

Reconfiguring the “American Pacific”:  
Narrative Reenactments of Viet Nam  
in Maxine Hong Kingston’s  
*The Fifth Book of Peace*

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In 1967, Earll and I, with our son, left Berkeley in despair over the war. . . . We had not, of course, escaped from the war, but had put ourselves in the very midst of it, as close as you could get and remain in the United States. We should have though of it—hardware and soldiers were sent to Hawai‘i, which funneled everything to Vietnam. . . . We heard the target practice—with missiles—in the mountains, where we hiked, and looked at the jagged red dirt like wounds in the earth’s green skin.

—from “War,” *Hawai‘i One Summer*

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles. . . .  
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

—from “Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass*

Dawn of the day of meeting the veterans, . . . I dig peelings and bamboo leaves and coffee grounds and ashes into my new compost; I’m making earth. . . . I strew grass seed, and think about Walt Whitman’s grass, which grows from the dead.

—from “Earth,” *The Fifth Book of Peace*

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## I    REMEMBERING WAR AND WRITING PEACE

Maxine Hong Kingston is often said to be the most widely-taught living author in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Her fame rests chiefly on her first book, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), which did more than any other single work to galvanize and garner respect for the field of Asian American literary studies when it was still an emerging discipline in the seventies and eighties. When Kingston's home was destroyed by the Oakland-Berkeley fire in October 1991, she lost a nearly completed manuscript called "The Fourth Book of Peace," a work conceived as continuing a legendary series of Chinese "Books of Peace" that were "lost in deliberate fires," victims of book-burnings ordered by ruling monarchs who had acquired and maintained their power through war.<sup>2</sup> Kingston heard about the fire on the radio as she was driving home from a funeral service for her father. Thinking to save her book and a few other precious possessions inherited from her parents, she rushed to the area, slipped past police barricades, and walked through a smoldering, blackened landscape to get to the site of her home, which she found completely leveled. The Persian Gulf War was then in progress, and she emerged from the site with a piercing vision of the devastation being wrought in Iraq and the necessity of communicating this vision to others. She quotes from Oakland Fire Captain Ray Gatchalian, Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, to articulate the connection between fire and war that inspired her to rewrite the lost book as a renewed commitment to pacifism:

"Seeing it the next morning, it brought me back to the shock and horror of Vietnam. When I looked down on the devastation that day, I thought what an opportunity this would be to bring busloads of people and busloads of children and tell them when we, as a country, decide to go to war against somebody, this is what we are going to get. When we decide to send our military and our bombs into a country, this is what we're deciding to do."<sup>3</sup>

The day after the fire, Kingston revisited the site with two friends to search for her book manuscript, which she finally found, a feathery thickness of white ash that melted instantly beneath the weight of her hand. Thereafter, Kingston returned many times with family and friends or by herself to retrieve burnt bits and pieces of former possessions, some recognizable and others not, until she realized that there was no end to such a process and began searching for other ways of dealing with the com-

bined loss of father, home, and book. *The Fifth Book of Peace*, published twelve years after the fire and in the midst of the second US war against Iraq, not only rewrites the lost "fourth book" but reframes Kingston's entire oeuvre as a form of peace activism through writing. *The Fifth Book of Peace* offers an imaginative reconfiguration of "American Pacific" from its embodiment and signification of military-based pacification into places and practices of non-violent pacifism.

This reconfiguration of the American Pacific takes the form of narrative reenactments of the Viet Nam War from the point of view of peace activism in the seventies and veterans remembering Viet Nam in the nineties. These reenactments embody a process of collaboratively remembering and writing Viet Nam, a narrative process that is both collective and private, critical and redemptive, and that offers closure through insistence on incompleteness. Kingston's concern with memory work's methods and results places her writing within an extensive corpus of Asian American literature that critically remembers and re-presents the history of twentieth-century US wars in Asia. Although such memory work has always been a strong component of Asian American literature, an escalation of new US wars abroad in the closing decades of the twentieth century together with conflicting transnational movements to remember or redress the heroes and victims of different theaters of World War II have lent a particular urgency to the task of reading Asian American literature within the framework of Asian/American war memory.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of "narrative reenactment" deployed here is adapted from Marita Sturken's discussion of cultural memory as a dynamic, collaborative process involving both reconstruction and erasure. In her book *Tangled Memories*, which investigates the forms and politics of remembering the Viet Nam War and the AIDS epidemic, Sturken views memory as "a narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived,"<sup>5</sup> and argues that public memory "most often takes the form of cultural reenactment, the retelling of the past in order to create narratives of closure and to promote processes of healing."<sup>6</sup> This definition reworks the psychoanalytic meaning of the term "reenactment," which signifies a survivor's unavoidable repetition of a traumatic experience. Reenactment in the psychoanalytic sense occurs when a subject is unable to occupy a point of view outside an event because its overwhelming nature resists narrativization; in such cases, memory is restricted to a literal repetition, or reenactment, of the original traumatic

scene.<sup>7</sup> Although such a model of blocked narration has been used effectively by literary critics to analyze narrative representations of traumatic memory, Sturken's reconceptualization of reenactment facilitates analysis of therapeutically- or redress-oriented narratives of Asian/American wars, including Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*.

Sturken's "narrative reenactment" is a productive framework because it situates textual analysis in the middle ground between pathological traumatization and complete health. This middle ground is where many Asian/American literary representations of war memory are situated, defined at one end by the unacceptability of abject incapacitation and at the other by the impossibility of perfect agency. In this middle ground, Asian American writers envision psychic and political recuperation while remaining skeptical about the possibility or desirability of complete recovery. The four major narratives comprising *The Fifth Book of Peace* occupy this middle ground. Kingston's account of the fire and its effect on her artistic activity (chapters one and two, called "Fire" and "Paper"), the fictional story of activist Wittman Ah Sing's relocation to Hawai'i to avoid being drafted and to search for a more promising environment for pacifist living (chapter three, called "Water"), and Kingston's account of teaching writing workshops for Vietnam veterans in the wake of the fire (chapter four, called "Earth") are narratives that reenact the suffering of participating in or witnessing the Viet Nam War. It is the process of narrative reenactment—a process of returning to the same ground to remember and retell it yet articulate it anew each time, a process that creates an incremental and always partial narrative recovery of the past—that contains the possibility of an ethical, community-building practice of pacifism. This paper analyzes the narrative reenactment of Viet Nam comprising chapter three of *The Fifth Book of Peace* in terms of Kingston's reconfiguration of "American Pacific." The next section will build a context for such an analysis by tracing the trajectory of Kingston's oeuvre as reflecting a principle of narrative reenactment, whereby each new work revisits and expands on previously narrated episodes of war memory and thus contributes to an evolving intertextual narrative of pacifism. The third section will discuss the implications of Kingston's use of American poet Walt Whitman in her representation of anti-war activism in Hawai'i. I will argue that Kingston's use of Whitman enables a reconfiguration of "American Pacific" as a place and practice of collaborative grassroots pacifism, and that this reconfiguration which comprises chapter three of *The Fifth Book of*

*Peace* is part of the author's continuously evolving narrative reenactment of Viet Nam and other US wars in Asia.

## II PACIFISM AS INTERTEXTUALITY IN KINGSTON'S WRITINGS: FROM WOMEN WARRIORS TO BOOKS OF PEACE

Kingston's six books are notable for their destabilization of traditionally defined boundaries between fiction and autobiography, and for their counter-memories of Chinese American history which present a multi-cultural and feminist critique of dominant US narratives of national identity. The first and second books, *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980), established Kingston reputation as an autobiographer and ignited a longstanding debate within the Asian American community around issues of cultural "authenticity," artistic license, and the ethnic writer's gendered relationship to dominant culture.<sup>8</sup> Although *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* were originally conceived as one work, Kingston decided to publish them separately, with the result that *The Woman Warrior* narrates stories about historical and legendary Chinese and Chinese American women, including Kingston's female relatives, while *China Men* does the same for Chinese and Chinese American men. These two books were followed by *Hawai'i One Summer* (1987), a slender volume of personal essays about Hawai'i that originally appeared in a column written for the *New York Times* during the 1970s. First published as a limited handbound edition, *Hawai'i One Summer* was a little known work until the University of Hawai'i Press reissued it in 1998. Kingston's fourth book, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), was the first of her works to be explicitly labeled and marketed as a novel, although it, too, blends fiction and memoir. The title is an allusion to the monkey protagonist of the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* (called *Saiyuuki* in Japan), and the story concerns a male Chinese American playwright coming of age during the Asian American and anti-war movements of the seventies. (His name is Wittman Ah Sing, and his story is picked up and continued in the third chapter of *The Fifth Book of Peace*.) A long gap followed in Kingston's output after she lost the manuscript of what would have been her fifth book. The actual fifth book was published more than ten years after *Tripmaster Monkey*—*To Be the Poet* (2001), which consists of the William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization that Kingston delivered at Harvard University in 2000. Finally, in 2003, the recuperated book that Kingston

had described as a “nonfiction fiction nonfiction sandwich”<sup>9</sup> was published as *The Fifth Book of Peace*.

In the remainder of this section, I will look at each of these six books in turn in order to describe Kingston’s oeuvre as performing a narrative reenactment of Asian/American wars from her perspective as an Asian American. Further, I will argue that viewing Kingston’s oeuvre as such foregrounds its pacifist trajectory, that pacifism is a form of intertextuality in Kingston’s writings.

*The Woman Warrior* has five chapters, each featuring a different female protagonist. The first chapter concerns Fa Mook Lan, the fabled Chinese woman warrior who saved her father’s life when he was conscripted. She took his place in battle disguised as a man, and achieved legendary fame as a general. In *The Woman Warrior*, Fa Mook Lan’s homecoming is enacted through her laying down of masculine arms and armor and donning a traditional wedding garment to take up the duties of filial wife and daughter-in-law. While this scene can be read as both critiquing or affirming traditional gender roles, the dominant tone of Fa Mook Lan’s representation in *The Woman Warrior* is one of power and triumph. Kingston treats Fa Mook Lan differently in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. Appearing at the end of the book rather than the beginning, the narrative of Fa Mook Lan’s return from battle valorizes a transition from front to home front. She is defined as “a woman who brings the men home” and embodies the association of peace with domestic life. This reconfiguration of Fa Mook Lan reiterates a relationship between women and war that Kingston poses at the beginning of the last chapter of *The Fifth Book of Peace*, when she describes the origins of her writing workshops for Viet Nam veterans and quotes at length from one of the many vets who wrote to her out of their own memories of surviving fires. This man says that “veterans need to report to women.”<sup>10</sup> Women are “sanctuary,” they “bring soldiers home,” and they “need to hear the war stories.”<sup>11</sup> In the version of Fa Mook Lan’s homecoming that appears in *The Fifth Book of Peace*, “woman” and “home” punctuate almost every line:

Now, go home. By her voice,  
the men recognize their general—  
a beautiful woman.  
You were our general? A woman.  
Our general was a woman. A beautiful woman.  
A woman led us through the war.

A woman has led us home.  
 Fa Mook Lan disbands the army.  
 Return home. Farewell.  
 Beholding—and becoming—Yin, the Feminine,  
 come home from war.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas in *The Woman Warrior* Kingston cites her mother's chanted Chinese-language version of the legend of Fa Mook Lan as the source of her narrative, in *The Fifth Book of Peace* she uses her own English rendition of her mother's chant and in the process changes the emphasis of Fa Mook Lan's story from one of triumphant (masculinist) warfare to peaceful (feminist) homecoming. Thus, the concluding pages of *The Fifth Book of Peace* suggest that a change in Fa Mook Lan's signification of warriorhood has taken place between her appearances in Kingston's first and most recent books. In *The Woman Warrior*, which is a response and contribution to Asian/American feminist movements of the seventies, Fa Mook Lan is created as an antidote to one of the book's other stories, that of No Name Woman, an aunt who committed suicide after being brutally punished for a pregnancy resulting from rape. In *The Woman Warrior*, Fa Mook Lan has the necessary function of offsetting the "lesson" of No Name Woman's fate by embodying the possibility of women successfully challenging repressive patriarchal institutions and laws. In *The Fifth Book of Peace*, the new emphasis on peace in Fa Mook Lan's representation suggests that she has been re-imagined in response to changes in Kingston's priorities. In the 1990s, examples of empowered Asian "women warriors" were no longer a rarity in Asian American literature or American cultural discourses. What did remain almost nonexistent or invisible was a literary tradition of "books of peace," to which Kingston now devoted her creative energy by recuperating the still-radical potential of a traditional alignment of "woman" with "home" and "peace."

Looking back on the trajectory of Kingston's writing from the standpoint of her most recent version of Fa Mook Lan, an abiding concern with writing war into peace becomes clearly visible. In Kingston's second book, *China Men*, the chapter called "The Brother in Vietnam" offers a remarkable synopsis of the extent to which twentieth-century American history is a history of US wars in Asian countries. In the following excerpt, Kingston recalls an incident from her elementary school days in Oakland:

For the Korean War, we wore dog tags and had Preparedness Drill in the school basement. We had to fill out a form for what to engrave on the dog tags. I looked up “religion” in the American-Chinese Dictionary and asked my mother what religion we were. “Our religion is Chinese,” she said. . . . The kids at school said, “Are you Catholic?” “No.” “Then you’re a Protestant.” So our dog tags had O for religion and O for race because neither black nor white. Mine also had O for blood type. Some kids said O was for “Oriental,” but I knew it was for “Other” because the Filipinos, the Gypsies, and the Hawaiian boy were O’s. Zero was also the name of the Japanese fighter plane, so we had better watch our step. The teachers gave us anti-Communist comic books and Civil Defense pamphlets about atomic bomb attacks. . . . “The War,” I wrote in a composition, which the teacher corrected, “Which war?” There was more than one.<sup>13</sup>

There indeed has been more than one war of consequence for Asian Americans, but their cumulative effect and recurrent location in Asia are accurately signified by the singular proper noun, “the War.” This short passage succeeds in placing the Viet Nam War in the context of World War II, the Korean War, and the Cold War, and it raises important issues about what it means to survive a war, how the Hong family in particular has survived various wars, and the relationship of racialized minorities in the United States to US wars abroad. All of these concerns are developed further in *The Fifth Book of Peace*.

In particular, the relationship between racialized minorities in the US, the primary subject of *China Men*, and US wars abroad, the primary framework of *The Fifth Book of Peace*, is underscored in the latter work through updated versions of Kingston’s parents’ immigration. *China Men*, which consists of portrayals of Chinese American men that re/claim America as home for Chinese immigrants and their descendants, presents a false version of Tom Hong’s immigration. It turns out that this discrepancy is not the result of the author’s aesthetic choices but the dangers of immigration for Asians. Kingston’s father entered the US on his third attempt as a stowaway from Cuba during a period of anti-Asian immigration laws, and this illegal entry was not revealed by Kingston’s mother until fears of possible deportation were nullified by Mr. Hong’s death. New details about Kingston’s mother’s escape from China in 1939 on the eve of Japan’s takeover also appear in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. Kingston tells these new stories in an episode where the BBC films her in a boat off Angel Island, the infamous west coast detention station for Asian immigrants. That Kingston continues to narrate her parents’ entry



into the US more than twenty-five years after the fact recalls Rob Wilson's observation of both *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*: that Kingston's efforts to claim and celebrate Chinese Americans' American identity inevitably bring to the surface a counter-narrative of exclusion.<sup>14</sup>

Some critics have gone further to suggest that *China Men*, as well as *Tripmaster Monkey*, supports an official version of multiculturalism that works to maintain racial discrimination in American society, and indeed, in the Angel Island episode, Kingston reaffirms a popular concept of America-as-multicultural-family: "I wanted the BBC to show the world a multicultural, multiracial America. Every time we go to war, we're in a schizophrenic agony. Whoever the enemy is, they're related to us."<sup>15</sup> However, this is not an uncritical act of national affiliation. When invited by the BBC to be part of a documentary series on "writers and teachers journeying across national boundaries,"<sup>16</sup> Kingston wanted the film focused not on China but the writing workshops she was conducting for Viet Nam veterans with the support of the Community of Mindful Living, founded by Buddhist monk and Viet Nam exile Thich Nhat Hanh. What results from Kingston's use of the opportunity provided by the BBC is a multi-layered narrative reenactment of Asian/American wars. On one level, the BBC footage filmed off Angel Island is a literal simulation of a Chinese female immigrant's entry into the US during a particular moment in history, one marked by anti-Asian immigration laws and impending US involvement in World War II. The critical implications of this particular narrative of American immigration, erased in the standard Ellis Island version, are underscored by being embedded within a second-generation Asian American's reenactment of the Viet Nam War. Within the framework of dominant US national narratives, Viet Nam is commonly understood as being totally unlike World War II, which is constantly rescripted as a "good" war. But in the framework of Asian American counter-memory, the Viet Nam War is not different from, but quite similar to, World War II. Both are part of a larger historical pattern of American military pacification of Asian nations. In the episode of the BBC filming Kingston's narrative of her parents' obstructed entries into the US, we are reminded of the entire history of American wars and nation building, and how differently this history can be remembered by Asian Americans.

*China Men* was followed by *Hawai'i One Summer*, and in this third book, not just one chapter but the entire volume is framed by the Viet Nam War. *Hawai'i One Summer* is a collection of eleven prose pieces,

most of which originally appeared in Kingston's "Hers" column in the *New York Times* during the seventies. They were gathered into a limited edition of 150 hand-bound copies published by Meadow Press in 1987, and later reprinted by the University of Hawai'i in 1998. In the 1998 Preface to *Hawai'i One Summer*, Kingston says she wrote the essays in the middle of her seventeen-year stay in Hawai'i.<sup>17</sup> A whole decade of life in Hawai'i is thus condensed into the "summer of 1978" that forms the nominal subject of these essays, organized into three sections called "June," "July," and "August." The 1998 Preface also mentions one reader's observation that the book contains many allusions to suicide. Re-reading it myself after a lapse of several years, I am startled by the number of references in just the first essay to nuclear holocaust and other kinds of death and disaster, particularly since this piece is about the purchase of a first home following upon the success of *The Woman Warrior*. The last two pieces in *Hawai'i One Summer* close the volume on the same somber note with which it begins. These concluding pieces concern beat poet Lew Welch, whose suicide is connected to "the black pall that spread over the world during the long war" in Viet Nam,<sup>18</sup> and Kingston's fear for the safety of her son who bodysurfs at merciless Sandy Beach. The last sentence in *Hawai'i One Summer* juxtaposes the anxiety of a death-filled present with a deliberate act of imagining survival: "I . . . find some comfort in the stream of commuter traffic, cars filled with men over twenty, passing Sandy Beach on their way to work."<sup>19</sup> Framed as it is by the subject of violent death, *Hawai'i One Summer* can be read as a pre-text for Kingston's fourth book, *Tripmaster Monkey*, which introduces her famous anti-war activist character Wittman and begins with his thoughts of suicide.<sup>20</sup>

Visually and thematically, the end of *Hawai'i One Summer* and the beginning of *Tripmaster Monkey* face each other across the Pacific Ocean. *Hawai'i One Summer* concludes with an image of Kingston standing on the southeastern shore of O'ahu consumed with thoughts of death and willing herself to imagine a safe future. *Tripmaster Monkey* begins with an image from the other side of the Pacific—Wittman Ah Sing walking through Golden Gate Park while mentally facing the Bridge and the ocean beyond it. He, too, is preoccupied with thoughts of death while willing himself to imagine a peaceful future. Although Wittman envisions and rejects the possibility of making a spectacular leap off the Golden Gate Bridge, he cannot rid his mind of the image of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who immolated himself to protest the war.

(Sandy Beach is located on O'ahu's leeward coast and therefore faces southeast and not northeast toward the direction of San Francisco. However, this technicality does not diminish the larger geographical and symbolic alignment of O'ahu and San Francisco Bay as "facing" each other across the Pacific.) The ending of Kingston's third book and the beginning of her fourth thus suggest that in the decade that passed between the writing of *Hawai'i One Summer* in the seventies and *Tripmaster Monkey* in the eighties, Kingston returned to memories of the events surrounding her relocation to Hawai'i. She invented Wittman Ah Sing as an alter-ego to reenact her story of living through the suicidal mission that the Viet Nam War seemed to have become.

As *The Fifth Book of Peace* was nearing completion, Kingston's actual fifth book, *To Be the Poet* (2002), was being written up. This book, too, is an integral part of the pacifist trajectory in Kingston's work, since poetry itself is defined as a peaceful genre. In the first paragraph, Kingston boldly declares that she wants a poet's life of peace; twelve years and one thousand pages of laboring in prose to produce the "long-book (about the long wars in Viet Nam and in the Middle East)" have created a need for "the easiness of poetry," "the brevity of the poem," the "always happy" life of the poet.<sup>21</sup> The point is not whether this definition of poetry is right or wrong, but what Kingston's desire for poetry expresses—a longing for stillness, simplicity, lightness, laughter, and free time, a desire, in short, for a peaceful life. A genius at writing what she needs into existence—her recuperation of No Name Woman proceeds from a declaration that "[u]nless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help"<sup>22</sup>—Kingston simply writes her poet's life into being. It is delightful, and peaceful, to accompany Kingston from her bardic opening declaration ("I Choose the Poet's Life") through her tongue-in-cheek petulant demands for inspiration ("I Call on the Muses of Poetry, and Here's What I Get") to the magically easy transition from prose lines into poetic lines that concludes the volume ("Spring Harvest"). The last poem included in *To Be The Poet* is Kingston's English rendition of the chant of Fa Mook Lan, exactly as it appears at the end of *The Fifth Book of Peace*. It is accompanied by the following epiphany: "I am ending the longbook with a poem. All that prose added up to this one poem. If I hadn't put myself into a poetic state, I wouldn't have thought to end this way. I went through a poetry door and came out of the war story."<sup>23</sup> Echoing what happened between the conclusion of *Hawai'i One Summer* and the beginning of *Tripmaster Monkey*, *To Be*

*The Poet* and *The Fifth Book of Peace* also create an intertextual dialogue, though less pre-text and reenactment than parallel narratives, wherein the stories of Kingston's writing-in-community for veterans and her personal quest for poetry arrive in tandem at the same conclusion. It is one more example of how, just as there are no firm borders between fiction, history, and autobiography within each of Kingston's works, the borders between separate works also blur when they are read in the framework of an intertextual narrative of pacifism. For Kingston, the task of remembering war in order to write peace has been a lifetime paper project that began with her first narrative about women warriors who "right" wrongs by "writing" them.<sup>24</sup>

### III VETERANS OF PEACE RECONFIGURE THE AMERICAN PACIFIC: WALT WHITMAN, WITTMAN AH SING, AND MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

The American Pacific, as both geo-political and symbolic terrain, is a primary site and subject of *The Fifth Book of Peace*. Wittman relocates to Hawai'i in order to start a new life for himself and his family, drawn like countless others before and after him by the promise of rejuvenation in "paradise." The allure of Hawai'i works as powerfully on self-aware newcomers like Wittman and his artist/wife Tana, who bring with them a critical understanding of hegemonic structures and their status as unwelcome outsiders, as it does for those who come to Hawai'i more naively, arrogantly, or self-centeredly as tourists, military, capitalists, and immigrants.<sup>25</sup> Wittman's chapter in *The Fifth Book of Peace* suggests that Kingston sought a more comprehensive retelling of her own relocation to Hawai'i, which had previously been told only through a few vignettes in *China Men* and the essays comprising *Hawai'i One Summer*. In particular, almost all the key episodes narrated in *Hawai'i One Summer* are recycled in Wittman's narrative, such as the ambiguities of being an anti-materialist homeowner, Kingston's sorrowful remembrance of Beat poet Lew Welch, whom she had met before leaving California, a couple of snorkeling expeditions to the island on the windward side of O'ahu known as Chinaman's Hat, son Joseph's terror upon sighting a *menehune* (a Hawaiian sprite) and many of his other experiences as a young child transplanted to a very different culture, and the AWOL soldiers whom Kingston and her husband met and helped through their work at the sanctuary for draft resisters provided for a few weeks by the Church of the Crossroads in Honolulu.

Playwright Wittman Ah Sing is conceived as a complex amalgam of four figures: American poet Walt Whitman, the monkey hero of the Chinese classic *The Journey to the West* (called *Saiyuuki* in Japan), a stereotyped character named "Ah Sin" in a story by American writer Bret Harte, and Asian American writer Frank Chin, who was the most vocal and famous critic of *The Woman Warrior* as well as Kingston's "literary arch rival."<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, Wittman first makes his appearance in *Tripmaster Monkey*, a Joycean novel that begins with his thoughts of suicide and concludes in a tour de force monologue about himself and his artistic mission. This personal performance caps a three-night run of an epic staging of another Chinese classic, *The Water Margin*, involving a cast of hundreds, spontaneous audience participation, and a fireworks extravaganza that hints one last time at Wittman's death wish and underscores the seductive power of fire and firearms. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Wittman's play is about a particular war and the nature of war itself, and through staging this play he battles the social and political systems that deny his full existence as a human being and an American. Yet by the end of the second night he also comes to a realization that no one wins through warfare, not even the heroes of the Chinese classics on whom he has so long built his identity politics. In *The Fifth Book of Peace*, Wittman's narrative also culminates in a communal play but one that, from the outset, is conceived as a pacifist enterprise. In the discussion of Wittman that follows, I focus my analysis on Kingston's new deployment of Walt Whitman to provide her character with a vision and method for articulating Hawai'i's alternative potential as another kind of "American Pacific," and to create a writing partner through whom she can reenact her own memory of Viet Nam.

Walt Whitman worked on one volume of poems his entire life, editing and adding to it through several versions beginning in 1855 and ending with the so-called "death bed" edition of 1891–92. (In this sense, Whitman's oeuvre, too, is marked by formal and thematic reenactment.) *Leaves of Grass* thus spans the half century of US history that included the building of the transcontinental railroad, the Civil War, and America's transition from an agrarian to an industrialized society. Although Whitman's stylistic and philosophical excesses border at times on naiveté, arrogance, or mediocrity, and although Whitman's contemporary Emily Dickinson is generally considered by literary critics to be America's greatest poet, Whitman's image as America's national bard remains intact and his influence on the development of twentieth-century

American poetry has been profound.<sup>27</sup> Dickinson, in fact, is also a quintessential poet of excess, but the socio-cultural circumstances of her life and the nature of her psyche and genius channeled that excess into a minimalist style and reclusive lifestyle. Whitman's excess insisted on public expression, to the point where he found it necessary to dissolve the borders between private and public so that the song of America would be a "Song of Myself," the title of his fifty-two stanza epic poem that broke taboos regarding appropriate poetic form and subject matter.

Whitmanian excess gives Wittman access to Hawai'i. It provides a model of ethically responsible poetic license to speak for and from Hawai'i, even as a newcomer. Whitmanian excess signifies permission to speak of anything and everything to any degree: "I harbor for good or bad/I permit to speak at every hazard/Nature without check with original energy."<sup>28</sup> However, such freedom of expression is understood as being responsible to spiritual integrity: "I believe in you my soul, the other that I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other."<sup>29</sup> Whitmanian excess also grants supreme authority to the individual that is at the same time humble and democratic: "I resist anything better than my own diversity, / Breathe the air but leave plenty after me, / And am not stuck up, and am in my place."<sup>30</sup> A third key aspect of Whitmanian excess is that it defines identity both locally (by gender and place) and globally: "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son."<sup>31</sup> But above all, perhaps, Whitmanian excess—as both vision and style—is essential to Wittman's commitment to a pacifist livelihood because it makes democracy and community inseparable from an ability to witness, grieve, and transform violence and death. Whitman's poetry is filled with representations of the myriad forms of death, including passages like the following which could easily be taken for a description of a bombing in the year 2005 despite the technological "advances" in weaponry that have occurred since the Civil War: "The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion, / The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air."<sup>32</sup> Whitman's poetry is also filled with meditations on death that seek to absorb the fact of death into a vision of life: "The smallest sprout shows there is really no death, / . . . And to die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier."<sup>33</sup>

Before transporting Wittman to Hawai'i, Kingston enhanced his Whitmanian vision and method with cultural knowledge she herself did not have as a newcomer to the islands in the late sixties. From the moment Wittman settles in for the long plane ride and another passenger, a Native

Hawaiian, challenges his motivations for moving to Hawai'i, he is ready to negotiate the cultural *kapu* (Hawaiian for "taboo," "no-entry") of the islands, the prohibitions on who can enter, who can speak, what can be said. This preparedness is depicted through Wittman's dialogue with four heterogeneous historical figures—James Jones, Haunani-Kay/Mililani Trask, Gauguin, and Lew Welch. Jones is the author of *From Here to Eternity* (1951), a World War II novel set in Hawai'i whose protagonist is an anti-war soldier named Prewitt.<sup>34</sup> This book seems to be the sole reading material that Wittman has brought with him, and it is referred to and used as a roadmap during the Ah Sings' first two days in Hawai'i. It is also a book that Kingston herself reads from as part of her mental preparation for her first writing workshop with veterans. Haunani-Kay Trask, who helped found and teaches in the department of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai'i, and Mililani Trask, a lawyer, are sisters who have played a prominent role in Hawaiian sovereignty movements since the seventies. Haunani-Kay Trask has written about her "mainland" education and subsequent politicization into a Hawaiian identity in her widely-read volume of essays, *From a Native Daughter* (1993).<sup>35</sup> Although the Trask sisters are not explicitly mentioned in the book, Polly Keoua, the beautiful Native Hawaiian returning home from law school who confronts Wittman on his knowledge of and relationship to Hawai'i, can be read as a reference to them. Gauguin is a figure who signifies both Wittman's and his wife (a painter) Tana's artistic pursuits in Polynesia. Wittman's frequent references to Gauguin indicate his attraction to the romantic figure of the artist-in-Paradise, but his identification with Gauguin also expresses awareness of being a linguistically and culturally handicapped foreigner, one charged with the responsibility of observing new surroundings as honestly and vigorously as possible. Lew Welch, whom Kingston met before leaving Berkeley, disappeared into the woods around San Juan Ridge in Nevada County in the spring of 1971 while he was staying at a cabin owned by poet Gary Snyder. He left a suicide note and is presumed to have shot and killed himself although his body was never recovered. Welch had suffered from bouts of depression and alcoholism since his graduation from college, but Kingston connects his disappearance to the war in southeast Asia, quoting from his poem "Chicago" which says, "I'm just going to walk away from it. Maybe/A small part of it will die if I'm not around / feeding it anymore."<sup>36</sup> This reference to Lew Welch opens the chapter on Wittman.

None of these four historical figures, however, provides Wittman with a method or vision for reconfiguring the “American Pacific.” Rather, Keoua/Trask, Gauguin, Jones/Prewitt, and Welch serve as touchstones for Wittman’s political and cultural consciousness. Welch and Keoua, for example, are framing devices, raising issues about how and for whom an “American Pacific” is to be defined. Gauguin and Prewitt, on the other hand, are deployed primarily as negative role models. On the plane, when Tana mediates tension between Wittman and Polly by requesting to draw her and ends up giving the drawing to Polly as a gift, Wittman wryly notes that Gauguin did not give away paintings to his Tahitian models. Likewise, Prewitt is quickly and literally disposed of as a roadmap of any lasting value when Wittman uses his copy of *From Here to Eternity* to wedge one of the tires of his car and thus escape from a crazy white man shooting at him at Ka’ena point, the northwestern tip of O’ahu where the paved highway ends in a dirt road. (There is no public thoroughfare circling the island of O’ahu completely.) Thus, although Keoua, Welch, Gauguin, and Prewitt embody the key issues of Wittman’s relocation, they do not provide models for dealing with them that are acceptable or appropriate to Wittman himself. Welch’s suicide is a form of response already rejected at the end of *Tripmaster Monkey*. Jones’ racism undermines the appeal of *From Here to Eternity* as spiritual or literary support for draft resistance. (“Wittman hated the book for being gook-filled. . . . Seven times Jones calls the aloha shirt a gook shirt. He wrote “gook” 30 times.”<sup>37</sup>) Keoua’s cultural politics are tailored to her particular priorities as a Native Hawaiian; Wittman cannot simply mimic or assume them for his own position as a mainlander Asian American. Gauguin, like Prewitt, is too much a product of western Orientalism to be useful as a role model for an Asian American artist. In the final analysis it is Walt Whitman, frequently called the “poet of the open road,” who provides Wittman with a workable method of inter-subjective communication and democratic re-mapping through which to seek out Hawai’i’s embodiment of an alternative “American Pacific.”

A brief description of Wittman’s first two days in Hawai’i will illustrate how Kingston uses Whitmanian excess to provide her anti-war activist/artist with a philosophy capable of validating his geographical relocation and a style capable of narrating it. The Ah Sings’ first day on O’ahu consists of their renting a car in Honolulu and cruising through Waikiki before driving around the southeastern tip of the island and along the windward coast until, at nightfall, they find a house to rent in



Kahalu'u. On the second day, Wittman completes a "circle" of the island by continuing north along the windward coast as he drives back into Honolulu the long way to return the car. A large chunk of the chapter is taken up with the events of this second day. Wittman socializes with a Hawaiian family living on the beach at Kahana Bay, stumbles into live ammunition drills when he enters a military kapu area, visits a *heiau* (sacred site), gets shot at by a stranger in a cabin at Ka'ena Point, backtracks down the middle of the island through pineapple and sugar cane fields and military housing, then past Pearl Harbor and into Honolulu once more. He then takes a bus into Waikiki after returning the car, joins an anti-war demonstration there, and when it turns ugly hitches a ride back home with two newly arrived African American VISTA workers who come onto the scene. They are, by chance, heading to Kahalu'u, so the three drive back to the windward side via the Pali highway, which at that time was one of only two inland routes through the Ko'olau mountain range connecting the leeward and windward coasts. In other words, Wittman's first two days in Hawai'i take him completely around and through the island of O'ahu. Symbolically speaking, he covers the "entire" island and meets "all" segments of the population. Kingston's manner of narration gives the impression of itemizing everyone and everything Wittman sees during these first two days. A rough count, for the entire chapter, yields 40–50 named characters identified by occupation and place of residence or origin, and another 300 unnamed individuals comprising the participants in two peace parades, the regular staff for the Church of the Crossroads, the AWOL soldiers who find sanctuary there, their supporters, the Kahalu'u community where the Ah Sings live, and a busload of tourists. Kingston's technique of conspicuous enumeration replicates Whitman's exhaustive catalogs of people and places as well as the intention behind such a style. The "song of myself" created by Whitman/Wittman seeks to embrace all individual embodiments of animate and inanimate existence within a vision of harmonious co-existence. Exhaustive itemization, in other words, is a rhetorical correlative for a vision of democratic community in Wittman's chapter of *The Fifth Book of Peace* as it is in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

This style and vision of "inclusiveness" in both Whitman and Kingston has been interpreted by some critics as supporting a hegemonic definition of multiculturalism in which whiteness remains the measure of "American" identity and socio-economic privilege.<sup>38</sup> My own view is that the over-arching sensibility and intention behind Kingston's writing,

and Whitman's, are fundamentally generous and democratic. Whitman's poem of America is at pains to embrace the whole of society from the most empowered to the most marginalized, leaving no one unacknowledged, hence his famous excessive catalogs that itemize and level American people and places (as in the oft-cited example of his placing the President next to a prostitute). Kingston, I believe, understands Whitman's excess as the mark of a writer who can assume both the supreme confidence and utter humility that are necessary for presuming to inhabit the lives of others, to speak for and about them from one's own limited point of view. This is Wittman Ah Sing's situation when he arrives in Hawai'i, as it is the challenge faced by every minoritized American poet confronting the subject of "America."

But if poetic license is key to Kingston's original conception of Wittman in *Tripmaster Monkey*, Wittman's reappearance in *The Fifth Book of Peace* indicates that Kingston has gone beyond Whitman's representation of democratic community by drawing out the implications of his representation of death for the relationship of community to pacifism. Thematically if not stylistically, the aspect of *Leaves of Grass* emphasized in *The Fifth Book of Peace* is its representation of war, the Whitman who is known for his profound sorrow over the Civil War, his nursing of wounded war veterans, and his celebrated elegy for President Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." Three brief but explicit allusions to Whitman in *The Fifth Book of Peace* make this emphasis quite clear. The first allusion is the third passage quoted at the beginning of this essay. It refers to Canto 6 of "Song of Myself," which elaborates Whitman's central metaphor, grass, as a symbol of death and regeneration. The second and third allusions occur near the end of the "Water" chapter, when Wittman is observing wounded soldiers at Tripler Army Hospital, and giving parting words of advice to two AWOL soldiers who had been hiding at the Ah Sings' Kahalu'u home but decided to turn themselves in:

Whitman's namesake had spent the Civil War in hospitals, reading to the wounded, giving them nickels to buy milk, writing to their mothers, holding the dying in his arms, and kissing them goodbye.<sup>39</sup>

Giving the non-readers words to live by, Wittman quoted the healing poet of the American Civil War: "This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take your hat off to nothing known or unknown."<sup>40</sup>

Certainly in the history of European and American literature, the representation of death as the ultimate democracy, the great leveler, is nothing new. But in Whitman's handling of this theme, particularly through the grass metaphor and in his Civil War poems, the representation of death's democratizing effect is imbued with an eloquent capacity for mourning and reconciliation.

In her most recent work, Kingston draws out the pacifist implications of Whitman's attentiveness to Civil War veterans and his insistence on viewing death in relation to life. Thus, the Wittman who reappears in *The Fifth Book of Peace* is not only endowed with Whitman's method of observing, naming, and embracing everyone and everything, but understands his articulation of community as a form of promoting peace. Community, in other words, is defined in *The Fifth Book of Peace* as a manifestation and medium of pacifism. On a very basic level, being-with-others, or connecting oneself to others, is defined as a life-affirming gesture that is foundational to peace, just as its antithesis, disconnection and exclusion, is the foundation of warfare. Wittman's Whitmanian catalogues and excursions during his first two days on O'ahu lay the groundwork for the climax and conclusion of the "Water" chapter—two pacifist "projects" that define and connect Wittman to a community where he performs his artistic work and a community where he lives, and that connect these two communities to each other. That is, Wittman stages a communal play for the AWOL soldiers and their supporters at the Church of the Crossroads sanctuary, and opens his house in Kahalu'u for a grand housewarming party to which the entire community is invited. These are interconnected events that together define Wittman's pacifist manner of living and earning a living. Wittman's son Mario, who grew up in the Kahalu'u neighborhood and was schooled at the Church of the Crossroads, appears as a high school graduate in the last episode of the narrative. His refusal after being pressured by friends to join the military as a means of social and economic opportunity is identified as the most significant outcome of Wittman's and Tana's pacifism. He has become what his peace-making parents had hoped for most of all—a young man who decides he will not be a person who kills others.

#### IV COLLABORATIVE GRASSROOTS PACIFISM

Community is vital to memory work that seeks to alleviate grief or redress grievances. If bearing witness and remembering are productive negotiations of suffering and death, it is owing to the circuit of listening

and speaking that structures such activities. In American literature and popular culture, narrative reenactments of Viet Nam are replete with instances of redemptive circuits of listening and speaking as well as episodes of violence that occur when either speaking or listening is obstructed. One thinks of the Wall in Washington, D.C. where thousands of letters and mementos have been left as messages for the dead and missing, the veterans in Tim O'Brien's stories and novels, such as Norman Bowker (*The Things They Carried*) who commits suicide because he can't find a listener, or the homeless veteran in Andrew Pham's memoir *Catfish and Mandala*, who has abandoned a wife and child because he can only live with his memories alone in the Mexican desert.<sup>41</sup> Kingston's writing workshops for veterans pull its participants gently back into the world of the living and the future. The dedication for *The Fifth Book of Peace*—"to Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace"—forms a linguistic parallel to the circles brushed in ink on the dust jacket of the book, the book's title page, and the four title pages for each of the book's chapters. Together, these linguistic and graphic circles inscribe what may become possible through collaborative memory work: antagonistic relationships may become reciprocal, destructive binaries may be transformed into life-generating circles of energy. Mutual assistance may enable veterans of peace to bear witness for soldiers and veterans of war to become non-violent peace builders.

At her second writing workshop for veterans, Kingston called on Wittman's spirit to assist her, but I think he is always with her whether explicitly summoned or not. I read Wittman as a "partner" Kingston has created to enable collaborative remembering and witnessing of her own life, her survival as an Asian American of Asian/American wars. The process of intertwined forgetting and remembering that Sturken points to as enabling traumatic experiences to be re-shaped into acceptable, affirmative historical narratives of self and nation is also at work in personal memory. Kingston did not recognize the depth of her unhappiness at the time she wrote the pieces collected into *Hawai'i One Summer*. Read in the framework of narrative reenactment of war memory, the 340 pages of *Tripmaster Monkey* and 172 pages of the "Water" chapter from *The Fifth Book of Peace* indicate the intensity of the Viet Nam memory that Kingston sought to express. The weight of this memory looms larger if we add on the 69 pages of *Hawai'i One Summer* and 111 pages of *To Be The Poet* that function as pretext and context for Wittman's narratives. The creation of Wittman Ah Sing is Kingston's strategy for

bringing her own Viet Nam memory into narrative reenactment. Through Wittman, Kingston can speak and listen to herself, search out her forgetting and rethink her remembering. Whitman is also present through Wittman. His gentle, fearless, forgiving manner of inspecting and naming death in all its forms and conditions is especially invoked whenever the two deaths most grieved and least represented in *The Fifth Book of Peace* are mentioned—the death of Kingston's father on the eve of the Oakland-Berkeley fire and the death of her mother toward the end of the book's completion. Grass still grows from the dead, who return to earth as compost, but the earth cannot indefinitely sustain the loss of its green skin through unnatural fires and wars. *The Fifth Book of Peace* presents a model for grassroots peace activism based on collaborative remembering and writing; its aim is to "write until the stories full of explosions become quiet."<sup>42</sup> Whitman and Wittman assist Kingston in imagining, performing, and teaching such memory work.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kingston's status as the most-taught living author in the US was recently reiterated by Sau-ling Wong in her keynote talk for the Asian American Literature Association symposium in Kyoto on September 25, 2004, "Maxine Hong Kingston in a Global Frame."

<sup>2</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Fifth Book of Peace* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Although there is a rapidly growing literature on transnational Asian/American war memory, particularly on the Asia-Pacific theaters of World War II, only a small portion of it deals specifically with Asian American literature. For studies of the history, politics, and semiotics of Asian/American war memory, see Studs Terkel, *The "Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (New York: New Press, 1984); John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and T. Fujitani et al., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). On war memory in Asian American literature, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) and Gayle K. Sato, "Asian American Literary History: War, Memory, and Representation," in *Asian American Literary Studies*, ed. Guiyou Huang (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> For a description of trauma as a form of blocked narration, see Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 158–82.

<sup>8</sup> For a concise overview of Kingston's career, see Patricia P. Chu, "The Woman Warrior: *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston," in *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature*, ed. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Stephen H. Sumida (New York: Modern Language Assoc., 2001), 86–96. Useful volumes of critical essays on *The Woman Warrior* are Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, ed., *The Woman Warrior: A Casebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior* (New York: Modern Language Assoc., 1991). Jinqi Ling, *Narrating Nationalisms: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) contains an excellent chapter on *China Men*.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Trinh Moser, "Kingston, Maxine Hong," in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, ed. Steven R. Serafin (New York: Continuum, 2000), 629.

<sup>10</sup> Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 247.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 247–48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>13</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980; New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 275–76.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 27–28.

<sup>15</sup> Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 361.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>17</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *Hawai'i One Summer* (San Francisco: Meadow Press, 1987; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), xi.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *To Be the Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf; New York: Vintage, 1977), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Kingston, *To Be the Poet*, 110–11.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), 158.

<sup>25</sup> For an account of the decimation of the Hawaiian population after contact with the west, and a history of Hawai'i by a Native Hawaiian scholar focusing on the period before the US-engineered overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, see David E. Stannard, *Before the Horror: The Population of Hawai'i on the Eve of Western Contact* (Honolulu: Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i, 1989); and Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002). For an accessible, comprehensive discussion of Native Hawaiian cultural traditions and their manipulation by corporate tourism, see Elizabeth Buck, *Paradise Remade: The Politics of Culture and History in Hawai'i* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). For a more narrowly focused but complementary discussion of colonizing discourses about Hawai'i, see Phyllis Turnbull and Kathy E. Ferguson, "Military Presence/Missionary Past: The Historical Construction of Masculine Order and Feminine Hawai'i," *Social Process in Hawai'i* 38 (1997): 96–107.

<sup>26</sup> The quotation is from David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 67. When

*The Woman Warrior* was lavishly praised in the mainstream press and embraced by white feminists, it set off a hostile, long-standing debate in which Kingston was accused of misrepresenting Chinese and Chinese American culture and selling out to a white Orientalist literary establishment. Kingston's negotiation of this contentious period of Asian American culture through the writing of *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey* can itself be understood as a conversion of war into peace through narrative reenactment.

<sup>27</sup> For a compelling interpretive history of American poetry in terms of two descent lines, a dominant "popular" mode of poetry represented by Whitman and a tradition of "professional poets" represented by Dickinson, see Lewis Putnam Turco, *Visions and Revisions of American History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Jerome Loving (1891–92; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> James Jones, *From Here to Eternity* (1951; New York: Avon, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*, Rev. ed. (1993; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson places Whitman in the context of imperialist discourses of Americanization: ". . . [S]ome icon of technological might such as the moon landing or the transcontinental railway, or 'the people' itself seen as some intoxicating social glue of mass conglomeration as in Whitman's 'Song of Myself,' secured a conviction of American national subjectivity." Li points to elements of *Tripmaster Monkey* that illustrate Kingston's incomplete critique of the valorization of whiteness in America's master narrative of national identity. See Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific*, 17; and Li, *Imagining the Nation*, 81–90.

<sup>39</sup> Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 234.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>41</sup> Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Penguin, 1990); Andrew X. Pham, *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam* (1999; New York: Picador, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 314.

Many years later Maxine Hong Kingston wrote a Fourth Book of Peace, but it too was burned“in the catastrophic Berkeley-Oakland Hills fire of 1991, a fire that coincided with the death of her father. Now in this visionary and redemptive work, Kingston completes her interrupted labor, weaving fiction and memoir into a luminous meditation on war and peace, devastation and renewal.Â Q: Your new book is called THE FIFTH BOOK OF PEACE. Tell us about that title, and about the books of peace that figure in Chinese mythology.Â Q: Two of your brothers were in the Viet Nam war. How has that affected your role in the peace movement? A: At our current peace demonstrations, I see parents and spouses of troops calling for peace. Maxine Hong Kingston; Feminism; The Woman Warrior; The Fifth Book of Peace; To Be the Poet; Mythologization; Chinese-American Literature; multiculturalism; Fa Mu Lan, Fa Mook Lan; life writing. “Fear-of-Women:“™ Eliding and Mythologizing Women in Maxine Hong Kingston“™s The Fifth Book of Peace by Miriam Brown B.A., Oglethorpe University, 2006. A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fullment. of the Requirements for the Degree.