

Stefanie Tannen. *The Female Trickster: The Mask that Reveals, Post-Jungian and Postmodern Psychological Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Culture*. London, New York: Routledge, 2007.

By Rosemary Onyango, Indiana State University

1 The increasing scholarly attention on the manifestation of tricksters in postmodern fictive narratives indicates the figure's significance as a motif and stylistic novelty. Among those who have contributed valuable insights into this topic are Jeanne Rosier Smith and Jeanne Campbell Reesman. Tannen's book supplements this growing body of literature in its creative and passionate accommodation of interdisciplinary perspectives. Although Hyde's article "Where are the Women Tricksters?", included in Reesman's volume, indicates that female tricksters are less prevalent in contemporary times, Tannen proclaims: "A female Trickster is among us. She stands visible at the crossroads of feminism, humor, depth, psychology and postmodernism, ready for us to unpack her bag of multiple meanings" (3).

2 Grounded in post-Jungian and postmodern psychological perspectives, Tannen traces the progression of the female Trickster in mythology, social institutions, literature and film revealing how the feminine identity has been shaped, redefined and liberated from various limitations. She views the use of a mature sense of humor as central to exposing the Trickster's wit, allowing her to reclaim her life. Inspired by the Nancy Drew Mystery Series of her youth and contemporary American works of fiction Tannen's thesis reflects her passion for this topic:

My thesis throughout this book has been that what has been manifested in the female body in the last half of the twentieth century, while certainly standing on the shoulders of all those witty women and men who have come before them, is a new variant of Feminine energy manifesting through humor which can be embodied in many forms: from heterosexual woman or man, a cross-dresser, a transvestite, a homosexual, and other gender forms not yet known or named. (240)

3 Divided into four parts, the book has fourteen chapters, detailed endnotes, a useful index and lengthy bibliography. Part I lays the groundwork for the study. Following a brief introduction and definitions in chapter 1, chapter 2 introduces the focal fictional female Tricksters: Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski, a lawyer and investigator; Sara Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, a feminist investigator concerned with issues of wealth, power and social justice; Barbara Neely's Blanche White, an African American worker that employs her Trickster energy to confront race, gender and class; and Dana Stabenow's Kate Shugak, an attractive Native American with a sensitive and critical mind that discusses prejudicial attitudes within

her own community. Chapter 3 provides theoretical frameworks for analyzing these and other female detectives.

4 Part II, "Calling upon the Ancestors," is a compelling exploration of the repression of women's imagination in institutionalized patriarchy detailing the social-economic, legal and political factors that influenced the evolution of women's autonomy in their role as wives, writers and professionals. Chapter 6, "Law and the imagination" exposes how the courts sanctioned gender bias before the 1970s, restricting women's right to vote, own property and become lawyers. Tannen attributes legal transformations to the growing consciousness of a male judge who witnessed the impact of gender bias on women in his courtroom in the 1980s and to women's own activism. Regarding the latter she states:

As women streamed into the legal profession in the 1970s and 1980s, they were the ones who could not avert their eyes from the legal enclosure women found themselves in and thus led in pushing through the cases which challenged sex-based discrimination. (91)

5 Additionally, Tannen's examination of various views about Trickster myths such as Native American's Winnebago and North West coast of America's Raven, is linked to and strengthens her treatment of women's humor in Parts III, "Honoring the Traditions" and IV, "Re/storation." According to Tannen, creative feminine identity arises from the women's role as bridge builders "between previously uncrossable boundaries and borders" (204). Another avenue for exploring humor is *Sex in the City*, which, in Tannen's view, exemplifies Trickster's re-emergence in popular media. Tannen stresses that besides their interaction with men, the focal characters bond with each other and "work their shape-shifting magic on every possible permutation of sexual adventure previously off-limits for women to "voice" in mainstream culture" (226). Exploring themes as varied as relationships, occupations and social justice, Tannen demonstrates how they weave words with humor to expose issues that society views as subversive.

6 The book's main contributions include thorough treatment of interdisciplinary perspectives, reviews of various sources that span several decades and original insights. Tannen infuses her personal experience in her discussion of waves of feminism and adopts a feminist approach to textual materials which "would require at the very least an explicit demonstration of sensitivities to the differences that affect the writer, the reader, and the cultures they are embedded within, including an analysis of the impacts of these contexts upon the writing" (31). The book exposes multiple evolutions from earlier held views in the context of socialization and psychological models, feminism, and the Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives in juxtaposition to trends in law and imagination, humor and the

emergence of the female Trickster in women's writing. Tannen's observation that early feminist modernism and postmodernist theoretical assumptions share some limitations including lack of sensitivity to diversity indicates that she does not hesitate to expose their weaknesses.

7 In discussing how socialization patterns might have enabled and restricted men and women with the potential to becoming great writers, Tannen draws from sources ranging from the early works of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, to new energy in women's writings produced between the nineteenth century and 1970s. Regarding white women writers she notes, "Any women writing during this time frame had to be extremely privileged in relation to material and ideological determinants such as money, education, status, genre and conduct to have her imaginal realms even come near pen and paper" (Tannen 99). Although the changing of married women's family names to that of the husbands' limited their property rights; Tannen observes that besides collaborating with men, pioneer women writers "took male names or showcased their married titles in order to get published...they worked within women's traditional statuses and role expectations to manifest their Trickster energies" (101).

8 Recognizing the decade of the 1980s a defining era, Tannen affirms that the renaissance of the female Trickster was not accidental. She builds a strong case about narratives of gender socialization, the legal system and male-dominated literary canons that impacted the personal and cultural survival of generations of women. The Trickster energy discovered in mythology, mystery novels, poetry and excerpts from film support how they navigated barriers in the process of salvaging their autonomy. The book highlights the recurrent motif, "refusing to be victim" and the theme of "the mask that reveals" as the hallmarks of the postmodern female Trickster who has mastered the art of deploying mature humor, authority, agency and autonomy to overcome obstacles. However, Tannen cautiously celebrates the prevalence of the Trickster energy in women's writing and society, stating: "Even though western women have legal identity along with greater freedom of physical and psychological movement, life is still quite segregated, albeit in a more subtle fashion" (164).

9 A few sections suffer from lack of clarity and specificity. Chapter 9 discusses humor, a central component of the Trickster energy. In some instances, such as the treatment of the four stages of development Piaget's views and the author's appear indistinct. Also, the section on clowns although linked to the humor in female sleuths, lacks specific supporting evidence. Regarding the use of questions, a few seem to interrupt the flow of ideas. The summary section of "Imagination and metaphor," contains two questions that beg for a comment instead, there is a quotation from Thelma Shinn that though informative, renders a relatively

fractured ending compared to other chapters that summarize the salient ideas. Similarly, in the section titled "Trickster as taboo transgressor," Tannen introduces several questions stating they would be addressed in Chapters 9 and 10. While the latter attempts to tackle some of them, both chapters pose additional questions.

10 Overall, the book is a valuable scholarly contribution that is well researched and inspiring. It presents a number of thought-provoking ideas that will be of considerable interest to readers and researchers in multicultural literature and gender studies.

Works Cited

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