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Elke Sturm-Trigonakis



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REFERENCES

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- 1 The very title of the volume, *On the Legacy of Maxine Hong Kingston: The Mulhouse Book*, attracts the attention of the reader because of the rather unusual combination of a conventional scientific title with a reference to a place, the Alsatian town of Mulhouse, which was the venue of the first conference devoted exclusively to Kingston in order to celebrate her entire oeuvre. The editor, Sämi Ludwig, together with Rocío G. Davis, also editor of the series *Contributions to Asian American Literary Studies*, is a *connoisseur* of Kingston's work and teaches at the University of Haute-Alsace Mulhouse. In addition, the co-editor's interview with Kingston herself takes our understanding and appreciation of the author beyond the strictly academic realm. From the very outset, the reader feels overwhelmed by the richness, complexity and diversity of Kingston's personality and oeuvre as it is presented in the volume. The selection of very interesting essays, combined with an interview with the author, original presentations by Maxine and her husband Earl Kingston as well as Buff Perry's poems and dramatic reading of key sections from Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace* (in a DVD), contribute to an impressive collection. The editors also emphasize that despite the worldwide popularity of the author's work, the Mulhouse meeting was indeed the first conference exclusively devoted to Maxine Hong Kingston. Therefore, the book testifies to a

particular conference format because it focuses on a particular author, who happens to be the most important Asian American author (12-13).

- 2 While the first part is dedicated to Kingston's canonical work, the postmodern autobiographies *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, the second focuses on "less frequently discussed writings" and the author's most recent publications, reflecting the second period in Kingston's creative work; the third and the forth chapters offer a contextualization of Kingston's texts both within and outside Asian-American literature.
- 3 The volume opens with Maxine Hong Kingston's speech in which the author goes back to the 1978 conference in Hawaii which is considered to be the founding conference on Asian-American Literature. Kingston comments on her contemporaneous dominant tendency to read Asian-American texts as anthropological documents because of their reliance on orality and autobiography so that the aesthetic and artistic value of the texts was often ignored (22). As it regularly happens in comparable circumstances, Kingston was attacked by representatives of different ethnic affiliations as being "exotic" or not being feminist enough or simply of exploiting Chinese myths and talk-stories (22-23). In short, Kingston became the target of all kinds of accusations by a nationalist, exclusivist, supposedly mono-cultural and monolingual official discourse – be it Chinese or US-American. Interestingly, similar phenomena of exclusion of hybrid literary texts occurred elsewhere as well, as for example in Germany, in the case of literary texts by immigrant writers of Turkish or Spanish origin, or in France with Francophone literature from North or West Africa.ⁱ
- 4 Part I of the volume, entitled "Revisiting the canonical texts, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*" begins with Silvia Schiltermandl's contribution on "The Politics of Transnational Identity in and of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." The essay discusses the ways in which the intratextual strategy of the protagonist's transnational self-positioning in multilingual and multicultural borderlands (à la Gloria Anzaldúa) between China and the USA accounts in part for the novel's success since the reader adopts "a similar stance during the reading process [...], a transnational framework through which to consider Maxine's narratives;" hence, the reader participates in the "transnational sensibility" of the text, challenging the established norms without having to be a migrant herself (40; 41-42). In this respect, this emblematic text could be seen as belonging in a "new world literature," a New *Weltliteratur* that, owing to globalization, exhibits characteristics of linguistic and cultural hybridity, "in-between-ness" and transculturality (another example of this would be Martin Walser's *Der Augenblick der Liebe* or Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Carlota Fainberg*, cf. Sturm-Trigonakis 2007, and 2013). In the second essay, Lan Dong gives us a detailed account of the critical reception of *The Woman Warrior* in mainland China, emphasizing the ironic fact that the text is perceived as "Chinese" in the US, and as "American" in China.

Lan Dong goes on to propose a category of literary works which he calls "World Chinese Literature" (55), a suggestion with which I fully agree in so much as this would function as a taxonomical and analytical framework for all the nomadic texts with Chinese cultural and/or lingual elements, and it would be approached in the same manner as other literature written in English, Spanish, or French and could be seen as belonging to a "New World Literature."

- 5 Pin-chia Feng's insightful essay, entitled "Masks and Identity: Self-Fashioning in Chinese American Children's and Young Adult Literature," follows along the same lines. Pin-chia Feng demonstrates how some Chinese -American writers have their young protagonists employ the strategy of self-fashioning in order to avoid "ethnic marginality," constructing, instead, positive identities with which the reader can identify (91); without any doubt, this subject calls for further research regarding the frequency of its explicit thematization, for instance in Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* (1984), Yannick Lahens' *Dans la maison du père* (2000), or Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1999), to name just a few well-known texts.
- 6 The remaining contributions of Part I are characterized by a remarkable variety of theoretical approaches, focusing on feminism and "the dualistic perception of gender and ethnicity" (61), as does Nelly Mok's interesting article; or on eco-criticism as does Begoña Simal's essay about *China Men*, in which the author persuasively shows how Kingston's second novel "complicates and transforms the cultural nationalist paradigm, known as the 'claiming of America,'" by suggesting an empathetic reading of the novel, according to which Kingston's characters move away from the proprietorial relation of land toward an egalitarian bond with the natural environment" (96). Incidentally, this article opens up the possibility of crafting an alternative literary history of the USA, comparable, for instance, to Assia Djebar's, *L'amour, la fantasia* (1995) which attempts a re-writing of Algerian history.
- 7 Next, Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour draws our attention to the Taoist background of the short text "On Discovery" which is inserted in *China Men*. Perrin-Chenour considers it to be a very important text, first, because of the metamorphosis of its mythic character, and second, because of the liminal position it occupies between *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. Although Perrin-Chenour's interest lies primarily in the "use of myth" in order "to challenge standards of beauty and aesthetic rules meant to create gender divisions and/or social hierarchies," her contribution relates to John Whalen-Bridge's essay in Part II about the "engaged Buddhism" in Kingston's 2003 *The Fifth Book of Peace*, since the latter is also based on Eastern philosophy, moving between fact and fiction, but, always for universal peace (212). Kingston's long-standing commitment to peace, beginning in the 1960s with her days at UC Berkeley, where she protested against the Vietnam War becomes apparent in a collection of lectures the author gave at Harvard, entitled

To be a Poet (2002), as Eulalia Piñero Gil points out in her contribution. Kingston's pacifist background is further highlighted by Christine Lorre-Johnston in her essay "Maxine Hong Kingston's Peace Activism: Taking Stock," by Agnieszka Soltysik Monnetin in "Maxine Hong Kingston as Counterculture Writer," and naturally, by the author herself in her discussion with Buff Parry (225- 238).

- 8 Still in Part I, Cheng LokChua's contribution examines Kingston's manuscript revisions of key parts of *Woman Warrior* and *China Men* in order to elaborate on the creative process which leads from writing as a craft to writing as an art (119). Two further studies, written by Sean Mattio and Janna Odabas respectively, delve into Kingston's use of ghosts and specters in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as "figures that are in-between," with a specific narrative task "to question stable categories and to highlight troubling or silenced aspects" of past and history, as Odabas argues (157). Both scholars analyze their texts through the lens of the Gothic novel as a privileged form which expresses voices of the subaltern and marginalized, as does Toni Morrison in *Beloved*. At this point a discussion of the configurations of Magic Realism would possibly contribute to an even deeper understanding of the non-realistic and non-essentialist narrative strategies employed by Kingston.
- 9 In the second Part, Manuela Vastolo discusses questions of genre, focusing on the interdependence between fictional and nonfictional as non-separable entities in Kingston's writing, taking as examples *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *Tripmaster Monkey*; Vastolo argues that these two books have not "received much attention either by critics or by readers" (220), probably because they do not satisfy the readers' expectations of an Asian American text; this underlines the difficulties of "minority" writers to step out of their corner of alterity and to be taken seriously as writers and artists.ⁱⁱ
- 10 Part III provides the reader with exciting comparative and parallel readings, most of them within the frame of US-American Studies and one reaching as far as the Morocco feminist Fatima Mernissi. Thus, in "Dreams of Trespass: A Legacy of Genre/Gender Transgression," Sihem Arfaoui Abidi offers a comparative analysis of Kingston and the Morocco writer, stressing the interconnectedness of gender and genre. Next, the editor of the volume, Sämi Ludwig, locates Kingston's affinity with realism rather than Postmodernism or New Historicism; through the comparison of Kingston's and Ishmael Reed's work, he unravels the authors' "more indirect approaches to reality, with realism without one-to-one correspondence in the signs themselves," claiming a theoretical "model of dynamic interaction" that is based on "performative metaphors of script-writing, possession, or the cognitive organization of behavior" as more adequate analyzing tools for the complexity of contemporary texts (259). The next article, by Anna Pehkoranta, thematizes loss, hypochondria, melancholy, and suicide as fundamental

signs of the female condition in *The Woman Warrior* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (264), invoking Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis.

- 11 Nicoletta Alexoae-Zagni, co-editor of the volume, begins the last part of the book, foregrounding again issues of literary criticism and literary influence. Alexoae-Zagni undertakes an analysis of self-referentiality and intertextual filiation, looking, in particular, at Shirley Geok-lin Lim's memoir. She draws the conclusion that the Malaysian-born writer is "a genuine disciple of Kingston's" because she "extends and takes to greater depths the literary issue that 'created' her, in a permanent intersection of familial, communal, national, textual and intertextual memories, where the lines between filiation and affiliation blur in cross-fertilization" (311). The last contribution by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, seeks to answer challenging questions of how to keep canonical works such as *The Woman Warrior* alive through "continued production of cultural activity beyond its initial appearance," as she states (313), investigating, as an example of *continuation* (in Gérard Genette's sense) Marilyn Chin's *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* (2009), which, in her opinion, "updates" Kingston's *Woman Warrior* (337).
- 12 Concluding, I would definitely recommend this volume to every scholar investigating issues that question national and mainstream discourses, deal with canon debates, or asymmetrical conditions of production, dissemination, and/or reception of literature. Due to the broad variety of theoretical approaches, on the one hand, and the book's concentration on the writings of one particular author, on the other, the volume succeeds in offering breadth and depth of expertise on its object of research. The editors and authors of the *Mulhouse Book* have made a precious contribution to our knowledge and understanding not only of Maxine Hong Kingston's oeuvre or of Asian-American writing, but also of world literature in the era of globalization. Therefore, this book will become an invaluable research tool for any serious scholar wishing to study new developments in contemporary literature.

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NOTES

- i. For a detailed discussion on hybrid literature in British, Spanish, Portuguese, French and German Philologies, see my critical analysis in Sturm-Trigonakis 2007, 47-92 and Sturm-Trigonakis 2013, 21- 55. In relation to the US-American situation see esp. Sturm-Trigonakis 2013 35-41; Lee 2003.
 - ii. See f. ex. The development of José F. A. Oliver from the “foreign workers’ poet” to one of the most innovative representatives of contemporary poetry in German, Sturm-Trigonakis (2013).
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AUTHOR

ELKE STURM-TRIGONAKIS

Elke Sturm-Trigonakis teaches comparative literature and German literature at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her interests in research include multilingual and hybrid world literature