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**Author**

Lee, Hsiu-chuan

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## Genre-Crossing: Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and its Discursive Community

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Hsiu-chuan Lee

This paper seeks to explore the potential of an individual's practice of writing/speaking to be politically and culturally productive. Taking Maxine Hong Kingston's controversial book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) as a case, I will study the problematics of textual circulation dealt with in the book as well as the way in which it dramatically reflects the discursive transmission/interpretation taking place around the book. There are two reasons to choose *The Woman Warrior* as a text of investigation: First, as one of the most widely read and talked about anthologized texts among contemporary literary works, *The Woman Warrior's* circulation enacts a discursive community crossing the boundaries of genres/disciplines.<sup>1</sup> It is taught in courses and departments ranging from composition, American culture, ethnic studies, women's studies, and popular culture to postmodernism and serves as rhetorical model, autobiography, biography and even historiography. Second, not only does a multi-generic discursive community ensue from the reading and the transmission of *The Woman Warrior*; but the book itself is concerned with the problematics of textual circulation. In a sense, the telling and re-telling of stories in *The Woman Warrior* dramatically reflect the discursive transmission/interpretation taking place outside the book. While each myth/story/memory in *The Woman Warrior* branches into divergent interpretations, the narrative of the book as a whole similarly leads not to a self-contained, totalizing authorship, but to a dialogical and historical cognition.

Indeed, as the interpretive history of *The Woman Warrior* is inscribed by the development of contemporary feminist, ethnic, postmodern and, particularly, Chinese American aesthetic discourses, the multiple discursive voices inside the book are correlated with a Chinese immigrant history. As revealed in the transmission of the "no-name woman" story, *The Woman Warrior* embodies at least three different viewpoints of immigrant Chinese and/or Chinese Americans: the viewpoint of the Chinese left behind by their relatives and friends immigrating to the U.S., that

of the first generation Chinese Americans who move to the U.S. in adulthood and that of the second generation Chinese Americans who are born in America and have knowledge about China only form re-told stories. Every shift of a historical position and/or a change of the story-teller calls for a new reading/interpretation of an existing story. Or, it might be argued, underscoring each individual's attempt at story-telling/writing is her/his need to negotiate with a specific living/historical context. In either case, story-telling in *The Woman Warrior* features less a repetition of something already existing than a continuation and enlargement, if not a conversion and a distortion, of earlier stories.

Using Thomas Beebee's theory of genre as a basis, the textual transmission in and around *The Woman Warrior* reads as a continuous genre-crossing.<sup>2</sup> Beebee defines genre in terms of its "use-value." To him, generic distinction is imaginary (as distinct from symbolic) and genre is embodied in the reader's imaginary/lived relations with a text. Put another way, the genre of a text is determined at the moment when it is appropriated by a reader into a specific "use," or, when it is cast into a specific interpretation—an interpretation significant (useful) to the reader in her/his particular subject/historical position. Since meaning is impossible without the mediation of a genre or genres, each act of writing/reading/interpretation is to select/create a genre. To re-tell/reinterpret other people's stories is then to appropriate those stories into one's "use," namely, into one's "genre." Given the correlation of "genre," "meaning," and "power,"<sup>3</sup> all individual writing/speaking somehow attempts self-assertion.

Nonetheless, as a genre is generally applied to a text retroactively and no texts are "fully identical with their genres" (Beebee 19), not a single act of reading/speaking could be totalizing. A polyphonic discursive community inside and around *The Woman Warrior* is possible precisely because every reading/story-telling is open to multiple re-readings (re-uses). Each act of self-assertion/negotiation is historically based/bounded and inextricably provisional. Kingston confessed that there are "omissions" in *The Woman Warrior* she did not realize "until long after" she had finished the book. She even declared that she would "make some changes in setting" if she could rewrite *The Woman Warrior* (Lim 24-25). Moreover, since innate to each act of speaking/writing is not only a rebellion/revision of already existing stories but a

desire for a hearing (for an audience, a community), a self-asserted story-telling usually leads to a negotiation of self-other/self-community relations. The personal thus appeals—in the Bakhtinian sense—dialogically to the collective. In the following analysis, I will focus on the interaction of the different voices (or the Bakhtinian dialogized languages/genres) in *The Woman Warrior*.<sup>4</sup> My goal is to see how an individual voice, instead of being self-contained, might contribute to the cultural and the political in its participation in/enactment of a polyphonic and multi-generic discursive communality.

*The Woman Warrior* opens with the narrator Maxine's re-telling of her mother's cautionary story about her no-name aunt. This attempt at re-telling, more correctly a re-interpretation, of the no-name woman's story marks Maxine's intention to break out of her complicity with her mother's imposed silence, a complicity which has lasted for twenty years. What makes Maxine feel the need to break the silence? What makes the silence suddenly unbearable for her? Before Maxine realizes that she has to talk, the silence provides her with an illusion of emotional safety and signifying stability. Maxine tells her readers, "I enjoyed the silence. At first it did not occur to me I was supposed to talk ... It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that silence became a misery" (166). Silence becomes questionable when one sees through the illusion of its taken-for-grantedness, this which is demystifiable only when something alien is introduced into one's living world to change one's perspective on things. The new demand from school enables Maxine to see through her false enjoyment in silence before school. Similarly, she can no longer participate in her mother's silence when she has learned to see things differently from her mother. Instead of accepting the story of the no-name aunt for its cautionary use, Maxine reads it into different "genres" and in so doing puts into question the cautionary value of this story.

Indeed, Maxine's biggest contribution in the section of "No-Name Woman" is her transformation of a silence into "voice." Whereas "silence" marks the closure of a story, the termination of the act of story-telling, "voice" excavates the paradoxes inside the story by exposing its innate incompleteness. In Lacan's graph of desire, for example, "voice" is placed at the right end of his signifier vector S-S' to indicate the objectal leftover of each signi-

fying process ("quilting") or, the process of *capitonnage*. "Voice" is therefore the remnant of each signification. As something unheld, uncontrolled in meaning production, "voice" always passes to the other and thus prevents the symbolic movement from being arrested. Conversely, "silence" exerts a violent suspension of "voice." It fills up the gap between each utterance and enunciation, enforces an imaginary arrestment on the sliding signifier of the symbolic, and embodies the moment of (illusory) signification and understanding.

Hence a dominant signifying economy arises around a silence. The taboo story of no-name woman is powerful precisely because people circulate it in silence. While everyone secretly knows and believes that they understand the story without ever prying into its origins or possible ways to interpret it, the story serves as an imaginary center of the village community. The shared silence is not only a result of a shared fantasy/genre of the villagers, but also a promoter of this shared fantasy/genre. Fantasy can be understood as an imaginary scenario working to support (give consistency to) what we call "reality." Since it enables the creation of signification, it works like a genre, determining meaning production/transmission.

Although it seems that the villagers intended to banish the aunt into forgetfulness, the creation as well as the (secret/silent) remembrance of her story held the villagers together. Despite the fact that in appearance the no-name aunt was punished because she had broken the "roundness" of her village community (13), it is perhaps more correct to say that the "roundness" of the community was more conceivable after a law-breaking scapegoat was picked. As Maxine guesses, her aunt might have escaped that severe punishment if the incident had not occurred at a time when her village community was under the danger of disruption, a disruption resulting from wars, famine, floods and especially from the departure of most of the village men to work overseas. She points out that "[a]dultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food" (13). Instead of following her mother's interpretation to read the no-name aunt's behavior as casting her village community into crisis, Maxine implies that the punishment was significant due to the villagers' crisis.



The "use-value" of the no-name-woman's story is thus understandable. Then why does Maxine's mother Brave Orchid need to re-tell this story when she is no longer in China? As we are told by Maxine, Brave Orchid is strongly concerned with the code of necessity. She only tells the "useful parts" of the story and she "will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life" (6). What then is the "use-value" or no-name-woman story to her? Why should she appeal to a "traditional" "Chinese" story in educating her daughter who was born in and grew up in America and has never been to China?

Here, it is useful to answer these questions in reference to Brave Orchid's situation as an immigrant Chinese woman in America. Before her husband sent for her, Brave Orchid was a female doctor, a slave holder and according to Maxine, a "modern" (76) and "professional" woman (77). Brave Orchid was by no means a conservative village woman when she was in China. In comparison with most of the women of her age, she was noted for her adventurous spirit and untraditional thinking. That her thinking was accepted, even admired, among her community in China is not because it was the "real," or the most correct/objective, but because she always was able to "talk" others into her fantasy/genre. A "capable exorcist" (92), she could banish whatever was incompatible with her thinking out of her living economy, just as she once talked the Sitting Ghost "out of existence" (Sato 141). However, after she arrived in America, her empowered role as a "shaman" has been jeopardized. As a woman and immigrant minority in society, she falls from respected female doctor to laundress. Failing to integrate into her living economy the new ideas and new ways of speaking/doing things in America, Brave Orchid cannot but conceal her anxiety of losing self-power by telling cautionary stories, imposing silence upon her American-born daughter.

Accordingly, when Brave Orchid asks Maxine not to "tell anyone" she has an aunt (15), she is attempting to have her daughter participate in her economy and thereby reinforces her authority perhaps not only over her daughter but over her immigrant situation in general. First, as a story-teller, she has asserted her position of knowledge; moreover, insisting that no "voice" leak out of her story, she confirms her scenario. In fact, the no-name woman's secret is not the only secret Brave Orchid attempts to

guard against disclosure. The narrator Maxine's world is filled with immigrant secrets that her parents keep cautioning her against revealing in front of Americans. Ironically, she would never know what to tell even if she wanted to because she is never told what these secrets exactly are (183). The usefulness of these secrets lies not in whatever the substance they conceal—if any—but in their formal power as secrets to consolidate the Chinese community. To the immigrant Chinese, the secrets create an illusion that there must be something essential underlying the ethnic label "Chinese" and thus elevate the Chinese to the status of the "real" while relegating the American to that of "ghost."

Unable to achieve self-fulfillment in America, Brave Orchid explains away her failure by reducing everything American into "ghosts": "This is a terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away" (104). Failing to exert control over her children, she accuses her "American children" of being like "ghosts" who have no "feelings and memory" (115) and of not being smart enough to "tell real from false" (202). At the same time, she projects the "real" onto the life in China:

Someday, very soon, we're going back home, where there are Han people everywhere. We'll buy furniture then, *real* tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time. (98)  
[my emphasis]

Ironically, Brave Orchid never really plans to go back to China. As Maxine remarks, "my grandmother wrote letters pleading for them [her parents] to come home, and they ignored her" (108). The creation of secrets, the exorcistic gestures in facing the American "ghosts," as well as the projections of the "real" to the life in China only reflect Brave Orchid's need of self-assertion—her self-negotiation with the immigrant living condition she deems hostile.

The transmission of the no-name woman's story from the villagers to Brave Orchid exemplifies a shift of the story's "use-value." Brave Orchid appropriates the story for her personal use. She establishes an imaginary relation with the story that is different from the relation between the Chinese villagers and the original story. This shift of "use-value" could be understood as Brave Orchid's employment of a different genre in looking at the same story. The introduction of her personal needs/experiences into the story opens up the original reading and makes the story significant

in relation to her immigrant situation. Originating possibly as a story of scapegoating, the story of the no-name woman becomes a cautionary story imposing ethnic silence and complicity on Brave Orchid. When the story is further handed down to the narrator Maxine, it is her turn to re-tell the story in her own genre and produce her own interpretations. Maxine's re-telling of her mother's stories and ancient myth is not necessarily more revolutionary than Brave Orchid's story-telling. She does not re-tell her mother's stories and myth simply for the purpose of questioning her mother. Like Brave Orchid, she inscribes her personal needs into the story/myth and thereby makes the story/myth imaginarily useful to her individual life.

Maxine's focus on "use-value" is evident when she talks about the story of her no-name aunt: "Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (8). The incompleteness of Brave Orchid's version of the story offers Maxine an empty space in which to inscribe her own problems, anxieties and wishes. Her emphasis on the gender issue of the story reflects her personal concern with the prevailing sexism in her living world. Her preoccupation with the images of "silence" points to her childhood terror of not being able to speak, a terror recounted in the final section of the book.<sup>5</sup> The mentioning of the no-name aunt's bravery—the aunt's willingness to protect both her lover and her child in spite of the social consequences and her attempt to cross "boundaries not delineated in space" (8)—reveals Maxine's wish to become a law-breaking, progressive female heroine. Finally, the retelling of her aunt's loneliness and banishment from her community reminds us of Maxine's fear of being unwanted by her own family and community.

Additionally, the intended misreading of the tales of Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen also exposes Maxine's endeavor to relate the story to her own problems. The combination of the story of Yue Fei—the famous hero whose mother inscribes words on his back—with the story of Fa Mu Lan brings light to Maxine's preoccupation with the power of words. Her emphasis on "the hazards of crossing gender boundaries," as well as her assertion of Fa Mu Lan's womanhood, which she brings out by giving her a lover and having her bear a child in battle, is again attributed to her own concern with her marginalized gender position. In the story of Ts'ai Yen, Maxine further re-writes the significance of Ts'ai Yen's



return to China: in the historical story, the redemption of Ts'ai Yen is achieved when she is ransomed back to China, that is, when she is released from her detention in the barbarian land. In the narrator's version of this story, however, Ts'ai Yen's "moment of glory or validation occurs" when she "breaks out of silence into song," (Wong, "Cultural and Historical Context" 34) a song bridging the communication gap between the barbarian and the Chinese. Twisting the historical story to her own use, Maxine draws her reader's attention to the communicative function of art and validates her own position as a story-teller by filling in the gap between her Chinese parentage and her American life.

Here, in spite of a seeming mother-daughter conflict in *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine's focus on the "use-value" of story-telling makes her a good follower of Brave Orchid's code of necessity. If Brave Orchid is a capable shaman who draws a strict line between the reality and the "ghost" world and never allows "ghosts'" intrusion into her world of pragmatism, Maxine must have found in her mother a model of exorcism. In fact, a major part of *The Woman Warrior* is devoted to Maxine's quest for certainty. Repeatedly she reminds herself that her mother's stories are meant to "test" her "strength to establish realities" (5). She never ceases to question what is real and what is made-up: "I continue to sort out what is just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (205). When she grows up, moreover, she feels that she has to leave home because she wants to see the world "logically." She "enjoy[s] the simplicity" (204) after banishing the "ghosts," such as anything incomprehensible, from her waking "American" life:

To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. (87)

Whereas Brave Orchid defends herself by denouncing everything beyond her control as "American," Maxine categorizes whatever is outside her conceptual logic as "Chinese." Both of them seek excuses for their failure to resolve the paradoxes in their lives under the banner of "cultural binarism." Neither of them realizes that their conflicts are derived not so much from the incompatibil-

ity of "Chinese" and "American" as from their different positions as subjects in history.

Because of Brave Orchid and the narrator Maxine's partial-subject position, any of their attempts to set up an economic closure around their lives is doomed to fail. The fantasy/genre they depend upon is always traversable once one looks at the issue from a different subject/historical position. For Brave Orchid, the most obvious failure is seen in her intervention into her sister Moon Orchid's marriage. In the section "At the Western Palace," Brave Orchid tries to reactivate her old myth of "the emperor's four wives." She insists that Moon Orchid claim her right over her husband who had left her immediately after their marriage in China over thirty years ago and settled down in America with a new wife. As expected, the whole "show" (150) arranged by Brave Orchid to have Moon Orchid meet with her husband turns out to be a tragedy. Not only can the husband not take Moon Orchid into his house but Moon Orchid suffers from paranoia from then on. Sau-Ling Wong rightly points out that Brave Orchid is in this case "self-contained" and "utterly oblivious to her environment" (Wong, "Reading" 46). Her insistence on the correctness of her own reading of the myth/legend illustrates the limitation of her personal vision. Actually, Brave Orchid is understandably absorbed in the myth of "the emperor's four wives." Moon Orchid's was left behind by a husband gone overseas; her situation reminds Brave Orchid of her own anxiety, perhaps not only before her husband sent for her from America, but even after she has joined him there. As Maxine observes, "Brave Orchid told her children they must help her keep their father from marrying another woman because she didn't think she could take it any better than her sister" (160). Underlying Brave Orchid's attempt to "help" her sister is her anxiety about her own marriage.

Following her mother, Maxine's probing for the absolute is seen most clearly in the section "White Tigers." Marilyn Yalom suggests a reading of Fa Mu Lan's story as Maxine's "wish-fulfillment fantasy designed to counter the image of the victimized aunt" (110). Whether Maxine really takes Fa Mu Lan as her model warrior is still debatable; however, what is clear is that the Fa Mu Lan described in her dream is endowed with an absolute vision and a totalizing power, the two things Maxine wishes for in her waking life. The myth starts with Maxine's crossing from the

symbolic world of her mother's story-telling into an absolute world of dream. Or, borrowing from Lacan, she leaves a partial world of "voice" for a visual world of specular totality.<sup>6</sup> No sooner has Maxine quit her mother's "voice" of story-telling than she enters into the dream world which is marked by multiple colors (Sato 139). Through the emphasis on the visual experience in this section, the mysterious power of the old couple who adopt Maxine in her dream is manifested in their possession of a magical water gourd through which one can *see* the whole world. Moreover, the training Maxine undergoes to be a warrior consists of exercises which teach her to transcend the linguistic world of meaning deferral to an ideographic world of imagery stability. First, she is required to create the ideographic words with her body. Later, she is supposed to copy the actions of owls, bats and tigers. Then, she is trained to see "a dragon whole" (29) even though the dragon is only a creature of human imagination. Her lesson concludes when she is able to "point at the sky and make a sword appear" (33)—an accomplishment demonstrating her ability to manipulate images in the world at her will.

However, this dream vision is unfulfillable in Maxine's real life. Even the author Kingston does not feel that the fantasy tale of Fa Mu Lan manifests an ideal to be quested for. When asked why she did not put "White Tigers" at the climax of her book, Kingston dismissed the story to be a "childish myth" that she put at the beginning of the book because it is "not a climax we reach for" ("Mis-readings" 57). There are at least two reasons for Kingston to dislike the story of Fa Mu Lan. First, it features a dream for totality while the sense of totality is inextricably an illusion. Not only is the achievement of absolute vision impossible, but the search for the absolute usually leads to an intolerance of differences, an impenetrable exorcism. Secondly, Kingston does not like the image of "warrior." Her reaction to her connection with Fa Mu Lan was "very negative": "I don't feel that she's me... I wish I had not had a metaphor of a warrior person who uses weapons and goes to war" (qtd in Aubery 80). This pacifist position is reiterated in the narrator Maxine's comment: "I mustn't feel bad that I haven't done as well as the swordswoman did; after all, ... I dislike armies" (*Warrior* 49). In addition, Maxine says, "[w]hat fighting and killing I have seen have not been glorious but slum grubby.... Fights are confusing as to who has won" (51). Underlying each fight is a

desire to erase the alien, the uncontrollable, namely, the other. It is "confusing as to who has won" because it is always hard to say whether one can really win over the other or just temporarily suppress the other and then suffer from the danger of the other's resurgence.

Evidently, in contrast to her dream vision, Maxine's waking life is filled with lack, frustrations and insolvable paradoxes. She tells us immediately after her recounting of Fa Mu Lan's story: "My American life has been such a disappointment" (45). Doubly marginalized in her living world as both a woman and an ethnic minority, Maxine is desperate to prove to her parents the usefulness of raising daughters as well as to assert her presence in front of her racist boss. Speaking is important for her because she finds that the only thing in common between she and Fa Mu Lan is "the words" at their backs (53). Nonetheless, while Fa Mu Lan's words are carved into her skin and conjoined with her body, Maxine's reporting words are floating, sliding, subject to other people's readings. Her position is less totalizing. Always exploratory and fragmentary, her speaking both asserts her subject position and addresses her to the judgement of a discursive community.

This also accounts for why Maxine has to keep speaking. Unable to maintain a signifying enclosure of silence, Maxine suffers from the anxiety of losing her voice: "Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves" (186). Moreover, once she opens her mouth and starts speaking, it is again difficult for her to hold herself back. One of the most obvious examples can be found in the episode of Maxine's "telling list." The teenager Maxine creates a list of over two hundred truths about her bad thinking and misbehavior to confess to Brave Orchid in order to "stop the pain in [her] throat" (197). What she wants to do is to hold her anxieties and concerns under control through the help of a regulating list and spoken language. However, when she starts to talk, the bursting list is soon confronted by the striking back of Brave Orchid, the "champion talker" (202). Maxine creates her "telling list" to unburden her mind of her insecurities but instead, the list continues to grow and it seems that she needs to talk more to regain her stability. This episode is particularly interesting because it reminds us of Kingston's situation in real life. Deeply engaged in the discursive community built around her book, Kingston could have to spend her life-time clarifying, defending,



and thus re-writing the significance of her writings after the publication of *The Woman Warrior*.

Given the fact that a voice leads to more voices, perhaps the only way for the narrator Maxine to escape from the dialogical complications of the world of voice is to self-impose an exile from her subject position of uncertainty. Fa Mu Lan, as an example, leaves her village to accept tutoring from the mysterious old couple in order to gain the supernatural power of a warrior. Facing her husband's voyage overseas and her children's death, the young Brave Orchid decides to leave her family to become an exorcistic midwife in a medical school. Similarly, Maxine has to leave her mother as well as her Chinese community in order to live "ghost-free" (108). Here, exile implies freedom from her/his subject position in the discursive tension, as well as an assimilation into an established economic/conceptual/discursive system. In other words, exile is a giving-away of one's exploratory subjectivity in exchange for a temporary illusory stability and safety, by making oneself an object of another's desire and manipulation. Taken at the generic level, it is to categorize oneself into a single established genre rather than invent one's individual genre in reading/interpretation. Lacking the courage required for entry into a discursive community, this self-imposed exile features a spirit of escapism, a relinquishment of one's individual agency.

Therefore, although this form of escapism, self-relinquishment and self-abstention from community is a way to resolve one's sense of uncertainty temporarily, it is not advocated in *The Woman Warrior*. Actually, an exile could be productive only when it is followed by a return to the community, that is, when the person returning from exile can bring something new into her/his original community and re-map it in one way or another. The magic power of Fa Mu Lan would count for nothing if she could not avenge her family and community. After becoming a female doctor, Brave Orchid was welcomed home as an empowered figure expected to make a difference in her living world. Perhaps the most obvious example is in the story of Ts'ai Yen: during her twelve-year-stay in exile, she produces songs and poetry that serve to bridge the communication gap between the barbarian and the Chinese after her return to China.

A similar accomplishment might also be expected from the narrator Maxine. The purpose of her assuming an American



identity must not be to reinforce Brave Orchid's belief in cultural-binarism. Rather, it must be to introduce a new way to look at her Chinese parentage. From a child who fears "the size of the world" (99) and has to banish the discontinuous and the incomprehensible from her perception, Maxine has to learn to make her mind large, "as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (29). A similar idea was developed by Kingston in an interview:

I have learned that writing does not make ghosts go away. I wanted to record, to find words for, the "ghosts," ... They are not concrete; they are beautiful and powerful. But they don't have a solidity that we can pass around from one to another. I wanted to give them a substance that goes beyond me. (Rabinowitz 178)

Since it is always a losing fight to try to impose silence through writing and speaking, it is better to leave one's writings/stories open to different genres of reading. Writing/speaking in this sense is not necessarily an exorcistic effort for through it, one not only asserts her/himself in an intervention into a discursive community but also continuously yields ground to her/his readers. As an individual practice, writing/speaking provides a way for a person to break out of any imaginary closure of signification by bringing the personal, the uncategorized, the unspeakable as well as the ghost-like into symbolic circulation.

An individual practice originating from Kingston's personal life experiences, *The Woman Warrior* is revolutionary because of its openness in both structure and content. Kingston tells her interviewer, "I am always figuring out how the lone person forms a community" (Rabinowitz 185). Writing with a community in her mind, she plays out how individuals interact with a discursive world: how they traverse the boundaries defined by others, how they appropriate cultural objects to their use, invent new genres, create new meanings, but also subject their own discourses to other people's reading and writing. Kingston's community is a community in constant change. It is a community of affinity and dialogue, not of homogeneity. The taken-for-grantedness is confronted with the personal. The history is opened up by an individual's memory. In writing *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston has tactfully formed a community of endless dialogues.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A survey on the courses and contexts in which *The Woman Warrior* is taught and circulated is done by Shirley Geok-lin Lim ed., *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991), 8-9. For the anthologization of sections from *The Woman Warrior*, see Lim, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Beebee, "Introduction: Why Genre" and "Theoretical Postlude: The Ideology of Genre," *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State U P, 1994), 1-29 and 249-283.

<sup>3</sup> Beebee: "No genre, no power" (12).

<sup>4</sup> According to Bakhtin, unlike other genres, novel is a "genre-in-the-making," a "genre" of "heteroglossia" and incompleteness in which a "dialogue of languages" is staged (365) and where different genres coexist, interact, and are parodied (5). See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> This is obvious in the "torturing scene" at the beginning of "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," in which Maxine forces another silent Chinese girl (her double) to talk. Maxine spells out her own anxiety of not being able to talk when she tells her victim: "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality" (180).

<sup>6</sup> The Lacanian specular world is a world of image (picture) that closes upon itself and features an illusion of completeness/ totality in the symbolic. See Lacan, "What is a Picture," *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 105-119.

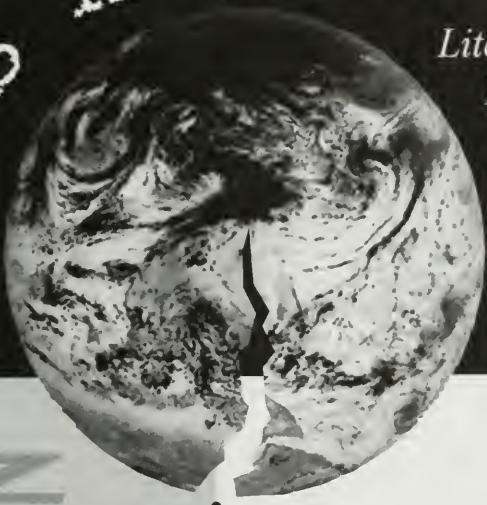
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