

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

2003

Internal dialogues: Construction of the self in The Woman Warrior

Ann Shirley Modzelewski

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Modzelewski, Ann Shirley, "Internal dialogues: Construction of the self in The Woman Warrior" (2003).
Theses Digitization Project. 2468.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2468>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

INTERNAL DIALOGUES: CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF
IN THE *WOMAN WARRIOR*

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
English Literature

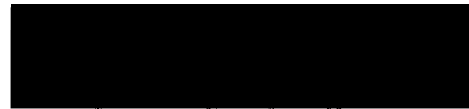
by
Ann Shirley Modzelewski
September 2003

INTERNAL DIALOGUES: CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF
IN THE WOMAN WARRIOR

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

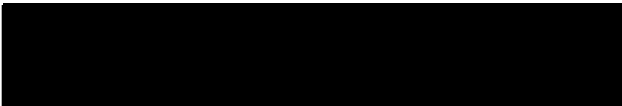
by
Ann Shirley Modzelewski
September 2003

Approved by:

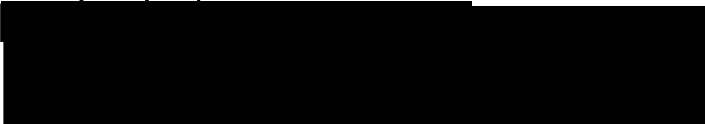


Phil Page, Ph.D., Chair, English

9/18/03
Date



Mary Boland, Ph.D.



Holly Henry, Ph.D.

© 2003 Ann Shirley Modzelewski

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers past autobiographical theory and questions whether it addresses the autobiography of the female writer. Particular attention is paid to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and Sidonie Smith's autobiographical "I." In particular, autobiographies by Harriet Jacobs, Margaret Sanger, and Maxine Hong Kingston are closely examined to reveal their polyvocality, use of the autobiographical "I," and rhetorical strategies maintained in order to create a close relationship with the reader.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the initial guidance of Dr. Jennifer Andersen, feminist theory may have eluded my scholarly interest. I am forever indebted to her for her guidance. In addition, thanks must be given to Professor Emerita Lorelee MacPike. Lorelee's guidance throughout my time at Cal State has been invaluable. Her expertise in feminist discourse, and how to survive the perils in academia have sustained me at times when I thought I would not continue. Finally, I must acknowledge the support that my entire family has given me. Without their support, I would have not been able to accomplish my goals.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the downtown San Diego YWCA Battered Women's Shelter. A place where voices are finally heard and meaningful dialogue begins for the first time for countless women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

CHAPTER ONE: THE FIRST FORAYS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
THEORY 1

 The Traditional Approaches 3

 The Feminist Approaches to Autobiographical
 Theory 14

 Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Dialogism 20

CHAPTER TWO: CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

 Harriet Jacobs and Margaret Sanger 25

 Harriet Jacobs (1818-1896) 29

 Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) 53

CHAPTER THREE: THE WOMAN WARRIOR 69

 Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-) 70

 "No Name Woman" 74

CHAPTER FOUR: CHAPTER NOTES

 Chapter One 95

 Chapter Two 97

 Chapter Three 100

WORKS CITED 102

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST FORAYS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL THEORY

If we consider all that an individual is made up of-- body, mind, soul, psyche, and the acquired ability to communicate--we may assume that they all hold an equal importance. However, communication and the psyche are what bring animation and response to the individual. Our existence is teeming with stimuli from birth. The evolution of the self, as an independent, thought provoking being, comes only through communication and interaction with others. Voices, sounds, temperature fluctuations, people, and ideas form us and shape us largely. Formation of the self becomes an event that has many different components that play an integral role. However, the focus of this thesis is to bring light to the formation of the self through interaction with others. Specifically, how the female writer defines herself through and against the voices of others she encounters.

For centuries, women have been held up to the yardstick of personal self worth and self-definition that patriarchal societies have thrust upon them. The woman's autobiography has become a reflection of the cultural conditioning that the prevailing society has forced her to

write under. Sidonie Smith reiterates this idea in her text, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987):

Since the ideology of gender makes of woman's life script a non-story, a salient space, a gap in patriarchal culture, the ideal woman is self effacing rather than self promoting, and her "natural story" shapes itself not around the public, heroic life, but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that, according to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography. From that point of view, she has no public story to tell. That situating of the autobiographer in two universes of discourse accounts for the poetics of woman's autobiography and grounds its differences. (50)

Clearly, women have a challenge when writing their autobiographies. In the past, academia had not given attention to the woman's autobiographical text. However, within the last twenty years theory has emerged that addresses the autobiography written by women.

Feminism, in large part, is responsible for the new interest and scholarly debate that is now centered on the female autobiography. This new research is considering

many facets from which theorizing can proceed. Therefore, in the spirit of inclusiveness that is a hallmark of feminist theory this thesis will discuss past and new theoretical paradigms for theorizing women's autobiography.

Traditionally, feminism asks the reader to consider concepts that have not always been addressed by academia; this thesis embraces such a concept. Linguistic theory (Bakhtin) and the autobiographical "I" (Sidonie Smith) will be utilized to uncover narrative strategies that woman writers use to realize their textual selves. Furthermore, the suggestion will be made that the autobiographical act is far more than a record of one's life, yet; it is an attempt at continuing the events that create the drive for the autobiographical act in the first place.

The Traditional Approaches

Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres: yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of abundant overflowing, or a free, anarchic, and unclassified productivity, but because of the trait of participation itself.

---Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre"

Only since World War II has the genre of autobiography been considered worthy of scholarly attention. Before this period, autobiographies were considered only for the information that they provided about the lives of their authors. Furthermore, these works studied the genre; they did not postulate any theoretical paradigms from which the genre could benefit from. Interests in the form, style, or factors surrounding the autobiographical act were not considered. After World War II, however, interest in autobiography as more than a means to learn information about the autobiographical subject began to emerge.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of two works that studied autobiography. The first, written by Georg Misch in 1907, was titled *History of Autobiography in Antiquity*.¹ It considered the growth of the concept of the individual in autobiography from Egyptian inscriptions, through Greek love lyrics, to Augustine's *Confessions*. Then in 1909, Anna Burr's text *Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative Study (1909)* focused upon French memoirs and British Quaker journals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.² According to Estelle Jelinek in her text, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography From Antiquity to the Present*, "Burr's

concern with the seriousness, sincerity, and high moral character of autobiographers leads her to deplore the only American autobiography she mentions, Benjamin Franklin's, for its typically American materialism" (1). After Burr's anthology of autobiography, it would be fifty years before autobiography saw another inquiry into life writing. The publication of two bibliographies of autobiography, William Matthews' *British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written Before 1951*³ (1955) and Louis Kaplan's *A Bibliography of American Autobiographies up to 1945*⁴ (1961), were both critical inquiries into the act of autobiography.

During this period, the emphasis within autobiographical studies centered on whether or not autobiography was indeed worthy of being considered a genre. Many voices began to emerge in favor of autobiography being considered more than a mere historical representation of events in one's life. In 1954, Wayne Shumaker was one of the first to assert that autobiography was indeed a genre distinct from biography, and Georges Gusdorf argued, "the literary, artistic function of autobiography is...of greater importance than the historical and objective function" (Jelinek 2). The first

scholarly approaches to the definition, critical study, and in-depth analysis of the autobiographical act were about to take place, absent only the role of the numerous autobiographies written by women. Left out of this new theoretical dialogue were the memoirs, autobiographies, and life narratives that women had been writing for centuries. However, women and their stories would not remain on the periphery for long.

Eventually, autobiographies began to be read as literary texts and not simply historical documents. Georges Gusdorf was key in the post-formalist regime of criticism to consider autobiography. As Sidonie Smith states in her text *Women, Autobiography, Theory; A Reader*, Gusdorf's essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," written in 1956, "defended autobiography as an art and representative of the best minds of its time because it recomposes and interprets life in its totality" (8).⁵ Gusdorf's theory that the pre-condition of autobiography was "a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" became the basis for his theoretical underpinning of the autobiographical act (Smith 29). For Gusdorf, one's self-consciousness was the "late product of a specific civilization" (29). Gusdorf's concept that autobiographical selves are, as Susan Stanford Friedman

terms it in her essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," "constructed through the process of writing and therefore cannot reproduce exactly the selves who lived" was a postulate that had far-reaching implications for autobiography. The Self that emerged from the act of autobiography was finally present within autobiographical studies. Gusdorf's theory of the individual, and the eventual genesis of the authorial self, laid a groundwork that paved the way for future theoretical considerations within autobiography. Many autobiographies could be read through the lens that Gusdorf posited; however, Gusdorf's theory raised problems when confronted with a text that was not a product of an individualistic society. As Susan Stanford Friedman reiterates:

The individualistic concept of the autobiographical self that pervades Gusdorf's work raises serious theoretical problems for critics who recognize that the Self, Self-creation, and Self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-Western peoples. The model of separate and unique self-hood that is highlighted in his work and shared by many other critics

establishes a critical bias that leads to the (mis) reading [sic] and marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities in the processes of canon formation. (72)

The formation of the Self as a part of group identity is not addressed by Gusdorf. In addition, Gusdorf's emphasis on the creation of the Self as a separate being does not address the theoretical considerations of the psychological shaping of the Self as formulated by scholars such as Nancy Chodorow.⁶ In the early eighties, Chodorow investigated the "differentiating process of ego formation" before the oedipal stage that Sigmund Freud considered formative in the ego development of a male. Chodorow argued that a mother interacts differently with her male and female offspring. Because she is "a person who is a woman and not simply the performer of a formally defined role" the mother then "identifies anticipatorily" with her daughter, thus compounding the process of separation (47). On the other hand, a male child must turn away from the mother to form a relationship with his father that is more positional rather than relational. Thus, a boy learns to define himself as "that which is not feminine inside himself, and importantly, by denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers to be feminine in the

outside world" (50). As a boy turns away from his mother, a rupture occurs and a "scheme of difference" takes place. Females, however, develop a more fluid ego boundary because they suffer no rupture in the identification process with their mothers. Thus, a more permeable ego boundary is realized and remains with the girl over her lifetime. Chodorow writes:

Feminine identification is based not on fantasized or externally defined characteristics and negative identification, but on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in every day life, and exemplified by the person...with whom she has been more involved. It is continuous with her early childhood identifications and attachments. (51)

Consequently, for girls, the concept of Self is derived as like the Other, whereas boys get a sense of Self as unlike the other. This postulate has far-reaching implications for autobiography. For women the individualistic concept that has sought to define their life experiences does not fit. Moreover, for the woman who is in a society where the individualistic concept is not prominent, her life story will fit even less neatly into existing theoretical

paradigms that seek to define her life experience and eventual formation of the Self.

Unfortunately, Gusdorf's theory did not address the unique experience of a woman, or the ego formation of a person whose identity was not grounded in Western society. According to Stanford-Friedman, Gusdorf associated the presence of Self with the rise of European countries and frequently related the concept of the Self with the rise of the industrial revolution. For Gusdorf, the endemic Western experience was the medium from which his postulates arose. For Gusdorf:

Autobiography does not develop endemically in cultures where the individual does not oppose himself to all others; he does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community... [Where] lives are so thoroughly tangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being.

(Stanford-Friedman 29-30)

Unfortunately, according to this theoretical paradigm, Gusdorf's "isolated being" is the premise for the act of autobiography. The focus upon the Self as a distinct unit, separate from one's society, is where the autobiographer's writing originates. Unfortunately, this notion excludes those who do not participate in such an environment. Of course, Gusdorf is not alone in seeing the autobiographical act as a reproduction of a solitary existence. In the early seventies, James Olney envisioned the autobiographical act as the result of a "teleological unity." For Olney, the autobiographer is "surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness grown out of a unique heredity and unique experience...Separate selfhood is the very moment of creation" (20-22). Although Olney's theoretical exploration of the "teleological unity" of the Self places the subject (the Self) at the center of the autobiographical act, at the same time it isolates the subject. For Olney, an autobiography is

A single, radical and radial energy originating in the subject center, an aggressive, creative expression of the Self, a defense of individual integrity in the face of an otherwise multiple, confusing, swarming, and inimical universe. (15)

Again, the autobiographical act is not realized until the self is a discrete unit of one's environment. The Self becomes a "defense" against one's society, not the natural outgrowth of interaction. Consequently, for the author who is coming to autobiography within a society where one's Self is a by-product of those who surround the author, "separate selfhood" can never be realized. The concept of the "teleological unity" of the Self leaves the experience of those who are outside the circle of Western experience still searching for a way to articulate their autobiographical voice. Olney does, however, conceptualize the coming to selfhood as a series of "metaphors." For Olney:

The Self expresses itself by the metaphors it creates and projects, and we know it by those metaphors; but it did not exist as it now does and as it now is before creating metaphors. We do not see or touch the Self, but we do see and touch its metaphors: and thus, we "know" the self, activity, or agent, represented in the metaphor and the metaphorizing. (34 Olney)

The concept of metaphors advancing the realization of the Self through autobiography is valuable indeed. For autobiography is always a series of metaphors. These

metaphors may be the stories of others reiterated, or the metaphors of our life stories, they are the seeds of the life narrative. Moreover, a theoretical exploration of a text that has its meaning imbued in the metaphoric incidents of one's life can benefit greatly from such an approach. Because the remembering of one's life stories is by nature a remembrance of events that place the Self in a meaningful position juxtaposed to such events, metaphors ground our experiences with others. Through metaphors, then, our life story is told from the position of another life story. The continual dialogue of others, the Self's relation to itself and to others, and the meaning derived from metaphors place the autobiographical subject in the position of making meaning out of stories; thus the autobiography is realized. If one is to take a theoretical perspective of reading life narratives, the theories advanced by Gusdorf and Olney are both valuable methods to interpret autobiography because they both speak to the Self that emerges out of the autobiographical act. Unfortunately, where these theories fall short is in their attempt to articulate a position that is different from the Western experience, and/or different from a male's experience of identity formation. The male's experience in a Western society is the focal point of such postulates;

consequently, the non-male, non-Western life narrative is left at the periphery of serious scholarly debate.

On the other hand, feminist autobiographical theory addresses this difficulty by focusing specifically on a woman's experience when undertaking the autobiographical act; as well, feminist theory considers more than the Western experience and seeks to define the autobiographical act as a complex mélange of cultural, societal, familial, and gendered constructed experiences, all of which contribute to the Self that emerges as a product of the autobiographical act.⁷ Consequently, the inclusionary vision of feminism provides a fertile medium for the reading of a non-Western autobiography.

The Feminist Approaches to Autobiographical Theory

The subject...--female autobiographies, memoirs, letters, and diaries--represents one of those cases of maddening neglect that have motivated feminist scholarship since 1970. This body of writing about the self has remained invisible, systematically ignored in the studies on autobiography that have proliferated in the past fifteen years.

--Domna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph* (vii)

Although women have been writing autobiographies for many centuries, criticism of women's autobiography is only two decades old. The reason for this glaring oversight is quite simple. As Sidonie Smith states in her Introduction

to, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, "Women's autobiography, seldom taken seriously as a focus of study before the seventies, was not deemed appropriately complex for academic dissertations, criticism, or the literary canon" (4). There were scholars who took the genre of autobiography seriously; however, they restricted their study to the autobiographies of men, not women. The scholarly attention that these autobiographies received assured that their place in the canon. However, interest in the autobiographical act was to quickly change focus. Women, and their life stories, were beginning to get the attention that they so fervently deserved. The scholarly attention that was now being placed on women's autobiographical writings can be traced the second wave of feminism that occurred during the early to late nineteen-seventies. During this second wave of feminism, the role of women within society was being re-evaluated; therefore, women's life stories gained more prominence in academia and abroad. Finally, the 1980s marked a decade when autobiographical studies and feminism would emerge as a new and cogent force that would place women's autobiographical practices squarely in the scholarly debate of autobiographical theory. However, feminist criticism had a monumental task to undertake.

For centuries, the autobiography was read and considered in terms of the male experience, more specifically, the Western male experience. The autobiography had long been considered a site from which the differences of men and women were articulated through stories that placed the male in a heroic and dominant position implicitly over women. Even more troubling was the lack of serious scholarly attention and debate that women's autobiographical writings were receiving. This exclusionary practice denied women's life narratives a place in the canon. Thus, feminist attention was placed upon recovering the stories of women who had been denied their place in the scholarly circle. In 1979, a series of studies mapped a tentative canon for women. Mary G. Mason and Carol Hurd Green authored *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings By Women*.⁸ The text considered the writings of the late-medieval writers Margery Kemp and Julian of Norwich, as well as Margaret Cavendish and Anne Bradstreet. Mason and Green used their text to create a gender distinction that linked the female to the realm of the "Other." This postulate would take feminist autobiographical criticism in the direction of seeking the qualities of the writing, actions, and development of the Self by women as Other, or as being othered.

Many feminist critics followed Mason and Green and their concept of the subjectivity of women. Their approaches to reading autobiographies varied. Crossing disciplinary boundaries that took feminist criticism into areas such as psychoanalytic theory, linguistics, sociology (gender construction), and the relationship of language and women to the autobiographical act (socio-linguistics), feminist autobiographical criticism sought to engage the subjectivity that women were under while writing their life narratives in their scholarly discussions. Theory that addressed the Black woman's experience, the lesbian autobiography, sexualities of women, and the experience and agency of women were advanced and received with much interest.⁹ Focuses on the gendered identity of women were common threads among many of the theories being advanced. However, scholarship was about to emerge that would consider the aspect of women's textuality and women as a product of a specific cultural production that had been present for centuries. Rather than simply explore how women differed from men in their gender construction and modes of re-telling their life stories, theory was emerging that centered on the way women represented the "I" in autobiographical discourse.

In the early 1980s Sidonie Smith became, and still is, a leading voice in the imperative to assert that women's "autobiographical subjectivity is enacted in cultural spaces between the personal 'I' and the body politic" (Smith and Watson 141).¹⁰ For Smith, autobiography is performative in that the "I" of autobiographical discourse is a result of the performance of autobiography in and of itself, "the interiority that is said to be *prior* to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling" (Smith and Watson 145). Thus, the "I" of autobiography is a result of the synthesis that occurs when the author writes her life narrative and finds herself reflected within the pages of the text. In Smith's text, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (1987), the "I" of autobiography is described as a "fictive persona." This persona is "involved in a kind of masquerade, the autobiographer creates an iconic representation of a continuous identity that stands for, or rather before, her subjectivity as she tells of this 'I' rather than that 'I'" (Smith 47). This notion of the "I" of autobiographical discourse has spurred many to theorize that the "I" present in the text is a fictionalized "I." Since autobiography, by its

nature, can never be factual (because it is always a rendering of one's position within the course of events), the "I" that is presented is limited and, at best, a representation of an assumed "I." ¹¹ Smith's concept of the "I" has far reaching implications within autobiographical studies because it allows for the realization and product of autobiography to be a sense of Self; Smith's theory allows for scholarly discussion to take place that centers on the autobiographical voice of the female author. Smith theories differ from Gusdorf's and Olney's theoretical claims by placing the woman's experience at the center of her postulates. Consequently, Smith's theory better addresses the autobiographical act when performed by women.

For Smith, the "I" is realized as a result of the autobiographical act. Whether this "I" is fictionalized, is realized as an authentic aspect of one's psyche, or is simply a byproduct of the author's attempt at achieving a voice through which she can claim herself a speaking subject, the Self that emerges is multi-vocal and is realized as part of the text, in much the same way as Mikhail Bakhtin has postulated. Smith's postulates are based upon the woman's experience, and how her interaction or dialogue with others shapes her Self. Smith agrees with

Bakhtin that the interaction, or dialogue, of others, while the metaphors of the life narrative are being recomposed, is where the Self finds much of its origin. Fundamentally, then, "the Self that autobiography inscribes is constituted from the polyphonic voices of discourse, as Mikhail Bakhtin persuasively argues..." (Smith 48). The Self that is constituted through the exchange of the interaction or dialogue with others speaks to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. However, Bakhtin's approach to the emergence of Self through dialogue centers on the male experience. Thus, both approaches (Smith and Bakhtin) are necessary for a more complete reading of autobiographies written by women.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Dialogism

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others.

---M.M. Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*

In the early 1930s, the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin contended that language itself was the medium for the unconscious; within this medium, social groups have many words, meanings, and connotations. He termed this linguistic cocktail of self-actualization and definition within the framework of multiple, yet limited meanings

"heteroglossia." The individual, according to Bakhtin, is a conglomeration of the very dialogic nature of man or woman. For Bakhtin, the Self is more than a result of a solitary existence. "Social man" he writes,

is surrounded by ideological phenomena, by object-signs of various types and categories, by words in the multifarious forms of their realization (sounds, writing, and others), by scientific statements, religious symbols and beliefs, works of art, and so on. All of these things in their totality comprise the ideological environment, which forms a solid ring around man. And man's consciousness lives and develops in this environment. Human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. ... In fact, the individual consciousness can only become a consciousness by being realized in the forms of the ideological environment proper to it: in language, in conventional gesture, in artistic image, in myth, and so on. (Medvedev 14)

Through Bakhtin's dialogic imagination, the independent, solitary existence, which defines Western thought, is

reformulated. The Self is no longer an atomized unit, it becomes as Smith states "a product of and conduit for a variety of discourses that structure ways of talking about Self" (76). Thus, the forms that selfhood takes are necessarily "populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin 124). The cultural expectations, mores, and meanings that are assigned to the metaphors of life are filtered through the stories of others; consequently, the Self emerges as a byproduct of these experiences and dialogues. As Bakhtin himself asserts, "the word in one's voice is always someone else's," thus our Self, or the "I" of autobiographical discourse is embedded in polyphony (Holquist 72).¹² The speaking subject of the autobiography is always posterior to the dialogue in which it was formulated. Because this is so, an "internal clash" must occur between one's own words and the words of others entering the text. These competing voices create the desire to conform as well as the desire to resist within the author, which, in turn, dictates what will be reiterated in the text and how the life story is presented. Eventually, these competing voices must coalesce; thus, the authorial voice is created and reiterated in the text. Such a notion will serve to enhance a reading of autobiography that is invested in the

dialogic engagement of those who surround us throughout our lifetime. Consequently, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is well suited for autobiographies that place the Self in dialogue with others that surround it, especially non-individualistic cultures, because Bakhtin's theory of dialogism addresses the polyphony of voices that surround and eventually formulate the Self.

However, Bakhtin did not consider "woman" in his postulates. Consequently, his theory in total is insufficient to account for the differing types of dialogue that occur in a woman's autobiography. Alone Bakhtin's postulates fail to recognize basic differences in ego formation and relational aspects of a woman's coming to selfhood, therefore, this gap does not allow for a full and informed reading of a polyphonic autobiography that centers on the life of a woman. However, when united with Sidonie Smith's concept of the autobiographical "I," (which considers the differences of ego formation and coming to selfhood for women) readings of autobiography that recognize the influence of others upon the speaking subject in autobiography as it pertains to a woman's experience can be more complete. Through this dual lens, autobiographies that are invested in experiences that are non-Western in origin, and reflect the unique cultural

heritage of other traditions, allow greater insight into the development of the "I" or Self of autobiographical discourse as mediated through others.

Consequently, the integration of these theories (dialogism and the concept of the autobiographical "I") allows for a fuller and more productive reading of how autobiography is produced in autobiographies such as Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*. Together with Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical formation of the Self, and Smith's concept of the autobiographical "I", a reading of autobiographical texts that is premised on the community influence of the individual can be comprehended with more insight and understanding concerning the formation of the Self as it occurs in such a society. Evidence of the reiteration of voices that surround the speaking subject when coming to the autobiographical act can be found in numerous autobiographies written by women. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, Margaret Sanger's *An Autobiography*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts* are examples of the polyphonic autobiography that can benefit from the union of a theoretical perspective that embraces Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and Smith's theory of the autobiographical "I."

CHAPTER TWO

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Harriet Jacobs and Margaret Sanger

Coming to the autobiographical act is not simple. The author must make decisions that will have far-reaching implications regarding her text. The voices that the writer allows to come into the text, as well as the representation of her Self or autobiographical "I," are both fundamental components of autobiography. Moreover, the social, cultural, historical moment in which the author resides in dictates her construction of the text. The societal expectations and/or limitations placed upon an author subject the author to certain stylistic qualities within her writing, as well as does the content of the stories she chooses to narrate. Additionally, questions that may be asked by the author are, who is my intended audience what response do I want from them? What specific stories will I address to this audience? How should my text be shaped to elicit the response that I want to obtain from my readers? Should I speak in first person? How should I engage my audience in the conversation that the text will provide? Finally, do I need to justify my actions to my readers? Coming to the

autobiographical act can be a complex negotiation between author and reader.

Because intent dictates the manner in which an autobiography is shaped, authors must be diligent concerning the ongoing dialogue that is taking place as the reader reads, formulates an opinion, and draws conclusions. Authors who are writing their life narratives engage these issues in differing ways depending upon their circumstances and goals. As the following two autobiographies will demonstrate, there are myriad ways to overcome limitations placed on the writing of an autobiography, and although they may not initially appear to be polyphonic texts, they are. For Harriet Jacobs, the above considerations were key in writing her narrative. Jacobs was a slave woman living under conditions over which she had little control. Jacobs had to illustrate she was "good woman" despite her circumstances, make herself likable despite the "bad" things she had done, speak convincingly to a White audience although she was Black, and above all, although speaking from the position of a woman, she had to be authoritative if she were to have her narrative taken seriously. If she failed in her attempt to unmask the horrors of slavery, she failed on multiple levels. Slavery, and its atrocities, might not be taken

seriously; moreover, the articulate voice of a female slave would be considered a fictional one, thus her autobiography would have been read as a "story," not an actual account of her life. Much research into Jacobs' slave narrative has been undertaken in academia. Some critics focus on the establishing legitimacy of the narrative, while others read Jacobs' narrative as a unique form of the genre because it was one of the first to openly discuss issues of sexual harassment and detail the life of a slave in such an open manner. For Margaret Sanger, the autobiographical act had a dissimilar purpose. Sanger had already stimulated the reform that she was fighting for (access to birth control for women), but her story of the trials and tribulations that led to her successful movement had not been told. Additionally, for Sanger, the autobiographical act served as medium in which she could reflect on her life. Since her much of her time was devoted to other's, the autobiographical act gave Sanger an outlet to investigate her own experiences. And as Bakhtin's notion of dialogism will demonstrate, the autobiographical act is another form of dialogue with society (a dialogue in which the author speaks back through the past to future readers). Furthermore, Sanger's autobiography has not been analyzed in academia for its

autobiographical quality. Criticism that addresses the political issues that Sanger faced has been written; however, the autobiography and its many voices and reasons for Sanger writing it have not been fully explored. Jacobs and Sanger had dissimilar reasons for articulating their life stories on paper. For Jacobs the reform that she was seeking was yet to come. For Sanger, the reform was realized, but the story had not been told; however, the way in which Sanger would re-tell her struggle for reproductive rights was as crucial as it was for Jacobs. Because Sanger had participated in activities that at the time of her autobiography were still considered "indecent," Sanger had to express to her audience that she was concerned with enhancing the lives of women, their children, and men to a certain extent. Thus, she needed her readers to understand the reasons for her actions, and as well, accept her authorial voice as an accurate echo of the past.

As considered in chapter one, Bakhtin and Smith have postulated that the autobiographical "I" is a conglomeration of the voices that surround that author. The following autobiographies will demonstrate how the polyphonic voices that surround the speaking subject emerge in the text to become the writers' dialogue with

their audience in an attempt to achieve textual selfhood. Jacobs' and Sanger's autobiographies speak to the postulates that Bakhtin and Smith has provided by demonstrating the multi-vocality that surrounded the author. Within these texts, voices emerge that recreate the medium through which the author comes to textual selfhood. The reader becomes privy to this conversation, and becomes part of the dialogue. By means of Bakhtinian and feminist insights, the dialogue present in the following autobiographies will demonstrate how the Self is created and reiterated for the marginalized woman and offered up to the reader as yet another form of dialogue that may spur the readers' own consideration of their unique selfhood.

Harriet Jacobs (1818-1896)

Dominance of the past, which returns like a nightmare to hang over the unredeemed present, can only be smashed by the analytic power of a form of remembering which can look calmly at what has happened as history without seeing it as morally neutral.

---Jurgen Habermas

In the nineteenth century, the institution of chattel slavery gave rise to a new American literary form, the slave narrative.¹ According to John Sekora, the emancipatory novel was important then and now because:

outside the narrative, slavery was a wordless, nameless, timeless time. It was a time without history and without imminence. Slaveholders sought to reduce existence to the psychological present and to mandate their records as the only reliable texts. ("Comprehending Slavery" 163)

As a result, the emancipatory narrative refuted the very foundation of slavery. Slave narratives, however, were more than a means of documenting the institution of chattel slavery; they were, in William L. Andrews's words, "a profound interrogation of the relationship of power, sex, and morality within the slave system" ("Changing Moral Discourse" 227). An exceptional example of such a narrative is *Incidents in the Life of A slave Girl*.

Published in 1861, the narrative was written by Harriet Jacobs under the pseudonym Linda Brent and edited by L [ydia] Maria [Francis] Child. During this period, the civil war was beginning; the Confederate States of America had been formed, and before the end of the year Abraham Lincoln would state that the war was "a People's contest...a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men..." (The History Place). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* portrays

Brent's life as a female Slave in South Carolina, and pays particular attention to the daily sexual advances by her master Mr. Flint. However, the open discussion of sex, adultery, and the horrors of slavery were not topics that were acceptable in literature during the ante-bellum period; accordingly, the manner in which Jacobs related her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, was fundamental to its reception in 1850. As Sidonie Smith states, "conventions that are culturally and historically specific govern storytelling options, narrative plotting, and the uses of remembering" (Smith and Watson 71). Consequently, Jacobs had to employ strategies that would "speak" to her readership. Jacobs considered her audience to be primarily "White Abolitionist Sisters" in the North, and White men who were against Slavery. These were among the people Jacobs hoped would read, approve, and act upon her book as possible audiences.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is a slave narrative, which exemplifies the skillful writing of a slave woman. Jacobs' goals as both a slave and a woman were to expose the atrocities of chattel slavery (as well as call to arms the fight against slavery), and reveal the notion that slave women were considered based solely on their reproductive capabilities and ability to work by

white slave owners. Jacobs' use of current genre form (the sentimental novel), an engaging narrator, utilization of the tenets of the "Cult of true Womanhood," and the dialogue that was present in her life creates a narrative that succeeds in explicating the life of a slave woman. Via these conventions, Jacobs is able to instill sympathy and intimacy within readers, thereby creating an atmosphere that is conducive to elicit a response from readers that would lead to their participation in the abolition of slavery. In addition, Jacobs was aware of what her readers read and how it might influence their actions. With this knowledge, Jacobs could structure her narrative to create the effect she desired.

Jacobs' text participates in the tradition of borrowing from other genres to reach a wider readership, which was a common practice among authors of the era. Since the Sentimental novel was a genre of literature widely popular during the era, Jacobs borrowed from this genre. Jacobs' knowledge of this genre's qualities speaks to her shrewdness as an author and her awareness of the powerful results that drawing upon the genre could elicit. Since the audience of the slave narrative would likely be readers of other literature, borrowing from a genre that was familiar to her readers enabled Jacobs to create a

level of familiarity with her readers that would be conducive to the close relationship that was required in order to garner sympathy.²

The Sentimental novel was innovative as a genre because it attracted a new audience to literature. The Sentimental novel "exalted feeling above reason and raised the analysis of emotion to a fine art" (Changing Moral Discourse 229). The assumptions underlying the sentimental novel were Jean Jacques-Rousseau's doctrine of the natural goodness of man and his belief that "moral development was fostered by experiencing powerful sympathies" (Changing Moral Discourse 229). Markman Ellis, the author of *The Sentimental Novel: The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*, describes the audience of the Sentimental novel by stating:

This audience was not only numerically larger than that previously attracted, it was also notable because it was made up of a new social alliance. The sentimental novel addressed women as much as men and, increasingly, those who belonged to the middle station of life, the social level between manual workers, and the gentry that Dorothy Marshall characterized as

the Middling Sort. (Changing Moral Discourse
231)

Because qualities of Sentimental literature emphasized the cultivation of sensibility, the glorification of virtue, the preservation of family life, the revival of religion, and the achievement of a utopian society, the genre served to lessen the "indecentcy" of Jacobs' stories and, as well, create a rapport with the readers that would last throughout the text. Jacobs' so-called indecencies are portrayed as result of a society that did not hold the above virtues in esteem because she was forced to participate in events that she had no control over. For Example, Jacobs writes:

When he told me I was made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt so strong. (16)

Jacobs is simultaneously reiterating the dialogue that she has with her master in order to show the commanding presence that he had over to her readers, and at the same time she is displaying the heteroglossia that surrounded her as she formulated her sense of Self. Early in the text this excerpt illustrates the rhetorical strategy of first

conveying to her audience she was not a willing participant. For Jacobs, the familiar genre form could potentially temper the representation of her Self in the text that would manifest itself through stories and narrative strategies. ² Jacobs recasts herself as a character within a Sentimental novel; thus, she is presenting herself as a virtuous woman. The "virtuous" woman therefore could override the reader's any feelings of indecency that they the reader may experience. Thus, Jacobs is cast as victim of indecent advances rather than indecent person in her own right. In Yvonne Johnson's words:

Because the writer and narrator of this text are the same, the narrator's voice and the author's sense of Self are interwoven throughout the presentation of the text. Thus, the Self-interpretation emerges rhetorically from the autobiographer's engagement with fictive stories of Selfhood and from the polyphonic voices of discourse. ("The Voices of African-American Women" 31)

Accordingly, Jacobs' Selfhood is tied to her authorial voice and those who surrounded her. Weaving voices of those that surrounded Jacobs allows the reading audience

to participate in the dialogue that Jacobs was a part of, a crucial aspect indeed if Jacobs was to convincingly portray her position as a slave. If the reading audience could "hear" the voices that surrounded Jacobs, this would allow them to participate in the dialogue itself. Thus, the continuation of voices coalescing to create in autobiographical "I" is shared by the reader. The reader becomes an active participant in the past and current dialogue that is present within the text. Bakhtin's concept of the other constituting the word one speaks is realized and used to create yet another dialogue, and Smiths' autobiographical "I" is realized. The reader gains an insight into what dialogue was akin to for a woman of the era; in addition, the ways in which the dialogue of male slave owners contributed to the construction of an authorial voice that was subjected to a realm of otherness is voiced. Consequently, Jacobs' narrative voice was central to her readers understanding her aim. Jacobs required a rapport with the readers that would engage her readers in conversation with her. Thus, the inception of the relationship between Jacobs and her readers would be based upon a conversation with Jacobs herself. However, Jacobs' authorial voice on a personal or very intimate level is not present in the text, because in Angelyn

Mitchell's words, "it held no currency in rhetorical value" ("Visions and Revisions of Slavery" 8).³ Because she speaks through her fictive narrator Linda Brent, a certain distance remains throughout the text. To bridge this distance between her fictive narrator and her reader, Brent exacted a strategy that Yvonne Johnson terms an "engaged narrator."⁴ An engaged narrator, simply stated, is one who addresses the reader in the first person. This type of narrator encourages the reader to identify as much as possible with the author's plight. Evidence of this rhetorical strategy can be found throughout *Incidents*. For example, "Reader it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully, what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage" (29). This passage affirms the concept that Jacobs desired the one-on-one relationship with her reader that would stimulate a feeling of closeness. It is also evidence that Jacobs is forcing readers to examine their own feelings regarding slavery. Jacobs' appeal to the reader in first person creates a break in the reading, which forces the reader into conversation with her. The result is a reader that is participating in more than reading. Introspection, and all of its ramifications, is placed upon the reader,

creating an internal dialogue that the reader must reconcile. Thus, an undeniable accounting of one's stance regarding slavery had to be undertaken.

Furthermore, the text illustrates the significance of dialogue and Jacobs' awareness of the power of rhetoric. Jacobs' writes, "But, alas,! We all know that the memory of a faithful slave does not avail much to save her children from the auction block" (6). By using terms such as "you" and "we" Jacobs is able to make a direct appeal to her readers, again creating the introspection necessary to enact her cause. By using non-gender specific pronouns, Jacobs will not alienate anyone from her narrative. Men and women alike will be able to place themselves in the "you" "we" position without feeling as though the appeal is directed to either sex. For male readers, this strategy was acutely important.

For if men felt that the plea was meant only for women, their participation in the abolition of slavery would not have present because of the societal boundaries that clearly defined male and female pursuits. A male reading the text had to be in the position of believing that the conversation could apply to him specifically. The overt usage of such terms allows Jacobs to engage the reader in a conversational style that includes direct

statements being advanced to the reader. Jacobs uses this rhetorical strategy many times in her text, as Yvonne Johnson stresses in her text *The Voices of African American Women*:

Jacobs' narrator addresses the narratee as 'you' in at least nine passages of her narrative. She also addresses the narratee directly as 'Reader' in at least five passages. Almost all of these passages direct the reader's attention and sympathy not only to her personal situation, but also to the plight of those still in bondage.

(16)

Aware that the suffering of women who were still in bondage needed to be addressed, Jacobs realized that male and female readers had to be able to relate on some level with their plight. She was also sensitive that the current definition of what a woman should aspire to be (as stated previously) was not attainable in her society or the free White woman's society. White women, especially slave owners' wives, were in many ways unable to live up the standard of the "cult of true womanhood." The notions of domesticity, tenderness, and helplessness were simply not attainable in the problematical relationship between slave owner wife and female slave. Hence, Jacobs' narrative

decried the evils of slavery, and at the same time reiterated to women that a more flexible definition of how women could be considered was possible. Nevertheless, Jacobs had to appeal to her readers by more than an appeal to a new definition of what were proper actions for women. Jacobs had to draw from her reader a part of her awareness that was an integral notion of the era, the concept of the "cult of true womanhood."

Since the "cult of true womanhood" stood for the true woman of the era, embodying, submissiveness to men, tenderness, innocence, purity, piousness, domesticity, and sometimes helplessness, Jacobs knew that an appeal to this ideal would work in reaching her readers. By utilizing this concept, Jacobs could maintain that she wanted to live up to this popular ideal; however, she could not. Because, as Johnson contends, "...this true womanhood model was designed for the upper and middle-class white woman, although poorer white women could aspire to this status..." (18). Jacobs knew that her implied readers would be familiar with the allusions she would make to "true womanhood" in her narrative (18). In addition, Jacobs recognized that the treatment of Black female slaves was ascribed to their so-called "jezebel" stereotype. This rationalization gave White men the

freedom to sexually exploit Black female Slaves without suffering societal ramifications. Consequently, Jacobs had to expose this myth by illustrating the Black female slave was no "jezebel," and, at the same time, that she could not live up to the expectations that the "cult of true womanhood" demanded because of slavery. As the following passage establishes, Jacobs' depiction of the conditions to which women were subjected creates a sense of the helplessness that women faced under their master's firm grip, thus allowing the reader to gain a greater appreciation of what the slave woman was confronted with:

The slave girl is raised in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are dear to her heart;

or the profligate men who have power over her
may be exceedingly odious to her. (52)

This passage creates a sympathetic response within the reader from which further assumptions can proceed. Again, this type of rhetorical tool is evidence that Jacobs was keenly aware of the impact that dialogue would have upon her readers. By countering the "jezebel" notion with her own statement of facts regarding the slave's life, Jacobs reformulated the basis from which the "jezebel" premise was founded. A woman was now creating the dialogue that could lead to a new definition of how Black women may be perceived. The sexually promiscuous biases that haunted the Black woman would now be exposed to illustrate that the promiscuity was White a male tendency, not a Black female one. Yet, Jacobs knew that her statements alone would not be convincing enough. Jacobs had to call upon her experiences to elicit images that forced readers to reconcile their biases.

Because Jacobs' readers were in the delicate position of sympathizing with Jacobs and holding her accountable at the same time, Jacobs had to carefully illustrate the moments in which her master (Mr. Flint) made it impossible for her to live up to the expectations of her readers. The dialogue that Jacobs would call upon became of utmost

importance; these "conversations" were the basis for her argument against slavery. Therefore, Jacobs sought to both obtain understanding from her readers and at the same time gain acceptance for her deviation from the tenets of "true womanhood"; accordingly, she had to structure the accounts of sexual misconduct by her master in a way that would elicit a sympathetic response. Adding to Jacobs' particular historical moment was the belief that purity was considered the most important characteristic of a "true woman." Jacobs admits to her readers in the narrative that she is not sexually pure. Nonetheless, she asks her readers to consider the immediate circumstances she was under, as well as all of the circumstances that a woman faced while she was in bondage:

My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. The light heart that nature had given me became heavy with sad forebodings. (27)

With an account of what slavery was analogous to for the Black woman, and a relationship established with her readers that garnered sympathy, Jacobs had established a relationship with her readers that was intimate and commanding at once. Smith and Bakhtin's theoretical concept of the Self having its origins in dialogue is evidenced and used to create another dialogue, this time with the reader. With the inclusion of this description, Jacobs embodies the life of a female slave in relation to her male master. His words haunted her, his movements traced her steps, and as a result, Jacobs' sense of Self was predicated upon his commitment to undermine her moral convictions. Nevertheless, the use of the concept of the Sentimental novel, an engaging narrator, and the virtues of the "Cult of True Womanhood" were still inadequate to cement the inextricable bond that Jacobs wanted to achieve with her readers. Jacobs utilized the dialogue of those that surrounded her to enact an even closer relationship with her reader.

As a rhetorical strategy, Jacobs' use of the dialogue of those who surrounded her places the reader in the position of one who has first-hand knowledge of the events that were taking place. Dialogue occurs on various levels in *Incidents*. As the text will demonstrate, dialogue in

Incidents goes beyond the expected verbal engagement of speaking subjects. For Jacobs, the voices that surrounded her would serve as the readers' first-hand account of the brutalities that she suffered. Her first description of the dialogue that surrounded her is found in the beginning of the narrative "when I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave" (*Incidents* 5). Jacobs' Selfhood was defined through the dialogue of slavery that surrounded her. ³

This acknowledgement of the voices that surrounded Jacobs, creating her sense of Self, is evidence that Jacobs listened to the conversations that were around her and formulated concepts that would govern her Self image. However, not all of the voices that surrounded Jacobs were alike. Some of these voices would enter the text in African American dialect as well. By giving her characters an authentic place in her narrative, Jacobs was able to reveal the heteroglossia that surrounded her.⁵ For example, when Jacobs is depicting a slave auction, she gives the slave on the auction block an authentic dialect, "please, massa, hire me this year. I will work very hard massa" (*Incidents* 13). In this passage, it is clear that the authentic voice of the slave becomes an imperative.

The dialogue that the slave is having with potential owners must be authentically presented; if not, the space in which her readers envision the scene will not be as authentic as it could be. Therefore, as Jacobs struggles with remembrance, she has a choice. The slave's voice could have been written without dialect, but Jacobs internalized the voice as it was spoken, and by doing so, rearticulated a voice from the past with powerful consequence. The reader would have another voice to reconcile with other than Jacobs; the voice of a male slave would enter the conversation that Jacobs has initiated with the reader. Thus, the text becomes a polyphony of the voices that surrounded Jacobs; her narrative, which was seemingly monologic, now contains another voice to "hear." Jacobs' narrator's voice is reiterated in the text many times over as well. Often, her voice enters the text as a dialogic engagement between the reader and herself. Jacobs is speaking to other women (and men), and her conversation with them must always be directed to the goal of abolishing slavery. For instance, when Jacobs is explaining the relationship between White children and Black slave children, she asserts that initially, they are somewhat equals.⁴ Allowed to play and eat together, the children enjoy each other's company, and

by all accounts are almost like sisters. However, as time advances, the Black child becomes aware that she is different; the paths of the children will never converge. Even more distressing, the Black child will eventually become a servant to the White child. After this account, Jacobs composes an appeal to her reader that forces the dialogue into the realm of self-inquiry:

In view of these things, why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the North? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak! There are noble men and woman who plead for us, striving to help those who cannot help themselves. God bless them! God give them strength and courage to go on! God bless those everywhere, who are laboring to advance the cause of humanity! (*Incidents* 29)

The dialogue of the text now straightforwardly places the reader in a position of structuring a response. While Jacobs uses her voice as slave to evoke a response, her voice also is sent from the perspective of a woman being bombarded with the unwanted sexual advances from her master. Since Jacobs lacked the physical ability to defy her master's advances, dialogue was a defensive tool that

she used frequently. For Joanne Braxton," women resort to wit, cunning, and verbal warfare as forms of rebellion; in *Incidents*, Linda employs verbal warfare and defensive verbal postures as tools of liberation" (Braxton 32). In the form of "sass," Jacobs was able to defend herself against her master's cruelties.⁵ An example of "sass" can be found the first time her master (Mr. Flint) hits Jacobs. Jacobs, in return, retaliates not with her fists but with sass: "You have struck me for answering you honestly. How I despise you." Later when he threatens to send her to jail she responds, "as for the jail, there would be more peace for me there than there is here" (*Incidents* 39, 40). For Jacobs, dialogue would again serve as a means to an end, and it served to illustrate to her reader that she did have a voice. Her awareness of the power that language held aided her in stopping the advances of her master. Her dialogue gave life to the dialogue that she hoped her readers would have with others that sympathized with the slaves voice as well. Clearly, Jacobs was aware on many levels that the use of language in life could aid her in many different ways. Because Jacobs was so adept at speaking her mind within the boundaries of acceptable behavior for a slave, she was

able to navigate the harsh terrain that a slave must endure.

As a slave woman, Jacobs speaks from the position of many-- slave, woman, mother, subject of sexual advances, even as voice for other slaves who are still in bondage. These multiple voices can be heard throughout the text when Jacobs speaks. As Sidonie Smith suggests, "the narrator is a composite of speaking voices, the "I" is a sign of multiple voices" (Smith and Watson 60). Jacobs is a woman who has no voice outside the pages of her text, thus her voice must be emphatic when she speaks. Dialogue and all its inherent multiplicities for Jacobs becomes a textual strategy in and of itself on multiple levels, which defines her Selfhood, gives her a visible position within a society that denies her existence as a being of worth, and serves as a means to defend herself against those who would continue to propagate the "jezebel" notion.

Through engaged narration, use of the sentimental novel, the precepts of the 'cult of true womanhood," and dialogue, Jacobs constructed a relationship with readers that allowed them to become active participants in the perils of slavery, and at the same time, she created an authorial Self composed of the heteroglossic discourse

that inhabits her environment. Necessarily then, the Self of autobiography is echoed in Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia. For Bakhtin:

Social man [sic] is surrounded by ideological phenomena, by object-signs of various categories: by words in the multi-farious forms of their realization (sounds, writing, and the others), by scientific statements, religious symbols and beliefs, works of art and so on. All of these things in their totality comprise the ideological environment, which forms a solid ring around man. And mans consciousness lives and develops in this environment. (Medvedev 14)

Jacobs' voice resonates throughout the text as a voice, which is composed of many voices. Although Jacobs' narrative took the form of a sentimental novel, in Toni Braxton's words she "inverted the traditional happy ending of the nineteenth century domestic novel and amalgamated the elements of that fiction with the traditional slave narrative to create an original form" (Braxton 38). The "I" that Jacobs realized in the text was not in traditional Western terms a unified "I." It was an "I" that was focused on numerous levels, none of which allowed her to be a participant in society, as she truly deserved

to be. What Jacobs accomplished was a narrative that would be read and lauded for its merits as a true literary text and that would therefore give voice to a formerly voiceless group, creating a new dialogue where none existed before, and requiring readers to incorporate into their existing value systems a new voice, a new argument, a new way of considering the slave's position in society. Jacobs' narrative is successful because of the strategies that she implements. Her narrative is expressed using the Sentimental novel, an engaging narrator, the precepts of the "Cult of True Womanhood," and the dialogue that surrounded Jacobs. Without these approaches, the narrative would not have the same powerful impact upon its readers. The text would have been read as a mere account of what happened to a slave who was represented as a person on a page, not a living being with emotion and logical thought who speaks directly to her readers. Jacobs had to portray the words of others to the reader for many reasons, but most importantly, through the words of others Jacobs was able to realize her own awareness of her Self. Her self-consciousness was realized through others; thus, the text becomes intimate and commanding of the reader's attention. Moreover, Jacobs' use of dialogue (both actual and rhetorical) speaks to Bakhtin's concept of the novel

as being a work of art that transcends traditional beliefs of language:

Self-Consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero's image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world—but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his voice... If the umbilical cord uniting the hero to his creator is not cut, then what we have is not a work of art but a personal document. (Medvedev 20)

This concept of the author breaking the monologic unity that discourse can represent is imperative to the idea that the autobiographical act, if it is to be engaging, must echo the voices of those in the surrounding environment. Jacobs achieved this very notion within her text; as a result, Jacobs' narrative remains a topic of scholarly discussion.

Jacobs paved the way for other female reformers who would tell their stories many years later in different ways, but with the same goal, to enact reform for women, and with dialogue being present in their stories as well.

As Jacobs' silenced voice was given a place to speak out in her narrative, women soon would need a reformer to speak for their reproductive rights. Margaret Sanger would lead the way for women, and her task would not be easy.

Margaret Sanger (1879-1966)

"Though many disputed barricades have been leaped, you can never sit back, smugly content, believing the victory is forever yours; there is always the threat of it being snatched from you. All freedom must be safeguarded and held."

---Margaret Sanger, *An Autobiography*

Eighty-six years after Harriet Jacobs wrote of her struggles to achieve freedom and reveal the life of a slave woman, Margaret Sanger wrote her autobiography highlighting her struggles to gain access for women to birth-control methods. The years that separated these women and their narratives created disparate environments for each to come to the autobiographical act. However, for Jacobs and Sanger alike, coming to the autobiographical act was a means to renegotiate the obstacles that the dominant patriarchal society placed both women in. For Harriet Jacobs, her autobiography preceded the reform that she sought, and her audience was alien to her life and its limitations. Other slave narratives did precede Jacobs' however, they did not focus on the female slave experience, and they did not address issues unique to the

slave woman. Furthermore, Jacobs had to be cautious of the language that she was using in her narrative. Always deferring to her reader's moral code, Jacobs was careful not to obliterate the delicate relationship she had with her audience with language that might be considered offensive. Her goal not yet realized, Jacobs had only her narrative to convince her audience of the reality of slavery. For Jacobs, her voice had to be considered truthful before it was to even be considered. Jacobs had before her an audience that would have to constantly be reminded that she was trying to live up to moral codes of the era, but was unable to do so. Her narrative strategies speak to these specific constraints and skillfully negotiate the task of informing her audience of her struggles. Jacobs wrote under the influence of the limitations society had placed upon her while at the same time utilizing these limitations to influence society in return.

Margaret Sanger, however, came to the autobiographical act with a different set of conditions. Sanger's autobiography took place after her struggle for reproductive rights was attained. Written in 1938, when Sanger was fifty-nine, this autobiography would not be written to enact change, but to illustrate the struggles

that she had while trying to obtain birth control rights and remind readers of the past to ensure that the reform would endure. Moreover, Sanger's might possibly spur other women to unpopular but necessary actions, and finally to validate for herself that her actions were just. It is not surprising then that Sanger's autobiography is populated with her own voice, the voices that surrounded her, stories of others, and the societal dialogue of the Comstock Laws. As the text will demonstrate, just as Jacobs' narrative utilized the voices and dialogue of those who surrounded her to influence her readers, Sanger as well would call upon these influences to inform her readers and shape her narrative structure.

At the turn of the century, Margaret Sanger was a woman who had a choice. Never before were American women allowed to be educated and decide for themselves what career path (albeit a limited one) they would choose. For Sanger, the choice was an easy one. The death of her mother at forty-nine after bearing eleven children compelled Sanger to enter the nursing profession. She met and married her husband (William Sanger) in 1902. His avant-garde circle of friends in New York had radical ideas that Sanger took seriously.⁵ When she visited poor women with multiple unwanted pregnancies and weakened by

self-induced abortions, Sanger's undertaking became clear. The need for reproductive freedom would be her mission. Evidence of Sanger's discontent can be found in the following statement "I was the youngest of six, but after me others kept coming until we were eleven" (550). "Childhood is supposed to be a happy time. Mine was difficult..." (551). With these words, Sanger articulates the root of her discontent regarding reproduction. Product of a childhood that "...had little time for recreation," Sanger knew first hand of the struggles that being born into a large family would bring (550). For the reader of her autobiography, these statements serve to ground her life work. She further portrays her childhood by characterizing her father, asserting, " Father took little or no responsibility for the minute details of the daily tasks. I can see him when he had nothing on hand, laughing and joking" (551). "Mother's loyalty to father was tested repeatedly. Hers were the responsibilities of feeding and clothing and managing on his income, combined with the earnings of the oldest children" (551). Taken as a whole, these two statements are telling. Sanger gives no voice to her mother; only the role of a woman who must make ends meet on a meager existence is portrayed. The same is true for her father. Absent is his voice only. His carefree

behavior serves to define who he was. Choosing to give no voice to either parent, Sanger's voice is the only voice of authority for the events during childhood. The unvoiced dialogue of her parents is transformed into Sanger's own words, words which convey the frustration of seeing her mother have multiple unwanted pregnancies and her father proceed with his daily routine amidst a growing family. The polyphony of voices that could have been inserted in this dialogue is replaced with Sanger's memories. Reformulated into Sanger's own dialogue, Bakhtin's notion that that one "receives the word by the other's voices and it remains filled with that voice" allows the dialogic engagement that is taking place as Sanger initiates the autobiographical act (Todorov 48). As Sanger recalls the events of childhood the voices that were her parents still echo, however, they are replaced with her words, her intentions now. This is not to suggest, however, that Sanger replaces the words of others with hers as her only means of coming to the autobiographical act and subsequent realization of Selfhood throughout the text. On the contrary, Sanger (albeit infrequently) does supply the reader with quotations of others when the addition of such dialogue will recreate the dialogue that took place.

An example of the judicious use of dialogue that Sanger draws on can be found when Sanger reiterates a story regarding an unwanted pregnancy while she was a nurse. Eventually the woman depicted dies from another unwanted pregnancy and subsequent self-induced abortion:

At the end of three weeks, as I was preparing to leave the fragile patient to take up her difficult life once more, she finally voiced her fears, "another baby will finish me I suppose?" "It's too early to talk about that," I temporized. But when the doctor came to make his last call, I drew him aside. "Mrs. Sachs is terribly worried about having another baby." "She may well be," replied the doctor, and then he stood before her and said, "any more such capers young woman, and there'll be no need to send for me." "I know doctor" she replied timidly, "but," and she hesitated as though it took all her courage to say it, "what can I do to prevent it?" ... He [the doctor] laughed good-naturedly. "You want your cake and eat it too, do you? Well it can't be done." ... picking up his hat he said, "tell Jake to sleep on the roof." ... Then she lifted her thin, blue-veined

hands and clasped them beseechingly. "He can't understand. He's only a man. But you do, don't you? Please tell me the secret and I'll never breathe it to a soul. *Please!*" (566 Sanger)

As the scenario illustrates, Sanger uses the actual voice of others to convey the feeling of despair that is present within the woman and the indifference of the medical profession. The act of giving the woman a voice within the text speaks to Sanger's motives on various levels. In large part, the woman's voice was absent from the dialogue that was ongoing in society. By giving the woman a voice in the narrative, Sanger allows the previously silent woman to become a part of the dialogue. The reader is now in the position of considering the dialogue with all voices present. If we consider the above scenario as an example of Sanger's using the polyphony of voices around her to create an autobiographical Self, then the dialogue of this encounter is at the center of the quest for Self. As Michael Bell in *Bakhtin: the Human Sciences* writes:

Self-stories are double voiced; words are directed at both an object of speech and the words of the other, or the voices that resonate from our multiple conversational communities.

Thus, Selfhood is multi-voiced, populated by the voices of others. (39)

The multi-vocality of the dialogue that surrounded Sanger was intrinsically important as a means to recreate the climate of indignity and indifference that women were suffering in as well as to form her autobiographical Self. For if Sanger's autobiography was to record the voices that influenced her, tell of prior struggles that women went through on the way to achieving birth control, then the voices that were affected by the lack of dialogue was a crucial addition. Assuming multiple points of identity (nurse, woman, wife), Sanger is forced to grapple with these positions and negotiate her concept of Self among them. For when the act of autobiography takes place, the "I" that is written becomes, by nature perforce, a multiple "I." It is through others that Sanger realizes her autobiographical Self and the implications of these others. These dialogic encounters place the autobiographical act as a site of multiple foci that Sanger utilizes. As Sidonie Smith believes:

Since autobiographical narratives also enact the relationality of identity, a geographics of self-narrating involves the multiple modes of emplotment through which the narrating "I"

entwines a personal story with the stories of others, both individuals and collectives. (Smith and Watson 73)

As the autobiographical act emerges for Sanger, stories of other women will begin to enter the text; as a result, the influence others had on Sanger will become a part of Sanger's construction of Self. An ostensibly monologic life narrative is replaced with the collective voices of women that serve to create a dialogic exchange, which Sanger can utilize for both her sense of developing an authorial self and the structure of the narrative. Women are given a place within the ongoing dialogue of society that at the time sought to silence them. The effect of the relational dynamics that were part of Sanger's duties as a nurse is evidenced in the reiteration of their stories. The voices of the women who are present in society but who were not heard then are now heard. In this instance, Sanger's "I" becomes that of the person telling the story. She is taking upon an alien persona to become herself. As a result, she is creating a new dimension of her Self as she tells these stories. Again, Bakhtin's dialogic engagement that the author has with those who they are surrounded by and Smith's autobiographical Self being born out of this are realized within the pages of the text.

Dialogue, however, can assume as many forms as the autobiographical "I" can. Consequently, Sanger utilized yet another form of dialogue to reach women, and the readers of her autobiography, a dialogue with the written word. In 1912, and then two years later in 1914, Sanger published a series of columns and pamphlets that sought to educate women about birth control. These publications were in direct violation of the Comstock Laws because they disseminated information regarding sex and birth control.

The "Comstock Act" was passed in 1873. As an "Act of the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use," the Comstock act prohibited the sale or mailing of literature that was considered obscene. The act criminalized publication, distribution, and possession of information about or devices or medications for "unlawful" abortion or contraception. Individuals convicted of violating the Comstock Act could receive up to five years of imprisonment with hard labor and a fine of up to \$2,000. The act also banned distribution through the mail and import of materials from abroad, with provisions for even stronger penalties and fines. The Comstock act would prove to be Sanger's most problematical opponent, for it undermined the very methods by which she was to educate

women.⁸ The Comstock laws were passed in reaction to the sexual revolution that was beginning to develop for women of the era. The laws were meant to squelch the rise in power and sexual freedom that women were experiencing. By not allowing the open discussion of or writing material that was sexually explicit, the societal norms that had prevailed for centuries was sure to continue. As a result, if women had no access to the information that prevented pregnancy, then they would remain at home with children subjected to their husband's demands. Thus, men would continue to be dominant in society and in the lives of women. In her autobiography, Sanger mentions the Comstock Act and its far-reaching implications upon her movement: "...the so-called Comstock Law of 1873 ...had given authority to decide what might be called lewd, lascivious, indecent, or obscene..." (562). Thus the law, and its broad interpretations, would create an atmosphere for Sanger that would place a barrier between her goal of birth control for all women and the necessary use of the postal service to enact this change.

The language of the law had a powerful effect upon on society. Anthony Comstock (the author of the act) had far-reaching implications upon the very fabric of the American woman's life. Sanger writes, "so powerful had his

society become that anything to which he objected in its name was almost automatically barred; he had turned out to be sole censor for ninety million people" (562). The dialogue of the law set forth a ripple that would make the crusade for women's reproductive rights a difficult one. The language of the law sought to keep women ignorant of their reproductive rights. Ignoring the law, Sanger utilized her own dialogue, which assumed the form of the pamphlets that she distributed to women. However, the law would eventually intercede and Sanger's column in *The Call* would be met with disapproval. Sanger recalls this event in her text with the insertion of the words that replaced her column:

I turned to the *Call* to see my precious little effort, and, instead, encountered a newspaper box two columns wide in which was printed in black letters,

WHAT EVERY GIRL SHOULD KNOW

N
O
T
H
I
N

G

!

By Order Of

The Post-Office Department

The words gonorrhoea and syphilis had occurred in that article and Anthony Comstock, head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, did not like them." (562)

The placement of the original form of the Post Office's original text is an important aspect of the dialogic communion that Sanger enacts with the past (to move closer to her attainment of Self) and with her readership. The Post Office's text could have been rendered in a number of ways as Sanger wrote her text; however, the response from the post office was given in its original state, thereby allowing the reader a fuller, more exact experience of the event. The visual aspects of inserting the very words and their orientation on the page that were used against her advances in her struggle for reproductive freedom re-create the dialogue that Sanger was confronted with. The dialogic qualities of Sanger's text in this instance are multiple in essence. Sanger speaks back to the past and its limitations by inserting the Post Office's original words. She speaks to her readership by means of

allowing them to become privy to the words and the manner that were presented, and most importantly, Sanger engages in dialogue with herself by recounting the event in terms that would equal as closely as possible the past. The rhetorical strategy of placing the actual form of the text in her narrative is for Sanger another dialogue, a dialogue within the framework of the dialogue that currently exists as the text itself. Again, for the woman of the era, their place in society was being dictated by the dominant male patriarchal society. What every girl should know was indeed nothing. Thus, the male tradition of objectifying women was to continue and remain secure with women who were ignorant. Dialogue is represented as a powerful tool of the dominant in society to shape opinion.

From this example, dialogue assumes a position that transcends verbal interplay. It enters the realm of textual and societal influence. It forces the author to reconcile herself with the impact that words as signs can have as the development of Self emerges. For Bakhtin, important is the social environment in which the individual resides in is important. Social factors and their implications create the setting that give rise to the Self.⁵ In Bakhtin's words, "consciousness itself can arise and become a living fact only in the material

embodiment of sign" (Holquist 80). Consequently, the self-consciousness that is a requirement for the attainment of selfhood is predicated on the social relationship Sanger has with the surrounding environment. Thus, voices, signs, and the written word all create a medium in which the "I" is rooted. The autobiographical "I" is thus simultaneously narrating and becoming, it is in dialogue with the individual, the reader, and all of the signs, language, and various forms that culture may assume; it is heteroglossic in nature and form. This "I" is, in Sidonie Smith's words, "...the voice of publicly acknowledged authority, the voice of innocence and wonder, the voice of cynicism, the voice of postconversion certainty, the voice of suffering and victimization, and so on" (Smith and Watson 60). Sanger's and Jacobs' "I"s recapture these influences in their text with the choice of events and voices they utilize.

Consequently, the theoretical underpinnings of Gusdorf and Olney placing the autobiographical act as "a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" are limited in their applicability to the autobiographical act (*Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* 29). As individuals are inundated with language and signs that define who they are and how they represent

themselves in a text, the dialogue that results in the Self-consciousness of the individual is "populated with the intentions of others." As Jacobs' and Sanger's autobiographies illustrate, one becomes a social being through the surrounding environment, particularly when the individual is born into an environment in which group identity is an integral aspect of their society. The Chinese culture is such an environment. As Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* will demonstrate, Kingston tells and retells the stories in her memoir in order to place the tensions and limitations of a Chinese-American patriarchal society in comprehensible relation to one another and to postulate a Self that includes the oppositions and contradictions of that society. Accordingly, an approach that considers Smith's autobiographical "I" and Bakhtin's theory of dialogism can lead to a fuller and more productive reading of a text that is representative of a life experience that has multiple societal, familial, and linguistic determinants that facilitate the author's coming to selfhood via the autobiographical act.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

Applying Bakhtin's and Sidonie Smith's theories of the autobiographical "I" we have seen that the autobiographical act is not a solitary event. Nor, is the autobiographical act a mere recollection of events; yet, it is the fabric of ones coming to Selfhood. It is, on a very intimate level, the author's attempt at dialogue with her community, her reader, and themselves. As the author composes the autobiography, the people, voices and actions that took place all coalesce to create the autobiographical "I." The coming to Selfhood is mediated through language, because of course; the platform of the autobiography leaves little else for the author to work with. It is the medium through which humans relate to each other and the world. For Harriet Jacobs and Margaret Sanger language is a means by which their narratives convey messages. Language was for Jacobs and Sanger a direct means of dialogue. For Kingston, however, language was not direct. Stories were told to her in which meanings were not obvious. The meanings had to be teased out and arrived at correctly. There was not explicitness in the "talk-stories" Kingston heard as child. Moreover, there is

no explicit meaning in the stories she chose to add to her narrative. As Kingston did, the meaning must be derived from whatever we bring to the story. Each individual, of course, will bring different biases, and experiences which will shape the meaning of the story in different ways for all. Language is a force that must be reckoned with if the Chinese-American autobiographer is to create the autobiographical "I." For the Chinese-American woman coming to the autobiographical act, language assumes an even more commanding position. As Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* will demonstrate, dialogue and Self are inextricably linked to the autobiographical "I" in cultures where one's Selfhood is fixed to the very dialogue that surrounds the author.

Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-)

Harriet Jacobs and Margaret Sanger were women who knew all too well the constraints that the American society of their era had forced them to live under. Cognizant of societal expectations and limitations, they worked to enact their social change within a single cultural standard cultural standard. However, the modern American woman may trace her cultural history to more than one

origin. A duality of ancestral history is commonplace. Commonplace, however, does not always lend itself to simplicity. The Self, as Jacobs and Sanger have shown, is constructed at least partially from societal expectation. However, how does one neatly construct a Self when there is a clash of societal demands placed upon the subject? For the author in such a position, this is a daunting task. Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts*, is such an autobiography. Kingston wrote *The Woman Warrior* in 1975, at the age of thirty-five. The autobiography is a collection of five stories told to Kingston throughout her lifetime. The autobiography in Sidonie Smith's words is, "a complex autobiography about women's autobiographical storytelling" (*A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* 150). The non-linear arrangement of the stories is atypical of standard autobiographical form, which tends to be written as a straight progression from childhood to the current point in the author's life.¹ However for the marginalized, reconstruction of the Self that does not neatly fit into the hegemonic constructs of autobiographical discourse is part of their realization of agency. According to Susan Stanford Friedman, "their writing asserts that Selfhood they have been denied--in its uniqueness, which those who

stereotype them cannot see..." ("Autobiographical Selves" 39). The five chapters in *Woman Warrior*, *No Name Woman*, *White Tigers*, *Shaman*, *At the Western Palace*, and *A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe*, are all stories about women that Kingston heard while growing up that conveyed more than just a story. Recognizing the relationship between Self and the community's stories of Selfhood, Kingston writes herself into existence through these stories. Kingston skillfully "uses autobiography to create identity, she breaks down the hegemony of formal autobiography and breaks out of the silence that has bound her culturally to discover a resonant voice of her own" (*A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* 151). Her text reveals the tensions that growing up tied to two cultures that are dissimilar can create, and at the same time demonstrates how these competing forces can join together to form a textual Self that is representative of both cultures. Creating her own stories from the ones that were told to her, Kingston reformulates the dialogue that surrounded her to assist her in the realization of the autobiographical "I." Lauren Rusk has proposed in her text *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, Winterson*, Kingston's work contains three aspects of Selfhood, the personal, social, and philosophical realm.

Through these realms, Kingston's textual Self emerges because of the dialogic engagement of past stories told to her. Kingston's own voice occurs in combination with the voices of others that surrounded her to create the medium from which textual Self-authoring can proceed. According to Dale Bauer, "as Bakhtin demonstrates in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, the author's voice blends with, contradicts, disappears, and reemerges throughout the novel, thereby creating in the characters fully articulated and autonomous voices within their own individual word" (Feminist Dialogics 7). A close examination of the dialogic engagement (on multiple levels) within two stories of the text will reveal how Kingston utilizes these stories to realize the autobiographical "I." For Kingston, voices from the past (a past that resonates with the oral tradition that is integral to the Chinese society) echoes back through the pages of the text to create yet another dialogue, this time with the reader. As seen in *Jacobs and Sanger*, the drive to recreate the dialogue that surrounded the author will again become an imperative in the authorial process. As a consequence, the crucial intimate relationship required with the reader and demonstrated in the autobiographies of *Jacobs and Sanger* take place to create

the dialogue that will become the medium for textual
Self-authoring.

"No Name Woman"

Kingston initiates her text with "No Name Woman" and
its cautions of crossing the established boundary set for
women:

"You must not tell anyone," my mother said,
"what I am about to tell you. In china, your
father had a sister who killed herself. She
jumped into the family well. We say that your
father has all brothers because it is as if she
had never been born. Don't humiliate us. You
wouldn't like to be forgotten if you had never
been born." (3)

The warning from Kingston's mother situates the rest of
the story, which elaborates on the circumstances of the
sister's suicide because of an illegitimate child. From
admonitions such as " Now that you have started to
menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you," and
"the villagers are watchful," Kingston gains insight into
the sexual Self that is required of her, as well as the
societal expectations that are placed upon
Chinese-American women (5,6).² Noticeably, the story is

reiterated with quotes. Kingston's own voice does not divulge the story, which may betray the warning from her mother. Yet, she finds the solace of a third person to tell the story that has been handed down to her and left to haunt her for many years. We are hearing as the first voice of the story not that of Kingston, but the voice of her mother. Kingston rejects her mother's warning by supplying the reader with this story. The story's importance to Kingston's autobiographical "I" overcomes her mother's warning not to re-tell the story. Consequently, the influence that the American culture that Kingston was a part of begins to emerge. As Kingston explores the fate of her aunt, she reconsiders the cultural standards that determined that fate. The American concept of self is not so tightly bound to community identification. Thus, this story of female castigation is central to Kingston's emerging Self that is both Chinese and American because it speaks to the dialogue of the past that her aunt had to live under and creates a textual medium that Kingston as well must write under to take up the autobiographical act. Kingston's unique upbringing of both Chinese cultural standards that expected submissiveness from women and at the same time concern with the greater communal good over individual concerns,

clashes with the American ideals of individuality and self autonomy. Consequently, the struggle to obtain an authorial Self is mediated through the dialogue that her mother had with her, and the dialogue that the story has with the Chinese-American society that Kingston was a part of. Accordingly, the story becomes an imperative to textual the Self-authoring that has its basis in two cultures. As John Paul Eakins states, "like the aunt's story, Kingston's performance as an autobiographer is a complex mixture of deference and defiance: to write the story of "No Name Woman" is to speak the unspeakable" (Studies in the Art of Self Invention 259). The power of language resonates in "No Name Woman" by its admonition that one could simply be forgotten, never mentioned again. With language, there is existence. Without a name one ceases to exist. Kingston's aunt is alone because of her actions. Excluded from the community, Kingston's aunt is "one of the stars, a bright dot in blackness, without home, without companion, in eternal cold and silence" (16). In an act of replacing her aunt in the community, Kingston places the explicit and compelling story that denies woman a place within Chinese society if they ignore the community mores in a central rhetorical position. Thus for Kingston, her aunt is noted and her place in society

is still held, albeit posthumously. The act of placing the story in the beginning of the narrative suggests that for Kingston, this story is central to her textual Self-authoring. All the stories that follow are based upon the lack of dialogue that her aunt had with Chinese society and Kingston's own struggle with dialogues that seemed to contradict one another. The text becomes another form of dialogue that Kingston has with the Chinese-American society, a dialogue that seeks to give her aunt and her independent nature a place of peace and recognition at last. By placing her aunt in society through a story, Kingston will then be able to do the same for herself. Consequently, the textual Self-authoring that gave Kingston's aunt a Self can be used to give Kingston's hers. "No Name Woman" becomes an oral autobiography via Kingston's mother, and Kingston writes her aunt into existence by the addition of the story. As Lauren Rusk considers in her text, *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, Winterson*:

A fundamental question for the woman on the margins of these cultures [immigrant Chinese and mainstream American] concerns the value of individualism. The two cultures differ in the degree to which personal distinctiveness (and

sexuality) is suppressed in the service of a larger whole-the family, the community-and the degree to which it is prized and encouraged.

(118)

Individualism, choice, and self-determination are not choices that the Chinese female had. As "No Name Woman" is reiterated in the text, the pull from each culture creates an authorial tension that must be reconciled. This tension is central to the authorial Self that Kingston is constructing because for Kingston writing is an act of self-determination and choice. By repeating this story, she speaks back to the dialogue of the community that did not allow for such decisions. Consequently, the readers participation in the set of circumstances that Kingston must perform the autobiographical under is shared, dialogized to create yet another story that will transmit the voices that became part of Kingston's autobiographical "I." As Lauren Rusk points out, Kingston shows us not "who I was and who I became" but instead "how I remember to see as I saw, and how I have come to see" (81). By doing this Kingston allows the reader to become actively engaged in the process of her coming to Selfhood. Childhood stories that shaped who she was are revisited again, yet this time Kingston tells the story.

In a final act of reconciliation to her defiance of her mother's warnings Kingston writes, "my aunt haunts me- her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes" (16).³ With these words, Kingston exposes the duality of both cultures. The autobiographical moment for Kingston is now in dialogue with the past. Kingston alone remembers her aunt, and the same time, she remembers the warnings given that are attached to the story. Consequently, the words that Kingston heard as young girl fix the blending of the autobiographical "I" that is constructed from two distinct societies. As a result, the difference of the cultures is embodied in the words that Kingston utilizes. Kingston tells a story of the past, a common tradition in china, and at the same time, retells a story that she was forbidden to tell, a sign of the independence that American's possess. With both cultures reconciled as the autobiographical act emerges, Kingston's autobiographical Self finds it origins the dialogue with past and the present emerging dialogue that she is now creating. There is no instability in Kingston's stories. As their author, she alone holds their meanings for herself. As Michael Holquist suggests:

In a dialogue that takes place between two different persons (one self/other constellation to another self/other constellation) in physical space, the medium of exchange is, of course, natural language. In such exchanges, it is words that fix (if only fleetingly) meanings. They can do so because syntax, grammar, and the sound laws governing phonology provide a relatively stable armature for making distinctions in the unstable flux of life outside language.

(Dialogism 31)⁴

For Kingston then, the unique autobiographical "I" that is constructed from both cultures is released through written dialogue.⁵ It is in Sidonie Smith's words:

A dialogic engagement. She struggles to constitute the voice of her own subjectivity, to emerge from a past dominated by stories told to her, ones that inscribe the fictional possibilities of female Selfhood, into a present articulated by her own story telling." (A Poetics of Women's Autobiography 152)

The unity of Self that Kingston seeks is present in the words she uses. A fusion of both cultures, Kingston emerges to write herself into existence. The dialogue of

the Chinese-American society and the American society at times clash and coalesce to give rise to Kingston's authorial voice. It is in this sense then, that Bakhtin's claim to the origins of a unified Self is only present in the act of Self-Actualization as it relates to the autobiographical act:

An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life. But there is no unitary and unique plane where both faces would mutually determine each other in relation to a single unity. It is only the once-occurrent event of Being in the process of actualization that can constitute this unity. (*Art and Answerability* 2)

Thus, the insertion of "No Name Woman" creates the space from which unity for the autobiographical "I" and Self can take place. "No Name Woman" also speaks to Smith's concept of the autobiographical "I" being composed of the relational tendencies woman have.

By reiterating a story told to her by mother, and then filling in the blanks with dialogue that surrounded her as child, Kingston's relational relationship with those that surrounded her are brought to life in the story. However, at the end of the section, Kingston is acutely aware of the dangers that betraying her aunt's memory may bring:

I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very afraid of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute. (19)

By using creating a story for her aunt, Kingston creates her own textual Self through her aunt. A woman who dared to be herself in a community that sought compliance to the established cultural norms, Kingston's aunt was much like her, in need of a story to define her place in society. Always cognizant of the consequences of "telling stories," Kingston maintains her identification with the warnings of the Chinese-American society. Although her aunt's name will never be known, the reader of Kingston's text now knows of the conditions under which the autobiographical

occurs for Kingston. Centered around dialogue from family, society, and Self in reaction to the others, the autobiographical act for Kingston takes place within a polyphony of voices that are both real and imagined. There is no concrete way for Kingston to separate story and fact. Thus, her dialogue is with the real and imagined. Her Selfhood will be largely predicated on the manner in which she defines the story told to her, which of course is dictated by the dialogue that she is surrounded by.

In many ways, *No Name Woman* gives a voice to three women. Kingston's mother, her aunt, and herself via retelling the story. It displays the relationality of Kingston had with her mother (emulating her mother by retelling a story that was not to be retold), and the individuation or defiance of a Chinese-American woman (retelling the cultural standards that the Chinese held and expected out of women. By creating a textual selfhood for her aunt out of her past experiences, Kingston's creates a dialogue with her readers that suggest that the same may be possible for themselves. A reconstruction of one's life can lead to Selfhood if the circumstances surrounding our lives are given meaning by ourselves, not others.

Kingston recaptures the theme of coming to Selfhood in relation to independence and community in her fifth section, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." In a story that is representative of the power that language possesses for Kingston, Bakhtin and Smith's theories merge again to create a story that will shape Kingston's autobiographical "I."

"A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe"

"She pushed my tongue up and sliced the frenum. Or maybe she snipped it with a pair of nail scissors. I don't remember her doing it, only her telling me about it, but all during childhood I felt sorry for the baby whose mother waited with scissors or knife in hand for it to cry-and the, when its mouth was wide open like a baby bird's, cut" (164).

Clearly, the above-remembered scenario illustrates the importance that language had in Kingston's life, a rite of passage that for Kingston punctuated the power of speaking. Her true voice stolen, her passivity was established by her mother. According to Kingston's mother, the frenum was cut so Kingston:

would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue will be able to move in any language. You'll be able to

speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything. Your frenum looked too tight to do those things, so I cut it." (164)

For Kingston, this act creates a tension with language that pervades the text. Kingston's mother alters her voice at young age to allow Kingston to speak freely in other languages. However, for Kingston, the cutting of the frenum was an act that robbed her of her natural voice. Thus, Kingston's struggle with her voice throughout the narrative can be traced back to the moment of her mother's powerful alteration of Kingston's voice. Consequently, it is fitting that Kingston does not remember the event, only the story that her mother made out of the occurrence. This estrangement from the act itself speaks to Bakhtin's concept that "those around us create the remembrance for us by their dialogue with us..." (Dialogism 40). The story becomes the mode through which Kingston remembers the event and formulates its significance through. The autobiographical "I" at this moment has its origins in language, in the words that her mother used to reiterate the story to Kingston. For Sidonie Smith:

 Storytelling also becomes the means through which Kingston confronts those complexities and

ambivalences that constitute a lifetime. In dialogic engagement with her mother's word, she struggles to constitute the voice of her own subjectivity to emerge from a past dominated by stories told to her, ones that inscribe the fictional possibilities of female Selfhood, into a present articulated by her own storytelling.

(A Poetics of Women's Autobiography 152)

Bakhtin's and Smith's theories at this moment coalesce to create the autobiographical "I." Kingston's voice becomes the remembrance in a textual medium; through words, again the event is revisited and shared with the reader to recreate the climate of dialogue that was present when the authorial self was being constructed. Inviting the reader to share in the same experiences, to share the dialogue that she was a part of, Kingston revisits yet another crucial event in early life. This time, however, words and their intention are remembered with detail:

"Normal Chinese voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans" (172).

With these words, Kingston calls upon the memories that define her Chinese-American voice. Caught between two cultural expectations of voice, Kingston did find a voice as most other Chinese-American schoolgirls did. "Most of us eventually found some voice, however faltering" (172).

"Some voice," carefully defines for Kingston that this new Americanized voice was not her own. A voice that asserted compliance, submission again, was at hand, this time from the American culture.

Kingston did eventually have a voice that she claimed, unfortunately, not all Chinese-American girls were able to find a balance between the expectations of both cultures. Kingston tells of a girl who did not speak except for reading aloud in school. Kingston tells "her older sister was usually beside her; their parents kept the older daughter back to protect the younger one" (172). Kingston writes that her own family kept her and her sister naturally separated and required them to work, unlike the quiet girl's family:

My younger sister was in the class below me; we were normal ages and normally separated. The parents of the quiet girl, on the other hand, protected both daughters. When it sprinkled, they kept them home from school. The girls' did

not work for a living the way we did. But in other ways, we were the same. (172)

With these words, Kingston reveals the origins of part of her anger towards the quiet girl. She was protected by her family and sister. Expectations were few of these girls. For Kingston, on the other hand, expectations were many. Kingston portrays the quiet girl as relatively at ease with her voicelessness, the antithesis of Kingston's feelings. Struggling to find her own place in either society, Kingston glimpses in this girl compliance and the apathy that it brings. Kingston further illustrates the compliance of the quiet girl by reiterating a story regarding sports. The confusion that Kingston had when playing with "Ghosts" was realized when she could not remember who was on her basketball team. Sports such as baseball were more welcoming for Kingston. Baseball had clearly defined goals, it was easier to know what to do. However, knowing what to do was different for the quiet girl:

Baseball was nice in that there was a definite spot to run to after hitting the ball.

Basketball confused me because when I caught the ball I didn't know whom to throw it to. "Me, me," the kids would be yelling. "Over here!"

Suddenly, it would occur to me I hadn't memorized which ghosts were on my team and which were on the other. When the kids said "automatic walk," the girl who was quieter than I kneeled with one end of the bat in each hand and placed it carefully on the plate. Then she dusted her hands as she walked to first base, where she tagged out before second base. She would-whisper read but not talk. Her whisper was as soft as if she had no muscles." (173)

The quiet girl was clearly submissive, even in a sport where she could display her own autonomy. As a result of the girls lack of Self, Kingston:

hated the younger sister, the quiet one. I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for my team. I hated her for her China doll hair cut. I hated her at music time for the wheezes that came out of her plastic flute." (173)

At odds with her own place in society, Kingston grew to resent the girl who was not unlike herself. Finally, in sixth grade, a year when Kingston was "arrogant with talk," Kingston's anger and frustration with the quiet girl were realized (173).

In the bathroom of Kingston's school, Kingston confronts the girl who epitomizes the compliant Chinese female. Kingston's inability to accept this paradigm for herself is evidenced in this confrontation. Her harassment of the girl was an outgrowth of her frustration and sheer inability to come to terms with a voice that had been silenced, and her own frustration of living in two cultures. The silenced girl, who would not talk, caused Kingston to relive her feelings of inadequacy as a silenced female and simultaneously created the anger within that could be articulated through no other means. Calling the girl "stupid" and warning her of her demise if she did not speak were the collective voices in the stories she heard revisiting her. Her voicelessness and inability to have real dialogue with the people in her life was mirrored in this corporeal form. Kingston's admonishment to the girl's sister, "your family really ought to force her to speak," spoke volumes concerning the inner struggle Kingston had within herself (181). The forcefulness, which Kingston evokes to gain the girl a voice, is warrior-like, powerful, and demanding, but it is nevertheless ineffectual and ultimately unnecessary. Because the girl would be taken care of by her family for the rest of her life, a voice was not necessary. Her needs

would be assumed and supplied to her. The passive quiet Chinese-American female would be emulated in this girl.

Kingston places this scenario in the late in the text to illustrate how language was emerging as an integral aspect of her Selfhood. The stories of how her language emerged are placed at the end of the narrative instead of at the beginning. Because her struggle with language was realized later in life, Kingston places the events near the conclusion of her narrative. And, unlike "No Name Woman," this story is Kingston's. Kingston's own story has definite meaning for her. Like baseball, this story had a definite place to go when confusion was present in other areas.

Again, it is at the point of textual self-authoring, stories of others are reiterated in the text. As a consequence, Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, and Smith's concept of the autobiographical "I" are both represented in this story. For the girl, dialogue was not a reality, she simply was not engaged in any dialogue with society or those around her, thus she was a passive female with no voice, which Kingston could not abide. Kingston's authorial Self is realized through the actions of others. Her frustration with the girl who would not speak defined

her own feelings toward language which in turn created the medium for textual self-authoring.

As the above scenario illustrates, the Self realized through the autobiographical act is "known through the response of the real, imagined, historical, and generalized others" (Bell 39). Kingston was never given any literal meaning to the stories her mother told her, neither was she ever given any indication whether or not the stories told to her were factual or not. Therefore, Kingston became the author of the stories told to her. Giving them all her own ending, and her own meaning, the stories the dialogue of a culture that sought to suppress voice, and when she did so, the stories created a voice. By reiterating these stories in her text, Kingston allows the reader to gain access to them and participate in the dialogue as well, just as Jacobs and Sanger do in their narratives.

Furthermore, Kingston uses these stories to create a Self that can live in both cultures. The stories, which Kingston creates meaning for, are in and of themselves a rewriting of the past. Consequently, a new story for Kingston's aunt creates a textual Self for Kingston that is in dialogue with the past as she searches for her Selfhood through the medium of life writing. By

manipulating the stories and their meanings, Kingston defines the cultural standards under which they fall. Through her aunt's story, and the story of the quiet girl, Kingston relives some of the dialogue that shaped who she is. The stories become for Kingston a powerful means of renegotiating cultural standards that she found to be unacceptable. Re-authoring these stories allowed Kingston a medium through which her own textual Self could be realized, and at the same times continues the dialogue that is ever present in her life.

An exploration of the autobiographies of Jacobs, Sanger, and Kingston has illustrated that for these women autobiographers the autobiographical act is mediated through the dialogue of others. These authors were compelled to recast the dialogue that was present in their lives. Clearly, in these stories the self is a conglomeration of the voices that surround the female speaking subject. The multiplicity of voices is given equal status in the construction of the Self, and it is clear that for all of the autobiographies considered, the quest for authorial Self consists of reiterating voices that were present in the authors' lives. These dialogic narratives are not fixed upon any one meaning. They are always being reconstructed as new readers gain access to

the text and possibly apply lessons from the text to their own lives. It is a multitude of voices that all coalesce to form the autobiographical "I." The author, in their quest for construction of the Self, seeks the ongoing dialogue of their past with their readers. Bakhtin and Smith's theories of dialogue and the autobiographical "I" are realized in this manner. The texts considered represent three marginalized women and their drive to reconnect to their readership using dialogue. For if we recognize that women are relational and this relationality places much emphasis on communication with others, and that the dialogue present in one's life dictates how the self will emerge, then the narrative strategies engaged to achieve Selfhood can be considered an ongoing dialogue.

Finally, one should consider that as the reader of the polyphonic autobiographical text reads, the reader is constructing her concept of self through the stories of others. Thus, the never-ending dialogue that these authors sought to represent is continued with the reader. Through Smith's autobiographical "I" and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, then, we can see that the autobiographical act represents an ongoing attempt at dialogue and introspection for the reader to participate in and the female author to gain textual selfhood through.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER NOTES

Chapter One

1. Georg Misch. *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*. Trans. by E.W. Dickes. 2 Vols. 1907. Reprint. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950.
2. Anna Robeson Burr. *The Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative Study*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909.
3. William Matthews. *British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written before 1951*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1951.
4. Louis Kaplan. *A Bibliography of American Autobiographies*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1961.
5. Georges Gusdorf. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography". In *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and Critical*, edited and translated by James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
6. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.
7. A comprehensive overview of the various critical feminist approaches to autobiography written by women

can be found in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's text, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*.

Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1998.

8. Mary G. Mason and Carol H. Green. Eds. *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979.
9. I use the term "feminist theory" to indicate feminist autobiographical theory in general. It should be noted, however, that there are indeed many differing threads in feminist thought. For an overview of various feminist positions, see *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* by Rosemarie Tong. Boulder: Westview Press, 1989.
10. Throughout the thesis, I reference the "I" of autobiographical discourse, which refers to the narrating "I." Smith makes clear the distinction of the various forms of the autobiographical "I" that occurs in autobiography. According to Smith, the following "I"'s occur in autobiography, the "real" or historical "I" which who is simply the person producing the autobiography. This "I" is a historical person situated at a specific time. The "narrating "I"-is the "I" who tells the autobiography. This "I" is linked only to the time that the autobiography

takes place in. There is also the narrated "I" who is the subject of history and the protagonist of the autobiography. Finally, the ideological "I" is the concept of "personhood culturally available to the narrator when she tells his story." For a more in-depth analysis see Smith and Watson's text, *reading autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

11. In *Reading Autobiography; A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith asserts "when life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making history in a sense." For Smith "...while autobiography may contain facts, they are no factual history about a particular time, person, or event. Rather, they offer subjective truth rather than fact."
12. For a more complete explanation of dialogism and heteroglossia see Michael Holquist's text, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Chapter Two

1. According to Angelyn Mitchell, in her essay "Visions and Revisions of Slavery," the slave narrative's

focus is not on "the experience of enslavement" but the "on the construct we call freedom." Mitchell further defines the genre as "a contemporary novel that engages the historical period of chattel slavery in order to provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom. Liberatory narratives are concerned with more than a state of being; their primary function indeed is in describing how to achieve freedom" (3-4). Furthermore, James Olney describes ten conventions of the slave narrative, including, the narrative, engraved, signed portrait; a title page asserting the narrative was written by the slave; testimonials and prefatory material used by white slave abolitionists; a beginning, "I was born"; accounts of whippings by cruel masters and mistresses and a slave's resistance to them; an account of the slave's difficulties learning how to read and write; denunciations of Christian slaveholders as the cruelest; accounts of successful effort(s) to escape; and the choice of a new last name." ("I Was Born" 152-53).

2. According to Patricia Meyer Spacks, Jacobs creates a "conciliatory relationship with her reader. ...attempting to justify untraditional ways of living

and writing so as to gain public acceptance."

Furthermore, *Incidents* demonstrates that it is impossible for "true womanhood" to flourish under slavery because slave women are not allowed to practice the virtues of modesty, chastity, and domesticity.

3. Mitchell, Angelyn. The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2002.
4. Yvonne Johnson states in her text, *The Voices of African American Women: The Use of Narrative and Authorial Voice in the Works of Harriet Jacobs, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker*, "...engaging narrators attempt to bring together the "you" addressed directly in the text, the reader implied by that direct address, and the actual reader of the text." "The narrator of *Incidents* uses engaging interventions by addressing the reader or you in a manner designed to evoke recognition and identification in the actual reader, a reader that is not likely to resemble Linda Brent in the least."
(15)
5. According to Sanger, "headlong we dived into one of the most interesting phases of life the United States

has ever seen. Radicalism in manners, art, industry, morals, politics was effervescing, and the lid was about to blow off in the Great War." Margaret Sanger eventually found the beliefs of the Socialist party inviting. The "individualist, anarchist" ideals of the party spoke to Sanger on many levels.

Furthermore, Sanger was known to have numerous lovers throughout the course of her life, a fact that is absent from the text.

Chapter Three

1. According to Estelle Jelinek, there exists a "continuous female tradition of discontinuity in women's autobiographical writing to the present day." "From earliest times, discontinuous forms" as "diaries journals, and notebooks... have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives. "Jelinek further observes that, "recent women's autobiographies perpetuate the formal precedents, being often not chronological and progressive but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized [like Kingston's work] self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters" (Jelinek 17,19).

WORKS CITED

- Andrews, William L. "The Changing Moral Discourse of Nineteenth-Century African American Women's Autobiography: Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Keckly." In, De/Colonizing the Subject: the Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography. By, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, U of Minnesota P, 1992. Pp.225-242.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "*Discourse in the Novel*." The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- . Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Eds. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Trans. and notes V. Liapunov. Austin: U of Texas P, 1990.
- Bauer, Dale. "*Gender in Bakhtin's Carnival*." Feminine Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. 708-20.
- Bell, Michael, and Michael Gardiner, Eds. Bakhtin and the Human Sciences. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Braxton, Toni. Black Women Writing Autobiography. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989.
- Eakin, John Paul. Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader. Ed. Sidonie Smith. Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1998. 72-82.
- Holquist, Michael. Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- Jacobs, Harriet. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Ed. L. Maria Child. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973.
- Johnson, Yvonne. The Voices of African American Women: The Use of Narrative and Authorial Voice in the Works of Harriet Jacobs, Zora Neal Huston and Alice Walker. New York: Lang Publishing, 2002.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. New York: Random House, 1977.
- Medvedev, P.N. The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. Trans. Albert J. Wherle. Baltimore; Goucher College Series, 1978.
- Rusk, Lauren. The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, Winterson. New York: Routledge UP, 2002.
- Sekora, John. "Comprehending Slavery." *Callaloo*, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Spring, 1994), Pp. 160-226.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

---. A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.