Quest for Identity in Jean Paul Sartre's *Words* and Maxine Hong Kingston's T*he Woman Warrior*

Neveen Samir Mohammad Ahmad
Lecturer of English Literature
Modern Academy for Engineering and Technology

Niveen_samir@yahoo.com

Abstract

The task of this paper is not merely a discussion of the comparative study of Sartre's *Words* and Kingston's T*he Woman Warrior.* The paper also attempts to examine how the implied author dealt with migration, gender, growth, and the Chinese-American identity in a neo-narration; it illustrates the complexities of twentieth century autobiography. That is the fact that the chronological narrative of traditional writing is ignored. As will be illustrated, the intersection of history and literature in addition to the experiences of the protagonists in the diaspora who struggle with character development and identity in different societies not only reflects the implied norms of the respective work (and thus the implied author's), but also makes it possible to draw conclusions about the implied author's (and even the epoch's) general approach to the world.

The mirroring technique highlights the theme of appearance versus reality. Their protagonists suffer from destabilized identity as a result of the clash between how they seem and how they see themselves, how they are labelled and how they really are.

In this paper, I shall explore a number of stages during the protagonists' search for self according to the different phases of their language experience. My discussion will follow the
thread from the point of departure of the quest to the process of self-identification and conclude with the completion of the quest. Beside this main concern, I will also talk about other
issues, namely that of filial, social and cultural forces that together form the textuality of selfhood.

Introduction

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and the Chinese-American woman writer Maxine Hong Kingston may not at first sight seem to be a likely pair for a comparison, but their autobiographical works *Words* (*Les Mots*, 1964) and *The Woman Warrior* (1975) contain certain comparable elements which I find worth exploring.

One revealing similarity between *Words* and *The Woman Warrior*

illustrating the

complexities of twentieth century autobiography is the fact that the chronological narrative of traditional writing is ignored. Instead, both works deal with the ontological development of
the self more than with the historical, personal events of the autobiographer's life. The business of self-identifying gains much emphasis in the retrospective recounting while personal incidents are selected contingently and fragmentarily to support this theme. This particular autobiographical act, as Albert E. Stone states, allows " a writer [to be] at once the creator and recreator of his or her personal identity"(4). According to his definition of this literary genre,
autobiography, "as a more or less trustworthy linguistic bridge between oneself or soul and other," "recreates a model of literate culture itself and the social circumstances in which individual personality is discovered, asserted, and confirmed (or denied) and community potentially established"(5).

What Sartre and Kingston do in their autobiographies is to reshape the self and project it through the textuality of fictions, fables, dreams and myths. It is through the autobiographical discourse in particular and language in general that the self is brought into being. "The self has no recoverable existence apart from language" (317). In the texts under discussion here, the search for self-identity is closely connected with language performance. Furthermore, writing serves as the medium through which selfhood is established and confirmed. Paul John Eakin expresses a similar idea, saying that "the writing of autobiography emerges as a symbolic analogue of the initial coming together of the individual and language that marks the origin of self-awareness", as well as the fulfillment of self-discovery, I would like to add (Eakin 213).

In this paper, I shall explore a number of stages during the protagonists' search for self according to the different phases of their language experience. My discussion will follow the
thread from the point of departure of the quest to the process of self-identification and conclude with the completion of the quest. Beside this main concern, I will also talk about other
issues, namely that of filial, social and cultural forces that together form the textuality of selfhood. Such issues are clearly shown in both works; for example, Hong Kingston started her search for self-identity in the chaos of her mother's "talk-stories".

Part I: Departing on the Quest.

The quest for self-identity in both texts is much like a journey with a point of departure and a point of arrival. The departing point is when the protagonist is aware of the urgent need to justify his/her existence in the world. This awareness is usually stimulated by the power of language. For Sartre, the initial linguistic experience is with the written word, while for Kingston it is with her mother’s "talk-stories”. The time-scheme of both works is sometimes confusing. Sartre divides *Words* into “Reading” and “Writing,” two parts which do not strictly follow a chronological sequence, since some incidents recounted in the two parts actually overlap in dating. I mark the starting-point of his quest as the period before he started reading. *The Woman Warrior* proves to be a more complex case. As Elaine H. Kim says, quoting Kingston’s own comment on the book, "*The Woman Warrior* expresses in much the way the mind works. Thoughts and memories are interrupted by fantasy and dreams” (44).

Taking Sartre’s words “1 began my life as I shall no doubt end it: among books" as the mark of self-awareness, I shall first examine the self when it is still in the embryonic state, i.e.
the initial sense of selflessness (28).

After the death of his father, which followed soon after the son’s birth, both mother and son were taken under his grandparent’s wings. Together, the son and his mother were called "the children". Thence, Sartre had trouble thinking of his mother as the one who gave birth to him. Moreover, the boy had a kind of Oedipus complex as revealed in the following Statement: “I should more likely have taken [mother] for an elder sister. This Virgin...was there to wait on me...how could she have given birth to me ?...I should marry her later on so as to look after her. 1 promised her I would protect her and devote my young importance to her service" (16). The boy was so confused that he at one point even believed that his birth was from "a miracle" rather than human parents (16).Since parents are the primary source and shaping force of one's existence, Hong Kingston writes her autobiography in two volumes*: The Woman Warrior* and *China Man* (1960), dealing with the mother-daughter relationship and the father-daughter relationship, respectively and since Sartre felt he did not have a physical birth-giver, he presents himself as "the undefined made flesh and blood" (27). Lacking a father and having no land, no property, inherited from him, Sartre has never felt at home anywhere: “We were never at home: either in the rue le Goff or later on, when my mother remarried"(56). This sense of parent1essness and homelessness place the boy at a zero point : "I was nothing : an indelible transparency" (69).

Because of the void within, the boy inevitably turned to the outside, looking

for confirmations of his existence, both physically and spiritually. With respect to his physical reality, he was greatly helped by the mirror. He was fond of making faces in front of the mirror and watching his own reflections. The autobiographer recalls two incidents of his childhood, in which the mirror functioned as his private refuge and "a form of self-protection". Once Sartre was scolded by his mother for making fun of another boy, and [he] escaped, and ran to [the] bedroom where[he] stood in front of the wardrobe mirror and spent a long time making faces (67). Another incident happened when Sartre disappointed his mother and Madame Picard, his mother's friend who had a high estimation of the boy, by giving a commonplace answer to a questionnaire. Again, "[he] disappeared, and went and made faces in front of a mirror" (69). In addition to the mirror, the people around him also formed a sort of "mirror" through which the boy recognized his existence. "My true self, my character and my name were in the hands of the adults; I had learnt to see myself through their eyes" (53). In order to please the adults, Sartre made great effort to exhibit his talents and charms. He knew well how to pose for a photograph to show himself at his best. And together with his grandfather, he acted out dramatic performances to show the great affection between them, reassuring the family belief that the boy was the "wonder", "an unusual boon from fate," and "a free gift to the old man"(17). Whether in front of a mirror or in front of the grown-ups, the boy "never stopped creating [himself]," because he believed that "everything was for show" (23). Only during interludes would he look inside himself and then had to acknowledge the emptiness within: "I had tried to take refuge from glory and dishonour in the loneliness of my true self; but I had no true self: I found nothing within me except a surprised insipidity" (69). According to Hugh J. Silverman's definition, "nothingness" here means that "the self is a meaning with no referent, an existence with no essence, a consciousness with no object that is other." The autobiographer is experiencing a period, in Silverman's term, "of speaking about the self without the self speaking or being named" (88).

Paralleling Kingston's first chapter about her dead aunt, Sartre's *Words* starts with his family history. A noteworthy similarity between the two opening chapters is that both deal with some family member whose name has once been forbidden. In *Words,* it was Charles, Sartre's grandfather, who in his youth preferred pursuing "a bareback rider" to being the pastor his father had wished him to be. Thenceforward, Charles' portrait was "turned to the wall and all mention of his name was forbidden"(9). A similar thing happened to Kingston's remote aunt who committed adultery and drowned herself with her newly-born illegitimate baby in the family well. Also her name was erased from the family memory as if "she had never been born" (8). It is indeed these two people who imposed special effects on the two autobiographers later on. In Sartre's life, Charles became the most

important formative influence. Kingston sees her aunt's ghost "drawing" to her, and her aunt's life "branching" into hers. Since the writing of autobiography is intended to establish and maintain an identity, starting one's autobiography with someone whose identity is being denied indicates the significance of being named and remembered.

The Sartre family, the author's paternal strain, was doomed by the spell of silence. Sartre's paternal grandparents had not spoken to each other for forty years. Of the children from this silent marriage, Helene went mad, Jean-Baptiste, Sartre's father, died when Sartre was a baby, and Joseph stammered and "spent his life struggling for words"(12). The struggle for words echoes the title of the book and foreshadows the protagonist's later experience with words. In fact, Sartre had no linguistic difficulty. Instead he was expected by the family to be an infant prodigy, saying precocious things which were taken by the adults as "prophecies"; "my words and gestures had a quality which escaped, yet which sprang to the eyes of grown-ups" (22).

The fact that both Sartre and Kingston start their autobiographies by recounting the family anecdotes on their maternal side indicates, as John Pilling observes in the chapter "Jean-Paul Sartre: *Les Mots* (1964), that "the maternal side of the family takes precedence over the paternal"(9). Sartre's grandfather Charles and Kingston's mother Brave Orchid played an important, dominant role in the protagonists' childhoods. Besides, their influence on the children is mainly linguistic. Charles 'had been a language teacher whose fondness of literature introduced the boy to the world of words. Brave Orchid, also, marked the girl's growth by her endlessly "talking -stories". The relationship between Sartre and his grandmother, the only one in the whole family who seemed to be detached from the boy's charm, is strengthened, as the boy recognized, "through the power of a word" (25). Following his mother's example, he called his grandparents by one word "Kar1emami" which referred to both of them. Sartre pleased the old lady. The word's sound suggested "a complete harmony". Hence, Sartre managed to "maintain the flawless unity of the family". "[his] grandmother, suspect and sinful, forever on the verge of slipping, was restrained by the arm of an angel, through the power of a word" (25).

Sartre, a seven-year-old boy, regarded himself as a ticketless traveller on a train to Dijon who was asked by the inspector to show his ticket or his identity papers. Having none, the boy tried to justify his presence on the train by talking endlessly and presumptuously to the inspector that he was "summoned to Dijon by important and secret reasons which concerned France and possible humanity" (71). According to Sartre's own analysis of this story, he himself played four parts: the train, the culprit, the ticket-inspector and the organizer of the whole thing (7). In

this act of se1f-ref1ection, Sartre lost his grasp of his true self, and substituted another identity for it. Hugh J. Silverman explains in "Sartre's Words on the Self" that "the self loses its identity and becomes an otherness when it cannot grasp itself in its own self-conscious act." "When it becomes other," Silverman continues, "it is no longer the self" (88). In Sartre's own words, he was nothing but an empty palace of mirrors (69).

Sartre's sense of selflessness was conditioned by his recognition that having no father, he owned nothing: no inheritance, no home, no identity. His search for self started, to use Jane P. Tompkin's term, "from zero" (273).

Hong Kingston started her search for self-identity in the chaos of her mother's "talk-stories" which are confusing in their manifestations of the conflicting filial, social and cultural forces. "Even now China wraps double binds around my feet."(48) According to David Murray, the "dual concern" of the work "is with the difficulty of being Chinese in America, but also with the difficulty of being a woman in either Chinese or American society" (Murray 19). Kingston's task is to claim her identity first at home, then in the world. Her mother, Brave Orchid, is the embodiment of mother and home. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, in her article "the Metaphysics of Matri1inearism" states that many female autobiographers put much emphasis on the matriarchal realm, i.e. "the home in which a child grows up, its management and domination by the mother and by feminine values of nurturing, relatedness, process" (180). The power and force of Brave Orchid's influence on Kingstone is fully demonstrated by her "talk-stories". The stories were the fundamental texts with which the mother taught the girl moral and ethical lessons. The mother-daughter relationship is presented as both psychological and linguistic. By telling stories, the mother had built for the girl, who was born in America and never went to China, a strong Chinese cultural background, providing her with female archetypes to identify with. But at the same time, she confused the girl by blurring the distinctions between truth and lies, reality and fantasy. The protagonist's crowded consciousness is exemplified in the following sentence: "Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear" (87).

Kingston starts her autobiography with the story of "No Name Woman", retelling her mother's "talk-story" about her adulterous aunt who drowned herself and her baby. Her punishment was to remain "a homeless ghost" even after her death. Brave Orchid's intention in telling Kingston this family secret was to teach the girl a moral lesson, warning her against any sexual misbehavior: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to [your aunt] could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been

born" (5). The girl learned that her matrilineal existence is contingent upon complete obedience to the patriarchal Chinese culture (Demetrakopoulos 200).

Following "No Name Woman" comes the fantastic story "White Tigers" which provides
a contrast to the previous one. Fa Mu Lan, the legendary woman warrior who was well-trained in martial arts, went to war to revenge her family. Her parents carved "oaths and names" and all misdoings to their family on her back before she left for battle, so that "people [would] know their sacrifice and the daughter [would] never forget." (34). In the war, Fa Mu Lan proved herself to be an outstanding fighter. Having won the war, however, she returned home to be a wife and mother. From this legend, young Kingston learned the other side of feminine worth, i.e. strength, bravery, loyalty, versus the worthlessness and powerlessness of the No-Name oman. Meanwhile, however, she got confused by the totally contrasting fates of these two women figures. They actually shared a basically similar situation. Both had stepped beyond the conventional boundaries of women's behavior; the aunt committed adultery while Fa Mu Lan disguised herself as a man, which was considered a capital crime for women in ancient China.
"The Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examination."(39) So, what constitutes the difference between their fates? The key is language, particularly, the act of speech. Kingston's ancestral aunt was the one who did not speak, a shadow of silence, as described in these words: " She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labor and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent
birth"(11). Fa Mu Lan. by contrast, spoke out. The words of vengeance carved on her back are her mission in the war "The idioms for revenge are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families'.
The reporting is the vengeance . . . not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (53). The words can justify her fight against the baron. " 'You've done this,' I said, and ripped off my shirt to show him my back. 'You are responsible for this'" (44). In this perspective, the swordswoman is rather a "spokesman", using her body of words as a sword, a weapon. Her victory in battle is a victory of words, by means of which she establishes her identity. "From the words on my back,
and how they were fulfilled, the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality" (45).

While Fa Mu Lan is a legendary figure, Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid, emerges as a woman warrior in reality whose story is recounted in the chapter entitled "Shaman". When she was young, Brave Orchid left home to attend medical

school. Having finished her study there, she returned to the village as a doctor gracefully and miraculously. In this story she told about herself, Brave Orchid was not only a champion story-teller, but also a defeater of ghosts. She was able to talk to the "Sitting Ghost" in medical school and chanted a magic spell to drive it out. However, she remained an ambiguous figure in the eyes of her daughter: in her own stories, she was a powerful "woman warrior", fighting against ghosts, and also a competent doctor; but in real life she is a laundress who fears the "ghosts" who are actually human beings only of races different from Chinese. On the one hand, she teaches her daughter the chant of Fa Mu Lan
and the story of her own brilliant past; on the other hand, she is the one repeatedly saying contemptuous proverbs about females, such as: "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds;" "There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls"; "When you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers"; "Break the women with their tongues". There is even a Chinese word for female "I" which also means "slave" (45-46). Brave Orchid made Kingston believe that she had cut Kingston's frenum as an infant so that the tongue would be more flexible in speaking other languages. However, this operation of tongue-cutting, instead of giving the girl a sharp tongue, made her a silent child in public for a long time.

Since the mother figure is associated with home and the motherland China, Kingston, who was born and brought up in America, gained her knowledge about China mostly from the mother 's "ta1k-stories". The mother told the girl that Chinese sold girls and that they killed baby girls right after birth. As a result, young Kingston rejected China: "I did not want to go to China. In China my parents would sell my sister and me. My father would marry would two or three more wives. . . I did not want to go where the ghosts took shapes nothing like our own" (99).
But, turning to American society. Kingston found that her "American 1ife was such a disappointment" (45). Being perpetually a foreigner and belonging to an ethnic minority, Kingston sees herself as a traveller in a limbo state. She belonged to two worlds: China and America; yet, she was at home in neither. This sense of homelessness parallels Sartre 's sense of "parentlessness ". As Suzanne Juhasz suggests, Kingston 's search for self embodies the search for home as well as her national identity. "It is as a Chinese-American woman that Kingston seeks to define herself" (15).

The ontological search, whether for a justification of existence, or for a mandate in the world, or simply for a father as in Sartre's case or for a defined national and gender identity, or for a home, as in Kingston's case is essentially also a search for language. This will be thoroughly discussed in the upcoming pages.

Part II: The Progression of the Search for Self.

In most literary narrations centering around a quest, whether for wealth or knowledge or lost family members, what counts most is not the beginning, nor the result, but the process of the search itself. It is the same with the quest for self in the two autobiographies under discussion here. The parallels between the two works 1ie in the fact that the development of the search for the self is closely connected with language acquisition. The autobiographers' focus is to present the establishment of selfhood through creative language experience.

Taking Sartre's words "I began my life as I shall no doubt end it: among books" (57), as the starting-point of his search for self, we shall follow him, the boy he was and the narrator he is, on his journey. During his early childhood, deeply convinced, on the one hand, that he was "the undefined made flesh and blood with no right, no function. Sartre on the other hand also kept up the family belief that he was an infant prodigy, an angel, a "wonder" child. These two conflicting ideas about himself made the boy a dual-role actor throughout his childhood, eveninto his maturity. The idea of "imposture" is fully developed in this autobiographical account.

Many incidents he selected for the book support this notion of "play-acting". As Jane P. Tompkins points out: "The metaphor of role-playing allows him to magnify the vicissitudes of his past, transforming the story of an only child growing up in a middle-class family into the drama of a soul victimized by illusions" (277). Within the family surroundings, he acted, pretended, in order to give pleasure. The dramatically affectionate performance with his grandfather was to please the old man. The boy said precocious things which were taken by the adults as prophecies. Constantly lying and acting, he did not only see himself as "an impostor",
"a clown", but also believed that "everyone else was born to play-act to each other" (55). He even regarded his family life as a comedy which "detached him from men and the world" (54), "the worst of it was that I suspected the grown-ups of play-acting. The words they spoke to me were like sweets; but they talked to each other in a very different way" (50). Disappointed by the grown-ups who were "disqualified by their play-acting". Sartre, although objecting to them,accepted to play his part. "I took refuge in the family comedy, whirling, running, flying from one deception to another " (59).

Paradoxically, books saved the boy from the deception around him. The coming of books into his life marks a great turning point in the boy's quest for self, although, later on Sartre saw this as a mistake which he lived with for more than thirty years. Even before he could read, the boy regarded books in a sacred way,

mingled with awe and respect: "They were . . . ancient monuments which had witnessed my birth." (28) With this realization, books became the only permanent testimony of her existence. Words had magic power over the boy as is witnessed in this detailed description of his first experience of reading, or more exactly listening to, a book:

> I was an exile: And then I did not recognize language. ... I realized: it was the book that was talking. Sentences emerged that frightened me: they were like real centipedes ... rich in unknown words, they were in love with themselves and their meanderings and had no time for me ... words left their mark on objects, transforming actions into rituals and events into ceremonies. (31)

Enjoying " the release which tore [him] out of [himself]", Sartre readily escaped from the fake world within and without himself to seek his "true" self in the world of the written word. "I would escape from this boring cemetery and I would go and rejoin life and frivolity in books" (35).

As once he had turned to the mirror for confirmation of his physical existence, now he identified the library with the mirror. According to his definition, "the library was the world trapped in a mirror; it had its infinite breadth, its variety and its unpredictability" (33). It is the illusory world that Sartre sees as reality. Reminiscing about his childhood, what the older Sartre can find are not "rustic childhoods", but a literary one: "I would search vainly in myself for the overloaded memories and sweet unreason of rustic childhoods. I never scratched the soil or searched for nests; I never looked for plants or threw stones at birds. But books were my birds and my nests, my pets, my stable and my countryside" (33).

Inside the world created by the encyclopedia *Grand Larousse* the boy would set out on "real" journeys, play games with words, go "nesting after real birds and chasing after real butterflies perched on real flowers" and see men and beasts with "bodies"," souls" and "essences". However, outside books, he met "vague shapes which more or less resembled the archetypes without attaining to their perfection. This confusion of his experiences through books with the hazardous course of real events" conditions his Idealism and Platonism. (34) The boy obtained his knowledge about the world not from the objects but from ideas. As he said himself, "I moved from knowledge to its object, found ideas more real than things. I met the universe in books" (34). This statement can also explain the title "Words" which " refers not simply to Sartre's youthful immersion in reading and writing but to his conception of reality" (Tompkins 275). As one reviewer has stated, to learn about reality from symbols and to

take words for things is the error Sartre made and upon which he based his "mission to find truth in the human construction of a picture of reality" (Gold 580).

As to his mission, young Jean-Paul was wavering between a religious one and a literary one. As the grandson of a priest, he saw himself as a priest "from childhood": " I had the unctuousness of the princes of the Church and the hearty manner of the priesthood" (23). Although the little boy was convinced that he was "unquestionably dedicated" to "some priesthood", religion to him was still ambiguous: I was both Catholic and Protestant and I united the spirit of criticism with that of submission (64). The debate between his grandparents about religious issues bored him to death. He was led to unbelief through his grandfather's "indifference" and his grandmother's "skepticism". In his family, faith was nothing but "an official name for sweet French liberty" (63), but mysticism suited him, because it "suits displaced persons and superfluous children" (63). Through reading, the boy was indoctrinated with the idea that literature is a kind of religion. As he exclaimed in his boyish voice, "I had found my religion: nothing seemed more important to me than a book. I saw the library as a temple" (39).

Although aware that he had found his vocation in books, the boy did not stop play-acting, not even while reading: "Seen, I saw myself: I saw myself reading as one hears oneself speak"(46). During the early stage of his reading, Sartre read grown-ups' books: *Tribulation d'un Chinois en Chine, Contes Choisis* and *Madame Bovary*. But he did not actually read them; rather, he deciphered them, "discovering language in its raw state" (38). In order to restore the boy to his childhood, Sartre's mother then introduced him to children's books and popular magazines which suited his age, like *Cri-Cri , L'Epatant,* and *Les Vacances*. It was the "genuine" reading he did when he enjoyed a dying of ecstasy" (46). Yet, at the same time, he was aware of their worthlessness. To keep his public image as an infant prodigy, a child prophet, the boy pretended to like Corneille's alexandrines which actually repelled him. He continued to lead this "double life" until his mature days, for "even today", the narrator admits, "I would rather read 'thrillers' than Wittgenstein" (49).

Rich readings cultivate rich imaginations. The boy was no longer satisfied with merely reading stories by other people, he wanted to make stories himself. Assuming that the boy's introduction to reading books marks the turning-point in the progression of the quest for self, so his story-making shall be regarded as another step forward. To read is to accept, while to imagine is primarily an act of creation. Keeping in mind that the boy regarded the mirror as "a form of se1f-protection" (71), he is now seen to protect himself through imagination.

His first stories were "replicas" of the tales he liked reading. Just like young Kingston, who daydreamt about becoming a woman warrior, Sartre identified with the heroes and heroines of adventure and war stories: Pardallan, Griselda and Michael Strogoff. "I became an avenger like everyone else" (74). The idea of being an avenger appears in both *Words* and *The Woman Warrior*. Sartre wished to be "a soldier and avenge the dead" (68), while Kingston would be a female avenger, taking revenge on her family. To avenge is to rebel and to be powerful, which compensates for the child's sense of vulnerable physical existence. In the imaginary world, the fatherless boy would become "a lonely adult, with neither father nor mother, hearth nor home, almost without a name" (75). He would set out on adventures, saving young girls, beheading the villains. The boy realized the difference between his role in real life and in the imaginary content: "it was no longer a question of giving pleasure but of dominating" (72). Only in these imaginary stories, Sartre's existence was needed, even indispensable to the whole universe: "[people] would cry out for me...Someone's lacking here: it's Sartre" (72). Words constitute the mission and justification of his existence.

Sartre continued to perform these "spiritual exercises" until he was introduced to cinema. This visual art added a new dimension to his imagination. Movies, mute at that time, taught him to turn his fantasies into action. Imitating the characters in films, the boy played soldier, adventurer and savior, as he once had dreamt to be. The same plot repeated itself again and again, satisfying the boy's heroic ambition, yet, at the same time, wearying him with its monotony. Becoming addicted to his own imaginations, the boy kept on "doing and undoing the same dictations and the same feats" (82). With the awareness that he was confined in a prison of "repetition," "pretending to be an actor pretending to be a hero," young Sartre realized that these spiritual exercises" were useless to solve the puzzle of his existence (90). "I had felt [the hero's] victory in my bones, yet, it was theirs and not mine: out in the street, I was a supernumerary once more" (79). Outside this prison, back in daily life, the boy was suffering from a miserable loneliness. At home, he was "an adult in miniature" between "one old man and two women"(53). Among other children, his equals and his contemporaries, he lost all his "prodigious intelligence", "universal knowledge", "athletic frame" and "ruffianly poise"(84). He could only resume these in his mute movie-actings. The truth, as seen by Tompkins, is that, "despite his grandiose fantasies, Sartre lacked the confidence to put himself forward among his peers, preferring the security of an imagined victory to the risks of an actual defeat"

(Tompkins 274). The private self and the public one coexist but conflict with each other, waiting for the moment of union i.e. the moment of discovering the true self. The boy's existence remained an unsolved riddle, as he concludes near the end of "reading" : " I could neither find within myself the imperative mandate which would have justified my presence in this world nor recognize the right of anyone else to deliver it to me. (84).

Part III :"If you don't talk, you can't have a personality" (*The Woman Warrior* 180).

In "Narrative and Chronology as Structures of Reference and the New Model Autobiographer", Paul John Eakin classifies both Sartre and Hong Kingston as new model autobiographers, since both of their autobiographical works support his formulation of the problem of structure in autobiography as a function of the relation between experience and its representative in language. According to him, Sartre's *Words* demonstrates how the living of the life he records was already decisively shaped by a consciousness steeped in the teleology that provided him with structures for the employment of a life and the creation of an identity. Furthermore, Eakin points out that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* demonstrates that conviction of the textuality of self can find expression in an intensely narrative structure and practice. The protagonist's "saturation in the structures of myth and legend," Eakin continues, "should have determined the autobiographer's decision to make of the traditional performance of oral narrative an opportunity to create a revolutionary, iconoclastic model of selfhood" (35).Therefore, Kingston's revision of the legend of Fa Mu Fan, from which the title of the book derives, aims to fashion from language a heroic identity for herself .

Convinced that language is, if not the earliest, at least the most important mode of self-expression, Kingston presents her quest for self rather as a quest for the power of speech. The text is written in the way of traditional story-telling. This oral narrative is mostly shaped by the mother's "talk-stories", as the narrator points out: "At last I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story (20). The girl realized:" we failed if we grew up to be but wives and slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen" (19). At this moment, the self starts emerging out of confusion and its limbo state. This wishful identification guided the girl into the right direction of her search. The legend of the swordswoman Fa Mu Tan is recounted in the first person in the chapter "White Tigers". That the "I" shifts from referring to the autobiographer herself to the fictional protagonist Fa Mu Lan suggests a close identification between the two. The basic similarity between them is clarified in the following statement: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs" (53).

Kingston knows two languages. However, both failed her. "I have so many words . . . "chink" words and "gook" words too . . . that they do not fit on my skin" (53).

Among the Chinese community, the derogatory sayings about womanhood reminded Kingston constantly of the shame it was to be a girl. Deeply offended by these sayings, yet, unable to fight back with words, young Kingston could only cry and scream to show her indignation. In order to prove these negative attitudes towards women wrong and to save herself from being condemned to be a wife or a slave Kingston behaved contrary to what was traditionally seen as proper female conduct: to be docile, obedient and frail. Since it was said by the villagers that "there is an outward tendency in females" and that they desert families, Kingston stopped getting A's in school just to show that she was not getting A's for her

future husband's sake (46-48). When she suspected that her parents were planning to marry her off, her behavior became a bit strange. She would take on strange looks, limp about, twist her mouth, wear shoes with open flaps to parties, burn food and break dishes. She did all these things to deny her female identity. When she was still a young girl, she once yelled at her mother: "I'm not a bad girl." Actually, what she wanted to say is, "I'm not a girl"(46).

Refusing to accept herself as a girl in the Chinese sense, Kingston then turned to American society to look for her true self. But belonging to an ethnic minority, she was confronted with other challenges to her quest for self. Repeatedly, the racists called her "nigger yellow" or humiliated her for being a Chinese. In such situations, Kingston imagined herself to be the woman warrior fighting against the racist: "If I took the sword, which my hate must

surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt " (49).Without a sword, Kingston could but whisper back in the "unreliable voice" of a " bad,small-person" (48).

The voice, closely connected with the act of speaking, takes on special importance in Kingston's narration. She describes the sound of her own voice, in the words of a neighbour, as the squeak of "a pressed-duck's" (92). Her time in kindergarten and primary school was covered with darkness when she suffered "a stubborn dumbness." Yet the mysterious silence imposed on the girl is psychological and cultural rather than physical. From a story by her mother, Kingston learned that her own frenum had been cut by her mother when she was a baby. Whenever Kingston asked her mother about this operation, however, the mother's answer was always evasive. Hence, the tongue-cutting became more and more obsessive in its ambiguity. In her mother's explanation, to cut the frenum was

to make the tongue move better in speaking other languages. Contrary to this wish, the girl had extreme difficulty in speaking out in public.Together with her over-consciousness of this alleged linguistic shortcoming, the secret-keeping tradition among Chinese-American immigrants kept the girl from speaking out. There are a number of "unspeakable", or even "unaskable" things recounted in this autobiography. The first chapter opens with an unspeakable family secret, " 'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'What I am about to tell you' "(l). Concealing becomes a part of Chinese culture as shown in the following exchange between mother and daughter:

[Mother]: "I didn't say you were ugly."
[Daughter]: "You say that all the time."
[Mother]: "That's what we're supposed to say that's what Chinese say. We like to
say the opposite."(203)

"Even the good things are unspeakable," such as the traditional holidays, the family ceremonies, and countless superstitious customs. Kingston could not help wondering how the Chinese people could preserve a culture in silence for five thousand years (85). Being immigrants in America, Kingston's family and other villagers also kept many secrets from their enemies, the "Ghosts". i.e. the Americans. "There were secrets never to be said in front of the ghosts, immigration secrets whose telling could get us sent back to China" (183). They even took on new names, "keeping the real ones with silence" (5). Brought up within this cultural environment, Kingston believed that "the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl"(66). "Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America (5). The Chinese people characterized the " ghosts . . . the Americans . . . as those who are noisy, talking during meals, talking about anything (184). To Kingston, talking also distinguished the sane people from the insane ones. "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves" (186).

The insane people portrayed in the book are al1 women: the Crazy lady who was stoned to death by the villagers, the old woman" who died happy, sitting on the steps after cooking dinner", "Crazy Mary" who was locked up in the crazyhouse, Pee-A-Nah as the children called her, a witch woman" (186-189). Kingston herself also bore witness to the tragedy of her own aunt, Moon Orchid. In the chapter "At the Western Palace", she tells the story of her aunt who came from China and ended up dying in an asylum in California. Moon Orchid was persuaded by her sister, Kingston's mother, to come to America in the hope to reclaim her legal

husband who had deserted her and married an American woman. Before coming to the United States, Moon Orchid was content with her life in China, living rather well on her husband's remittances. But the encounter with her former husband caused a complete breakdown of her life. The harsh truth was ex-posed that she was not only a deserted wife, but also a person unable to speak up for herself. As her husband insulted her, saying that she could not talk to the important American guests" he received at his home, and could barely talk to him, Moon Orchid opened and shut her mouth without any words coming out"(152). She could not claim her legal rights, nor accuse her unfaithful husband, because she had no words. The only place where she ended up feeling at home was the mental hospital. As she said to her sister, who went to visit her before her death: "We understand one another here. We speak the same language, the very same. They understand me, and I understand them" (160). Therefore, Moon Orchid's tragedy was not so much the result of her marital disintegration as that of her incapacity to communicate.

The protagonist was so haunted by these crazy women that at one point she even believed that "every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot"(189). Because of her own linguistic handicap, Kingston feared that she might be the doomed one in her family. Yet, to compensate for her taciturnity, the girl developed a rich and active imagination. Paralleling Sartre's juvenile fantasies, Kingston liked to imagine herself in "an adventurous world", using her sword as well as her words: "there were adventurous people inside my head to whom I talked"(189). Sartre once told his mother he was worried because there were talkings in his mind, and Kingston asked her sister if she also talked to people "that [were not] real insider [her] mind." (*Words* 136 & *The Woman Warrior* 190). The anxiety shared by both autobiographers is caused by the increasing pressure inside their mind which is crowded by imaginations and fantasies. Kingston's nightmare about a baby without an anus serves as the psychological illustration of her own linguistic experience. "As a child, I pictured a naked child sitting on a modern toilet desperately trying to perform until it died of congestion" (86). In fact, the "holeless baby" functions as a symbolic analogue for Kingston's anguished view of discourse as necessary to the survival of the self" (Eakin 263). To Kingston who suffered from a "congestion of words", to find an outlet is to save herself.

Kingston's anxiety about speech exploded in an astonishing outburst of violence and hatred against another quiet Chinese girl whose weakness and taciturnity exactly resembled her own situation. When the protagonist yelled at her "alter ego": "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality", she yelled out her own anguish and fear. The merciless torture she inflicted upon the girl was actually an act of self-torture. As a result, Kingston's attempt to force the girl to talk was

defeated. The girl refused to say one word and Kingston herself fell mysteriously ill for eighteen months. Back in school, she had to "figure out again how to talk" (182).

However, the girl's desire to talk was not extinguished but instead, intensified. She prepared in her heart a list consisting of all her misdoings and sought an opportunity to let her

mother know "The true things" about her and to "stop the pain in [her] throat" (197). "If only I could let my mother know the list, she . . . and the world . . . would become more like me, and I would never be alone again" (198). Here, Kingston expresses an idea similar to Sartre's that language performance has something to do with one's salvation. In Sartre's case, it is the writing, while for Kingston it is the speaking. Another parallel between the two texts is pointed out by Eakin :

> Maxine's narrative program, which calls for confessing one item to her mother each day is potentially as death-centered as Poulou's (Sartre's pet-name), for she not only proposes to herself a telling that will lead her to the end of her list, but an event free living that will end her need for list and telling in the first place. (272)

But the girl's confession was refused and stamped "madness", and "craziness" by her mother. With this final push, Kingston was returned back to her isolation and loneliness. Yet, meanwhile, she had broken free of cultural and maternal bounds around her feet.

To look for selfhood is to assert one's independent identity. In *Words* and *The Woman Warrior*, the motif of individuation is closely associated with the progression of self-quest. The quest for selfhood in both texts will achieve its culmination through language experience in freedom.

Part IV: The Discovery of Self-Identity.

The notion of search involves rejections of source as well as connections to it. The process of the quest for self "a combination of separation and attachment"(23). Both *Words* and The *Woman Warrior* demonstrate the movement of the protagonists' quest for self from connection to separation and, eventually, back to reconciliation. The definition of self must be achieved through individuation and preserved in freedom. In both texts, the protagonist's home functions as the primary source of the protagonist's being and its impact on him or her is dominant. Sartre's grandfather- Charles and Kingston's mother Brave Orchid are representatives of this formative force, from which the protagonist strives to

break away in order to assert his/her independence.

A higher stage of se1f-deve1opment is indicated by Sartre the narrator at the end of the "Reading" part: "I was saved by my grandfather: he flung me, without meaning to, into a fresh
imposture which changed my life"(85). This new "imposture" is his practice of writing. Charles' attitude toward the boy's new interest was ambivalent at first. On the one hand, he implicitly
encouraged the boy to write, still keeping up the public image of the boy as an infant prodigy. On the other hand, having deep "contempt for professional writers", he feared that the boy would make his living by his pen (98). But the boy had already made the decision that his vocation would be writing, which had given birth to his existence: "I was born from writing...By writing, I existed." The confrontation between the boy's attempt to achieve independence and the grandfather's dominant power takes place in the "man to man" talk in which the boy placed himself as an equal against his grandfather. Despite the fact that Charles had announced the disadvantages of being a professional writer, the boy "did not doubt for a second "that the writing profession was to be his vocation. later Sartre comments on this argument, [Charles] flung me into literature by the pains he took to steer me away from it"(103). It was in writing that the boy found his freedom:

"I was escaping from the Comedy . . . .By writing, I existed, I
escaped from the grownups . . . the public child gave himself private assignations" (97). Freed from family confinement, Sartre assigned himself an "imperative mandate", using as his motto Chateaubriand's words: "I know very well that I am a machine for making books" (104).

But even in writing, young Sartre still demonstrated a profound need for heroism. He imitated the plots from the "trashy magazines" he loved. Instead of daydreaming and acting out the heroic adventures and battles, now the boy turned them into words. In fact, writing at first was the continuation of the "spiritual-exercises" and "movie-actings" of Part I. Sartre acknowledges: "As an author, I was still the hero: I projected my epic dreams through him . . .I unloaded on to the writer the consecrated powers of the hero" (93,106). Since "heroism was the sole object of [his] desire," Sartre identified the writer with the soldier, and gave himself the mandate "to protect the human race"(103, 107). According to his understanding, both writer and soldier "must have to tackle the worst of dangers and render the most distinguished services to humanity"(106). Thus, the boy was playing a double role in writing. "An imaginary child, I was becoming a real knight errant whose exploits would be real books" (107). What he had said during his "movie-making" period . . ."the joy of cold steel I was in my element " . . . actually foreshadowed his experience with writing (72). Now, the cold steel of the sword was replaced by that

of the pen. "My vocation changed everything: sword-play vanished, writing remained"(121).

Seeing the library as a temple and he himself as the guardian of culture, Sartre also regarded his literary vocation as a religious one. The role of the writer, according to Sartre's conception, became a mixture of soldier and saint. "I confused literature with prayer and made a human sacrifice of it" (113). He assigned himself the task to "devote [his] pen to [the] "redemption" of the human race, holding it back "on the brink of the abyss by [his] mystic offering, by [his] work" (113). With this insight, the "knight errant" gave way to the "writer-martyr". Again, he said, "My commandments have been sewn into my skin: if I go a day without writing, the scar burns me; and if I write too easily, it also burns me" (104). This metaphor of one's mission being carved into one's skin parallels Kingston's description of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan with whom Kingston closely identifies. In both cases, the words sewn into the skin indicate a sense of exigency to fulfill them and serve as the justification of the person's conduct. The difference between the two uses of this metaphor is that Sartre's words were meant for redemption, while in Kingston's interpretation, they were for revenge.

Sartre considered writing not only as his vocation and religion, but also the justification of his right to exist. "I existed only to write and if I said: me . . . that meant the me who wrote" (97). Still living with the erroneous view that ideas were more real than things, Sartre discovered his real identity by writing. That writing gave him the impression of having a grasp and control on reality is specified in the following paragraph:

> To exist was to have a registered trade-name somewhere on the infinite Tablesof the Word; writing meant engraving new beings on them or . . . this was my most persistent illusion . . . catching living things in the trap of phrases: if I put words together ingeniously, the object would become entangled in signs, and I would hold it. (115)

Reviewing the story about the ticketless traveller on the train to Dijon, Sartre again identifies with the culprit. This second recounting of the story differs slightly from the first one, however, in the traveller's attitude towards his own situation. This time, the sense of guilt and anxiety disappears. Instead, the culprit behaves as modestly as the one who has a ticket.

> The ticket-inspector has entered my compartment and is looking at me, but less sternly than he once did: in fact, all he wants is to go away, and let me complete

> the journey in peace; as long as I give him valid excuse of some kind, he will be satisfied. Unfortunately, I cannot find one and, besides, do not even want to look for one. (157)

No longer making up presumptuous excuses to justify his right to be on the train, as the stowaway boy did in the early version of the story, now the traveller with whom Sartre identifies is confident about the completion of his journey. The train and the journey stand for the passage of life and the terminal, Dijon, stands for the end of life—death. The first version of this tale is recounted in the voice of young Sartre as a seven-year-old boy. Since both the narrator and the stowaway boy were at the beginning of their life and trip, the need to justify their existence was pressing. The second version is recounted by the autobiographer Sartre who had already passed middle-age with death not far off. The fact that all the need and desperation of the earlier time are replaced now by mature ease and tacit under-standing reveals a sense of security on Sartre's part. Although he still sees himself as a ticketless traveller, Sartre finds adequate justification to secure his being in the world through writing. Through "painting real objects with real words traced with a real pen", he becomes real himself too. "I knew once and for all, what I had to reply to the ticket -inspector who asked me for my ticket" (101). To justify one's existence is also to find a place for oneself. As a writer, Sartre thought that he had found his place, his "home", his being, as he exclaims; " I am on everyone's lips, a universal and singular language . . . I exist nowhere but I am, at last! I am everywhere (122). Sartre is celebrating the progression from "nobody", "selflessness" to a transcendental self.

Paradoxically, Sartre saw his decision to become a writer both as rebirth and as death:"The day I saw my name in the paper, a spring broke and I was finished;...The two endings are but one: whether I died to be born to glory or glory came first and killed me, the urge to write

contained a refusal to live" (120). The idea of rebirth after death is often associated with the legendary bird Phoenix. According to the legend, Phoenix will burn itself and rise from its own ashes, thus being reborn to immortality. Sartre presents to the reader a similar image:

"I would wait for the lightning flash when I should go up in flames." "I think I'm immortal!" "it
was I . . . rising from my ashes, who was tearing my fame from nothingness by my continually renewed creation"(121,123,147). The autobiographer celebrates this rebirth : "I am

reborn, I have at last become a complete man, thinking, speaking, singing, thundering and asserting himself with the peremptory inertia of matter"(122).

This rebirth to immortal life is, in Pilling's words "a kind of active parallel to the passive birth(s) [Sartre] has described in part one" (98). Hence, Sartre, by giving himself "an ever lasting body", protects himself from passing away in a death as vague as his birth. The "everlasting body" is that of the book. By writing, the writer is transforming his vulnerable body into "twenty-five volumes, eighteen thousand pages of text and three hundred illustrations," with his bones as "leather and cardboard", his "parchment flesh smelling of glue and mildew"(122).

With this incarnation, Sartre's identity as a writer is discovered and confirmed; "I found myself on the other side of the page, in the book"(128). As observed by Pilling, this experience is also analogous to Sartre's experience with the mirror as described in Part I (99). As a boy, Sartre sought his true image in the mirror. As an adult writer, he discovers his true existence in the book. The noteworthy difference between these two cases of mirroring is that by writing the looker becomes the mirror: "I was being looked at, from death to birth."(128) With this awareness, Sartre presents in his autobiography *Words* his life-long struggle for self-identity, writing at the end of the text, as "A whole man, made of all man, worth all of them, and anyone of them worth him" (158).

Similar to Sartre, who finds his true self-identity in the world away from the "grown-ups', especially away from his grandfather Charles' formative influence, Kingston has to cut the "double-bounds around her feet" to achieve her independent personality. The "double- bounds" are those of filiality and Chinese culture. In the last chapter of *The Woman warrior* "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe", Kingston reports how she established her individuation through the acquisition of speech, and, finally reconciled with her family and culture through

the practice of writing. The last chapter is the highlight of the whole book where all the conflicts between past and present, speaking and keeping silence, mother and daughter, myth and reality are solved and the protagonist completes the circle of her self-quest.

The climax of this chapter, as well as of the whole book, takes place during a family-dinner scene when the girl could no longer hold back her words and began to talk back to her mother: "my throat burst open, I stood-up, talking and burbling. I looked directly at my mother and at my father and screamed "(201).

She unpacked her over-loaded consciousness with such violence that the fight was rather an explosion of words. By looking directly at her parents, in a parallel to Sartre's "man to man" talk with his grandfather, the girl established equality between them and Placing herself in opposition to her parents, the daughter announced her decision to leave home: "I'm going away anyway, I am." She gained confidence as she went on: "I can make a living and take care of myself...Not everybody thinks I'm nothing. I am not going to be a slave or a wife"(201). This way of seeing and talking indicates her separation from the family ties. Only away from the family oppression, especially maternal dominance, can Kingston find her independence and freedom. Even as an adult, Kingston can only' survive away from home. The fact that she catches a cold whenever she visits home shows that she still unconsciously suffers from this family oppression.

Once freed from her mother's influence, Kingston starts to see the "talk-stories" which had marked her growth in a different light:

> I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You don't tell me a story and then say, 'This is a true story,' or 'This is just a story.' I can't tell the difference. I don't even know what your real names are, I can't tell what's real and what you make up. (202)

Here emerge two different attitudes toward truth and fiction which are maintained by the two protagonists. For Sartre, "truth and myth are one" (55). He is content with that idealism and accepts illusion as reality. But Kingston, although brought up in the mystified confusion of "talk-stories", tries to unveil the mystery of life and to distinguish sharply the real from the fictional: "To sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living"(205). As opposed to her mother, her home, Kingston establishes her identity as an American instead of a Chinese, a truth-teller instead of a liar. Leaving home is the first step
to take in discerning the difference:

> I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing. 1 learned to think that mysteries are for explanation, I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, dinners with vegetables no more complex than

> peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (204)

To explain the mysteries, to "get it straight, to name the unspeakable”, Kingstone presents her quest for self-identity also as the quest for straightforward speech. “The throat pain alwaysreturns, though, unless I tell what I really think, whether or not I lose my job, or spit out gaucheries all over a party”(205). In fact, *The Woman Warrior* is itself an act of telling the unspeakable. The opening chapter of the book "No Name Woman" is about a family shamemeant to be kept silent, as the mother repeatedly tells the daughter, "You must not tell anyone."

"Don’t tell anyone you had an aunt”(15). But now Kingston “alone devote[s] pages of paper to her”, thus publishing the family secret. Throughout the book, there are "unspeakable" things, such as ritual ceremonies, immigrants' secrets, and forbidden tales which Kingston exposes to the public. She makes her autobiography a testimony of her triumph in the struggle for speech. Like the legendary woman warrior Fa Mu Fan, Kingston wins her battle for individuality with the weapon of words. Moreover, the identity that the text establishes for its narrator is achieved through a process involving both individuation and attachment (26). The text maintains a tension of separation and connection between mother and daughter. During the early years, when the daughter totally depended on the maternal influence, her true self was concealed. When she went to the other extreme, that of absolute separation from her mother, the selfhood she attained did not reach its fullness. In order to complete the circle of the quest, Kingston proceeds to a reconciliation with her mother. She finds "it less scary to go home after yelling at your mother and father. It drives the fear away"(205). Kingston’s dedication of The Woman Warrior "To Mother and Father" indicates a family reunion. The story of the ancient poetess Ts’ai Yen, whose beginning is her mother’s and whose ending is that of Kingston’s, proves to be a work of their collaboration. This final story, echoing the legend of Fa Mu Lan, is about a woman absent from home, who eventually returned. Sharing more similarities with Kingston, Ts’ai Yen lived among the barbarians (Americans) who spoke a different language from Chinese. Even her children could not understand her. 'No higher listener. No listener but myself " (204). It was on the reed pipe whose whistling was the "death sound” on the battlefield that the barbarian soldiers composed music through which Ts’ai Yen understood them. By singing a Chinese song on this instrument, Ts’aiYen obtained understanding from the barbarians. The music, the song---the artistic form of language freed her from her isolation.

> Then, out of Ts'ai Yen's text, which was apart from the others, the barbarians heard a woman's voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear it matched the flutes. Ts'ai Yen sang about China and her fami1y there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering. Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians. (203)

According to Paul John Eakin's interpretation of this episode, the story of Ts'ai Yen "prefigures the resolution of Kingston's own story in the performance of the autobiographical act, the reintegration of the self in culture through the medium of art"(27). It is through writing also the artistic form of language that Kingston fulfills her transcu1tura1 quest for selfhood. She is also a translator, presenting her Chinese experience to American culture. We shall conclude our analysis of *The Woman Warrior* using Kingston's own comment on Ts'ai Yen's "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe": "it translated well"(209).

To sum up, the ending in both autobiographies forms a sort of answer sheet providing solutions to the issues raised in the earlier recounting, such as the right to exist, justification of one's being, one's mission in the world and one's self-identity. Yet the so-called self-discovery is no more an illusion than freedom as claimed by the searchers for selfhood. Both Sartre and Kingston gain alleged freedom away from their family, so they become their own masters. However, the self is still being dominated, with the only difference that before, the self was dominated by others and now it is by the person him/herself. What matters is not the problem of dominating and being dominated, but rather that of by whom the self is being dominated. It is with this illusory knowledge that both protagonists get confirmation of their self-identity by transfiguring their contingent beings into the permanence of the illusion in a book.

Conclusion

I want in conclusion to review some issues concerning the textuality of selfhood as exemplified in *Words* and *The Woman Warrior.*

First of all, both texts are extremely rich in their use of myths, fables, dreams, reflections and imaginations, while historical narratives are ignored or diminished. The fact that most narratives about the authors' lives are arrested before their adulthood, and childhood and adolescence gain special emphasis indicates that the focus of the texts is on the formation of identity which occurs during that period. The self-portrait of the writer is rather of the private and inner world than that of the public one. The self-quest as presented in each text is more contingent and ontological than historical and logical. Also, the autobiographer constructs his/her identity within the social and cultural content, attributing psychological and philosophical significance to it. Secondly, language experience plays an important role in the development of self-identification. The acquisition of language and the use of it mark the stages of self-awareness and self- discovery. In Paul John Eakin's words, "it is through language and the development of imagination in language that man achieves the se1f-ref1exive dimension of consciousness" (193). Both texts demonstrate the power of language in fashioning selfhood. The direct language influence comes, for Sartre, from the words written in books and, for Kingston, from the speech of her mother's "talk-stories". Both Sartre and Kingston establish their identities as writers. By reformulating their relationship with language, i.e. the reader becomes the writer, the listener becomes the speaker, both autobiographers undergo a transformation from the created to the creator.

Thirdly, the writing of autobiography is symbolically the second acquisition of language. It reconstructs the self in its retrospective account and presents it not as it is but as it wants to be. Sartre's *Words* focuses on the autobiographer's decision and becoming to be a writer; thus, it fulfills the author's ambition to transform his vulnerable physical existence into the immortality of words. *The Woman Warrior* aims to be a work of speech, justifying the author's gender; national and cultural identity.

To conclude, in Alfred Kazin's words, to write an autobiography is "to make a home for oneself, on paper...to live [life] again, and in this personal myth and resurrection of our experience, to give honor to our lives" (424).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. 2010. Vintage Books, 1975.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Words*. 2000.Translated by Irene Clephane, Penguin Books, 1964.

Secondary Sources:

Demetrakopoulos, Stephanie A." The Metaphysics of Matrl1inearism", *Women's Autobiography*, edited by Estelle C. Jelinek - Indiana University Press, 1980.

Eakin, John Paul. *Fictions in Autobiography; Studies in the Art of Self-Invention.* Princeton University Press,1985.

Gold, Herbert. "Saint Sartre: The Spaces Between the Words." *The Hudson Review,* Vol. XVII, no.4, winter 1964-65, pp.581-586.

Jay. Paul. *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes*
Cornell University Press,1984.

Jelinsk, Estelle C. ed. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Indiana University Press, 2017.

---. *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present*. Twayne,1986.

Juhasz, Suzanne. "Maxine Hong Kingston/Narrative Technique & Female Identity." *Contemporary American Women Writer: Narrative Strategies,* edited by Catherine Rainwater & William J. Scheick, The University Press of Kentucky, 1985,pp.173 - 189.

Kazin, Alfred. "The Self as History." *Contemporaries: From The 19th century to the Present.* Horizon Press, 1952.

Kim, Elaine H. "Asian American Writers: A Bibliographical Review," *American Studies International*, Vol. XXII, no.2, 2 Oct. 1984, pp.41-78.

Langbaum, Robert. *The Mystery of Identity*. Oxford University Press, 1977.

Murray, David. "Authenticity and Test in American-Indian, Hispanic and Asian Autobiography." *First Person Singular: Studies in American Autobiography*, edited

by A. Robert Lee, Vision Press, 1988, pp. 177-198.

Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press, 1972.

--- . *Studies in Autobiography*. Oxford University Press, 1988.

Pilling, John. *Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny.* London and Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

Silverman, Hugh J. "Sartre's Words on the Self." *Jean-Pau1 Sartre: Contemporary Approaches to His Philosophy*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman and Frederick A. Elliston. The Harvest Press, 1980, pp.85-104.

Spengemann, Williams C. *The Form of Autobiography, Episodes in the History of a literary Genre*. Yale University Press, 1980.

Stone, Albert E. *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

---. "Autobiography in American Culture: Looking Back at the Seventies." *American Studies Internationa1*, Vol XIX, no. 3, pp.3-13.

Tompkins, Jane P. "Sartre Resartus: A Reading of Les Mots." *Romanic Review*, Vol. 76, no. 1 January, 1980, pp.47-56.

Yee, Albert H. "Myopic Perceptions and Textbooks: Chinese-Americans: Search for Identity." *Journal of Social Issues* Vol. 29, no. 2, 1973, pp. 99-113.