

The Legacy of Maxine Hong Kingston The Mulhouse Book

edited by

Sämi Ludwig and Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni



CONTRIBUTIONS TO
ASIAN AMERICAN
LITERARY STUDIES

WITHDRAWN
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

LIT

Cover design: Rudolf Ammann

Photograph: courtesy of Random House Publishers

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-643-90299-3

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

©LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien,
Zweigniederlassung Zürich 2014
Klosbachstr. 107
CH-8032 Zürich
Tel. +41 (0) 44-251 75 05
Fax +41 (0) 44-251 75 06
E-Mail: zuerich@lit-verlag.ch
<http://www.lit-verlag.ch>

LIT VERLAG Dr. W. Hopf
Berlin 2014
Fresnostr. 2
D-48159 Münster
Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-62 03 20
Fax +49 (0) 2 51-23 19 72
E-Mail: lit@lit-verlag.de
<http://www.lit-verlag.de>

Distribution:

In Germany: LIT Verlag Fresnostr. 2, D-48159 Münster
Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-620 32 22, Fax +49 (0) 2 51-922 60 99, E-mail: vertrieb@lit-verlag.de
In Austria: Medienlogistik Pichler-ÖBZ, e-mail: mlo@medien-logistik.at
In the UK: Global Book Marketing, e-mail: mo@centralbooks.com
In North America: International Specialized Book Services, e-mail: orders@isbs.com
e-books are available at www.litwebshop.de

Table of Contents

Introduction: On the Excitement of Academic Gatherings <i>Sämi Ludwig and Nicoleta Alexoae-Zagni</i>	11
Opening Speech <i>Maxine Hong Kingston</i>	21
I. Revisiting the canonical texts, <i>The Woman Warrior and China Men</i>	
The Politics of Transnational Identity in and of Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> <i>Silvia Schultermandl</i>	33
Critical Reception in the Cultural 'Homeland': Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> in China <i>Lan Dong</i>	45
Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>Woman Warrior</i> Beyond the Feminine and the Unfeminine: Dismantling the Dualistic Perception of Gender and Ethnicity <i>Nelly Mok</i>	61
Masks and Identity: Self-Fashioning in Chinese American Children's and Young Adult Literature <i>Pin-chia Feng</i>	77
Claiming America Through Land Empathy: An Ecocritical Approach to Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>China Men</i> <i>Begoña Simal</i>	95
On Maxine Hong Kingston's Manuscript Revisions of <i>The Woman Warrior</i> and <i>China Men</i> : An Anecdotal Account <i>Cheng Lok Chua</i>	113

Maxine Hong Kingston as Counterculture Writer

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland)

Early in Maxine Hong Kingston's most recent book, *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life* (2011), her fictional avatar Wittman Ah Sing comes upon a group of women sitting in front of a hotel in Hong Kong. They are laughing and appear carefree, "free of husband, free of kids," buying candy from a street vendor, reminding Wittman of hippies. "Oh, let me be hippie with you," he longs silently, using the Whitmanian "Oh" that reminds us of his namesake (53). Then he notices that some are holding signs and realizes that what he is seeing is a labor demonstration by hotel cleaning women on their day off. Kingston now prods her character to speak to the women: "Tell them, Wittman: 'In San Francisco, we have immigrante workers too. We want los derechos too'" (54). This anecdote is only one of many in Kingston's recent work that offers a sense of how firmly she remains rooted in the values and vision of the radical movements of the 1960s that she experienced in Berkeley as a young woman. Forty years later, while traveling halfway across the world, Kingston finds labor demonstrations, anti-war activities, and the state of mind evoked in the word "hippie," used here playfully as an adjective, wherever she goes. Although *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life* is about the author's trip to China, revisiting some of the stories and sources for *The Woman Warrior* (1975), the book reveals how far Kingston has moved as a writer from the Chinese-American material that characterized that early work. Instead, her latest (and possibly last, if we take her at her word) book focuses broadly on the pacifism that has defined Kingston's writing since the early 1990s, and returns in many ways to the counterculture sensibilities that formed Kingston in 1960s Berkeley.

Although Kingston's counterculture background has occasionally been acknowledged, it has never been seriously explored. In a 1990 interview, Kingston explains that *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) is set in the early 60s because the "Monkey King" (an iconoclastic character from a Chinese epic novel, *Journey to the West*) was "here, in the Sixties. Abby Hoffman, Allen Ginsberg, you know? They were monkey spirits, trying to change the world with costumes and street theater" (Chin, "A MELUS Interview" 61). Similarly, during an interview in 1993, Neila C. Seshachari tells Kingston that she considers *Tripmaster Monkey* "a quintessential novel of the 1960s," and Kingston agrees, explaining that she set the novel during this time because she admired the many new words that it had spawned, such as "Be-In," "love-in," "flower power" and

"tripmaster" itself (Seshachari, "Reinventing Peace " 203). Deborah Madsen's biographical textbook on Maxine Kingston for the "Literary Masters" series devotes several pages to the place of the Civil Rights movement and feminism and a paragraph on the counterculture, but no scholarly article has ever been devoted to the subject (Madsen, *Maxine Hong Kingston* 54-61).

I would like to argue that a serious look at this question is important not only for the sake of a more accurate and nuanced appreciation of Kingston's formative experiences as a writer, but also as a step towards breaking down the barriers within the discipline that keep "ethnic writers" lumped together and critics focused only on their ethnic or gender identity. While these issues are important to Kingston's work, there are other issues that have become perhaps even more important to her, such as, most notably, pacifism. At the very least, a look at the place of the 1960s in Kingston's life may help to break up the binary racial schema that the term "Chinese-American" has inevitably invited. For years, the debates about Kingston's work focused on how much was influenced by her "Chinese" origins and how much by her "American" childhood. Although Kingston warns readers from the very first pages of *The Woman Warrior* not to over-determine and simplify cultural identity, asking her Chinese-American readers how they can distinguish between what is "Chinese" and what is particular to their own family, she is less vigilant about making sure we do not ignore the complexities of her American background as well. She may well have assumed that it was not necessary, given the way the novel *Tripmaster Monkey* makes it clear that her experience of California was not limited to Stockton. And yet, the deep stamp left on Kingston's world-view and work by the Berkeley counterculture during her college years and early adulthood there has been largely overlooked.

I will be arguing that the counterculture of the 1960s, by which I refer to both the political and the lifestyle movements, is indispensable to understanding Kingston's core values, such as pacifism, as well as her signature aesthetic choices, including generic hybridity, informal tone, rhetorical playfulness and structural non-linearity. The counterculture left Kingston with a lifelong fascination with consciousness-expansion, consciousness-raising and the power of the mind and imagination to influence reality. Finally, it provided her with a model of community that goes beyond kinship-based family, village or national units to affinity-based "sanghas" created with friends and like-minded strangers and a model of the entire world as an interconnected human family. For all these reasons, I maintain that no assessment of Kingston's work and influences can make sense without taking into account the world of bohemian Berkeley in the early 60s.

Like Wittman Ah Sing from *Tripmaster Monkey*, Maxine Kingston graduated from UC Berkeley in 1962 after having majored in English literature, and continued to live in or near San Francisco until 1967. In all respects, the period 1958 to 1967, the years that Kingston lived in Berkeley, were the most

important to the Bay Area counterculture. On the political side, student activism began on the UC Berkeley campus the year she enrolled, in 1958, with the organization SLATE, a precursor to the Free Speech movement. In 1960 a protest against HUAC activities led to student activists being forced down the steps of the San Francisco City Hall with fire hoses, an event that was filmed and led to the politicization of many people on the New Left. The highly visible Berkeley Free Speech movement began in 1964 with several dramatic acts of civil disobedience, including the prevention of the arrest of a CORE activist by students surrounding a police car for 32 hours and using it as a platform for speeches.

At the same time, the Haight-Ashbury scene had been coalescing since the early 60s, marijuana was abundant and LSD was legal until October of 1966. The following year, 1967, the year of the so-called "Summer of Love," was a key turning point in the history of the counterculture as well as in Kingston's own life. The year began with an event organized initially as a protest against the recent criminalization of LSD: the Human Be-In at the Golden Gate Park, also advertised as a Gathering of the Tribes. This would turn out to be a historic "coming out" party for the huge alternative community of "tribes" and people in San Francisco at this time. Sources differ, but between 20,000 and 30,000 people came to the park that January day, including Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg and Stanley Owsley (who distributed free samples of his famous homemade "Owsley acid").

Ironically, this celebration of the San Francisco bohemia was also the beginning of its end, largely due to the media obsession with the "hippies" that it sparked and which resulted in tens of thousands of young people, including many runaways, descending on the city for the "Summer of Love" and overwhelming its infrastructure and public services. The overcrowding, homelessness, health problems and hard drugs that flooded into San Francisco that summer spelled the end of the original counterculture scene. The Diggers, a group of radical community activists, who had staged happenings such as the "Death of Money" parade in the spring, organized a mock funeral happening called "Death of Hippie" at the end of the summer to announce that the "Summer of Love" was over and that visitors should go home and take what they learned to their own communities. This is not to imply that the counterculture scene itself was over, but that summer tourists were invited to take what they had learned back to their own communities. Many local residents also decided to leave. Among them, Maxine Hong Kingston moved to Hawai'i with her husband and young son, carrying her counterculture values with her.

Since "counterculture" is a broad term, and an allusion to its "values" may sound impressionistic, I will borrow and adapt the five values that Timothy Miller, in his book *The Hippies and American Values* (1991), identifies as key sites of the counterculture's ethics. These are, in his words: dope, sex, rock music, community, and cultural opposition. This last principle is in fact a

conflation of the two branches of the cultural left in the 1960s, the political activists and the hippies. Theodor Roszak, in his 1969 *The Making of a Counterculture*, was the first to argue that these two groups were actually two faces of the same phenomenon, though they often seemed quite distinct, especially to each other (264-265). The two groups may have had roughly the same goals but often disagreed sharply about how to achieve them. Activists believed in organized protest and putting pressure on lawmakers and institutions, while hippies tended to prefer putting their energies into creating an alternative society by living it themselves. In practice, the line separating hippies and activists was porous, and many people found themselves charting a middle ground that included political demonstrations and activity with various degrees of hippie-ness and involvement with alternative communities. Kingston is a perfect example of this in many ways, a devoted participant of anti-war demonstrations though wary of conventional politics. In *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003) she writes that "ideology is what got us into trouble [in the Vietnam War] in the first place ... We don't want ideology" (331). Similarly, in the recent *I Love a Broad Margin* she says that she wants to "change the world" (209), but her methods are mainly the "do-it-yourself" strategies of the counterculture: art-creation and community-formation. In the Veteran Writers Workshop, for example, the writing workshop she has run for veterans since 1991, she combines both.

This brings me to the second of Miller's principles, the ethics of community. Anyone familiar with Kingston's work would immediately recognize the centrality of this ethic to Kingston's work. Just as in the counterculture, where founding alternative communities was the most radical and important form of engaging in cultural opposition, so in Kingston's work, creating communities of readers, of writers, and of friends, constitutes a central drive. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Wittman's peregrinations around San Francisco in the novel culminate in the staging of a play that brings together nearly everyone that he has met over the course of the narrative. The play lasts several days and creates a kind of ephemeral community of players and spectators that is no less important for being impermanent. The counterculture of the 60s put a strong accent on community, solidarity and breaking out of the mold of American individualism as well as the isolated nuclear family. The Victorian mansions of the Haight-Ashbury area housed groups of roommates that saw themselves as extended families or as small tribes. In addition to "tribe," the word "sangha" figured prominently in the consciousness of the counterculture, as it does in Kingston's work. Alongside these more structured and permanent communities, the counterculture placed great value on social interactions in the public domain such as happenings and parties. Kingston captures this spirit better than any other living American writer. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, she devotes three long chapters to a single party. In a 1989 interview, she connects her ideas about the radical potential of parties explicitly to the 1960s: "All those love-ins and

Woodstock—all that is the monkey. The monkey loves to go to parties, and if you have a wonderful enough party, you can change life” (Blauvelt, “Talking” 79).

Miller’s third counterculture value is the “ethics of rock,” which may be the least obvious notion to connect to Kingston’s work. Yet, it is important to keep in mind the larger context of what rock music meant to the counterculture, namely, the principle that art and pleasure are an integral part of an ethical and political participation in the world. In the music of the 1960s, this engagement involved both the verbal and the performative dimensions of music. On the one hand, rock and folk music articulated the disappointments, longings and joys of the counterculture through its lyrics: Bob Dylan, Country Joe and the Fish, Joan Baez and other artists were the spokespeople for a generation, translating its political and personal aspirations into words that were sung (often collectively). On the other hand, music provided an occasion for bringing people together and creating a sense of community, solidarity, and intense connection, much as Wittman’s play in *Tripmaster Monkey* creates bonds among disparate people through its performance.

In short, the spirit of the “ethics of rock” can be perceived in Kingston’s lifelong commitment to artistic creativity. It is no accident that *The Woman Warrior* ends with a “song” that conveys the “sadness and anger” of the Chinese poetess captured by barbarians during her captivity. After being ransomed, she brings her songs back to China and they are passed along to her descendants. Although an ambivalent and enigmatic tale of captivity, cultural alienation and displacement, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” closes the novel with the words “It translated well,” suggesting that through music the two cultures, i.e., Chinese and “barbarian,” could find a point of common ground: a shared understanding of “forever wandering” (209). This dual function of music—communicating aspirations and creating bonds between people—is the heart of the countercultural ethic of rock.

The fourth principle, the ethics of sex, Miller defines in terms of freedom to enjoy physical pleasure and one’s body. Like music, sexuality does not seem at first glance to be a significant aspect of Kingston’s work, and yet it appears in key moments and in key functions. For example, the first story of *The Woman Warrior* is about the suicide of the aunt who becomes pregnant while her husband was away, and serves as a powerful and cruel introduction to femininity for the narrator. Signaling that *The Woman Warrior* will be a feminist text, this story establishes Kingston’s concern with the constraints and punishments that have historically defined female sexuality and defiantly displays her willingness to break taboos enforcing those restrictions.

In *China Men*, there is an equally striking and memorable description of sexuality, this time male, when Ah Goong masturbates and says that he is “fucking the world” (*China Men* 133). The word is crude but the intent is neither crudeness nor contempt for the world. Instead, Ah Goong is overwhelmed by

sexual excitement as a reaction to the “beauty” of the day. The effect of the passage is to retrieve the word “fucking” from a register connoting vulgarity and domination and to instead recode it as neutral or even joyful. By doing so Kingston furthers one of the counterculture’s main objectives concerning sex, that is, to strip it of aggression, mystification and shame. By “fucking the world,” that is, masturbating in the open air, Ah Goong is expressing a vital personal connection with the valley far from his home where he has been brought to build the railroad. Though admittedly comic, the episode refigures “fucking” as a natural and primal connection rather than an act of aggression.

Sexuality assumes an even more important place in *Tripmaster Monkey*. First of all, in a small-scale form of early culture jamming, Wittman puts Barbie dolls into sexual positions with other toys while working at a toy shop. The loss of his job as a result of these activities sets the story of the novel into motion. Also early in the novel, Wittman imagines himself as Joang Fu, a storyteller and singer, telling a story of a scientist who invents addictive sperm. Finally, in the scene when Wittman makes love with his future wife Taña, the word “fuck” is again used synonymously with “making love,” neutral and friendly: “So they got it on, and they were graceful, just so much foreplay, just so much fervor and abandon and sweat, positions normal. Classic moves. Silently went at it...Mouths against parts of the body, he did not make her blurt out, ‘I love you.’ Well, it was a fuck where they were hardly acquainted, after all, and one didn’t want to turn off the other by seeming overly weirded out” (154). A few moments after this unsentimental and “classic” lovemaking, Wittman and Taña get more playful and he sucks her toes and licks the spaces in between. She tells him she has had an orgasm between her toes, and they are pleased to have “invented a new sex act” (157). In the spirit of sexual equality, Kingston has Wittman hope that “someday he would get to know her well enough to ask her to make love to and with his toes...Find out whether men can have orgasms down there too” (157). In keeping with Miller’s definition of the ethics of sex, Kingston’s polite, egalitarian and playful sex scenes assume that pleasure in one’s body is a natural right and that “fucking” should be a friendly act.

Finally, the principle that Miller calls the “ethics of dope,” and which will be the focus of the remainder of this essay, refers to the conscientious use of marijuana and hallucinogens (as opposed to drugs like speed or heroin, which were also used by some but which were not central to the counterculture ethos).¹ The point of taking drugs for the counterculture community was often as a means to become more aware of the worlds both inside and outside, not as an escape from lucidity. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle call it a means of “deconditioning” that people used to help them perceive and critically

1. For a scholarly article on the meaning and use of marijuana and LSD in the 1960s, see David Farber, “The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture” (2002).

distance themselves from learned forms of aggression, racism, sexism and intolerance (*Imagine Nation* 15). Drugs were thus regarded as both fun and enlightening, bringing insights to users about the interconnectedness between people and between the material and spiritual world. For some, 'smoking marijuana or dropping acid was mainly a harmless good time, a way to share a moment of complicity and pleasure with other people. For others, it was a life-altering experience, even a holy one, an experience that could lead to significant changes in the world if enough people shared it. In the PBS documentary *Summer of Love* (2007), Mary Kaspar, who lived in the Haight-Ashbury area in the early 60s, explains that she and her friends believed that LSD could change the world because they had been changed so profoundly by it themselves. While high on acid, she had experienced "cosmic oneness, where I truly felt I was no different than you, I was no different from my black friends; I was no different than anyone who lived in any other part of the world."² Kaspar describes a radical dissolution of perceived boundaries between herself and any other human being, boundaries erected by the social categories of race, class and nationality. This faculty of altering one's perception of social reality and social schemas, and for becoming aware of them as such, is at the heart of the counterculture's use of hallucinogens: as consciousness-raising and consciousness-expanding tools.

At first glance, the counterculture's ethic of "dope" may also seem remote from Kingston's main concerns, even more so than music and sex. I intend to demonstrate in what follows that psychedelic experiences are in fact the secret core of Kingston's work, the cosmic laugh at the heart of her literary world. This is not to make any concrete claims about Kingston's personal experiences with marijuana or hallucinogens. Instead, my argument is about her writing and her use of psychedelic experiences as tropes for the acquisition of a specific kind of knowledge. To put it simply, the passages that focus on drug-induced experiences are the points of articulation of many of Kingston's most important personal and political values.

I would like to begin with the story that gives Kingston's first book its name and which has been one of the most taught and most discussed sections of her writing, "White Tigers" in *The Woman Warrior*. This chapter consists of an extensively elaborated retelling of the Mulan ballad, about a young woman who disguises herself as a man to replace her father when he is conscripted into the emperor's army. Unlike Kingston's version, the original ballad and its many Chinese retellings all begin with Mulan's distraught brooding about her old father's conscription as she weaves: "You can't tell the sound of the loom/ From the sighs of the girl" (Ting 77). None of these versions includes any account of a preparation for her career as warrior. This long section of "White Tigers," which describes the narrator's imagined apprenticeship with the mysterious couple who

2. A complete transcript of this film is available online at the PBS website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/love/>

teaches her martial arts and puts her through a series of tests, is entirely Kingston's own, weaving together elements of counterculture psychedelia with Chinese folklore and allusions to Native American initiation rites (much in vogue in the 1960s).³

Kingston's version begins with a bird leading the narrator away as a little girl to the mountains, in a manner that recalls Alice following the rabbit down the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The drug allusions begin with her getting lost in a cloud she calls "dragon's breath" (possibly evoking "Puff the Magic Dragon," the 1960s hymn to marijuana smoking sung by the group Peter, Paul and Mary⁴), and include distortions in temporal perception ("I would not know how many hours or days passed") and a heightened sensitivity to color: she emerges from the cloud into a "yellow" world where she meets an old couple with seemingly bottomless pots and a floor that stirs up "new blends of earth colors" when she walks on it (20). After some time, she is taken to the mountains of the white tigers and left alone, as in a Native American rite of passage. Following deer tracks, she is led to the "fungus of immortality," possibly an allusion to hallucinogenic mushrooms, which she eats.⁵ Soon after, she meets a white rabbit that jumps into her campfire to feed her and then sees two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances, melting from Chinese lion dances to African lion dances to Hindu Indian and American Indian dances, the lion's manes growing tall into feathers that shine, then the man and woman growing bigger and bigger, becoming tall angels.

Although there are rabbits (hares, actually) at the end of the original Mulan ballad, and Kingston's version also alludes to the story of Buddha, for whom a rabbit sacrifices itself by jumping in a fire, I would like to suggest yet another source for this fantastic fictional voyage: the white rabbit presiding over San

-
3. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong attributes elements such as the prolonged training and the hermit's retreat on misty mountains to Chinese folk traditions, but the hallucinatory transformations of objects and the intense and colorful distortions perceived by the narrator are of Kingston's invention (Wong, "Autobiography" 48, n. 7).
 4. In suggesting a local drug-linked resonance to the image of "dragon's breath," I do not mean to deny or diminish the enormous symbolic weight of the dragon in Chinese culture, which Kingston is also certainly evoking in this passage.
 5. This passage seems to allude not only to hallucinogenic mushrooms, but possibly even to the McKenna's theory, published a year earlier, that human consciousness was the result of an evolutionary leap triggered by the ingestion of psilocybin-containing mushrooms growing near the droppings of ungulate herds (in Terence and Dennis McKenna, *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*, 1975). The book became very popular in the 1970s, especially among counterculture readers.

Francisco culture in the 1960s (that is, the white rabbit of the Jefferson Airplane album of that name released in 1967). This song is itself a retelling of Lewis Carroll's original novel, not unlike Kingston's rewriting of the Chinese legend. Carroll's version and Grace Slick's both mention substances that upon being eaten make people smaller or bigger and provoke seemingly magical transformations of consciousness and perception.

The description of her narrator's training and experiences in this long embedded section of the chapter has been called magical realism, but I would argue that these passages could also be understood as psychedelic writing.⁶ The ever-shifting fantasy of warrior apprenticeship is like a drug-enhanced daydream, which the narrator contrasts to the reality of her life as a young woman in California, in which she does not like armies and thinks martial arts are "for unsure little boys kicking away under fluorescent lights" (52). The woman warrior fantasy stands outside of the narrator's ordinary existence, something like a reverie but with elaborate and hallucinatory details, where the tripper's imagination takes priority over the original ballad that serves as point of departure. A comparison could be made to Hunter S. Thompson's work (e.g. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*), which often mixed journalism, autobiographical sketch and complete fantasy (much of it drug-inspired). Nevertheless, Kingston's account of the woman warrior narrator's shamanic experience is rooted firmly in the mysticism of the West Coast Beats. Like the poetry of Lenore Kandel and Joanne Kyger, "White Tigers" reflects a counterculture engagement with Buddhist concepts of *anitya* and *anātman*, impermanence and no-self, which translate into a consciousness of the way the material world is in a state of constant, unending transformation and mutation of one thing into another, as the passage in which the dancers become lions illustrates.

China Men has even more explicit drug experiences. First of all, there is Uncle I Fu who is drugged into giving away all his money to thieves. Feeling "a surge of chemicals or light rushing through him," he goes to the bank to withdraw his life savings. Anyone familiar with drug literature would recognize the following description of his experience: "The walk he took was magical: inanimate objects glowed, but oh, the animate – the trees and the flowers and bugs and dogs were spraying colors. Human beings flared haloes around their heads and the rest of their bodies. Bands of light connected couples" (212).

6. Critics who identify *The Woman Warrior* as "magical realism" include Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* 58; Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism" *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* 542; and Theo D'haen, "Postmodernisms: From Fantastic to Magic Realist," 287. For "psychedelic writing," see Scott McCulloch's online article at the Literary Culture website: <http://www.suite101.com/content/psychedelia-in-writing-a14044>

Compare this to Timothy Leary's transcription of people's "first reactions to the psychedelic experience": "Why, colors are so bright! The world seems alive! I'm seeing for the first time! It's alive! It's alive!" ("The Molecular Revolution" 128). Besides enhanced visual perception, Uncle I Fu experiences a sense of connection to the ontological essence of material objects and physical properties: "He later explained how he understood the stopping quality of red light and the go of green" (212). Yet Kingston is also making fun of the altered state of the Uncle in this passage. While he may feel that "Time and fate were his invention and under the control of his will," in fact he has been duped into giving away his money to con men. Kingston's account of this scam is decidedly tongue in cheek, poking gentle fun at the anti-capitalist mantra of the counterculture, as she has the robbed Uncle rejoice to find himself "free of money ... free of burden" until his wife and employees make him "crash" down to the reality of his situation (213).

A far more positive encounter with drugs in *China Men* occurs to Great Grandfather, Bak Goong, who smokes opium on the ship to America and has an intense religious epiphany:

the meaning of life and time and what he was doing on this ship became clear to him... His thoughts branched and flowed and branched again and connected like rivers, veins, roads, ships' lanes. New ideas sparked and he caught his breath when he saw their connection to old ideas (95).

In addition to bringing him existential insight, Bak Goong's opium trip introduces two of Kingston's own preoccupations, i.e. pacifism and interconnectedness. In the same passage, Bak Goong thinks to himself: "Wars were laughable; how could a human being remember which side he was on? ... He loved the strangers around him as much as he loved his family" (95). Compare this passage to another Kingston writes in her own voice in *The Fifth Book of Peace*: "Every time we go to war, we're in schizophrenic agony. Whoever the enemy is, they're related to us" (361). The drug experience also permits Bak Goong to think in terms of paradox, to escape the limited logic of ordinary consciousness, a theme that is important to American philosophy, especially the tradition of Emerson and Whitman that Kingston claims for herself. As Whitman says in "Song of Myself," "Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself/(I am large, I contain multitudes)" and Emerson claimed that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," so Bak Goong sees how "Everything was true ... He was Lao Tse's great thinker, who can embrace opposing thoughts at the same moment" (95). Although opium is not actually a hallucinogen, Kingston attributes the characteristics of an LSD, peyote or ayahuasca trip to Great Grandfather, these all being substances that fascinated the counterculture for their consciousness-expanding qualities. In this instance, the drug allows Bak Goong to see the many connections between people and

things that normally are invisible, an idea that becomes the centerpiece of Kingston's later work.

While Bak Goong's opium experience is possibly one of the most positive accounts of a drug trip ever written, Kingston's novel *Tripmaster Monkey* is an even more explicit treatment of the countercultural scene that formed her adult values. Nevertheless, it is far from being a simple homage to that time and place. For one thing, Wittman Ah Sing is not exactly a hippie. His affinities are to the Beats, urban and nocturnal and literary, but he is well aware that he has arrived on the scene a bit late and that his Chinese background would complicate his ability to belong to that milieu just as it complicates his sense of belonging to any American institution or group.⁷ During the course of the novel, which follows Wittman around for a period of around two months in 1963, much of the narrative is concentrated on two key events: a party where he meets his future wife and the play that he puts on with the help of many people he's met. Both are sprawling affairs that offer Kingston the opportunity to riff on the complex joys of the social events that defined the bohemian branch of the counterculture: parties and performances. At the party Wittman encounters a group of stoned people who are calmly watching a fire, "swimming in hallucinogen, ripped but appearing as ordinary as pie" (87). Wittman is fascinated to see "how the psychedelic state looks from the outside, that is, through the vantage eyes of a head straight from ear to ear at the moment" (87-8). Although not high himself, Wittman infers from their calm "breathing in unison" what kind of experience they are having, one that sounds very much like Bak Goong's: "that trip where the margins between human beings, and between human beings and other creatures, disappear, so that if one gets hurt, we all hurt, so that to stop war, all we have to do is drop lysergic acid into the water supply" (88). In this slightly tongue-in-cheek manner, Kingston evokes the counterculture myth or fantasy of the revolutionary potential of exposing large numbers of people to LSD. Like Mary Kaspar from the PBS documentary, Wittman attributes to LSD the ability to make users perceive their radical interconnectedness.

What makes this notion even more subversive (as well as faithful to the counterculture understanding of how LSD works) is that it is perceived to be an insight facilitated by LSD, not an illusion caused by it. Just as for Mary Kaspar LSD was a springboard to a political consciousness based on the assumption that the connections she had perceived during her trips were real and not imagined, so Wittman corrects himself after raising the idea of LSD in the water supply by saying "but we don't even need to do that—because human beings of all time are in connection—the margins don't disappear—there aren't any margins—psychedelics only make you know about things, and do not cause a thing to be—

7. Wittman is resentfully aware that Kerouac was often racist and might well have seen him merely as a "Twinkling little Chinese," *Tripmaster Monkey* 69.

it is—it already is ... the pleasure of acid was in knowing ideas as real as one's body and the physical universe" (88). In other words, psychedelics could be considered as a short-cut to certain kinds of knowledge, but they were not necessary once the knowledge had been acquired. *Tripmaster Monkey* is thus the story of a "head" (drug user) now "straight from ear to ear" (no longer using LSD) bringing psychedelic wisdom to uninitiated readers.

Thus, even if *Tripmaster Monkey* presents LSD as a means of gaining important insights about community and the place of the self in the larger scheme of things, the book is also a kind of guide to acquiring those insights without needing to take any drugs at all. Instead, the novel seems to suggest, art itself is a kind of trip that can take you outside of yourself and show you a more complex portrait of reality. This is the first figurative leap staged by the novel around the trope of "tripmaster," which figures Wittman as a guide for the altered-consciousness experience he offers to spectators and players through his play. The play is so effective a trip that it changes even him, transforming him into a pacifist after having seen that the three brothers and warriors in the story all end up losing the war (340). Another level of meaning for the tripmaster trope is the way the novel's omniscient but not entirely neutral narrator guides Wittman on his journey through the novel, making sure that he stays out of harm's way. Finally, we can conceive behind these different layers of tripmasters the author herself, shaping and guiding the reader's trip into her fictional universe. In an interview with Neila Seshachari in 1993, Kingston affirmed that she was "very good" at being a tripmaster back in the 1960s, making sure that people went to "beautiful places" rather than "dangerous" ones (Seshachari 205). It is clear that Kingston's understanding of her work as a writer is connected to this guiding function.

The next book that Kingston published, *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003), is a generic hybrid—part memoir, part fiction—that grows directly out of *Tripmaster Monkey* rather than Kingston's two earlier books on Chinese-American experience, though also drawing on the little-known *Hawai'i One Summer* (1987). The textual fusion between fiction and autobiography is especially visible in the chapter titled "Water," which is written as an extension of *Tripmaster Monkey*, with Wittman and his wife Taña moving to Hawai'i, but also as a lightly fictionalized memoir of the Kingstons' move to Hawai'i in 1967. The link between the Ah Sings and the Kingstons is provided by *Hawai'i One Summer*, which is a collection of sketches describing Maxine Kingston's life in Hawai'i and which provides much of the raw material for the contents of "Water."

Near the beginning of the "Water" chapter, Kingston describes the Ah Sings' first night in their new home. Although they have rented it, they tell their young son a bedtime story that rewrites their own arrival to the house as a Digger fairy tale. They tell him of a Prince and Princess who meet in an empty house and occupy it together in a counterculture tactic called squatting and end up living

happily ever after with their little boy, whom their son recognizes as himself (91-91). Wittman and Taña also celebrate their new life by some smoking marijuana given to them by friends as a going-away present. Wittman is initially reluctant because he has given up drugs in general as a “political action,” explained in *Tripmaster Monkey* as a gesture of commemoration of the way the British American Tobacco Company forced many Chinese into opium addiction in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, putting politics momentarily aside, Wittman smokes a joint with his wife and has a trip every bit as enlightening and grandiose as Bak Goong’s opium dream on his passage to America. Wittman feels himself floating out of his house and across the ocean and around the world and back in time. He sees a rainbow across the North Pole and fires burning in Vietnam and he sees himself in previous lives with his wife, including one in the “Wild West.” Fully alert on this journey, Wittman has “a sense of knowing the truth, aware of everything, even his doubts and having smoked dope ... He was not making this up, and not controlling the story” (92). Just like Bak Goong, Wittman realizes that “All is connected to all, and I am conscious of that, and I am conscious that I am conscious” (92).

Here again we have the essence of the value that the counterculture attributed to marijuana and psychedelics, that is, the ability to induce perception of the connections that are normally obscured by our social schemas and hierarchies. Also like Bak Goong, Wittman’s drug experience is one of intense self-awareness, including the awareness that he has taken drugs. This state of heightened lucidity can be compared to the “mindfulness” that Kingston advocates through this book and her last one, a mindfulness that she associates with meditation but which clearly has some origins in the chemical experiences that came before meditation for many people who passed through the 60s counterculture. (In fact, meditation was for many an attempt to find a more natural alternative to the experience of tripping that had tacitly set the standard for mind-altering experiences.)

Perhaps because the whole book is structured around the theme of peace, the “Water” section of *The Fifth Book of Peace* claims its counterculture origins and values in a far more assertive and explicit way than even *Tripmaster Monkey* did. Shortly after arriving on the island, and tired of waiting to be formally welcomed by their neighbors, the Ah Sings decide to throw a welcome party themselves. With her signature combination of gentle irony and moral seriousness, Kingston suggests that her bohemian values have something to teach America about its own values and history:

the nation that came together through gift-giving has broken down, or never was. It’s up to us, the ones who know about potlatches, karasses, love-ins, and be-ins, to give a party. How to change society? Give it a party ... How to civilize kids? Give a party. How to radicalize Kahalu’u? [their new neighborhood] Give a party (162).

In this passage, Kingston claims for Wittman an identity rooted in the practices of the Berkeley counterculture and specifically its social events. For the Diggers, organizing free parties was actually a political tool meant to change the world, shifting its values playfully and gradually towards a more communal and less commercial and competitive register. In the same spirit, the Ah Sings hope to teach their neighbors to be friendlier, more open and welcoming, by welcoming *them* and teaching them neighborliness by example.

The Fifth Book of Peace is also full of nostalgia for the passing of those halcyon days. There are numerous references to the “good high days” of “free grass and legal LSD” when “a stranger walking by on Telegraph Avenue or in the Haight would have handed you a tab or a cookie for free” (90). While visiting another house nearby, where “hippie haoles [non-Hawaiian hippies]” party all night long, looking like “zombies and vampires,” the Ah Sings can only regret that “the times and places of good trips are over” (165). Their standard of reference are the parties “back home in California” where “trippers had been such good talkers that they tape recorded themselves. Stoned, they rapped all night. Playing back the tape, they were still brilliant. Times have changed, drugs have changed” (165). The Ah Sings left Berkeley when the Summer of Love had turned dark, when overcrowding, under-aged runaways and hard drugs like amphetamines and heroine had changed the nature of the Haight-Ashbury scene into something much tougher and less wholesome. The specificity of this transformation and disappointment is visible in the passage above, where the silent stoned hippies next door fill the Ah Sings with regret for the sparkling psychedelic parties of their past.

The acuteness and clarity of the book’s recognition that the drug experiences that partially formed the Ah Sings’ vision and values are no longer possible (not for them nor for anyone, since those experiences were linked to a particular social context that was gone) is directly connected to the way *The Fifth Book of Peace* searches for alternatives to those experiences. These alternatives include meditation, “mindful living,” reading and, above all, writing. All of these practices are tacitly offered as alternative tools for both tripping, taking meaningful mental voyages, and for creating communities or sanghas of mindful trippers and fellow-travelers. The most concrete example of this process is the phenomenally successful Veteran Writers Workshop. Since 1991, Kingston has run a workshop for veterans who want to write, and in 2006, she edited a collection of their stories and poems titled *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*. In the introduction, she wrote that humans “tell stories and we listen to stories in order to live. To stay conscious. To connect one with another. To understand consequences. To keep history. To rebuild civilization” (1).⁸ In these six short

8. The echo of Joan Didion’s *The White Album* (1979) is instructive here. While Didion also begins her book with the words “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (11), and her book is also about the 1960s and Hawaii, her narra-

sentences, one can see the counterculture values that have informed Kingston's writing from the start: mindful living, self-awareness, community, spiritual connectedness, cultural memory and artistic production. All of these principles are basic to the counterculture, and while Timothy Leary would have argued in the 1960s that they are essentially linked to the conscientious use of psychedelics, for Kingston in *The Fifth Book of Peace* they are linked to the conscientious use of creative writing.

In her most recent book, *I Love a Broad Margin To My Life*, Kingston revisits many of the counterculture themes established in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. The drug references have receded into the background but the insights they produce and mind-altering experiences they assume are still present. Wittman Ah Sing is also back, this time explicitly as Kingston's alter-ego, who tells the story of her own return to China through Wittman's perspective. Kingston often explains her decision to use a male protagonist for *Tripmaster Monkey* in terms of the freedoms and dangers that defined men's lives in the early sixties, referring to the draft, among other things, as making men more "hip" and interesting than women, in her view. One thing for certain is that men had more freedom of movement than women in the early sixties. Her decision to fictionally travel to China in Wittman's body in *I Love a Broad Margin* seems to have a similar motive. At one point in the book, Kingston explains that Wittman, "a fiction, is free to befriend anyone" and can "enter the many places/in this world where a man is able and a lady/is not" (104). For instance, in Hong Kong, she has backpacker Wittman lie down in a public park and sleep. It would be harder to imagine a lone woman sleeping in a public space like this.

Interestingly, the dream that Wittman has during this nap recalls the drug trip he takes in *The Fifth Book of Peace* and to Bak Goong in *China Men*:

On the grass in a city park, our male traveller
feeling his lone hobo self, laid
his body down with backpack for pillow.
In San Francisco, it was 2 o'clock the night
before. Going west from California's
shores, jumping forward in time, he'd arrived
at the house of maternity, the land of migrations.
Sleeping in public, jet-lagged, soul
not caught up with body, body
loose from the soul, body trusted itself to
the grass, the ground, the earth, the good earth,
and rested in that state where dream is wake,
wake is dream. Conscious you are conscious.
Climb—fly—high and higher, and know:
Now/Always, all connects to all. (60)

tive stance is so distanced and mediated by irony that Kingston's participatory engagement with the era stands out in stark relief.

Among other things, the passage above immediately reveals to what extent San Francisco remains Kingston/Wittman's center of reference, literally and figuratively speaking. If Wittman keeps track of the time in San Francisco while in another time zone, he also keeps those bohemian consciousness-expanding experiences as the Greenwich of his values and sense of self even when far from home. Accordingly, the passage includes references to the intense self-awareness described previously in drug trips ("conscious that you are conscious"), as well as a description of flight in which "high" is a literal perspective on the world (from above, like an omniscient narrator) as well as a state of mind. Finally the passage returns to the notion of universal interconnectedness ("all connects all") that defines Kingston's cosmology and has served as a refrain in her work since *Great Grandfather* in *China Men* realizes that every human being is "related" (*China Men* 95).

Another key counterculture principle that is reprieved in the book is the belief in the importance of perception and consciousness. At the heart of this principle is the notion that these are not passive but are active faculties that can shape and alter reality. Concretely, the counterculture viewed problems such as the Vietnam War and racism as products of ignorance and a dysfunctional mindset which could be addressed through education and dialogue. Consciousness raising, teach-ins and psychedelic experience could all lead to major social changes because people would begin to perceive the world without the ideological blinkers that kept them in thrall to what Leary called the "fake-prop TV studio stage set that is called American reality" (Leary 3). A more radical version of this idea held that individual and collective acts of faith or will could influence empirical reality. Thus, Wittman's personal project after arriving in Hawai'i is not to write poems or plays but to "work on perception" (143). The stakes were high: "the way of seeing the world—even one person's seeing of it—could cause it, could change it ... End the war by knowing it to be over ... It's all connected, all related to all" (143).

This conviction, whether in its more esoteric or more moderate form, was the beating heart of the optimism of counterculture politics in all its forms. Accordingly, in *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*, Kingston, who merges freely into Wittman's voice and body, writes: "I ended the war in Vietnam. I am determined, we shall stop warring in Iraq and Afghanistan" (117-8). Although Kingston is tongue in cheek here, the faith in the power of demonstrations and the agency of the individual to counter despair, quietism, and helplessness before political and historical events is very serious. Civil disobedience occupies such an important place in this book because it is a concrete example of individual actions combining into collective social agency. Mass social demonstrations are a precious legacy of the 1960s, along with street theater, culture jamming, and other forms of thoughtful, creative and playful protest. Kingston's book tacitly calls for a stop to the relentless trivialization of the 1960s and for an appreciation of the courage and achievements of a generation

that refused—if only for a moment—the politics of acquisition and consumption that have increasingly shaped American culture since World War II.

A final value that Kingston's latest book tacitly rehabilitates is universalism, a concept that was crucial for 1960s political activism, but which lost favor in the wake of poststructuralist theory and multiculturalism (and the concern with "difference" central to both). Although Kingston's career has been defined by her identity as a "Chinese-American" writer, she has stressed from the beginning that she is not writing only as an Asian-American writer. The Chinese dimension of her life is a complex affair of family rituals, stories and history, acquired knowledge, and cultural practices, but her Chinese-ness is not some essential or defining quality. In an early essay, "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers," Kingston insisted that she is an American writer and that *The Woman Warrior* is an American book. However, this insistence on her American identity is not a flag-waving nationalism but a reaction to the ignorant assumption on the part of critics that she is *not* American because of her Chinese parents and appearance. What is at stake for Kingston is not American identity per se but an objection to stereotyping and exclusion by exoticization. Instead of asking "Is this work typical of Chinese Americans?," Kingston suggests that we should ask, "Is this work typical of human beings?" (62). This question cuts to the core of Kingston's humanism, which is not based on traditional humanist notions of an essentialist subject so much as on her counterculture-informed commitment to the idea of human beings connected by relation and affinity, like a recombined family (as opposed to a blood-defined family). Universalism fell out of favor in the late 1970s, critiqued as Euro-centric and insensitive to real differences, but over-attention to cultural and racial differences can also inadvertently lead to their reification and essentialization. Kingston asks us to look beyond cultural and racial difference to perceive the inherent connectedness (not the same thing as sameness or "identity") between people.

In conclusion, Maxine Hong Kingston has been hitherto studied as a feminist and as a multicultural writer, but a recognition of her contribution to counterculture literature is long overdue. Hers is an authentic voice of the period, rapping out brilliant and unconventional prose firmly anchored in the culture and ethos of Bay Area bohemia. In addition to the usual comparisons to Leslie Marmon Silko and Toni Morrison, Kingston should be studied alongside Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Hunter S. Thompson. Precisely because the so-called hippie movement produced relatively little memorable literature, Kingston cannot be overlooked. Counterculture literature needs its female Chinese Beatnik as much as Asian-American literature needs its hippies and radicals. American literary studies can only become richer from relaxing some of its sub-disciplinary borders and remembering that "all is connected to all."

Works Cited

- Blauvelt, William Satake. "Talking with the Woman Warrior." *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston*. Eds. Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1998: 77-85.
- Bonetti, Kay. "An Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston." *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston*. Eds. Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1998: 33-46.
- Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Braunstein, Peter, and Michael William Doyle. *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Chin, Marilyn, and Maxine Hong Kingston. "A MELUS Interview: Maxine Hong Kingston." *MELUS* 16.4 "Toward the Multiculture" (Winter 1989-1990): 57-74.
- D'haen, Theo. "Postmodernisms: From Fantastic to Magic Realist," *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*. Eds. Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997: 283-293.
- Didion, Joan. *The White Album*. New York: Farar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990.
- Farber, David. "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture." *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*. Eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle. New York: Routledge, 2002: 17-40.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*. London: Harvill Secher, 2011.
- . *The Fifth Book of Peace*. New York: Vintage, 2003.
- . *Tripmaster Monkey*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- . *Hawai'i One Summer*. San Francisco: Meadow Press, 1987.
- . "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers." *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue*. Ed. Guy Amirthanaygam. London: Macmillan Press, 1982.
- . *China Men*. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- . *The Woman Warrior*. New York: Vintage, 1975.
- Leary, Timothy. "The Molecular Revolution." *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out*. Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1965:112-141.
- Lott, Eric. *The Disappearing Liberal Intellectual*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. PAGES
- Madsen, Deborah. *Maxine Hong Kingston*, Literary Masters Vol. 9. Detroit, MI: The Gale Group, 2000.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- McCulloch, Scott. "Psychedelic Writing: Is a Literary Genre Based on Psychedelia Possible?" Online article at the Literary Culture website:

- <http://www.suite101.com/content/psychedelia-in-writing-a14044>. Written February 17, 2007. Accessed on June 5, 2011.
- McKenna, Terence and Dennis. *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*. San Francisco: Harper, 1975.
- Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969.
- Savio, Mario. Transcript of "Gears Speech" of December 2, 1964. Available online at: <http://jasondylan.wordpress.com/2010/04/20/mario-savios-1964-berkeley-gears-speech-and-its-2009-remembrance-and-reaffirmation/> (accessed July 24, 2012).
- Seshachari, Neila C. "Reinventing Peace: Conversations with Tripmaster Maxine Hong Kingston." *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston*. Eds. Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1998: 192-214.
- Shan, Te-Hsing. "Life, Writing, and Peace: Reading Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1.1 (2009): online journal.
- Summer of Love*. Dir. Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco. Produced by PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). 2007.
- Ting, PP. "The Ballad of Mulan." Trans. William H. Nienhauser. *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry*. Eds. Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1975): 77-80.
- Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiography Controversy." *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook*. Ed. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 29-56.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Farris. "Magical Romance/Magical Realism." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995: 497-550.