The Woman Warrior: Analysis Of No Name Woman

The Woman Warrior: Memoir of Girlhood Among Ghosts is a memoir written by Chinese-American author Maxine Hong Kingston that focuses on female characters from various backgrounds, tales, and traditions. The events of the book unfold in a non-chronological order, with stories taking place either in China or America. Despite the distance and the two opposing lands, The Woman Warrior is Kingston's own biographic tale that addresses her experience as a hyphenated Chinese-American identity as she grows up in America. It portrays a female coming of age story against the backdrop of the misogyny of the Chinese heritage (Ahokas 106)

In the first chapter of the memoir that is titled No Name Woman, Kingston narrates the unfortunate life and death of her father's youngest sister whose existence was erased upon being impregnated by a man who was not her husband and giving birth to illegitimate child. After giving birth to her child in a pigsty, she drowned herself in the village's well together with her new-born baby. This story is actually told by her mother who in return warns her not to tell it to anybody else and to pretend as if she has never heard of it before and to never speak of her aunt especially in the presence of her father.

In many ways, the story of her aunt has several underlying meanings and motifs that echo throughout the whole narrative of this memoir. It acts as a preface for Kingston's memoir, an anecdote.

Firstly, aligning the context with the title, one of the most prominent significance of her aunt's story towards the whole text is the undoubted strength of woman as a fighter and a lover—a true warrior in a world with a misogynistic backdrop. In a world where females are silenced and victimized, her aunt took upon her own self to decide her own fate—committing suicide. Despite its morbidity, Kingston's aunt's power of deciding her own fate echoes throughout the text. In the next mythical-woven chapter The White Tiger, Kingston merges her voice with Mulan's—a female warrior from China who trains for years to finally take upon her father's position as a general in war and chooses to return home as a wife and mother after fulfilling her filial duties—fighting as a warrior and returning home as a lover. The warrior figure is also incorporated into Shaman, a chapter that centres upon Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid as upon herself to revenge the whole village, but taking her beloved child with her. Brave Orchid confronting the sitting ghost, and Kingston confronting her mom, her aunt confront.

Another crucial preoccupation that is asserted throughout the text is the invention of the author's self. Through the talk stories, she "remomerates and reconstructs . . . [her] child's and later [her] teenager's and adult woman's yearnings, hopes, dreams." (Suciu 5) From someone whose morals and achievements are based off of talk stories ranging from cultural myths or historical accounts, Kingston in the end accepts herself as a fully grown, complete individual. The significance of this with the opening chapter is that instead of just retelling another talk story, she reimagines and reinvents the life of her aunt. Through the little details of her infidelity, she conjures up multiple perspectives and fictional possibilities of what could have actually happened to her aunt.

The story of her aunt starts off with the descriptive accounts of her mother and later followed by

her own interpretations and reimaginations. This structure is actually parallel to the whole context of her memoir. The memoir starts off with talk stories— from the tale of the supposedly non-existent aunt to the mythical tale of the female warrior Fa Mulan who disguises herself as a man to carry out her filial duties towards her father. The next part is another talk story focusing on her mother, Brave Orchid and her years as a medical student and practitioner in China. Even in the following chapter where the story focuses on Moon Orchid and her unsuccessful attempt in taking her Americanized husband, Kingston retells this story as heard from her brother.

However, in most part of the last chapter, Kingston tells her own story. Kingston progresses from “rewrit[ing] her mother’s talk stories” (Bolaki 39) to writing her own.

Not only she illustrates her aunt as a rebellious figure, her very action of immortalizing her aunt’s tale and existence onto paper is an act of rebellion itself. Through her imaginative rebirthing of her aunt, Kingston betrays her mother, her family, and her Chinese tradition (Johnston 139) that imposes silence.

In the first chapter of the memoir, she highlights the toxic tradition of silence that is practised by the Chinese people. Upon telling Kingston the story of her aunt, Kingston’s mother made it clear how she had noticed the baby bump on her aunt’s stomach but proceeded to pretend as if it was nothing. The villagers as well, considering that there were no strangers among them and that they are closely there must have seen her body growing over the month but “[n]o one said anything.” Surprisingly, it never occurred among any of them to actually ask or to seek for the truth. What harm is there in asking?

Unlike Kingston who tells the story of her aunt as a means of giving justice, Kingston’s mother tells this story to her as a means of caution. However, to Kingston’s claim, it is done out of necessity as the story of her aunt serves as a warning to teenage Kingston who had just started to menstruate. If Kingston were to engage in the game of silence and pretend, she too would have participated in the family’s life-long punishment towards the aunt.

Her rebellion also develops gradually. When she first heard the story of her aunt, she “cannot ask” (Kingston 9) what her aunt was wearing despite her curiosity because it would mean breaking the silence. However, in the last chapter, she eventually speaks out to her mother about the many things that she has always wanted to ask and to clarify. This is another proof that

Kingston was also confronting and breaking harmful stereotypes in (Ahokas 104)

Lastly, the story of her aunt highlights how the foreign Chinese culture still holds her feet within the familiar American soil.

With such a strong opening chapter, Kingston deliberately shows her stance that flows effortlessly until the end. She rebelled throughout her writings, doing what she can to provide justice for those faced with injustice and to provide voice for those who are unheard. The Woman Warrior’s first chapter clearly provides a foreground for the entire content of the book—that is of a strong female character who will rebel and fight against these written or unwritten rules that traditions are imposing on women. Kingston’s rebellious nature runs a free course throughout the whole text. She takes up this huge treacherous act upon her back and carries it as a responsibility. Deliberately breaking the silence of her aunt, she fulfils her

commitment as a writer and as a fighter who at the same time, strives as a lover who celebrates the heritage of her culture regardless of its perfection.

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