

From the Woman Warrior to Veterans of Peace: Maxine Hong Kingston's Pacifist Textual Strategies

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I. TOWARD PEACEFUL LITERATURE

Maxine Hong Kingston's 1976 autobiographical *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* has remained highly esteemed and has been frequently used as a text for various subjects in U. S. universities. It features the Chinese legendary female hero Fa Mu Lan, who, disguised as a man, joined the emperor's army and became a great general. The narrator's mother tells her daughter Fa Mu Lan stories and teaches her the chant of Fa Mu Lan, and for the narrator, Fa Mu Lan becomes a role model who transgresses gender boundaries and is loved and respected for her achievements.¹

Kingston, however, expressed her regrets later on, from a pacifist point of view, for having used the woman warrior as a central figure in *The Woman Warrior*.² In an interview with Donna Perry, Kingston reflects that she should have presented Fa Mu Lan not only as "a battle-ax-type woman" but also as a weaver and an artist, as she is in the original Chinese legend (175).³ In an interview with Paul Skenazy, Kingston comments:

I have often regretted calling the book *The Woman Warrior* because I have become more and more of a pacifist. Even as I was writing *The Woman Warrior*, I was finding a lot of dissatisfaction with having a military general as a hero. So I end the story with another mythic woman, Ts'ai Yen. I like her a lot better. (132)

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In her essay “The Novel’s Next Step: From the Novel of the Americas to the Global Novel,” Kingston proposes the idea of “peace literature” as follows:

How to write a novel that uses nonviolent means to get to nonviolent ends? We are addicted to excitement and crisis. We confuse “pacific” and “passive,” and are afraid that a world without war is a place where we’ll die of boredom. A tale about a society in which characters deal with one another nonviolently seems so anomalous that we’ve hardly begun to invent its tactics, its drama. There’s a creative-writing adage that the loaded gun in an early chapter has to go off later on. How to break that rule? . . . How to not shoot and not launch, and yet have drama? The writer needs to imagine the world healthy, nurturing young Wittman [the protagonist of *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* as well as “Water” in *The Fifth Book of Peace*] to be a good man, a citizen whose work improves life. (13)

In this article, I examine how Kingston has tried to achieve this goal of promoting peace through her literary works. I begin with an overview of the importance of representations of woman warriors and their cultural meaning and then discuss how Kingston avoids equating warriors with heroes in her works, from *The Woman Warrior* through *China Men*, *Tripmaster Monkey*, and *The Fifth Book of Peace*.

II. “WOMAN WARRIOR” AS METAPHOR

Women warriors, both historical and mythic, have appeared in different cultures, representing various ideas and ideals. Joan of Arc (1412–1431), a woman warrior par excellence, and the allegorical image of *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugene Delacroix (1830), for example, immediately come to mind.⁴ More recently, woman warriors have often been regarded as empowering role models for women who struggle against oppression. The historical presence of women warriors has been used as evidence of women’s potential, and fictional women warriors have been regarded as representations of independence, physical as well as mental strength, competence, and leadership—qualities that have been traditionally considered male virtues. Possessing these qualities, woman warrior figures have, many argue, undermined gender stereotypes and encouraged women to take up traditionally male roles and occupations. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy, in their introduction to *Athena’s Daughters: Television’s New Women Warriors*, argue that woman warriors of television series, such as *Xena*, *Warrior Princess*, challenge patriarchy by featuring female protagonists in the traditional plot of the male “just warrior” fighting and dying for the greater good, which is arguably “the most

powerful and influential story” in Western culture (1). In *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*, Sherrie A. Inness argues that the “tough girl” image in mass media “suggests that a greater variety of gender roles are open to women” and “can offer women new role models” (5). In *The Woman Warriors: A History*, David E. Jones enumerates historical “woman warriors” and goes so far as to state that it is useful for women to have these role models because power, choice, and control are the prerogatives of the warrior, without which the grandeur of any virtue is undermined; for example, gentleness, when not accompanied by these qualities, may be considered a reflection of timidity (xi).

On the other hand, many people, both men and women from Aristophanes on, have assumed that war is men’s business and that women do not, or should not, have anything to do with it. Thus, as in the case of Aristophanes’ comedy *Lysistrata*, the argument goes that there will be no war if women have political power. Some feminists have considered pacifism to be a feminist issue and have been its ardent advocates; Virginia Woolf, in her feminist-pacifist polemic, *Three Guineas*, argues that in order to prevent wars we should encourage women to have gainful occupations, and thus economic independence and direct political influence, because women, if given a choice, would oppose wars. More recently, Cynthia Enloe, in *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*, sees war and militarism as patriarchal and argues that the acceptance of women as warriors in the patriarchal social order only signifies the militarization of women and should not be celebrated as a feminist gain.

Some critics who favor woman warrior figures as positive role models for women do discuss this problem. For example, Early and Kennedy state that “a woman’s efforts to participate in [the ‘just warrior’ story] are deemed dangerous because they place the liberated woman in the service of patriarchy, violence, and sadism” (2). It seems, however, that their main concern tends to be whether the women are represented as independent, assertive, and as competent as men or are represented as weaker and less competent than men, or are apparently tough and independent but are in fact controlled by male authority and still confined within a traditionally female stereotype. The ethical legitimacy of acquiring independence, self-assertion, and power by killing or hurting other people is seldom put into question.

Even when the question of the moral legitimacy of the female “just warrior” rises, the optimistic assumption that the equal participation of women in military organizations will change the nature of militarism prevails. Some of the articles included in *Athena’s Daughters* deal with this issue, but they tend

to conclude, rather optimistically, that woman warriors that offer positive role models for women and young girls also alter the traditional “just warrior” plot by questioning the legitimacy of state-sanctioned violence and by offering alternative definitions of such words as “warrior” and “hero.” For example, Early, in her essay on the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, states that the program “endeavors to call into question aspects of just warriorism by weaving a pacifist subtext into plot structures” (64). Inness’s *Tough Girls* concludes that female heroes, representing tough—that is, assertive, strong, and independent—women deconstruct gender hierarchy and add new meanings, such as cooperation, compassion, and nurturing, to toughness. Mary K. DeShazer, in “‘Sisters in Arms’: The Warrior Construct in Writings by Contemporary U.S. Women of Color,” states that for U.S. women of color such as Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Maxine Hong Kingston, for whom confronting violence is often not a matter of choice but a daily reality, a warrior identity does not signify “a necrophilic zest for destruction but an ongoing commitment to radical change” and “a powerful force for global transformation” (353–54).

Enloe, however, warns that it is too optimistic to expect that women’s participation will change militarism. She opposes the idealization of woman warrior figures as part of the maneuver to militarize women, pointing out that in various cultures heroic woman warrior stories have been used to inspire wars (244).

Kingston obviously shares Enloe’s concern that presenting women warriors as positive role models may promote women’s militarization. It is also obvious that this concern has led her to make strategic narrative moves to not equate women warriors with heroic female role models. Her oeuvre begins with the woman warrior figure, but she goes on to other images to represent heroism. Reading Kingston’s major works as pacifist polemics, starting with *The Woman Warrior*, is not only possible but is, in fact, necessary in order to understand the plot and character choices that she has made in her writings.

III. *THE WOMAN WARRIOR AND CHINA MEN: PACIFIST CONTRADICTIONS AND HEROES*

In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator tells the story of Fa Mu Lan. In her version, Fa Mu Lan is welcomed by her family and neighbors when she returns from the army as a renowned general. The narrator then goes on to recollect:

I went to college—Berkeley in the sixties—and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy. I would have liked to bring myself back as a boy for my parents to welcome with chickens and pigs. That was for my brother, who returned alive from Vietnam. (56)

Observing her brother's return from Vietnam, it seems to the narrator that he is loved by the family for his participation in the U.S. military, and she can't help but feel that going to and being welcomed back from war is a privilege, as well as a duty, allowed only to men, as it was in ancient China.

The Fa Mu Lan story her mother told her as a child, however, helps her to have self-respect. The narrator feels that she would be a failure if she did not become something other than “a wife and a slave,” which is all that is expected of Chinese women, and that she “would have to grow up a warrior woman” (24). Even though she detests all kinds of violence and is active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and therefore unable and unwilling to imitate Fa Mu Lan by joining the military, she still seeks approval from her family and a sense of self-worth by comparing herself to Fa Mu Lan.

The narrator tries to solve this contradiction in three ways. First, her version of the Fa Mu Lan story emphasizes Fa Mu Lan's stoic self-restraint and physical and mental skills as a martial arts expert rather than her triumphs as a war general. Although Fa Mu Lan eventually becomes a general who leads troops, much of the Fa Mu Lan story presented in *The Woman Warrior* depicts her training years, and there are only two occasions in which Fa Mu Lan actually fights and kills her enemy. Moreover, one of these combat scenes is mythic and symbolic rather than realistic. In this scene, the enemy is a giant, and when Fa Mu Lan cuts off his head, his true form of a snake is revealed, and he slithers away (45). His soldiers, freed from the snake's spell over them, stop fighting and pledge their loyalty to Fa Mu Lan.

Second, the narrator also presents heroic women who are not warriors, implying that they are as worthy role models as the woman warrior archetype. One of these heroic women is the poet Ts'ai Yen, who, while being held captive for twelve years during wartime, composed lyrics, which she sang to the accompaniment of an indigenous reed pipe. Ts'ai Yen does not sing about battles or war heroes, but about China and her family. Another heroic woman figure is the narrator's mother, who was a licensed doctor in China, and who has survived immigration and many hardships in the United States. She is also a storyteller who passes on to her daughter the power of talk-story. Both Ts'ai Yen and the narrator's mother are depicted heroically as survivors and creators. Both of them create and pass on songs and stories even while living

among “barbarians” and “ghosts.” After unsuccessfully trying to imitate the woman warrior by finding an aggressive means of political resistance that would fit her own needs, the narrator, by creating and passing on stories, chooses Ts’ ai Yen and her mother as her role models.

Third, the narrator extends and tries to transform the definition of “warrior” by comparing her own pacifist activities to Fa Mu Lan’s achievements. Although she admires the legendary Fa Mu Lan, the narrator becomes a pacifist and antiwar activist and courageously confronts racism and sexism in everyday situations. When she works as an office clerk and typist, she speaks up against the employer’s racist remarks and practices; she points out to her employer that the word “nigger yellow” is not appropriate when describing a paint color, and she refuses to type her employer’s invitation letter to a business banquet because the restaurant he chose for the occasion is being accused of discriminatory practices by African American organizations (57–58). She then goes on to say:

What we [she and Fa Mu Lan] have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are “report a crime” and “report to five families.” The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. (62–63)

Here, she redefines the word *revenge* to include verbal activities, and thus attempts to stretch the concept of warrior to include, not just literal soldiers and warriors, but also people like herself—those who attempt to change the world by using words—and concludes that “[t]he swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar” (62).

However, the contradiction still remains. She tries to prove that she, as a writer and peace activist, is as worthy as her brother, a Vietnam veteran, by claiming that the swordswoman and she “are not so dissimilar.” But if her worthiness is measured against her brother’s contribution to the Vietnam War, which she is against in principle, and to the woman warrior’s successful career as a military general, she has fallen into a dilemma by trying to demonstrate her worthiness through being a warrior. She presents military activities, which she understands in reality as “fighting and killing” that “have not been glorious but slum grubby,” and to which she is wholeheartedly opposed, as highly valued criteria of “worthiness.” As Yuan Shu argues in “Cultural Politics and Chinese American Female Subjectivity: Rethinking Kingston’s Woman Warrior,” Kingston presents Fa Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior* as a woman successful “in the same patriarchal terms against which [Kingston herself] has tried to rebel” (202). By comparing her antiwar struggle to Fa

Mu Lan's achievement as a war general and to her brother's participation in the military, the narrator "militarizes" her own activities rather than successfully changing the concept of militarism.

Kingston's use of the woman warrior image contains a contradiction that aptly reflects the contradiction that state-sanctioned militarizing maneuvers force on citizens, especially ethnic minorities and women; in a society that values military activities as virtuous, acceptance into the military may appeal to marginalized groups as a way to earn full citizenship, or full recognition, although, in reality, it also means participating in a system that oppresses ethnic minorities and women, often by physical violence. Kingston, after *The Woman Warrior*, gives up her use of the warrior figure as a metaphor for heroism and struggle for just causes. In *China Men*, which is more directly related to the Vietnam War, Kingston chooses not to depict this contradiction and offers noncontradictory alternative role models.

China Men, which is considered to be a companion piece to *The Woman Warrior*, consists of the stories of men in the narrator's family.⁵ She presents no heroic warrior figure, either male or female. The men are immigrants who work in the cane fields, the gold mines, railroads, and laundries. None of these men fantasize about or identify with legendary Chinese warriors. There is a brief mention of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, when the narrator's grandfather goes to see a theater production of it in Sacramento and, recognizing his favorite characters such as Guan Goong, feels "refreshed and inspired" (147-48). But what the grandfather is most impressed with is the "Peach Garden Oath" of the three characters to be brothers, not with Guan Goong's achievement as a just warrior (147-48).

The only warrior figure in *China Men* is the narrator's brother, who serves in the Navy and goes to Vietnam. This brother, however, being a school-teacher and a pacifist, is reluctant to join the military. He does so because the only alternative for him would be to flee to Canada, where he does not know anyone and would have to live as a fugitive for the rest of his life. After he comes back from Vietnam, he is so traumatized by his war experiences that he is unable to function for three years.

Although he is not a conventional warrior who fights a just war, the brother is depicted as brave and heroic in his effort to teach hostile high school boys the concept of pacifism, telling them that "[t]he military draft is not an American tradition. Protest against it is a longer tradition" (285). Trying to survive the war years as best he can, he makes a resolution:

[In] the Navy he would follow orders up to a point short of a direct kill. He would

not shoot a human being; he would not press the last button that dropped the bomb. But he would ride the ship that brought the bombs, which his taxes had already paid for. If ordered to shoot at a human target, he would then go AWOL to Canada or Sweden. But up until then, he would be a pacifist in the Navy rather than in jail, no more or less guilty than the ordinary stay-at-home citizen of the war economy. (285)

His heroic achievement is his persistent pacifism and his determination to survive without killing anyone (305).

Another heroic male figure in *China Men* is a farmer in Hawaii, depicted in a short chapter "The Hundred-Year-Old Man." At the age of one hundred and six, answering a reporter's question as to what has given him the most joy, he says, "What I like best is to work in a cane field when the young green plants are just growing up" (307). When asked how to stop the war, he answers, "Let everybody out of the army" (307).

Kingston, thus, presents alternative ways for men to be brave and heroic without imitating famous warriors. *The Woman Warrior* represents female strength and independence using a warrior metaphor that transgresses gender conventions. *China Men* represents male strength and independence by depicting men who cherish pacifism, education, and nurturing, without using a warrior metaphor, which also transgresses gender conventions. Pacifism in *The Woman Warrior* is a feminist issue. In *China Men*, Kingston emphasizes that it is a men's issue as well.

IV. TRIPMASTER MONKEY AS "PEACE LITERATURE"

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book, Kingston's only work to date that can be appropriately called a novel, is set in the Vietnam War era in California. Its protagonist is would-be poet and playwright Wittman Ah Sing, a fifth-generation Chinese American and a Berkeley graduate. Inspired by his former classmate and actress, Nanci Lee, Wittman writes and successfully produces a play that involves numerous multicultural characters. While the play is based on such Chinese classics as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and *The Journey to the West*, it develops into an "Anti-War Bond show" (270). The theater offers a festive, exciting but nonviolent space for everyone involved (270).

As in *China Men*, *Tripmaster Monkey* presents a pacifist, Wittman, as hero. While planning to produce his play (the title of which is not given in the novel), he persuades a whole variety of men and women of various ethnic,

class, and occupational backgrounds to come together and work for peace. Thus, he is not only “the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of the Monkeys” but also a modern American version of Sung Chiang, the leader of the one hundred and eight outlaws in the original *Marsh* (33). Unlike Sung Chiang, Wittman’s achievement is not militaristic but peaceful. Participating in his production, “friends, friends’ friends, and family” join together with “archenemies” (276) to celebrate friendship. Wittman includes battle scenes in his play, with loud noises and explosions, but they turn out to be illusions, controlled by Wittman, who is “not crazy” but who thinks that “what’s crazy is the idea that revolutionaries must shoot and bomb and kill, that revolution is the same as war.” Producing a fake war in this way, he aims at displacing the real one and creating a festive community of friends (306). The performance ends not with tragic battle scenes or deaths as do *Three Kingdoms* and *Marsh* but with a wedding ceremony.

Just as the one hundred and eight outlaw characters of *Marsh* are good at one skill or another, mostly handling weapons or martial arts, all of the characters in *Tripmaster* have some unique skill or technique for survival. While the expertise of the outlaws is related to martial arts and violence, however, Wittman and his friends have nonviolent skills useful for survival and helping one another. For example, his friend Lance Kamiyama is a fast-track civil servant, good at making business connections. He is also good at storytelling and karate demonstrations. Wittman’s wife Taña is an insurance adjuster and also a painter. She is good at reciting poetry as well. His mother Ruby-Long-Legs and her friends are former Vaudeville dancers, and some of them are successful businesswomen. His father Zeppelin, besides being publisher of a newsletter called *Find Treasure*, is skilled at finding useful things in the garbage. His grandmother was a dressmaker for the theater, and her husband Lincoln Wong, a rich retired businessman, is a former lumberjack who still likes riding a tree in stormy weather (266). An old Chinese American man Wittman meets at the department storage section turns out to be a former “Yale younger poet.” The hilarious assortment of cast members reminds us that creating unity among a variety of people does not have to depend on or aim at militarism. *Tripmaster Monkey* features pacifist characters, as does *China Men* and thus demonstrates that heroes do not have to be warriors.

Unlike *China Men*, however, *Tripmaster Monkey* presents famous Chinese warriors, both men and women, as characters in Wittman’s play—Lui Pei, Gang Goong, and Chang Fei from *Three Kingdoms* and Lee Kuey from *Marsh*—to name just a few. These well-known characters are, however, not presented as the great heroes they are widely known to be. Their skills as

fighters and war generals are never graphically described; rather, their stories are presented as antiviolenace and pacifist cautionary tales. For example, Lee Kuey, or the Black Tornado, one of the most popular characters of *Marsh*, always carries two huge hatchets and declares that he likes nothing better than slaughtering people. He is usually presented as a skillful fighter, a simple-minded but lovable fellow, and the most loyal follower of Sung Chiang. But Wittman's play does not present him as such. None of his slaughtering scenes, which abound in the original text as exciting highlight scenes, are presented in *Tripmaster*. The episodes that involve Lee Kuey, rather, present him as a brutal troublemaker who "made too much trouble for his own side" (257); he kills a female singer because her song interrupted his talk, and because of his poor decision making, his mother is left in the mountains by herself and is killed by a tiger.

Liu Pei, Gwan Goong, and Chang Fei, the famous characters from *Three Kingdoms*, are also presented not as superheroes but as tragic figures who cause unnecessary war and confusion because of their arrogance and stubborn militarism. Gwan Goong is captured and executed by Sun Chü'an because he refuses Sun's offer of brotherhood and marriage between their children. Liu Pei attacks Sun Chü'an in revenge, but this strategically unwise move ruins his chance to defeat his rivals and to unite and bring peace and order to the whole of China. The night before combat, Chang Fei is assassinated by two of his own men who had been whipped and humiliated by him. Wittman's choice of these episodes rather than the more well-known battle scenes emphasizes the pacifist nature of his production.⁶

Unlike these male warriors, woman warrior characters such as Lady Sun, the wife of Lui Pei, and Night Ogress, one of the outlaws, are depicted as brave, independent, smart, and physically well trained, but nonetheless non-violent, in Wittman's production. They all persuade and sometimes threaten their enemies in order to achieve their purposes, but they do not resort to violence. One exception is a supernatural woman warrior who wears an extravagant costume and leads the navy; she is a character Wittman fabricates in order to meet the request of the women in the cast. Told sarcastically, however, this is a revision of the Fa Mu Lan story, explicitly critical of presenting a woman warrior as a liberating role model:

Unfortunately for peace on Earth, the listening ladies were appeased, and Lance had run out of plowshare ideas. Nanci and Taña and Sunny and Judy thought that if they were allowed to play war women, they were liberated. The time of peace women, who will not roll bandages or serve coffee and doughnuts or rivet air-

planes or man battleships or shoot guns at strangers, does not begin tonight. (148)

Here, a third-person narrator juxtaposes a heroic fighting beauty, female factory workers, nurses, and housewives, highlighting that, although those who are “liberated” and those who support men in traditionally feminine ways are often perceived as binary opposites, all women who participate in war-related activities are trapped in the state military system, just in different slots.

Wittman, after successfully producing the play full of warriors and wars—however fake they may be—determines to be more of a pacifist (340). For Wittman and for Kingston, cautionary tales full of warrior figures and actions are not pacifist enough. Along with her essay “The Novel’s Next Step,” *Tripmaster Monkey* is Kingston’s declaration of her search for peace literature that features “peace woman” as a role model.

V. THE FIFTH BOOK OF PEACE

The Fifth Book of Peace, Kingston’s most recent work, consists of three nonfictional sections and one fictional one. The first and second parts, “Fire” and “Paper,” are rather short descriptions of Kingston’s search for the supposedly lost Chinese three “Books of Peace” and her experience in the Oakland firestorm of 1991, in which the manuscript of her own “Book of Peace” was destroyed. “Water” is a sequel to *Tripmaster*, in which Wittman, Taña, and their son, Mario, leave California and settle in Hawaii. “Earth,” the book’s final section, is an account of Kingston’s involvement as an organizer and instructor of a series of writing workshops for war veterans, which eventually resulted in the anthology she edited, *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*.

The Fifth Book of Peace is Kingston’s attempt to produce the “peace literature” that she proposed in “The Novel’s Next Step.” In order to accomplish this, she critically comments on her own use of the Fa Mu Lan story and proposes an alternative reading of the legend. Contemplating her previous writing on Fa Mu Lan, Kingston states, “I have told her story as a women’s liberation story, and as a war story. But I now understand, it is a homecoming story” (390). Quoting the traditional chant of Fa Mu Lan (transcribed as “Fa Mook Lan” in this book) Kingston emphasizes that Fa Mook Lan was originally a weaver and a healer. After the war, she comes back to resume her life as a beautiful woman and to show her troops that “it is possible for a soldier to become feminine” without losing respect and status; the story illustrates,

thus, that it is also possible for a veteran to return without becoming homeless (390). Kingston detests the fact that *The Woman Warrior* is being used as a text at the United States Air Force Academy, because “[i]t gives a mythos to the women military students,” and she admits that her attempt to expand the concept of the word “warrior” to mean the nonviolent “one who wars against confusion” has ultimately failed (49). She refuses to be identified as a warrior woman, and when one of her friends comments that she was striding like a warrior, Kingston responds, “Oh, no, I’m not a warrior. I don’t walk like a warrior,” even though her friend explained that she meant that she had “a strong, purposeful walk” (256).

Having thus articulated her reason for not featuring a warrior woman as a hero and a role model in her later work, in *The Fifth Book of Peace* Kingston presents pacifists as heroes as she does in *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey*. In “Water,” Wittman and Taña decide to move to Hawaii so that Wittman can dodge the draft (which is thought to be easier there). While theirs is at first a rather low-key, uneventful everyday life among aloha-spirited Hawaiians, the couple becomes involved in the antiwar activities that take place around the U.S. military base. They join a church-based antiwar community called Sanctuary that protects deserters, and also help two young deserters by offering their home as shelter. As in *Tripmaster*, Wittman and Taña are not warriors. They are war resisters, abandoning their secure life in California in order to resist the war and then risking their citizenship and even their lives in order to prevent themselves and other Americans from participating in the Vietnam War. Their triumphant moment comes when Mario, when graduating from high school, reveals his own pacifist creed and tells military recruiters that he is not interested in joining the military (237).⁷ By dodging the draft, supporting deserters and assisting them to flee to Canada or Sweden, and raising his son to be a pacifist, Wittman is in fact putting into practice the advice given by the old man in *China Men*, that is, to let “everybody out of the army” in order to put an end to all war. Wittman produces a play called *Viet Rock* at Sanctuary that involves everyone, just as he does in *Tripmaster*. As a more consciously pacifist production, however, it involves no battle scenes and no warriors and ends with an explosion that kills all the characters. In *Tripmaster*, explosions in the drama that Wittman produced represented exciting battle scenes, while in *Viet Rock* the explosion symbolizes total and meaningless destruction. Here, Wittman as a producer is more careful than he was before not to present war scenes as enjoyable and exciting.

“Earth” presents participants in Kingston’s writers’ workshop as heroic characters. The participants consist not only of Vietnam veterans but also of

civilians with war experience and former antiwar activists. Kingston explains this decision in her introduction to *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*, stating that the definition of “veteran” developed to include, not only former servicemen and servicewomen, but also deserters, peace activists, refugees, survivors of domestic violence, and former street gang members, because everyone of them is affected by war (2). Because of their traumatic experiences, all of them have difficulties fitting back into society, and many of them still suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder. They try to rebuild their shattered lives by writing about their experiences and by informing others about how terrible war can be through their writings. Their war experiences, revealed to us sporadically through direct quotes from the participants’ writings and speeches, are devastating, and by no means heroic stories of a “just war.” It is in their effort to survive the pain, and to create and share new insights even when in pain, that Kingston presents them as heroic.

At one of the most difficult moments, for example, in which veterans express their still-present hostility toward peace activists, whom they consider “traitors,” one of the participants speaks up, explaining that peace activists, including himself, also “made sacrifices, went to jail, got kicked out of the family” and risked their lives (395). The veterans thus learn to perceive the peace activists not as “the peaceniks” who “partied at college while [they] were doing the grunt work, and sacrificing [their] lives” but as fellow “resister[s]” (394–95). The words *veteran* and *resister* are used to replace *warrior* as a terms for a courageous and heroic person. The emphasis, when using these terms, however, is on survival and a shared determination to be pacifists, and not on the ability to defeat others.

In terms of its purpose of promoting pacifism, *The Fifth Book of Peace* contains contradictions, as does *The Woman Warrior*. “Earth” reveals some of these contradictions most explicitly; this is the section in which the actual descriptions of the Vietnam War are presented as the lived experiences of the workshop participants. While their descriptions of the meaningless sufferings and deaths are nightmarish enough to turn anyone pacifist, it also proves, as Polly Shulman sarcastically comments in her *New York Times Book Review* article, that “hell makes better stories than heaven.” It also reveals the strong allure of war as a symbol of just purposes and comradeship. When the workshop participants and Vietnamese veterans of the war have a meeting together, the U.S. and Vietnamese veterans find out that they share the feeling that war gave them a sense of purpose in life, was a great adventure, and was “good times, good fun” (355).

The woman warrior as a symbol of gender equality and a model of strength

and self-assertiveness also turns out to die hard. Some of the female veterans, although they are participating in the workshop because of their PTSD problems, are presented positively as competent servicewomen who have done their duty and are proud of it. One of the male veterans who participates in Kingston's workshop recites his tribute to the women who were in Vietnam, praising their willingness to serve the country, their sense of duty, and competence. The women who hear his speech are pleased, feeling that "[t]his bunker is a men's club that at last welcomes women" (321).

The "Paper" section shows the strong allure of war as story material and demonstrates that we cannot, after all, ignore war into extinction, as Wittman tentatively states (78) and as Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*. It is one thing to be uninterested in participating in war, but quite another to deny its existence and its consequences. In the "Water" section Kingston succeeds in creating characters who are not interested in supporting nationalism through military means and who, at the same time, are interested in creating opportunities for war veterans, who include both survivors and resisters, to have an audience for their stories that, pejoratively categorized as "vet lit," U.S. audiences have been unwilling to listen to (354–55).

VI. ANOTHER "WOMAN WARRIOR"?

As if reflecting the contradictory situation highlighted in the "Paper" section, the narrator's mother tells her another woman warrior story, which is "better than Fa Mook Lan" and which "men shouldn't hear" (58). It is a story of Ming Hong, who "disguises herself as a man, and wins first, second, and third places in the imperial exams and archery contests" and "counsels the king on how to be a good ruler."

As a doctor, she cures the king. The King's daughter throws the red ball at Ming Hong, she catches it and has to marry her. Already married to a man, she marries a woman. Her enemy discovers her feminine shoe, and takes it to the king. Her father-in-law, who's been having yearnings for her/him, takes the mighty archer, doctor, scribe in a carriage to a whorehouse, and exposes him/her. Meanwhile, Ming Hong's husband, away at war, lives through many adventures. He comes home. (58)

This story is strange in more than one way. First of all, Ming Hong, according to her mother's version, is not a warrior but a scholar and "archer, doctor, scribe." Second, this story does not tell what happened to Ming Hong after

she is “exposed” by the king. Was she executed for having deceived the king? Was she forced to become a prostitute? What happened to her husband, a warrior, after he came back? Did he seek revenge, and in what way? Shall we read more about her in future? Or is her story just a reminder that a woman warrior, if such a person really exists, is a gruesome and bizarre figure, not an admirable role model? Kingston, after *The Woman Warrior*, seems to be more concerned with advocating pacifism among both men and women than with focusing on feminist issues. But will she be, if she chooses to write more about this other “woman warrior,” again, more gender specific? Will Ming Hong be a “peace woman” and a heroic role model for women and girls? The story is enigmatic and elliptical enough to allow for many possibilities to develop, each of which probably contains contradictions of its own, just as *The Fifth Book of Peace* contains contradictions.

The contradictions are not solved but well highlighted, which is probably what Kingston refers to as her novel’s next step. Surviving the pain, telling and writing stories about survival, and continuing to create even while still struggling to survive and in pain—these are what Kingston does when she tries to create a coherent work of art after suffering the devastating loss of her manuscript and her other belongings by fire, and what she proposes everyone to do toward the end of *The Fifth Book of Peace*: “In a time of destruction, create something. A poem. A parade. A community. A school. A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment” (402).

NOTES

¹ I prefer to use “the narrator” rather than “Kingston” or “Maxine,” since the identity of the narrator by itself has been an issue (that I do not intend to deal with in this article), as well as if, or how much of, this “memoir” is factual or autobiographical. About the issue of the book’s genre and of the narrator’s identity, see, for example, the articles by Lee Quinby and Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong.

² For more on Kingston’s commitment to the peace movement, see her interview with Neila C. Seshachari (195–96).

³ Fa Mu Lan is supposed to be a historical figure who lived sometime during the Sui dynasty (581–618). See 391–92 of Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace*, “The Ballad of Mulan,” for a well-known version of the legend that was recorded in the twelfth century.

⁴ For woman warrior images in Western art, see Linda Nochlin’s *Representing Women*.

⁵ For more on *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior* originally being parts of one book, see Kingston’s interviews with Kay Bonetti (35) and with Paula Rabinowitz (69).

⁶ On Kingston’s rereading of the Chinese classics, see my “Speaking with Divine Authority: Maternal Discourse in the Works of Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, and Leslie Marmon Silko,” 46–94.

⁷ Mario’s being uninterested in joining the military is especially important, since having no interest in war is one of the ways of preventing war that Virginia Woolf proposes in *Three*

Guineas. Considering Woolf's importance for Kingston, it is likely that *The Fifth Book of Peace* was influenced by *Three Guineas*, Woolf's explicit treatise on pacifism in which she declares that "[a]s a woman my country is the whole world" (109). Mario's refusal to be interested in joining the military obviously echoes Woolf's assumption that women are pacifists and can prevent war by being uninterested in war and military issues. The episode can be interpreted that men as well as women can be educated to be able to free themselves from the nationalism that requires violence for sustenance and to become a citizen of the whole world.

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