



The Woman Warrior

Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts

Maxine Hong Kingston

The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Maxine Hong Kingston grew up in California. Her first book, *The Woman Warrior*, blended fiction, memoir and myth in innovative ways.



- *The Woman Warrior* is a collection of memoirs written in 5 chapters based on popular Chinese myths.
- The book defies traditional genre classification: it is at once a novel, autobiography, memoir (neither fact nor fiction), collection of essays.
- Maxine presents Chinese culture as a conglomeration of diverse, multiple, often contradictory values that she does not try to unify into an easy explanation.

‣ Maxine

‣ Brave Orchid

‣ Moon Orchid

‣ No Name Woman

‣ Silent girl.



The Quest for Identity

The Identity Plot

Elements of the identity plot:

- 1. The narrative revolves around the identity of the characters
- 2. The character is a minority group
- 3. The character is at odds with his group
- 4. The character is conflicted about his/her difference from both the minority and majority
- 5. Authenticity and origins are always at stake in the character's quest for identity.
- 6. Comic and tragic versions of the plot.

Ethnic Identity

- **Immigrants are caught between cultures. “Out of Place”**

Check Edward Said's *Out of Place*

- **Orient Vs. Occident/ Self Vs. Other**
- **Ethnic Identity:** we see Maxine trying to negotiate her ethnic identity through different stages of her life. Sometimes she assimilates to the new culture and sometimes she rejects it.

Gender Identity

- Female immigrants are **twice removed** from centers of power.
- Sexism and gender roles: China is a patriarchal society where women are silenced and female slaves are sold or even given for free.
- At first ,Maxine tries to conform to both the feminine and the masculine, but later on, she uses feminist models daring to assert autonomy and challenge patriarchy and shed feminine decorum.



Language and Communication

**“Don’t tell anyone,” my mother said,
“what I am about to tell you.”**

-The Woman Warrior -

Imposed Silence

- **“No Name” aunt** . No name woman was silenced & erased from memory by forbidding anybody to talk about her, and by obliging her to give silent birth. (Sinful). The aunt commits suicide.
- **Moon Orchid** who is silenced by her husband when she travels to America in order to meet the husband who abandoned her for 30 years.(innocent). The aunt goes mad.
- **connection between speechlessness and insanity:**
“I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity .Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves” .
- **The Myth of Philomela**
- **Maxine’s Silence:** is always silenced at home by her mother ,so she fails to raise her voice at work. Eventually, she retorts to writing in order to be heard.
- **Cutting the Tongue**

Writing as Therapy

➤ **Writing and Sanity:** Maxine was unable to express herself in speech and paper when she was young. When she grows up, she realizes that silence is choking and that it incurs mental and psychological disorders. Therefore, Maxine writes to keep herself sane.

➤ **Sublimating rage with a creative act .**

➤ **Giving Voice to the Voiceless:** She writes about herself ,her mother ,her erased aunts and silenced females .By doing this she is giving voice to the voiceless :

“My aunt haunts me ,I alone devote pages of paper to her”

➤ **Writing as an act Retaliation and survival.**



Myth and Storytelling

- Maxine derives her inspiration from the community of female storytellers and she continues the tales from her own imagination.
- each chapter is a form of myth that Maxine uses symbolically in order to invoke a mythic, ancestral, familial, individual past.

“No Name Woman”

- In order to reveal the Misogyny and violence committed against women in China.
- To draw attention to the imposed silence and inability to communicate.



“White Tigers”

Maxine communes with a legendary female warrior, Fa Mu Lan, and in her fantasy merges with the warrior and becomes the Woman Warrior.

Analogy between Fa Mu Lan and Maxine

- Apprenticeship
- Writing and Fighting
- Pen and Sword
- Defying traditional gender roles



“Shaman”

Stories about Brave Orchid and how she became a doctor and a Shaman driving away evil spirits and ghosts. She talks about slave girls too .



“At the Western Palace”

In this chapter she tells the myth of the Emperor who had 4 wives (east, west, north and south). His wife that represents the west kidnaps him and the wife who represents east goes on a journey to bring back her husband.

Maxine tries to draw analogy between the myth and her aunt's (Moon Orchid) experience that led her to silence and madness.



“A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”

➤ Maxine draws analogy between the myth of the princess who was kidnapped by Barbarians and her own experience in America.

“I learned to make my mind large , as the universe is large , so that there is room for paradoxes”

➤ **Cultural Reconciliation:** It is about the importance of achieving mutual understanding between cultures. Maxine wishes to celebrate marginality by expressing herself through a language in which opposed and diverse voices coexist .





WHY do authors incorporate Myths
and the Supernatural in their
narratives?

