imitation. The purpose and emphasis are dissimilar used by various writers under different circumstances. For example, for the writers in 18<sup>th</sup>, they wish to utilize it to produce comic and amusing effect; in 20<sup>th</sup>, the writers like Joyce and Stein use parody as a form of experiment which has brand new rules; and postmodernists not only parody texts, but also history, reality and even social members in reality.

Till now, parody not only selects texts and discourses to imitate and transform, but models and alters the objects from other domains. In postmodernist works, parody is a popular skill, which gives prominence to the shortage of the parodied object. It has a destructive effect and it is a certain type of literary writing technique with clear intention and distinct analysis. The extent of the parodied objects is a large scale. It can be a writer, a work, a sort of writing technique, and views or standpoints, etc.. Resorting to parody, the author aims at making fun of the parodied objects, showing its funny and comical effects, in order to achieve the satiric purpose. In *TM*, parody is largely applied to the narration. In the thesis, three primary forms of parody will be unfolded in front of us, in order to describe the close connection between this writing technique, the development of the plot and the theme of *TM*.

### 1. PARODY ON THE BEAT GENERATION AND ON THE ROAD

In *TM*, Kingston portrays his protagonist as an image of a hippie of 1960s, who is deeply influenced by a group of poets and novelists at that time who are named the Beat Generation. The representatives of this group are William Burroughs, Allen Ginsburg, and Jack Kerouac, etc., who are a group of people against traditions and authorities. They gather in San Francisco, which is a western city of America and also an important place where Wittman, our protagonist, lives. They prefer to lead a vagrant life and appreciate the feeling of being on the road, favor jazz music, addict in drugs, take hallucinogen and try to experience unconventional kinds of sex, etc.. Moreover, they are aspired by these behaviors, which are shocked by the society, to produce their works and express their rebellious spirit. The Beat Generation is viewed as pioneers in anti-cultural movement and considered as the spiritual tutors and life leaders by hippies of 1960s.

Therefore, hippies of 1960s imitate their behaviors in life. Our protagonist, Wittman is one of them.

In his college, he agrees with the value system and the living way of the Beat Generation and imitates on these aspects. He cuts school to attend *Howl* trial. He addicts in drugs, takes fancy in Jazz music, enjoys life beyond the bond and feels the nameless freedom. Moreover, when he is dating with his beloved girl, he clearly behaves as the image of Kerouac. "He had tied his hair back, braided loose, almost a queue but not a slave queue, very hip..." (Kingston, 1989, p.12). Then, he dates from an "almost-girlfriend" (Ibid., p.20), who seems like this.

She wore a leotard and tights like an old-fashioned Beat chick...Wittman Ah Sing profiling down the street with a beautiful almost-girlfriend, clipping along, alongside, keeping up with him, the two of them making the scene on the Beach, like cruising in the gone Kerouac time of yore. (Ibid.)

The wandering on the Beach shows that Wittman is sentimentally attached to the Beat Generation. After this, he brings Nanci to a bookstore, which is named "the City Lights Pocket Book Shop" (Ibid., p.21) and is known by selling obscene books. While, although Wittman is searching for the traces left by the Beats, trying to think and behave as their ways and comparing himself with the Beat, when he is "blown away by a muster of famous poets", "he, a poor monkey, was yet looking for other of his kind." (Ibid.) which indicates that Wittman has dissimilarities with the Beats and he will begin to rethink his different direction. The parody on Kerouac, here, is the clue for readers to realize that some changes of Wittman will be coming. It also shows that the story from this moment on will be explored more deeply, and indicates that it is the cause of the development of the following story plot. In the next chapter, when he is contending with the Yale poet, his rethinking about the Beats is much more obvious. He says,

I used to dope, I don't dope anymore. I've seen all there is to see on dope; the trips have been repeating themselves, looping like *Dead of Night*. I liked dope; I learned a lot. I felt religious. I felt communal. I believed all sorts of things: the possibility of ...change the universe. (Ibid., p.48)

This part of the narration deeply shows that in Wittman's inner mind, he has changed his attitude towards the Beat Generation. He is suspicious about their living way and their value system. Now, he has no further desire to be like an image of the Beats. Here, the plot of the novel develops and the parody propels readers to catch much further trace implied by this unique stylistic feature in the following statement by Kingston. In Chapter Three "Twisters and Shouters", the whole paragraph from the end of page 69 to the beginning of page 70, Kingston let the narrator speak out loudly about Wittman's strong unsatisfied feeling at the back of his mind. He supposes that "if King Kerouac, King of the Beats, were walking here tonight" (Ibid., p.69), and he will "refute" his word

"little, twinkling little Chinese" (Ibid.). Here Wittman is stretching out his suspicious attitude towards the Beats. Now he is formally speaking out his justification and his conclusion about the Beats, and he will break away from them. Look at another parody case as a proof.

Jock Kerouac. I call into question your naming of me. I trust your sight no more. You tell people by their jobs. And by their race. And the wrong race at that. ... What do you know, Kerouac? What do you know? You don't know shit. I'm the American here. I'm the American walking here. Fuck Kerouac and his American road anyway. (Ibid., pp.69-70)

Here, Wittman has gradually realized the discrimination Kerouac and even other Americans towards Chinese Americans, he is disgusted at this King of the Beats. When he drives his wife roaming on the road in the west of the United States, his feeling about wide differences with the Beats is more prominent. After being out of work, he drives his wife on the road, like the character that is portrayed in *On the Road* by Kerouac. The experience on the road makes Wittman clearly wake up to comprehend that the only way to get rid of Chinese Americans' stereotype in the whites' minds is to produce influential Chinese American culture by Chinese Americans themselves, break silences to get the right to speak out on behalf of Chinese Americans themselves and finally enjoy the same equality with the whites as well as blend themselves into the mainstream society of the United States. Here, the parody on the Beats certainly is the embodiment of much further development of the plot in *TM*. In Chapter Eight, which is the climax of the novel, Wittman has been eventually capable of putting his own theater on before the public, which not only means that his theater creating is coming to the climax, but also shows that Wittman's striving on Chinese Americans' equal rights in culture is also coming into the climax. In Wittman's theater, he let all various types of characters perform on the stage: mysterious monkey, Gwan Goong riding on the Red Horse, conjoined twin brothers—Bones and Jones during the age of the American Civil War, the hostess dancers of different countries and the little girls in the cheongsam, etc.. This theater is just like the carnival party: The increasing numbers of spectators, the Fashion Show, Dance Show, Acrobatic Performance and Puppet Show, etc. which are interwoven in the theater performance. Moreover, on the stage, the actors even put the atmosphere into the climax by lighting firecrackers and fireworks. The atmosphere on and off the stage is bustling with noise and excitement. This carnival party is ended with Wittman's one-man show. In his monologue, he satirizes the cultural discrimination in American culture and turns the stereotyped Chinese American image up and down in the mainstream American value system. The open ending of this novel also leaves readers a huge pondering and imaginary space: Chinese Americans will build and should build a specific space that is an independent and equal space both belonging to Chinese American culture

and American culture. This also inoculates Kingston's strong hope that one day in the future, the mainstream of American culture is an equal multi-national culture, the mainstream of American society is an equal multi-national society and all Chinese Americans can find out their American national identity and realize their status. They can eventually blend together into the mainstream of American society, which can be called, from the true sense, as a big national melting pot. Here, Kingston's hope is just her aim at writing this fiction and it's also the theme of this fiction. Meanwhile, the roaming on the road of the west America can be also seen as a kind of parody *On the Road* by Kerouac. Wittman has similar experience as the protagonist in the novel of *On the Road*. Both two protagonists temporarily escape from the cruel reality of the society at that time. However, Wittman is much different from the Beats. Kingston uses the parody on the Beat Generation to show the transformation of the attitudes towards the Beats. This kind of parody, here, on the Beats and *On the Road* brings the development, the climax, and the open ending of the novel *TM* and it also deserves revealing the theme of this fiction.

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## 2. PARODY ON SUN WUKONG AND JOURNEY TO THE WEST

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In addition to the parody on the Beats and western literary work *On the Road*, Kingston also takes the typical Chinese fictional character and Chinese traditional class as her parody objects. The parody, here, also contributes in relating with the development of the plot and revealing the theme of the fiction.

First, our readers will recollect the image of Sun Wukong, when they are meeting with Wittman Ah Sing in the novel. These two characters are respectively in an American literary work and a traditional Chinese classic, but they share some common points. The parody on Sun Wukong not only focuses on the image imitation, but also considers it as a means to criticize the stereotype of Chinese Americans. Kingston connects the two images together in their behaviors and their speeches. In the first chapter, Kingston introduces the monkeyish image of Wittman. When he is a child, he has dressed as a monkey to perform in order to help his parents support the family. When Nanci evaluates his poem like a work produced by a Black person, he behaves like a monkey. When Nanci queries his poems, he tells her that "he is the incarnation of King of Monkey in contemporary America" (Ibid., p.33). Meanwhile, Wittman is called as "poor monkey" and "dear monkey" by the narrator (Ibid.). In these two ways, Kingston calls Wittman as "king of monkey" and she has her purpose and target. Sun Wukong is famous for his seventy-two transformations, which are his housekeeping skill and Wittman is also characterized by his changes. The difference is that Wittman changes with

his identities, while Sun Wukong changes with the body of the deformation. One reason of the parody on Sun Wukong is to indicate that Wittman is not the timid and contemptible stereotyped Chinese American by means of his transformations in identities, just as Sun Wukong has been recognized by immortals of the heaven by way of bringing his housekeeping skill into achievement at aiding Xuan Zang in the pilgrimage. Sun Wukong penetrates the insight of the devils and monsters and Wittman also has sharp-eyes to the discrimination and marginalization which exists in the mainstream of American society towards Chinese Americans' national identity and their cultural identity. In the climax of the novel, Chapter Eight "Bones and Jones", in his theater which is produced by himself, he utilizes various artistic means to criticize the alienated images of Chinese Americans in American people's eyes. At this point, Wittman is similar to Sun Wukong, who has bravery to combat. However, he advocates settling problems peacefully instead of waging wars. When he is facing the Vietnam War, he chooses to marry Tana and considers being a religious man rather than serves in the army. In the climax, Wittman puts on his splendid theater, in which there are all colors of people, all collage stories alluded from Chinese and western cultures, all types of frantic behaviors adding fun to his theater, and all spectators' mentalities are shocked by its diversified scenes of the theater. Here, Kingston repeatedly uses her unique stylistic skill to vividly clarify her proposition of building a peaceful and harmonious world without cultural and racial discrimination. Here, the theme of this novel has been brought to its climax. Not only Wittman calls himself as "King of Monkey" at the beginning of the novel referred before, but also the narrator names Wittman as "dear American monkey" (Ibid., p.340). At the end of the novel, in Chapter Nine "One-Man Show", Kingston leaves readers an open ending with the parody on Sun Wukong. "Dear American monkey, don't be afraid. Here, let us tweak your ear, and kiss your other ear." (Ibid.)

Kingston uses the parody on Sun Wukong as the clue to identify the cause, the development, the climax and the end of the whole novel. This parody on Sun Wukong is a very significant stylistic skill used in this novel by Kingston. Kingston takes the image of Sun Wukong to set Wittman's distinctive traits off. She intends to persuade Chinese Americans to receive and recognize this image who behaves "very hip" (Ibid., p.12) and he is a "King of Monkey". Moreover, for Chinese Americans, they have the burden of confusion with their identity. Therefore, they can only take imitation of Wittman, who is continuously trying to look for his appropriate cultural and national position or status in American society, in order that they can finally cope with their sense of dislocation. Only in this way, it's possible for them to assimilate themselves into the mainstream of American society.

Besides the parody on the image of Sun Wukong, the parody on *Journey to the West* is also another case of

Kingston's writing technique of parody. We have referred before that parody can be viewed as the imitation of a large scope of objects, thus, the parody on the text itself is certainly one part of them. The description of Wittman's roaming on the road in the west of the United States composes the main body of the revised version of *Journey to the West*, in which the protagonist is "an American King of Monkey" rather than "a Chinese King of Monkey". In this American version of *Journey to the West*, Wittman wanders in the Golden Gate Park; he has a visit of three famous bridges in San Francisco together with his wife Tana; he knows about the position of air-raid shelter in San Francisco; he takes part in the party hold by his friend Lance in Auckland and he pays a visit to his parents in Sacramento with Tana. Moreover, when he is driving on the road to the western America with Tana, he tells Tana many his familiar things and introduces some his familiar places, all of which firmly stand out of his mind. For instance:

Sutter's Fort is that way, said Wittman. "Sac High. I graduated from Sac High. That's the Greyhound Station. Crocker, ... That's the Old Eagle Theatre. The first theater was the Chinese puppet theater on I Street. That's the Governor's Mansion. That's the hotel where congressmen go to wheel and deal."... There's the peanut man. ... (Ibid., p.178)

In traditional Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong accompanies his master to walk on the road to the west and in American *Journey to the West*, Wittman together with his wife walks on the road to the west. The only difference between them is about the route. For Sun Wukong, the west is an unfamiliar place both from the spatial and the mental aspect, but for Wittman, the west is such a familiar place in those two respects. The parody Kingston used here, just exemplifies that Wittman is an American and America is his native land as well as his home country through the comparison between the similarities and dissimilarities in these two different versions of *Journey to the West*. The course of Wittman's physical experience, from wandering in San Francisco to roaming on the road in western America, is just the course of Wittman's spiritual experience, from walking back and forth in the mainstream of American culture

and American society into which Wittman resolutely endeavors to assimilate himself. The growing and maturing of Wittman, by way of traveling "on the road" physically and mentally, is the same developmental process of the plot in *TM*, which marks the cause till the end of the plot in *TM*.

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## CONCLUSION

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The image of Wittman, created by Kingston, is a mixture who is "an American King of Monkey". Moreover, the novel of *TM*, produced by Kingston, is also a mixture which is a story of a Chinese American's story of *On the Road* and *Journey to the West*. According to Kingston's parody on these two different types of images and literary works, an overall fictional plot of *TM* and a complete showing about the theme of *TM* are clearly presented before readers. Through Kingston's confident allusion and borrowing from other classic literary writers and works as well as adding to her own genius reformulation and transformation, this unique postmodern stylistic skill is proved to be her representative writing technique.

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