

From Lone Monkey to Family Man: Wittman's Evolving Inclusion in *Tripmaster Monkey*

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I. Introduction

Upon reading the opening of *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, it would be difficult to call Wittman Ah Sing well-adjusted. Suicide fantasies plague him from the opening pages, and throughout the novel self-consciousness and anxiety threaten to tear this lone monkey apart. This isolated mentality eventually cedes, however, to a generously expansive viewpoint consonant with the novel's rapid-fire, highly allusive, pastiche style. *Tripmaster* thus charts its protagonist's progression toward the creation of the very multivocal art the text itself embodies, detailing Wittman's struggle to break out of the comfortable form of monologue and into more inclusive communication. Indeed, it is an entirely reformed Wittman that we find in Kingston's 2003 *Fifth Book of Peace*, a hybrid work that includes, along with various essays, a novella-postscript to *Tripmaster*. The Wittman of *Fifth Book*, with wife and child in tow, pleasantly absorbs all the Hawaiian islands have to offer, experiencing a blissful harmony with his new community. Although *Tripmaster's* conclusion is inconclusive, I contend that Wittman's progression from isolated paranoid to family man is visible within the pages of the earlier work.

Tripmaster is a complex voyage through the mind of Wittman as he pursues daily activities—partying, flirting, working, evading work—all of which culminate in a final monologue and play. My reading therefore follows Irma Maini's in viewing the novel as a *Künstlerroman*, emphasizing Wittman's pursuit of his own artistic voice. Maini places Wittman within a certain genre of ethnic writers who resist

typical artistic alienation in favor of inclusion and mainstreaming. I would suggest rather that Wittman initially aligns himself with a host of individualistic, separatist literary role models of multiple races and nationalities; explicitly, these include Rilke, Eliot, and Joyce (exemplars of the misunderstood and alienated); implicitly, there are the racial ranters such as Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, and Frank Chin.¹ The novel represents Wittman's transition from a univocalist in this established tradition to a multivocalist of his own newly-created tradition. Ultimately the text plots Wittman's attempts to appropriately appropriate the lessons of his famed namesake, discovering how to make his "song of myself" large enough to "contain multitudes."

As an all-American protagonist down to his namesake, Wittman's struggle to reconcile the battling binaries of individual and communal subjectivity also highlights problems endemic to the issue of racial identity in contemporary American society. Throughout the narrative Wittman oscillates between a Chinese-identified self-concept and an American-identified one, between Chinese heritage and American nationality. Saddled with paranoia and self-doubt, he shifts uncertainly between his roles as lone monkey and community leader, the isolated and the integrated. These antonyms reach harmonic resolution only through Wittman's final production in which the additional voices of myriad textual participants enable him to create an artistically synthesized whole. This narrative is in turn framed and contained by that of an omniscient third-person narrator, who interrupts Wittman's solipsistic soliloquies with congenial remarks and invitations directed toward the reader. Kingston's text thus snowballs as it progresses, continually accruing a greater mass of narrative participants. In this emphasis on collaborative work, art is made possible only through the contribution of others. At the end of the novel Kingston emphasizes her indebtedness to myriad authors and acquaintances for the production of *Tripmaster* itself; appropriately, she uses her final page to express gratitude towards all those who provided stories, narratives, and fragments now interwoven in her text.

A central question I would like to address is why multivocality has

such transcendent artistic import for both author and protagonist in *Tripmaster*. While the incorporation of multiple voices often serves a mimetic purpose for American writers, Kingston does not appear to view American society as an exemplum of the successful multivocal integration present in her novel. Her work constantly highlights the failure of American voices to successfully harmonize, foregrounding instead the constant fragmentation of our frequently divisive society. Through art, specifically the forms of prose and drama, this utopian ideal can achieve at least partial realization. I therefore see Kingston's multivocal writing as an end in itself, rather than as a mimetic representation of American society. Through this multivocal text Kingston demonstrates a particular preoccupation with certain dilemmas of American identity, such as the population's inherent plurality, and the culture's push toward uniformity. Her work creates an alternative, reconstructed reality that never claims to reflect America as it is or even as it was several decades ago; in fact, she consciously eschews any attempt at a singular "factual" narrative. Kingston subtly mocks mimetic art in her description of the statue Taña and Wittman see outside Sutro's park:²

Near the entrance, a true-to-life sculpture of a Japanese man stood almost naked, holding a hand mirror and looking itself in the eyes. Self-portrait. According to the plaque, the artist had used his own human hair for the hair on his statue. [...]

'It's exact, and it ought to be beautiful.' [said Wittman to Taña]

'But isn't.'

'But isn't.' (166)

This artwork, complete with bizarrely affixed human hair, is horrific in its very attempt to simulate normalcy, paralleling Kingston's fundamental disregard for the boundary lines between reality and art. Rather than offering a blueprint for an envisioned Utopia, her narrative, sliding as fluidly as it does between time, place, character, and even reality, provides instead its own blueprint for the potential of the literary.

The primacy of the text renders multivocality all the more signifi-

cant; if it is only through artistic production that true unity is possible, then the successful integration of myriad voices becomes crucial in maintaining Kingston's egalitarian construct. Like Wittman himself, the text progresses from univocal to multivocal, from a narrow focus on its protagonist to a larger perspective encompassing the entire community. Through multiple contributions, both text and protagonist achieve a gradual reconciliation of the previously sharply demarcated binaries of self and other, Chinese and American. *Tripmaster* both demonstrates the tremendous significance of the text as the locus for otherwise unlikely integration, and reveals the challenging process involved in shifting from monologue to dialogue to complete script. Wittman's artistic evolution is sometimes unwitting, and often unwilling, but the conclusion leaves him equipped with a barrage of participants and a temporary relief from the compulsion to choose a singular identity.

II. *Tripmaster's* Postmodernism: It's Not a Philosophy, Just a Life-Style

Oh god, the cosmic nature of puns. (85)

There are those of us right here who can no longer speak in pre-educated accents even among old friends and relatives unless stoned out of our minds. (133)

Like Kingston's earlier autobiographical works, *Tripmaster Monkey* remakes former myths and renders old stories new in their retelling. This integration of past narratives with present ones, as well as the novel's consistent metatextuality, provide evidence for many to read the novel through the lens of postmodern criticism.³ Kingston's liberal incorporation of all styles and forms, her sense of creating the new from a reworking of the old, and her consistent emphasis on the textual, fit easily into the postmodern aesthetic. While it would be impossible to ignore Kingston's stylistic affinities to postmodernism, these critiques threaten to reduce the novel to a mere collection of puns and word plays that merely question the form without propos-

ing any substantive solutions. Critics too easily distracted by the novel's playfulness miss its equally significant sense of its own substantiality; *Tripmaster* articulates not the failure of art but its importance as the only possible form and forum for resolving questions of identity and community. One such critic, Jeanne Smith, writes:

In picaresque trickster fashion, the novel resists linear development with its loose anecdotal construction and frequent talk-story forays. The reader must give up a search for plot in a narration whose very substance is interruptions, sidetrips, and verbal fireworks to be enjoyed for their own sake, even as their abundance threatens to overshadow those who relay them. (52)

Smith provides an apt description of the novel's style; however, Kingston's prose is not mere fireworks, and should not be reduced to a form of linguistic cotton candy spun for the consumption of idle-minded pleasure-seekers. Smith's reading takes Kingston as a face-value postmodernist, reducing all substantive content to linguistic play and rhetorical conceits. For Kingston, however, the style is never far removed from the essential content, as the incorporation of myriad forms has a highly specific meaning in the context of her perception of American identity. Our protagonist Wittman is specifically a "fifth-generation native Californian" (41) and therefore a fully American narrator, despite his own anxieties to the contrary, and his style aptly incorporates the full multiplicity he seeks to embody. This is postmodernism with a purpose, a directed use of eclecticism and *pastiche* to create an ideally multivocal community feasible only via artistic representation.

Another difficulty in categorizing *Tripmaster* as postmodern lies in the typical assumption of postmodern theorists that it is impossible to create anything new. Fredric Jameson's well-known categorization is appropriate:

With the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style—what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints, as incomparable as your own body—the producers of culture had nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture. (18)

In *Tripmaster*, Kingston's most abundant and linguistically complex undertaking, such distinctions become all but untenable as Wittman freely manipulates fact into fiction rather than attempting historical preservation. This is not to diminish the significance of original creation in the work, however. In her postmodern reading of the text, Patricia Lin observes, "Wittman is less a signifier of human typology than a locus for the recovery of prior texts, codes, and representations [...] [his] fate is not to invent but to retell stories" (338-9). While Wittman certainly becomes a crucible for the distillation and recombination of myriad past forms, Lin's reading elides the fundamentally creative aspect of his authorship. It is this very ability to act as the authorial ringmaster, the single maestro combining disparate acts into one orchestrated if chaotic show, that provides Wittman with a potential answer to the plaguing problems of racial identity. While Lin reads the text as evidence of the "impossibility of the new" (339), and the whole novel as the "fake book" of its subtitle which serves only as a "repetition and a catalogue" (ibid.) of other constructs, the success of Wittman's concluding play belies this reductive vision of art's impotence. This artistic creation serves as a self-contained moment of ideal synthesis and connection between human beings, rather than evidence of the "tentative status of artists and their creations" (341) that Lin perceives.

The play is therefore significant not only for its creative value to Wittman, but also for its metatextual commentary on the function of art for Kingston. We are invited to the play by the narrating storyteller, who guides the reader through the novel with enticements to "go on to the next chapter" (65) and "travel on with our monkey for the next while" (268), constantly reminding us of the text's textuality. Indeed, the narrator's very identity can only be uncovered through further reading and research; when Kingston reveals her to be Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, in an interview with Marilyn Chin, she admits, "Nobody's gotten it" (60).⁴ Such subtle allusiveness is in keeping with Kingston's nearly incessant references to literature and literary works, from Homer to Shakespeare to Rilke to Joyce. We see

metatextuality and allusions in the courtship of Wittman and Taña; as they exchange lines of poetry, the narrator observes, "Our fool for literature is utterly impressed by her allusiveness. He poeticated her in return" (128). Romantic interplay between two literary characters through the words of other literary characters reminds the reader that there is always a master puppeteer pulling the textual strings. Consequently, Wittman's artistic success is also Kingston's; his ability to create a fully multivocal moment through his play indicates her ability to do the same on the printed page.

Kingston's use of *pastiche* and metatextuality therefore emphasize her vision of art's potential rather than commenting on the failure of novelty in the contemporary age. Through these techniques, Kingston uses *Tripmaster Monkey*—as Wittman uses his play—to resolve conflicts endemic to 1980's America. Kingston does not propose these artistic representations as legitimate solutions to the tensions inherent in a heterogeneous society, nor explicitly as models for a utopian future, but rather offers them as temporary methods of uniting communities both within and through art. The text, in the midst of its own postmodernist *mêlée*, comes to embrace the artistic form as a potential resolution for conflicts of race, identity, and communalism.

III. Conflicts between Unity and Identity

'Of course, I like *Jules et Jim*. Everyone likes *Jules et Jim*. That's everyone's favorite movie.'

'No, it's not. Everyone's favorite movie is *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.'

'My favorite movie is *Ugetsu*.'

'*Children of Paradise*.'

'Yes, *Children of Paradise*.' (86)

The above excerpt offers one of the many multivocal preludes to Wittman's play, in which the participation of various voices enables a resolution to the struggle between unity and identity. Here, party guests debate the feasibility of a single movie maintaining universal appeal while simultaneously voicing their own distinctive prefer-

ences. Ironically, however, the quotes are detached from their speakers, and thus no opinion is individuated from any other. The choral mode enables endless possible opinions of endless possible favorite films.

Before Wittman embraces the full potential of such multivocality through his own artistic vision, this conflict between unity and identity beleaguers him through an inescapable paranoid uncertainty and self-doubt. Desperate at first to stand out from the crowd, our protagonist begins the novel univocally asserting his own sense of difference; hubristically narrating for himself, Wittman notes that Wittman "was more interesting than most, stood out" (12). Later he muses that "He was not like most people" (155) and "There had been no other playwright [at Berkeley with him]. Of whatever color. He was the only one" (19). Implicitly aligning himself with a tradition of ethnic "rant" poets, Wittman's early artistic production is entirely self-oriented, stressing his individualism and isolation. Rather than functioning as a tool of communication, Wittman's poetry initially acts only as a potential lure for the ladies. Nanci appears to be a ready listener, but upon bringing her to his apartment Wittman immediately regrets that he has not chosen a more impressive, showier art form such as painting. As he searches for the poem that "made him feel like a genius when he made it" (29), we realize that his poetry is really a love song from Wittman to Wittman, and Nanci is purely ancillary. Passionate to perform for Nanci, Wittman is nonetheless incapable of tolerating her appraisal of his work when she observes that he sounds "like a Black poet" (32).

Not fully prepared to be the lone renegade, Wittman seeks fellow rebels to form a new community of outsiders. This underlying quest for a collective of nonconformists makes Kingston's 1960's setting particularly appropriate. Despite his outsider status, Wittman is very much in line with the rest of his *Zeitgeist* as embodied by all the other "left-wing fanatics" (90) he encounters, be they the draft-dodging minister of the Universal Life Church, the pot-smoking drop-out Yale Younger Poet, or the earnest elephant-rights activist. Wittman has

some difficulty stomaching the paradoxical fact that his desire to set himself apart from the crowd is precisely what makes him one with the crowd, but through a growing recognition of his place in a larger community he is finally capable of listening to opposing voices. The participation of these variegated voices, interacting with his own in strophe and antistrophe, enables Wittman's final theatrical performance to transcend the previous parameters of his solipsistic selfhood. Thus one of Wittman's first steps towards artistic success is his ability to realize that the individual and the community are not mutually exclusive, but rather symbiotic.

Wittman stridently resists this revelation due to his persistent fear of a communal identity subsuming his own individuality. This perspective can help to explain the opening suicide fantasy, which might at first appear a sensationalist trick as Wittman never suffers from such self-abnegating despair thereafter. The scene is significant, however, in that it indicates precisely this fear that he will cease to exist as himself, and will become nothing more than an inarticulate mouth still attempting to speak his blown-apart mind. Wittman is therefore searching for a community that will harbor his uniqueness without blowing it to shreds; or, as A. Noelle Williams aptly states, "He is not interested in the kind of community that dictates individual identity but in a unity without uniformity" (330). Two particular scenes highlight Wittman's struggle to progress towards this "unity without uniformity," located at a party and an unemployment office respectively. Both become transitional moments for Wittman, as the first initiates his progress towards a less isolated subjectivity, and the second tests the reality of his newly communal self-projection.

A raging party hosted by his sometimes-best-friend Lance Kamiyama provides Wittman with his first opportunity to attempt a disappearance into the social matrix. Upon entering the bacchanal, Wittman realizes the impossibility of distinguishing the costumed from the uncostumed, as no one can tell a genuine business suit from an ironic one: "Awareness is all, on the part of the clothes-wearer, and on the part of the beholder. A costume either disguises or reveals. One or

the other. No way out of the bag" (85). This scene introduces the reader to both the party and the principal questions of selfhood and identity that mark this chapter in Wittman's epic progression. Initially the situation challenges Wittman to resist his impulse to form snap judgments based on external criteria. He is instinctively unsettled by the impossibility of facile categorization: he dons his cut-up tie as a supposed signifier of his anti-authoritarianism, yet his fellow beatniks are disguised as the working stiffs they mock. Always hypersensitive to racial stereotyping, Wittman is forced to confront his own hypocrisy and reevaluate his surface-based conclusions. However, the party also substantiates Wittman's anxiety by affirming the difficulties inherent in abrogating difference through uniforms or uniformity. After all, parody too close to reality ceases to be parody, morphing into that which it opposes.

The host himself provides an appropriate example, blending parody and reality so perfectly that even his best friend cannot tell the difference. Fluent in his own presumably-ironic self-deprecating rhetoric, Lance seamlessly switches personae: Young Millionaire and Mocker of Young Millionaires, devoted spouse and college Cool Guy, friend and foe. A wealthy young professional, Lance plays his role and derides it simultaneously, much to Wittman's consternation: "[Lance said] 'Circulate. Mix.' He burst out laughing at how there are hosts who'll say, 'Go Mix'" (83). Wittman's take on this situation is that Lance is "probably a sociopath"—but his uneasiness is blatantly self-reflective, given his tremendous concerns about internal and projected identity. Self-conscious and paranoid, Wittman's *modus operandi* is to constantly watch others and watch others watch him. The people-packed party forces his self/other conflicts to their crisis; no longer capable of escaping into his solipsistic shell, Wittman is thrust into a realm of necessitated interaction with the uncategorizable multitudes.

As the festivities progress Wittman gradually and tentatively acclimates to this myriad morass of interacting individuals. Drifting in and out of divers (and diverse) party conversations, he slowly permits other narratives to permeate his own. No longer the lone speaker

reading Rilke aloud on the bus and turning a deaf ear to the women he encounters, Wittman begins to make his previously stated resolution to "let it all come in" (4) a reality rather than an empty verbal gesture. Although he is not yet fully capable of integrating his own text with that of others, he begins to revel in the multivocal narratives of all the "Twisters and Shouters" (67) he overhears. The conversation is so varied as to be nearly all-encompassing; as Wittman muses, "the margins didn't disappear—there aren't any margins" (88). It seems that no one and nothing is excluded from discussion; in fact, one woman berates our narrow-minded preference for our own species as contemptible anthropocentrism: "You must've noticed, there's a lot of anti-elephant propaganda. The movies are brainwashing us against non-human species" (89).⁵ Despite the evident hyperbole of this particular narrator, the debate she instigates helps Wittman recognize the necessity of incorporating alternative voices into his own extant narrative.

While absorbing these multiple trips of multiple partygoers, Wittman suddenly overhears his own internal conflict concisely expressed by an acid-tripping guest: "How do you reconcile unity and identity?" (105). Despite his delight at this phrase, the incorporation of both terms into one sentence does not imply their fluid incorporation into Wittman's sentience. While the party leaves him several clues as to the feasible resolution of his conflict, he has not yet sufficiently reconciled self and other. The hedonistic dance sequence should represent the ideal opportunity for Wittman to finally lose himself in the crowd, yet only results in his increased self-consciousness. He attempts to merge with the flux and flow of partygoers, envisioning a true coalescence of identities:

My substantial body likewise—disappears and re-appears ... That hand or foot could be yours, it could be mine... I'm dancing with her and her and nobody and everybody [...] Heart booms to bass. My pulse, its pulse. Its pulse, my pulse. Ears, eyes, feet, heart, myself and all these people, my partners all. In sync. All synchronized. A ballet dancer and an m.s. spastic—no different—O democratic light. Innards at one with the rest of the world. (108, 110)

As promising as this experience is, Wittman's first attempts are unsuccessful; even as he begins to lose himself in the masses he is self-aware and self-conscious at every moment. The physical unity implied by the dance fades in the face of the consistent sense of separatism haunting Wittman's mind. The party scene ends inconclusively, with Wittman both together and apart, still struggling to reconcile his "me" with the "universe." His narrative has already begun to subtly alter, however, as the characters he meets at the party and its aftermath gradually contribute their own voices to his text, rupturing its previous self-absorbed integrity.

With the multivocal participation of the party guests, his family, and especially Taña, Wittman gradually alters his self-conception from lone ranter to communal playwright. Reflecting on the sundry promises he has made to his various companions in the two days following the party, he defensively concludes that "he did too have a philosophy of life: Do the right thing by whoever crosses your path. These coincidental people are your people" (223). Armed with this manifesto, Wittman soon finds his principles tested as he moves from party to the unemployment office, from concerns of play to concerns of work. The question then is whether or not Wittman can apply his newly inclusive ideals to life as well as to art.

Life and art subsequently become closely intertwined for Wittman; not only does his artwork serve as a potential model for his real life interactions, but his experiences in real life provide material for his art. Although Wittman's anti-authoritarian instincts lead him to revile the government workers, they too act as unexpected guides on his epic quest. With the aid of these myriad helpers, this insecure individual can therefore become the Tripmaster of the communal play at the novel's conclusion. The first, a clerk at the unemployment agency, asks Wittman for his ID after rejecting his proffered social security card as inadequate. Offended, Wittman objects, "I'm the only one in the world with this number, right?" (227). This automatic response indicates Wittman's continuing reliance on individuality, and inhibits him from properly understanding the clerk's question. What she

demands, in essence, is confirmation that Wittman is who he claims to be; in other words, she confronts him with the question of whether his image matches his reality. Obsessed with his own self-constructed image, Wittman misses the lesson entirely. To be whom he claims to be specifically entails relinquishing his previous instinct towards univocality and monologue, a step that he takes only tentatively and with frequent reversals. As the clerk warns, he must be prepared to verify that this asserted self corresponds with his real self, that he lives indeed by his own manifestos.

His test comes in the form of a new stranger/guide, a fellow applicant for unemployment funding named Mrs. Chew. Instantly abrogating his previously stated "philosophy of life," Wittman grumbles internally: "See what you have to put up with if you want to have a community? Any old Chinese lady comes along, she takes your day, you have to do her beckoning. The hippy-dippies don't know what they're in for. They couldn't take *Communitas*" (231). It is Wittman, however, who is having difficulty taking the *Communitas* he espoused earlier, still favoring his own running internal monologue to the contributions of others. But once again his guide offers assistance; asking only his time (of which he, unemployed, has an abundance) she takes over the narrative and offers him the gift of a story detailing her immigration process on Angel Island. Wittman thereby receives both a brief moment of personal connection, and material for his play. His interaction with Mrs. Chew forces Wittman to become the communal player he claims to be, and forces him to show true identification.

Mrs. Chew serves an additional role in the text by assisting Wittman in reevaluating his constricting, self-imposed system of binaries. Despite Wittman's detailed explanations, Mrs. Chew sees no reason why she cannot apply for both worker's compensation and unemployment. The reality of the situation is that Wittman's binary categorization is inadequate; she does inhabit a liminal state between the two categories, as she is both wounded from working, and still anxious to work again. After much deliberation, Wittman inscribes a final

"yes" over the many erased yeses and nos on her form, affirming the potential for possibility: both/and rather than either/or. Mrs. Chew in turn instructs Wittman on how to correctly say "no" to a question phrased in a complicated negative, thus representing affirmation through the denial of negation. Through this small gesture our hero fulfills one of his earlier promises for self-reformation: "The way to make a life: say Yes more often than No" (164). He must again prove that he is who he claimed to be, that he is indeed prepared to write "yes" instead of, over, and above, the "no." Through these acts Mrs. Chew both contributes to and becomes a participant in his final creative production, his ultimate realization of the potential to embrace all possibilities without negation.

IV. Racial Identification: Chinese / American

An American stands alone. Alienated, tribeless, individual. To be a successful American, leave your tribe, your caravan, your gang, your partner, your village cousins, your refugee family that you're making the money for, leave them behind. Do not bring back-up. (246)

Wittman's racial paranoia permeates the text and provides the focus for the majority of critical writing on the novel,⁶ from studies of his racially-based emasculation to explorations of the nature of a hyphenate identity. I read Wittman's overwhelming concern about his Chinese American/Chinese-American identity as another manifestation of his struggle to reconcile individuality and communalism, and to locate his own voice within and amongst the throng. In this Wittman follows Fanon's concept of the three stages of the evolution of minority literature, transitioning from assimilation (in his obsession with white authors such as Joyce and Rilke), to a consciously-contrived separatist voice (what Nanci calls his "Black" poetry), to an "awakening" consciousness of the self within a dominant society (his final play). Wittman's art makes a meandering rather than linear progression through Fanon's stages, struggling to achieve a desirable balance

of assimilation and separatism. Acting as the Monkey warrior throughout much of the novel, Wittman battles prejudice both fantasized and real; by permitting other voices to penetrate his monologue, he at last escapes his own ongoing mental war and locates a comfortable position in the both/and of racial possibility. His ultimate transformation into a pacifist indicates an internal peace rather than a political one, a resolution of his self-concept rather than one of his global politics.

Before discussing Wittman's racial identity issues, I want to focus briefly on a larger theme of language and communication. Kingston observed in her "Personal Statement" that *Woman Warrior* was only partially written to communicate to her readership at large, and possessed various subsets for those privy to her linguistic clues: "There are puns for Chinese speakers only, and I do not point them out for non-Chinese speakers. There are some visual puns best appreciated by those who write Chinese. I've written jokes in that book so private, only I can get them" (Amirthanayagam 65).⁷ *Tripmaster's* conclusion fully embraces the communicative potential of multiple languages, although it takes Wittman some time before he relinquishes the temptation to use his bilingualism as a tool for isolating less polyglot linguists. After previously deriding Nanci for not being sufficiently Chinese, he says to her, "'Huh? Monkey see, Monkey do?'" and internally notes that this phrase "sounds much uglier if you know Chinese" (32), thus emphasizing the language gap separating him from both his listener and any Anglophone reader. Later he speaks for keeping Chinese names untranslated in his play, asserting his ambition to "let the gringo Anglos do some hard hearing for a change" (138). Non-Chinese-speaking readers confront a double challenge, both through language and through textuality; for although Kingston inscribes the names in this case ("Hoong Ngoak, Fa Moke Lan, Ku San the Intelligent" [138]), the supposedly ugly sounds are mere mute letters to the untrained speaker. Often Wittman chooses to provide no translation at all, limiting his listener/reader to either the Chinese or the English exclusively. This topic provides another instance in which

Wittman's asserted multivocal self fails to correspond with his true univocal one, as his purported valorization of open communication conflicts with his desire for a private and perhaps impenetrable discourse. At one moment he asserts that "one shouldn't speak a foreign language in front of people who don't understand it, especially when talking about them" (182), while in the next he introduces Taña to his mother as his "pahng yow," hoping his Anglo bride will believe it means "wife" instead of "friend." For much of the novel Wittman continues to use language in this binary fashion, preaching Esperanto but all the while creating his own Tower of Babel.

While Wittman is initially quite conflicted over this issue of linguistic communication, Kingston detects potential rather than limitation in the proliferation of multiple tongues.⁸ She suggests, both in the novel and in interviews, that her solution is not to attempt ubiquitous translation, but rather to play with the natural tendency of language to appropriate foreign words, always pushing and expanding her readers' multilingualism. Describing her alternative to exclusive language, she states, "With a lot of perceptions that English is not my language, there is a lot of leaving me out of this culture. So a lot of my work is appropriation. I'm going to appropriate this job and these books and this language—the American language. I'm going to appropriate this country" (Skenazy 144). Divergent languages can thwart communication, but they can also enhance it by offering an exponentially expanded vocabulary. When Charley shouts a seemingly-mock-Japanese "Hai!" in a rehearsal, the narrator informs us that it "could mean 'Cunt!' or 'Crab!' or 'Yeah!' or 'Look!' or 'Hello there!' or it was just a noise" (143). The juxtaposition of the word and its translation enables the reader to experience the increased possibilities of the multilingual. Never one to be limited by mere binaries, Kingston stuffs her text with Japanese, Spanish, and French phrases as well, celebrating the possibilities of adding an ever-increasing number of words to one's arsenal. She provides an eloquent example of this perspective in Wittman's cross-generational and multilingual conversation with his so-called grandmother:

Wittman's English better than his Chinese, and PoPo's Chinese better than her English, you would think they weren't understanding each other. But the best way to talk to someone of another language is at the top of your intelligence, not to slow down or to shout or to talk babytalk. You say more than enough, o.d. your listener, give her plenty to choose from. She will get more out of it than you can say. (267)

While this passage seems a consummately Kingstonian statement of purpose, it represents a shift for Wittman towards his author's appreciation of multilingual communication, and thus towards a greater resolution of his racial identity conflicts. In his final theatrical performance, Wittman's multilingualism converges with Kingston's, and all language becomes translated and translatable, forming a true vehicle for communicative possibilities.

Wittman's ongoing struggle with language parallels his struggle with the dichotomies of Chinese/American and Self/Community. In the opening of the novel Wittman idealistically envisions a non-racialized nation where all distinctions evaporate. He tells the Yale Younger Poet, "I'm including everything that is being left out and everybody who has no place. My idea for the Civil Rights movement is that we integrate jobs, schools, buses, housing, lunch counters, yes, and we also integrate theaters and parties" (52). This statement echoes Kingston's own views on the subject, as stated in this 1991 interview with Donna Perry: "When I say 'my people' or 'our people,' I mean everybody. And I watch other people think that I mean Chinese people or Chinese American people or Asian American people or women. But, more and more, I'm spreading the meaning to mean every human being on earth" (21). This multicultural ideal is complicated in *Tripmaster* by the persistent question, inherent in Wittman's paranoia, of whether such inclusion necessitates an erasure of all individual distinctions. Always a consumer as well as a producer of art, Wittman first demonstrates his inveterate fear of assimilation through his antipathetic reaction to *West Side Story* at the beginning of the novel. Despite the film's supposedly universalist message, Wittman notes that this is in reality a mere farce of inclusion, art masquerading as multicultural while incorporating only various permutations of white.

Russ Tamblyn's "kinky hair" only "indicates blackness," the "interracial" couple are both Caucasians, and Wittman wonders how one can differentiate the two gangs at all when "not a face up there was darker than Pancake #11" (71). This negative artistic example inspires Wittman to later create an artwork rooted in reality as well as theory, including as many actors as members of the community in a completely egalitarian representation.

In addition to motivating Wittman to create a performance that is true integration and not its mere simulacrum, *West Side Story* forces him to confront his conflicting views on racial communities. Watching the Jets' enviable cultural brotherhood but deplorable exclusivity, Wittman perceives a mirror of his own internalized questions about racial identity. Such questions consume him, to the point that he defensively rationalizes his preoccupation:

The dumb part of himself that eats Fritos and goes to movies was avidly interested in race, a topic unworthy of a great mind. Low-karma shit. Baby-talk. Stuck at A,B,C. Can't get to Q. Crybaby. Race—a stupid soul-narrowing topic, like women's rights, like sociology, easy for low-I.Q. people to feel like they're thinking. (75)

Recalling Gertrude here rather than his typical alter-ego, Hamlet, our protagonist protests too much. He obsesses about racial and national distinctions, and particularly over the dilemma of how one can be both American and Chinese; which, to Wittman, ultimately becomes a question of whether one can deny all racial differences and simultaneously form a race-based community.

Wittman begins as an assimilationist, maintaining a concept of "American" that abrogates all racial distinction and erases any traits that might be regarded as overly Chinese, even if they are natural and genuine ones.⁹ Stridently asserting his position as an American, Wittman mocks the FOB's (Fresh off the Boats) for sticking out so much: spitting seeds, walking kung-fu style, attiring themselves inappropriately. His initial conception of America is one of the melting pot rather than the mosaic: a place that absorbs other nationalities rather than permitting individual cultural distinctions.¹⁰ Confronting those

who appear too-Chinese evokes self-loathing sentiments, as is the case when a homely stranger approaches him on the bus: "he wished she weren't Chinese, the kind who works hard and doesn't fix herself up" (73). Wittman is antagonized by the fire-duck smell of her parcel, by the way she pronounces "Oak Lun," by the very fact that this stranger has singled him out on the basis of their shared ethnicity. As a result, he consciously fends off all her attempts at forging a race-based community, falsely proclaiming himself to be Japanese and responding rudely to her amicable inquiries. This same instinct naturally separated him from his co-nationals in college: "Yeah, there were a Chinese fraternity and sorority, but if you were bone-proud, you didn't have anything to do with SOP sisters and the Pineapple Pies" (17). Convinced that "everybody would rather be the indigenous people of a place than be its immigrants" (306), Wittman in the early stages of the novel has not yet learned how to be both/and: how being an indigenous American does not necessarily exclude identification with his Chinese heritage.

Wittman has a tendency to belie his own assertive denial of racial distinctions by unconsciously replicating the very stereotypes he stridently resists. He often attempts to explain his character traits through reference to his racial heritage, citing "being new at almost every dumb thing" (55) and "minding so much about justice" (53) as side-effects of a Chinese nationality. Reinforcing stereotypes is nearly a mental tic for Wittman, recurring unconsciously at every turn: Chinese are nosy (74), Chinese have a lot of nerve (75), Chinese have no sense of direction (152), Chinese don't drive well (208), Chinese lack orderly meal routines and proper table manners (213). These facile categorizations directly contradict Wittman's asserted passion for inclusion, yet they prove unshakable as they serve the psychological function of enabling Wittman to group himself with others rather than emphasizing the isolation of his own individualized state. Not only does Wittman clandestinely covet a community but, in spite of himself, he initially conceives of this community as necessarily Chinese. Despite his purported antipathy for Asian communalism, he

soon wonders "What's wrong with him that he keeps ending up in Caucasian places? [...] So where were the brothers? Where was the fraternité?" (57). That Wittman suffers from a racial identity conflict is evident; more subtle is the fact that his internal crisis arises specifically from the inability to accept myriad possibilities rather than strict binaries despite his strong desire to do so.

Wittman's resistance to alternative voices manifests itself in the first reading of his play when his Japanese host Lance improvises on the friendship oath of Liu Pei, Gwan Goong, and Chang Fei. Lance's new and multinational injection into the old story causes Wittman to take great offense over another narrative voice daring to dispute his own, until Charley speaks the correct incantation and restores the oath to its original Chinese context. Wittman, relieved at seeing the original narrative preserved, observes, "He knows. He knows. Charley is Chinese, and knows. He is a hearer of legends. And he's translating what may be the secret oath the tongs take into daylight English for all to understand" (144). Wittman thus desires a listening audience but not actively engaged co-authors; he is prepared, for the moment, to share the Chinese stories, but not yet to grant the privilege of participation to others.

Despite this instinctive desire to preserve Chinese national heritage, Wittman is too much a paranoiac to embrace any community fully. Constantly on the look-out for those who might potentially reject him for his race, he masters the preemptive strike and is constantly on the offensive. Fearing rejection from the beautiful Nanci Lee, Wittman quickly shifts from his previously asserted belief in American identity to a denunciation of Nanci for her failure to conform to her nationality. Thus he both scorns the FOB's for being too Chinese, and mentally derides Nanci for not being Chinese enough, and specifically being too mainstream American: "She's maybe only part Chinese ... Nanci Lee and her highborn kin, rich Chinese-Americans of Orange County, where the most Chinese thing they do is throw the headdress ball" (12). This inability to accept those either inside or outside the community incapacitates Wittman for the first portion of the novel, as

his self-concept depends on his perception of his own adherence to racial categorization.

Wittman's ability to integrate multiple voices into his narrative parallels this process of successfully uniting multiple races into his own identity. In this task his father proves to be an instrumental guide, encouraging a view of race that celebrates unlimited inclusion. Zeppelin Ah Sing is a man unhindered by any racial constructs, freely sprinkling his speech with phrases in Hawaiian, Japanese, and Pig Latin, and showing up his son with a superior knowledge of American car mechanics. Through Zeppelin, Kingston demonstrates how the miscegenated experience offers the advantage of expanded possibilities rather than the anxiety of liminality present in her early memoirs. As Wittman learns, an ambiguous racial background grants empowerment rather than obscurity; consequently, being colorless is a weakness, rendering one incapable of easy passage between boundaries. The "other" race gains control by its otherness, particularly through the power of transformation and disguise. Zeppelin teaches his son the delight of masquerading as a member of other ethnic groups, as in his conversation with Taña:

"Do you think I look Injun?" asked Zeppelin, who was wearing his turquoise belt buckle. "Some say I look Italian." He was proud to be taken for whatever, especially by one of their own kind, Mexican, Filipino. His favorite, he'd been asked by a Basque once near Gardenville, "You Basque?" "I'm pure Chinese," he told Taña. "A pure Chinese can look Injun, Basque, Mexican, Italian, Gypsy, Pilipino [sic]." (200)

"Passing" has a complex history in American letters¹¹—in Zeppelin's definition, it is entertaining, subtly anti-authoritarian, and ultimately self-affirming. Slipping in and out of racial categorizations at will, the only identity he feels obliged to uphold is his own. Wittman, constantly avoiding any possible stereotype, feels humiliated by Zeppelin's hilarious account of his attempt to procure a free lemon with his tea. Frustrated with his father's conformity to the image of the "Cheap Chang," Wittman wishes to distance himself from this stereotype and deliberately wastes the teabag when he knows "a

really Chang guy would've made one bag do for the entire tea party" (200).

As he gradually overcomes his own rigid mental categorizations, however, Wittman is able to note the similarities between himself and Zeppelin, conceding that his father is after all "the one [who] started me on my trips" (196). Zeppelin's stint with the lemon possesses a certain trickster feel, an exuberant rejection of authority and specifically a play on language.¹² Although he may resist such penny-pinching as a Chinese stereotype, the beatnik Wittman, who furnishes his apartment with card tables and mattresses abandoned on the street, has undeniably inherited the trait from his father. Indeed, when he is honest with himself Wittman is forced to admit the beauty of his father's frugality, recalling his childhood of discovering all the free gifts available to those in the know, for "a day out with Pop was filled with presents. The world was a generous place" (204). One of Wittman's later "tricks" makes adroit use of his father's teachings as he slides seamlessly into the persona of a Mexican in order to protest a racist joke he claims to overhear in a restaurant. Angriily renouncing the offenders, Wittman peppers his own speech with "gringo," "raza," "sabe," using language to claim himself as one of the insulted race. Learning from his father, Wittman too is eventually able to rejoice in many transformations, gleefully adopting all the identities America has to offer. Zeppelin thus serves as a practical model for Wittman of how to accept his extant character traits without incessantly evaluating them as functions of various stereotypes. Instead, Zeppelin exudes a comfortable self-acceptance that does not deny race, but renders it a malleable rather than a fixed construct.

V. Tripmaster Who?: Competitors, Collaborators, and Other Voices

I act you theater, you act me theater. (281)

While Wittman accepts aid from Zeppelin and sundry other assistants, doing so causes him tremendous angst. Accustomed to his own

narration, he cannot readily accept collaboration without experiencing a persistent anxiety that he will relinquish control of his private narrative. Wittman's acquisition of the "tripmaster" title is thus a gradual and laborious one, and the fact that the nickname alludes to his eventual but not fully actualized self adds another meaning to Kingston's clever subtitle. This is Wittman's "fake book" in that he is not truly its master; our narrator controls the story, and he is but a poor player who struts and frets his hour on its page. While multivocality is Kingston's signature style, it is only with substantial difficulty that her protagonist successfully deviates from his monologic discourse.

One of Wittman's greatest problems in forging an integrated narrative is that his chronic sexual insecurity and subsequent misogyny impede the potential inclusion of feminine voices. Kingston's subtle mockery of Wittman's gender anxiety is an obvious reflection of her feminist stance; but more significantly, her ability to sympathetically depict a masculine voice represents her triumph over any misandristic leanings. After directly addressing her agitation over the Chinese subjugation of women in *Woman Warrior*, Kingston attempted to examine the parallel problems confronting Chinese masculinity in her second autobiographical work, *China Men*. The latter tells the story of men but only underscores the plight of women; in one myth Kingston has her gods decree: "This man is too wicked to be reborn a man. Let him be born a woman" (CM 120). Thus *Tripmaster's* ventriloquism, permitting the female to speak through the male, represents an important transition for author as well as character. Wittman is doubly significant in that he is not only a sympathetic male character, but also a partial representation of Kingston's long-time antagonist, the critic and playwright Frank Chin who frequently accused Kingston of participating in the literary emasculation of the Chinese.¹³ By using her character as a mouthpiece for Chin's anxieties about Chinese masculinity, Kingston defuses her opponent by embracing him within her text. When William Satake Blauvelt asked her in an interview if her book was a way of "getting even" with Chin, Kingston replied, "It's like him sending me hate mail, and I send him love letters, it's

like that" (81). Subtly mocking Chin (even affectionately) might still be considered a counterattack; but it is one appropriate to Kingston's belief in passive resistance and the importance of inclusion.¹⁴

Wittman, preoccupied with being the author of every script, cannot so easily incorporate the voice of the opposite sex. When the women begin to write scripts of their own, he experiences the vertigo of the undermined playwright, terrified that his characters have taken on their own voices and rendered him irrelevant. Upon arriving at Lance's party he muses, "You prepare scripts with lines for yourself and lines for her, but you have to try them on somebody brand new you never saw before, and [I] semi-knew everybody here. And girls won't co-operate" (99). One can imagine that this approach does little to endear Wittman to the ladies, and indeed he strikes out with the beautiful Nanci Lee at his first opportunity. Finally face-to-face with a woman he has coveted since college, Wittman treats his date to a lengthy meditation on himself and effectively ignores her every attempt to contribute to the conversation (pausing only to note begrudgingly, "Her turn to talk about her kiddiehood"). Following Wittman's monkey act, Nanci summarily flees, but in the light of Kingston's other works the silencing of women surfaces as a primary factor in this interaction. In one of the most poignant scenes in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston vividly describes her brutal attempt as a young child to force her silent female classmate to speak. In her desperate hostility, which ranges from threats to bribes, the young narrator reveals her own self-hatred and, retrospectively, her identification with the way society silences women: "We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine" (WW 172). In *Tripmaster*, Kingston appropriates the male voice who fails to listen, and demonstrates his subsequent rejection at the hands of the woman he refuses to hear.

In the end, Kingston does not vengefully abandon her protagonist to a woman's contempt, but instead provides him with a guide in the path towards intergender communications: his female counterpart, Taña De Weese. Wittman initially approaches Taña in his typical

fashion, anticipating a standard set of lines for them both. Surprised to find her reciting Robert Service, he fends off his impulse to be whimsically charmed by wondering why any well-educated woman would opt for Service over the more respectable T. S. Eliot. Hoping to return to his original script, he longs to recite back to her, to "educate her to a better poet (Yeats) than Robert Service," because, as he revealingly comments, "What's the use of having poems in your head if you can't have scenes in your life to say them in?" (115). Taña, however, proves to be her own author and throws Wittman's intended narrative off its course. Blithely, unselfconsciously, she spins her own tale featuring herself as the coveted femme fatale whom Wittman has secretly pursued all evening. Furthermore, Taña demands that Wittman speak her own words back to her, effectively dethroning him as playwright and relegating him to the role of actor speaking *her* lines: "Now, tell me that happened. Tell me that was what you did" (130). Nonplussed, Wittman plays along, but copes with this power play by mentally restoring himself to the position of authority: "Oh, at last. He'd found his woman who will talk while making love" (130). These lines confirm Taña's success; she has not only seduced Wittman into participating in her play, but also into believing it to be true.

Following their first sexual encounter the two engage in a similar battle for authorship when Taña outlines her "rules" of free love, negating any attempts to romanticize this sudden connection between strangers. Wittman has again lost his authorial ground, and thinks: "Damn. She beat him to it. Outplayed again. [...] He'd balked, and she'd taken his lines. Now what?" (154). His rhetorical maneuver is to refuse the very rules he would have chosen: "'I think I could love you,' he said. 'I think I do love you'" (154). While this statement leads, predictably enough, to lovemaking, Wittman's words are subtly subversive. Once Taña has ruptured his script, he can only respond by undermining hers in turn, claiming the one emotion she has forbidden him. Their relationship proceeds in a constant authorial struggle, one appropriately never resolved and always generating competitive creative potential. Somewhere in his subtle repartee with Taña,

Wittman begins to share control of his narrative, learning in the process that there is indeed a space for creative collaboration between surrender and domination. Permitting another master into the trip proves to be a crucial moment in his transition from intrapersonal monologue to interpersonal theatrical event.

While Taña is the primary force disrupting Wittman's univocal narrative, sundry characters follow suit throughout the novel. I would like to conclude with Lance and Charley as the men with whom Wittman reenacts the friendship oath of ancient Chinese epic, two significant contributors to his expanded sense of community and authorship. Wittman sees Lance as his *Doppelgänger*, formerly his comedy-act twin but currently his dark side sold out to high finance and a blonde bride. The two vie for linguistic control, toying with one another in an interchange that appears pure sport to Lance but genuine antagonism to Wittman, who "turned green and red with envy and admiration" (126) and then derisively addresses him with the strongest hippie insult: "Businessman" (127). Despite Wittman's attempts to the contrary, Lance wrests control of the narrative through his surreal tale of being stranded on an isolated island, incapable of returning to America. This story is notable not only for breaking into Wittman's monologue, but also for its replication of specific themes that form the very fabric of that monologue. Lance's primary subject is that of the outsider and outcast, of one desperately longing for a place in the United States he can never fully claim. Wittman, hearing what is in effect his own narrative retold by his dark double, viciously resents ceding his primary position as Tripmaster: "How to kill Lance and eat his heart, and plagiarize his stories? As a friend of the hero, you're a sub-plot of his legend. When you want to be the star" (126). By telling the tale of his exile, Lance has gained entrance; his narrative brings him inside the very circle from which he was once excluded. Wittman constantly fears becoming revealed as an outcast, an emotion he recalls vividly through a memory of watching a dentist and assistant flirt over his immobile head. Ultimately he must learn how to partake of Lance's heart without eating it; that is, how to make

productive, cooperative art without vying for primacy. Lance's ability to turn his outcast status to his advantage, to become the skillful host of the party who orchestrates the mingling of disparate characters, is instrumental in Wittman's education as the tripmaster of his own show.

While Wittman can only view Lance with a semi-hostile sense of competition, his friendship with Charley enables him to approach an understanding of communal artistic potential. Charley makes his entrance at the party (and in the text) at the very moment Wittman is thinking of him, and is therefore introduced as a reflection of Wittman's own subjectivity. Like Taña, however, Charley is fully capable of becoming his own author. He skillfully grasps control of the narrative by retelling, reshaping, and recreating a previous cinematic text, *The Saragossa Manuscript*. More than a microcosm of Kingston's own project and an obvious example of postmodern metafiction, the *Saragossa* tale is significant for the success of its multivocality as evinced in both the narrative process and its impact. The many plot twists hinge on layers of authorship, stories within stories, a man telling of a movie telling of a book which tells of a soldier. Wittman, silenced for a change, appreciates the power of the storyteller to unite the various drug-tripping listeners under his verbal spell. He begins to see the potential for unity and interconnectivity through a multivocal narrative:

[Charley] got them all inhabiting the same movie. Here we are, miraculously on Earth at the same moment, walking in and out of one another's lifestyles, no problems of double exposure, no difficulties crossing the frame. Life is ultimately fun and doesn't repeat itself and doesn't end. (103)

Such fluidity and openness indicates one of the many shifts in Wittman's cognitive patterns, a move away from the self-obsessed despair of the first chapter and toward the inclusive euphoria of the final one. Charley suggests a potential for a far less rigid concept of selfhood, one that doesn't necessarily deteriorate—and in fact, can even be enhanced—by the intrusion of others. He provides a nearly

utopian moment of perfect communication, after which all listeners will carry the film with them as though it were their own visual memory; as the prognosticating narrator tells us: "Charley had guided them so well that the visionaries will come away talking-story about this movie that they'd gone to" (104). Participating in this moment, Wittman glimpses the potential to cross boundary lines so that even reality is a flexible construct; even personal memories can become public ones. Armed with an expanded experience, his own and those of others, he is prepared to initiate his final performance.

The Wittman at the end of *Tripmaster* has an ambiguous future ahead of him. After a long public diatribe addressed to Taña, he concludes, "See how much I love you? Unromantically but" (339). He has accepted alternative voices into his narrative, but is still ambivalent about fully accepting Taña into his life. Although the crowd celebrates this statement as indicative of a match made in heaven, because "out of all this mess of talk, people heard 'I love you,'" (339), the reader recognizes that Wittman's commitment is by no means assured. As Kingston herself observed, "He's been a little bit tested—he managed to put on one show—but to truly be a realized adult man he has to continue [...] He's still reacting; he hasn't created himself yet" (Perry 175). The seeds of this creation are there in his newly-realized abilities for inclusion, but it will take some time for them to reach fruition. We never see this transition textually, but its effects are apparent from the opening pages of *Fifth Book*. In his enduring marriage to Taña, in his affection for his son Mario, and in his decision to escape to Hawaii as a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, Wittman appears here as the fully-realized being implied in *Tripmaster's* conclusion. Just before the opening of his story, Kingston writes:

Oh, the necessity and comfort of writing 'I ... I ... I ... I ... I ...,' the selfish first person, author, narrator, protagonist, one. Freedom—to write diarylike, OK to be formless, no art, no good English.

Fiction cares for others; it is compassion, and gives others voice. It time-travels the past and the future, and pulls the not-now, not-yet into existence.

The garret where I wrote, which was just my height, burned. A sign. I do not want the aloneness of the writer's life. No more solitary. I need a com-

munity of like minds. The Book of Peace, to be reconstructed, needs community. (60)

Kingston writes here in her own voice, autobiographically, but it is Wittman's that follows. These words are a transitional moment, part hers and part his: evidence of their shared roles as writers and listeners, "trippers and askers."¹⁵ As Kingston populates Wittman's farewell party with all her previous characters, Wittman congratulates himself: "He was living right, that he had cultivated these people of all kinds into family community. He liked himself for keeping everybody he had ever met" (67). Thus equipped with the community he began building in an earlier novel, he is prepared for his newest project: "to write—the poem, the play that would stop war" (72), to bring a collective art into action.

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NOTES

¹Malcolm X, aka Malcolm Little: Pan-Africanist, Nation of Islam minister, revolutionary activist, 1925-1965. Amiri Baraka, aka Leroi Jones: African American poet and activist, born 1934. Frank Chin: Chinese-American playwright, born 1940; discussed further later.

²Like most of the Berkeley locations Kingston describes, Sutro's was real, as was the statue. This is especially fitting in the context here, as Wittman and Taña discuss the ways in which art mimics life. Alfred Sutro opened the area as a massive public bath in 1896, and it eventually included museums, theaters, ice rinks, and an amusement park. The area closed and mysteriously burned down shortly thereafter, in 1966. This is the fire Kingston mentions as the Ah Sings' third anniversary, although the fire occurred on June 26th, and the Ah Sings are married in autumn.

³See David Leiwei Li's review, which describes the work as "postmodern in its willful emphasis upon play" (217) or Sharon Suzuki-Martinez for a more detailed analysis of the work as postmodern.

⁴Some have found Kingston's excessive allusions to be off-putting or even impenetrable; but as Kingston notes in an interview, "In my conversation I make literary references all the time and in my head I make them even more—I can hear Joyce and Shakespeare and Rilke. So why can't I use them in my writing?" (*Back-*

talk 175). As explained above, I read these references as expansive attempts to gesture outward to multiple works, as well as reminders of the text's textuality.

⁵In keeping with the theme of open boundaries, the margins between humans and animals are blurred elsewhere in the text as well. Not only does Wittman turn into a monkey (32), but Judy Louis appears to turn into a boar (79), and one of Lance's kung fu champs turns into a bee (280).

⁶See for example King-Kok Cheung, Isabella Furth, and Diane Simmons.

⁷See David Leiwei Li's article, "*China Men*: Maxine Hong Kingston and the American Canon." Li claims that by her second book Kingston parallels the mother in *China Men* who stitches "good morning" in both languages, ever aware that "artistic expression and cultural accommodation are an integral process" (484).

⁸Incorporation of multiple languages is not atypical of Modernism. However, Joyce's experimentation in *Finnegan's Wake* is surely a different project than Kingston's here; her objective is, as I discuss, inclusive rather than exclusive. While many modernist and postmodernist works experiment with languages as a form of verbal play, *Tripmaster* has a particular focus on the communicative potential of polylingualism.

⁹Ellison famously describes this struggle between natural and culturally prescribed desires in the yam episode of *Invisible Man*. More recently, *The Onion* parodied such anxieties in an article entitled "Chinese Laundry Owner Blasted for Reinforcing Negative Ethnic Stereotypes" (April 2, 1998).

¹⁰In the early stages of the novel, Wittman follows Gary Snyder's tenets: "We must consciously and fully accept and recognize that this is where we live and grasp the fact that our descendants will be here for millennia to come. [...] Europe or Africa or Asia will then be seen as the place our ancestors came from, places we might want to know about and to visit, but not 'home.' Home—deeply, spiritually—must be here" (40). It is only later in the novel that he is able to integrate these concepts of being a "native" American with being ethnically Chinese.

¹¹See Nella Larsen's work of the same title; also Jean Toomer, who defended "passing" based on his projection of a future miscegenated race: "The New American."

¹²Zeppelin demands a full lemon rather than a slice, insisting that the menu promises "tea with lemon" (201).

¹³Frank Chin consistently attacks Kingston for both her supposed misandry, and her failure to adhere to the factual accounts of Chinese mythology. He accuses "Kingston and her literary spawn" of being "the first writers of any race [...] to so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history. And, to legitimize their faking, they have to fake all of Asian American history and literature. [...] This version of history is their contribution to the stereotype" (3).

¹⁴Patricia Chu puts it best: "Like Chin, Wittman Ah Sing is a Chinese American playwright, idealistic and enraged over racism, with the persona of an angry young man who can be exasperating—especially in his sexism—but is fundamentally decent. Though this portrait could be considered a personal attack, it is best understood as a mediating voice by which Kingston expresses her own anger over American racism" (117).

¹⁵This line, the title of *Tripmaster's* first chapter, suggests the ability to both lead and listen that Wittman will finally attain. It references "Song of Myself": "Trippers and askers surround me ..." (16).

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