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M. H. Kingston´s *The Woman Warrior* and Mo Yan´s *Red Sorghum* in the Context of the World Literature

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

To the people I met during my Erasmus exchange for opening my eyes to the astonishing diversity of the world:

Johan, Móni, Eszter, Mario, Oleg, Xche, Qiling, Amanda, Bob, Albert, Jian Han, Valentina, René, Satoshi, Ng Yong, Charmian, Yihan, Carolina, Sofia, Eva, Ale, Gunnar, Adam, David, Maxime, Rula, Ranine, Alan, Sergio, Emil, Seow Hong, Ilija, San, Claudia, Hani, Tommy, Fulop, Laura, Catherin, Xixiao, Tomáš, Charles, and Alex.

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INTRODUCTION

"If to be born human is to be born angled toward an other an others, then to account for this the human being presupposes the quite-other" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 352).

Since times immemorial humanity has been driven primarily by forces of human instinct to survive, desire for happiness, and will to power, world dominance and wealth. While it is indisputable that the former propelled human beings to activity and migration it is the latter, as history shows, that have shaped the state and appearance of the world at any given time. The will to power has been exemplified in the history of mankind in the realities ranging from ordinary struggles between peoples to complex manifestations taking the forms of imperialism, colonialism, holocaust, wars, and also terrorism. Although human civilization claims to have learnt its lesson every time atrocities were inflicted on people by people, the reality proves to be different with the whole epoch of humanity being permeated by acts of inhumanity.

Next to power, there has been another great source of change and mobility all over the world that needs to be acknowledged, namely globalisation. Although globalization has often been viewed as a recent phenomenon, the term being connected mostly to the events in the last few decades, the underlying principles of globalization, as described by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations*, despite the fact that he himself never mentioned the word, can be traced back to the first integration of markets and division of labor in the early times of civilization (*The Economist*). Further, with the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492 not only extended trading between two continents, Europe and America, but more importantly the discoveries of abundant silver mines made the acceleration of the process of globalization possible. This particular instance of silver market convergence is

perceived by both economist and historians as very important because based on the value of silver, European currencies underwent serious inflation with the immense influx of silver from the Americas in the sixteenth century, which brought along significant changes in Europe. However, some scholars are not willing to accept the beginning of globalization earlier than the nineteenth century when the rapid decrease in transport costs brought about convergence of European and Asian commodity prices (*The Economist*). Therefore, as it becomes obvious, the global interconnection of societies can by no means be seen as a recent phenomenon. In contemporary age, globalization has been brought on by unprecedented advancement of information technology, transnational networks of business and migrancy, and in literary domain by substantial shifts of literary flows. It has marked a number of concomitant changes in all spheres of life including new world configurations and emergence of new literary topographies which are characterized by cross-cultural relationships and transnational identities.

By putting the two aforementioned phenomena on a common ground, the aim of this thesis is to bring to the fore the concept of World literature. Here, I would like to argue that World literature, in its idealistic state and widest scope, can be conceptualized as the site of transaction between humanism, so needed in contemporary era, and geocultural transformations of today´s globalised world. Since Goethe´s first pronouncement on the idea of *Weltliteratur* in 1827 and his vision of "foreign participation" (qtd. in Antoine Bergman 65) among and within nation states, the upsurge in the exchange of knowledge, trade, capital and most importantly for Goethe the global literary production has gained a dimension unfathomable for Goethe in his time. As a matter of fact, Goethe´s cosmopolitan inclinations notwithstanding, his notion of *Weltliteratur* in the nineteenth century was at its core Eurocentric rather than encompassing the world in its totality and preserved the boundaries of the then nation

states (Pizer 215, 216). As René Wellek formulated it, World literature for Goethe meant "an ideal of the unification of all literatures into one literature where each nation would play its part in a universal concert" (Wellek 221). With the course of time, the interpretation of World literature has become complicated due to the acceleration of globalization and has represented a considerable difficulty to scholars as to how to grasp and delineate such a concept whose scope became virtually limitless. Consequently, the awareness of the field´s vastness can be illustrated by the fact that in an attempt to aptly capture the character of World literature in today´s world, which naturally projects itself into the very essence of literature and literary output, World literature is sometimes called Global literature and the scrutiny of this phenomenon is performed under the rubric "transnational literary studies" (Pizer 221).

Nevertheless, despite the interpretative conundrum referred to earlier, there is a similar pattern of thought to be found in contemporary age which appears, in my opinion, to stem from the same premise as Goethe´s – that of David Damrosch. David Damrosch, an internationally recognized authority on World and Comparative Literature, embraces the same principle underlying his conceptualization of World literature as Goethe except for the extent of its ambit. The concept is understood by both neither as a limited or limitless canon of works but rather as a network. In this view, World literature encompasses for Damrosch "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (4). Another parallel to be drawn between Goethe and Damrosch is their shared appreciation of the role of translation for the world literary paradigm. Translation is considered not only as the indispensable means necessary for world literary output circulation among people coming from different parts of the world but more importantly, in ideal case, if utilized in an appropriate way, for promoting understanding "the Other".

The objective of this thesis is to draw on the humanistic potential inherent in the world literature concept in the analytical part of this work while grounding the crux of my argument in the lofty ideas and beliefs of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a world renowned literary critic influential in the field of post-colonialism and a founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, and Edward Wadie Said, a professor of Comparative Literature and a political activist with his profoundly influential book *Orientalism*. I use the word "lofty" here for one particular reason. Both Said and Spivak, Said of American-Palestinian origins, Spivak of Indian, were/are activists striving for better if not equal conditions through their writings, speeches and university activities for people disadvantaged due to their ancestry and position in the world system marked by colonist/colonized, colonial/postcolonial, Christian/Muslim, West/East, developed/Third world categories. Furthermore, both of them look to literature and the practice of reading as a potential means for reaching the ideal state of society where every aspect of life is governed by the principles of humanism and co-existence.

Obviously, such a view can be easily assailed for its naivety on the grounds of being divorced from reality. Yet, this "impossible" condition becomes the underlying assumption of Spivak´s intellectual musings. In her recent book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), from which the introductory quote to this thesis is taken, Spivak articulates her perception of literature and defends her tenet: "I find myself insisting on restoring rhetorical practices because I believe, in an irrational, utopian, and impractical way, that such reading can be an ethical motor that undermines the ideological field. If to be born human is to be born angled toward an other and others, then to account for this the human being presupposes the quite-other" (352). Nevertheless, she is fully aware of the fact that the feeling of sympathy is the ultimate expression of the human endeavor to reach out to the quite-other and she continues: "By

definition, we cannot – no self can – reach the quite other. Thus the ethical situation can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible. And literature, as a play of figures, can give us imaginative access to the experience" (*Aesthetic Education* 352). In addition, as Spivak proposes, aesthetic education can also serve as a tool for rectifying the damage caused by globalization´s adverse effects. She refuses to admit the standpoint that globalization took place in all spheres of our lives by claiming that the tentacles of globalization have seized capital and data only leaving everything else "damage control" (*Aesthetic Education* 1). In the age characterized by information overload, Spivak adverts to the detrimental effects of such information command on human ability to read and organize knowledge for knowing and understanding. In this view, as globalization "can never happen to the sensory equipment of the experiencing being," it is the aesthetic education that can prepare us for "thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial" (*Aesthetic Education* 2). Although thinking in binary oppositions have always been the preferred paradigm of human minds, the lived reality in the age of multiculturalism seems to have announced the demise of this pattern in lieu of phenomena with blurred boundaries and hybrid in nature.

In a similar vein, Edward Said puts forward a notion in his *Orientalism* championing humanistic intellectual orientation, using "one´s mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding and genuine disclosure" (xvii), in order to mitigate antagonistic attitudes towards the "Other" and open up the field of debate constrained by deep-rooted ways of thinking, stereotypes and prejudices. In spite of the fact that the area of Said´s interest was primarily the Middle East and Arab Islamic world, though he was an Arab Christian and Middle East was not his university specialization, his call for equity of all people and expressed misgivings about the

recurrence of the conditions of imperialism extends to the whole world. While centring his commentary on the phenomenon of the Orient as opposed to the Occident and the biased creation of the exotic Other by the West which has, according to Said, dominated Asia politically for more than two thousand years, Said denounces all forms and instances of abusing power leading to suffering, destruction, inequity and violent subjection. As he claims, these are often in guise of civilizing missions establishing order and democracy purporting to have the Others´ best at heart (*Orientalism* xvi).

Said´s answer to the above-mentioned state of affairs appears to be very much in line with Spivak´s in terms of reaching out to the Other and also the function of literature as ideally developing and promoting understanding of the "strange" and providing the material of intellectual exchange. This conviction is captured in his *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*: "There can be no true humanism whose scope is limited to extolling patriotically the virtues of our culture, our language, our monuments. Humanism is the exertion of one´s faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret, and grapple with the products of language in history, other languages and other histories" (28). Moreover, in his 2003 Preface to *Orient* Said appreciates, next to Goethe´s interest in other cultures and his creative attempts based on his fascination with the foreign, specifically the idea and value of Goethe´s *Weltliteratur*. According to him:

> Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter´s mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter´s philological mission (Orient xix).

As I have demonstrated, despite or rather because of the fact that technology permeates most if not all areas of today´s lives and reading practice has been virtually displaced by visual mediums and others, despite the fact that the very idea of philology is possibly perceived as somewhat antiquarian nowadays, there has been a renewed appeal for critical, informed reading to current and future generations made by literary scholars in the last few decades.

Owing to the fact that the world literary paradigm, as construed by David Damrosch, presupposes the world´s maximum geographical scope and its complex interactions, this thesis takes this framework as its pivotal underpinning for the analysis of the selected works of fiction – an American-Chinese *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston (1975) and a Chinese *Red Sorghum* (1986) by the 2012 Nobel Prize recipient Mo Yan in English translation by Howard Goldblatt. Drawing on David Damrosch´s conceptualization of World literature as "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (4) it becomes obvious that due to the vastness of the body of world´s literatures, translation takes on a crucial role for anyone reaching beyond the boundaries of one´s home irrespective of their linguistic equipment and cultural knowledge of individual states and literary traditions. However, in this thesis, I come to understand translation in a three-fold way. Not only as translator´s practice of decoding linguistic and cultural material of the source text written in the original language and its subsequent encoding into the target language and another culture but also as author´s activity of recording and reshaping the internal processing of culture and reality in the form of a piece of writing and the inevitable choices related to how this is done and finally translation as a cross-cultural encounter, reader´s confrontation with the unfamiliar necessitating constructing one´s own understanding based on reader´s previous experience in this

universe. In this thesis, both chosen imaginative texts will be looked into through the lens of their respective translation as described in the previous paragraph.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first one serves as the introduction to the concept of the World literature and offers a description of its past and contemporary conceptualizations. Second chapter illuminates the relationship between the East and the West throughout human history, providing the necessary background for the analysis of the selected literary works. Third and fourth chapters are devoted to the examination of *The Woman Warrior* and the *Red Sorghum* respectively with regard to their position in the world literary context.

1. WORLD LITERATURE

1.1. GOETHE´S *WELTLITERATUR*

According to John Pizer, Goethe´s concept of *Weltliteratur* originating in the early nineteenth century was enunciated by Goethe at a time of changing political atmosphere in Europe imbued with a sense of decreased importance of the individual nation-states whose borders became porous and the role of their individual autonomy came to be felt as diminished. As Pizer asserts, this was primarily the effect of the long Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent wake of the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, an assembly that reorganized Europe after the Napoleonic Wars with the objective to provide a long-term peace plan for Europe (Pizer 216). Inspired by the newly emerging sense of global modernity made possible by supranational interchange on many levels encompassing communication, commerce and media networks, Goethe gave voice to his vision of a world literary paradigm when speaking to his disciple Johann Peter Eckermann in January 1927 by announcing that:

> I am more and more convinced ... that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men ... I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations and advise every one to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach (*Conversations of Goethe* 212, 213).

Despite the fact that Goethe equated World literature with European literature (Pizer 216), his world view was not limited to the realm of European relations as is evident from his ruminations about a great intercourse arising between China, and the East Indies and the United States (*Conversations of Goethe* 222). As a result, his 1927 pronouncement is deeply inscribed with his cosmopolitan dispositions connected to and

springing from his genuine interest in foreign places and texts which he read both in their original versions if possible but also in translations in case of those not linguistically accessible to him. Preceding the articulation of his idea of a new literary modality, Goethe was captivated specifically by a Chinese novel, not specified by him, in which "the Chinamen think, act, and feel almost exactly like us; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them" (*Conversations of Goethe* 211). It should be noted, however, that Goethe´s fondness of faraway themes, plots, characters and places was mostly due to their exotic character and the artistic value of these works was in reality not considered by him very seriously.

A very important point to take into account at this moment is that the explication of Goethe´s term and his notions of World literature can be perceived as rather elusive as Goethe expressed himself on this theme at various times and moments, in various moods and under various circumstances, leading Eckermann to compare Goethe to "a diamond ... that casts a different color in every direction" (qtd. in Damrosch 1). To support this view, also John Pizer maintains that Goethe´s stance towards the formation of a World literature was fluctuating and "ambivalent" in the course of his life (Pizer 218).

In general, there are two main strands of thought at play to be found in Goethe´s reflections on World literature. First strand encapsulates World literature as a "transnational grid" to which writers of individual nation-states will contribute with works imbued with national spirit (Pizer, 215). The purpose of this grid which Goethe values very highly is that it represents a space enabling "foreign participation" (qtd. in Bergman 65) among nation-states. Thus, Goethe is pleased "to see that intercourse is now so close between the French, English and Germans, that we shall be able to correct one another. That is the greatest use of World literature which will show itself more and more" (*Conversations of Goethe* 270). Secondly, when saying that writers will be able

to "correct" one other, what Goethe has in mind is his urge for poet´s or in general artist´s striving for "elevated culture" which would approximate itself at least distantly to the beauty and greatness of works originating in classical antiquity (*Conversations of Goethe* 255). Therefore, even though Goethe lays special emphasis on the "foreign," he proposes at the same time that "we must not bind ourselves to anything in particular, and regard it as a model. We must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Servian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen; but if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented" (*Conversations of Goethe* 213). In ideal case, sufficient degree of geopolitical homogenization would create a literary field of universal literary works whose artistic value would be nearing the one Goethe finds in the culture of ancient Greeks. Furthermore, David Damrosch construes Goethe´s requirement for beauty as in line with the notion of "elitism" (13) for which Goethe appeals to also as a disapproving reaction to and warning against the upsurge in the spread of the "popular" culture among people due to the commercial mechanisms of nascent literary mass market which favours popular literary works earning much bigger profit over high culture literature with its limited readership.

In addition, another essential feature of World literature which occupied Goethe as well as David Damrosch is the function of translation that enables a literary work to enter the world literary sphere, to circulate there in a new shape marked by gains and losses brought about the process of translation, and possibly also fall out of it again. Goethe was particularly fascinated by the rich variability of a work that undergoes such a transformation which is evident from his multiple comments about his own works translated into other languages. In response to a French translation of his masterpiece he says: "I don´t like to read my Faust any more in German" because he

finds the work in the new translation "again fresh, new, and spirited" (qtd. in Damrosch 7).

Finally, the greatest merit of World literature for humankind, its humanistic potential, as I proposed in the introduction, was recognized already by Goethe in his time. However, it should be pointed out that Goethe did not approach the phenomenon naively. He believed that the growth of universal World literature could help different nations to "learn to know each other" and not unrealistically "get to know each other" (Johann W. Von Goethe 4). The idea of "nations thinking alike" was for Goethe impossible. What he really hoped for the main function of world literature to be was, above everything else, understanding and awareness among people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. And "even where they may not be able to love, may at least tolerate one another" (Goethe n. pag.).

The political substratum from which *Weltliteratur* paradigm emerged, however, did not last long and another phase of intense nationalism in Europe and Germany in particular, reminding the preceding one of national coalesce during the wars against Napoleon, affected the world. As John Pizer claims, the first sign dooming any truly transnational world literary paradigm was the fact that in the 1830s the main world literature exponents in Germany had to defend the established conceptualization of World literature, in order to be able to preserve it at all, as not threatening German nationalism, partially owing to the fact that German literature enjoyed special status in Europe. Next, what ultimately "drained" the then concept of World literature of its "historical-philosophical-humanistic substance" aimed at by Goethe was the sudden shift of its understanding to represent canonicity in the aftermath of failed 1848 revolutions followed by rampant xenophobic nationalism (Pizer 220). Therefore, from this time on, the term began to signify a compendium of Western literary masterpieces which ascended the canon on the basis of their reputed qualities. In the meantime, the

late nineteenth century saw the birth of the new interdisciplinary cross-cultural discipline of Comparative literature which has since then found itself negotiating its relation to world literature, as Comparative literature is often seen as the very early stage of World literature whose tangible material has sometimes been considered as Comparative literature´s resource fountain. Nevertheless, the context of World literature´s origin somewhat faded into oblivion with a few exceptions for the next several decades. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that World literature was rediscovered for contemporary age in a new global framework and thus generating new methodological questions.

Since there have been many different versions of World literature since Goethe enunciated this paradigm, the purpose of this section was not only to shed light on how Goethe conceived of his concept but more importantly to introduce the core material for further discussion aiming to draw parallels between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe´s and David Damrosch´s versions of such a literary mode as Damrosch´s will provide the theoretical matrix the analysis of the selected literary pieces will draw on.

1.2. DAVID DAMROSCH´S PRACTICE OF WORLD LITERATURE

John Pizer argues that there are apparent similarities to be found in the geopolitical situation towards the end of Goethe´s era and that of contemporary age underlying the manifestations of the then and present cultural transnationalism. Once again, the change of the world order, in our time marked by the collapse of Soviet Communism, brought about a sense of dissolving national and cultural boundaries and a wake of new forces interconnecting this time not merely Europe but the whole world (Pizer 216).

The advent of globalization in the new millennium endowed literary studies with a much broader dimension, in fact, the broadest possible, embracing the entire

world, calling for, as Gayatri Spivak called it in her *Death of a Discipline*, a "planetary" perspective. The unsuitability of existing postcolonial literary approaches prioritizing empire-nation dialectics and narrow-mindedness of comparative literature centred on Euro-American canon have posed a question as to how to address and deal with the aesthetic realities of current globalization. In "Conjectures on World Literature" Franco Moretti contends, in an attempt to situate World literature in a new globalised context and a field deluged with new and new literary and critical works, that "world literature cannot be literature, bigger; ... it has to be different. The categories have to be different." Moreover, his main point rests on the notion that "world literature is not an object, it´s a problem, and a problem that asks for a new critical method; and no-one has ever found a method by just reading more texts. That´s not how theories come into being; they need a leap, wager – a hypothesis – to get started" (Moretti 55). Whereas Moretti´s proposed solution - "distant reading" paradigm does not suit the needs of this thesis as it disregards close reading of works, David Damrosch put forward in his *What Is World Literature*? (281) a tripartite definition that appears pleasantly neat, if only at first sight, and which in several respects resembles Goethe´s *Weltliteratur* except for the fact that each is embedded in different geo-cultural realities. This definition addresses directly texts as well as the critical method:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time

Whereas both Goethe and Damrosch retain the commonly used classification of literatures stemming from the respective states they originate in and both seek to break through their boundaries to the benefit of connecting readers of different cultures

and times through engagement with texts, Damrosch employs a perspective going beyond primarily Western canon, unanchored in Eurocentric preconceptions. Notwithstanding the fact that his World literature presupposes the whole world in its spatial and temporal totality, it is not all-inclusive in terms of the summation of all national literatures as its agenda is not to quantify the size of World literature but, as point three states, to focus on the ways texts circulate in languages and cultures other than their original ones.

The next aspect of World literature shared by both Goethe and Damrosch is their appreciation of translation which enables a piece of literature to cross national borders and become an international work. In fact, Damrosch argues that a literary work can enter the realm of World literature only when, as said in point two, it gains in translation. Nevertheless, translation can harm a text as well if not done sensitively and appropriately. As each text is bound to develop a different meaning given the fact that the transportation of ideas and concepts into another setting is inevitably accompanied by divergence from the original, Damrosch argues that "a literary work manifests differently abroad than it does at home" (6).

Finally, even though World literature can undoubtedly give the impression of being "a great idealization of the capacities of the human spirit" (Medeiros 277) and, in Damrosch´s words, inspire "more genuine understanding of the world" (*Comparative Literature* 463) by constituting a shared embodiment of collective consciousness of humankind across time and place, there is also a negative side to it, stemming from the mere fact that world literature is a product of human beings, namely the reality that World literature is in thrall to "a fierce contest for power and dominance" (Medeiros 277). In an open debate on the study of World literature and Comparative literature at the 2011 American Comparative Literature Conference in Canada with Gayatri Spivak and David Damrosch, Damrosch voiced their shared concern about the way World

literature, if done badly, could very easily become "culturally deracinated, philologically bankrupt, and ideologically complicit with the worst tendencies of global capitalism" (*Comparative Literature* 456). Such a scenario applies not only to the forces of the world literary market but also to the academic practices at the university level.

In contrast to comparative literature, which traditionally aims at the study of NATO literatures preferably in their original languages, the study of World literature is often criticised for opening up of the global canon at the expense of becoming intellectually shallow and taking on the shape of amateur survey courses. However, Damrosch stays positive about the future of World literature by putting forward several improving proposals. These include making use of more languages and encouraging more language study at the university level, developing more collaborative scholarship in order to enhance the depth of the study while expanding the breadth, and promoting pluralism in literature anthologies, at the literary market and at universities (*Comparative Literature* 461, 462, 463).

1.3. WORLD LITERATURE AS A FRAME FOR THE ANALYSIS OF *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* AND *RED SORGHUM*

Challenging the canonic perception of World literature within which World literature has usually been associated either with "established body of classics," these being primarily the highest literary achievements of Greek and Roman literature, or "evolving canon of masterpieces," usually encompassing modern literary works of quality nearing that of classics, there is another approach to World literature on the contemporary scene that gained ground in the 1990s – World literature as "multiple windows on the world" (Damrosch 15). These works, compelling for their geographical and cultural diversity,

were extricated from having to reach the reputation of the privileged masterpieces limited to a few European countries so that they could gain scholarly attention, principally of scholars and humanities students. In this thesis, the selected works will be looked upon also from this anthropological point of view, whose criteria are social and informational rather than aesthetic, not incompatible with Damrosch´s modality of circulation and reading but rather supplementing it.

In chapter three, the analysis will begin with Maxine Hong Kingston´s *The Woman Warrior* in relation to its position in the world literary system. Looked at from the viewpoint of a window on the world, a discussion will be devoted to the controversy this book excited due to its fictional character purported to be an autobiography. The next subchapter will address the issue of the (ethnic) author´s responsibility to sociological representativeness and authenticity of her literary work´s subject and potential danger of falling into the trap of "Orientalism" with concrete examples. Finally, I will examine *The Woman Warrior* as a cultural translation bridging the gap between the Chinese and American culture pivoting on the author´s desire to "change the world through artistic pacifist means" (*Conversations with MHK* 168).

Chapter four will be devoted to the analysis of the English translation of Mo Yan´s *Red Sorghum* as a piece of World literature. First, I intend to illuminate the conditions under which the Chinese novel *Red Sorghum* was extricated from its Chinese confines with the event of its translation into English which, along with the English translations of his other books, is believed to have brought about Mo Yan´s entrance to the Nobel Prize shrine. In this part, I will illustrate on this particular example the inequalities of the world literary market based on the central-peripheral value system permeating world literature realm. Second, I will focus on the work from the "window on the world" perspective and discuss the controversy it sparked in the literary circles owing to the way it depicts Chinese society and government. Then, this discussion will

be connected to the analysis of the work´s singularity. Finally, I will look into the text itself, naturally embedded in Chinese culture, from a linguistic point of view and explore the issues that arise when a translation for a new audience is done, placing special emphasis on the “untranslatable.”

2. ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

The objective of this chapter is to shed some light on the way the East/West dichotomy having its roots in the early stages of humankind came into prominence and the ways the Western dominance trajectory has been the source of perpetual appropriation of the West´s East and its "other" throughout the history until recently with the East gaining more ground in the world power discourse. The importance of this section consists in elucidating the position of the Chinese element, China is to be understood here as a constitutive subset of the East, in the Western world while providing the evidence for clarifying why the East/West dichotomy is so difficult to deconstruct in the world thought. Therefore, cross-cultural at its core, World literature can function, as I have proposed earlier, as a means for advancing mutual understanding among people and ideally bring the world together by breaking through the boundaries.

As Thorsten Pattberg claims in his *The East-West Dichotomy*, the first recorded instance when the "east" (Persians) was historically depicted as an antagonist to the "west" (Greeks) was by Herodotus (484 – 425 BC), the "father of history," and thus enacting the "otherness" of the East. Moreover, Pattberg asserts that such an act was stemming from the necessity to resist the foreign force by establishing a Western "self" (n. pag.). As rooted in the constructivist theory, human identity should, therefore, not be seen as natural and stable but constructed or sometimes even wholly invented. Edward Said who was preoccupied with this phenomenon articulated his view that "far from a static thing then, identity of self or of 'other' is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes places as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies" (*Orientalism* 332).

The feeling of substantial difference permeating the perception of the two cultural constructs, East and West, can be seen as established on two facts. Firstly, as

they derive their names from two diametrically opposed hemispheres based on a geographical configuration of the globe, also their nature is construed along some kind of cultural divide positioning them opposite to each other. Secondly, since the first great encounter between the East and West through Jesuit missions to China in the late sixteenth century, their oppositeness has been predicated on the fact that East Asia was recognized as a place with its own history, traditions and texts legitimatizing it as a civilized culture. Perceived as a fully separate tradition, a civilization whose texts and thoughts appear not to be traceable in any of the fundamental texts of the Western one but at the same time "coeval with the Western tradition in terms of its historical depth, philosophical complexity, literary output, and geographic range" (Hayot 90). By implication, scholars were presented with "two worlds: that is, two fully developed, self-contained and non-intersecting structures of the most complex possible arrangements of society, life, and thought" (Hayot 90). Yet, while human senses were presented with two worlds, there was only one and the same species.

According to Pattberg, there have been only two formations of the East-West dichotomy in the history of mankind – Western centred (Eurocentric, c. 500 BC – 1950) and Eastern centric (Asia-centric, c. 1950 -). While the former one encompasses Greek (c. 500 BC – 0), Christian (c. 0 – 1500 AD) and North-atlantic (c. 1500 – 1950 AD) stages, the latter one pivots on the growing significance of China in the world configuration (c. 1950 -) with its rapid economic development and population growth. Traditionally, it is believed that the superior position of the West placing it ahead all the other civilizations was brought about by the advent of sciences, however, Pattberg puts forward also other moments in the history of the West exerting its will to control, namely Greeks in Persia, the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Romans and their emperors, the crusades, the missionaries, the colonial powers, the subjugation of the

New World, the invention of sciences, and finally Globalization providing the evidence that Western attempts at dominance have been a self-renewing, continual effort.

In Edward Said´s view, the West´s academic, historical, institutional form of dealing with the Orient, as opposed to the Occident, was enacted in the late eighteenth century through the establishment of Orientalism. For Said, Orientalism represents "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" by representation of its self through making pronouncements about it (*Orientalism* 3). Moreover, by the act of distancing itself from the Orient and consequently thrusting upon it an image of "surrogate and even underground self" the West managed to reinforce its superior position.

Next, despite the fact that at the time of the Jesuit missions to the East China was perceived as remarkably developed, the West´s subsequent leap forward conditioned by scientific thought and China´s inability to draw level, among other things, gave rise to a preconceived notion of China´s backwardness. Such a view was further endorsed under the progressive thought of the nineteenth century. Drawing on the theories of modernity, Eric Hayot illustrates how the non-modern was not incorporated as an "ontological other" but as a "historical one" in the modern discourse and thus the primitive was conceived of as "the fossil of modernity´s own past in the present" (Hayot 94). As the early East/West comparison was governed by the idealist (Hegelian) philosophy understanding modernity as a set of heterogeneous times, China was simply bound to never catch up with the West. In his *Philosophy of World History* Hegel´s asserts that "The history of the world moves from East to West, for Europe is the absolute end of history, and Asia is the beginning" (Hegel 103). For Hegel, building his argument on Chinese thought and religion, the Asian culture is a subject to *un*-historical development without progress to freedom and therefore its history is only "the repetition of the same majestic ruin" (Hegel 105).

Not even later, in the twentieth century, was there any sense of balance between the East and the West, this time grounded in the doctrine of Herbert Spencer´s "Social Darwinism". On the basis of the "survival of the fittest" the weak cultures were to be diminished and ruled over by the strongest ones. Accordingly, this kind of reasoning was utilized also in China´s case when the East´s westernization was justified by the law of nature (Pattberg).

Although the "single-origin hypothesis" was scientifically officially supported, for example in the study carried out by Jin Li and his team 1998-2004, proving that the Chinese race, like any other as well, is a descendant of Homo sapiens and the African continent, as demonstrated above, the East/West dialectic inscribed with inequality is deeply embedded in the human history and thought enabling the perpetuation of the notion of the East other as racially inferior through generations. Such stigmatization is commonly based on one´s ancestral inheritance related to physical appearance, disregarding one´s linguistic equipment and desire for belonging to a place and community one wants to be associated with.

In contemporary age, however, identity politics has come to be substantially challenged due to the unprecedented mobility of people across the globe brought on by globalization. While the phenomena of ethnicity and diaspora represent ossified mechanisms for identity formation and preservation based on the very existence of cultural differences among peoples and is basically anchored in boundary-maintenance, there has been a need for a new strategy to deal with the act of identification under present conditions. Addressing this issue, Professor Ien Ang, one of the leaders in cultural studies worldwide whose area of specialization are primarily various patterns of cultural flow and exchange in today´s globalized world, argues that the notion of solid identity should be superseded by the one of "hybridity" as it has the capacity to underscore the "complicated entanglements" of current society (Ang 141). The above-

mentioned need stems chiefly from the increasing difficulty to draw a line between categories such as “us” and “them,” Asian and Western, propelled by the amplification of cross-cultural encounters encompassing the necessity of various cultures to coexist with each other within a delineated space. As a result, in lieu of clearly defined identities, there arises a state of being somewhere in-between characterized by fluidity and blurred boundaries in a space conceived of as “a gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences” (Geertz 148). Ang´s reasoning behind the fact that the idea of diaspora is still of worldwide currency inclines to the appeal of the imagined sense of collective membership to ethnic groups whose ambit was extended with globalization and improved communication and who no longer necessarily see themselves as mere minorities within nation-states but as a constitutive part of their ethnic global diaspora. Ien Ang claims that the nature of such diaspora communities is proto-nationalist – although deterritorialised, they are bound symbolically (145). In line with this view, she is also aware of the limits of diaspora which consist in “its own assumed boundedness, its inevitable tendency to stress its internal coherence and unity, logically set apart from 'others'” and thus diasporic identity can be “the site of both support and oppression, emancipation and confinement, solidarity and division” (Ang 142). On the other hand, the concept of hybridity contingent on intercultural confrontations involving negotiating the differences between diverse cultures ultimately leads to the porousness of identities and hybridisation of the world despite the institutionalized maintenance of boundaries between states.

3. THE WOMAN WARRIOR

3.1. MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

Maxine Ting Ting Hong was born in 1940 in the Chinatown of Stockton, California where her parents, first-generation Chinese immigrants from Canton, operated a laundry. Kingston graduated from the University of Berkeley majoring in English, married actor Earll Kingston the same year in 1962 and in the meantime became involved in the Civil Rights and Women´s Liberation movements, and also in the anti-Vietnam war protests of the late 1960s. Later on Kingston moved to Hawaii where she taught English and creative writing and started working on her two memoirs *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980). After returning to California, Kingston published her first novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1988) and began teaching at Berkeley. Kingston has also published poetry, short stories and essays and has won several literary awards. Moreover, she received National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton in 1997 for her life´s work in promoting human values. Kingston continues writing, her latest work being *The Fifth Books of Peace* (2003).

3.2. *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* AS A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Since its publication in 1976, *The Woman Warrior* has attracted wide critical attention arousing major controversy in Asian American studies and is considered to be the most widely taught book by a living author in the North American colleges today (Grice, Shu, *Conversations with MHK*). The core of the book comprises five short stories in which the narrator of Chinese descent gives an account of autobiographical events taking place in the United States, rewrites her mother´s talk-stories but it also tells stories of other family members set in the US and China before the narrator´s birth.

Owing to the fact that the narrative is a fusion of biography, memoir and fiction, which manifests itself in the instability of the narrator´s voice shifting from the biographical "I" to the third person in the fourth chapter, in its fragmentary character disrupting the linear development and several instances when the reader is provided with contradictory information, Kingston manages to create a technique which blurs the boundaries of truth and her imagination and makes the text defy the binary of fact and fiction.

The controversy which arises in this particular case can be seen as representative of the whole of its species, related to two main issues. The first one concerns the forces of the literary marketplace, the second one represents supposed sociological representation in ethnic literary works within the discourse of Asian American cultural studies as part of the United States minority studies. The former issue is preoccupied with the conditions under which Chinese American ethnic minority literature is read and published in the society which is dominated by western hegemonic discourse and the concomitant influence it exerts over its authors. According to Frank Chin, fierce exponent of Chinese Americans´ nationalism and orthodox Chinese culture, Chinese American writers, being aware of their marginalized position in the American society, in order to improve the chances for their works to be published and gain popularity, tend to succumb to the need to cater to the taste of the West, which is in Chin´s view ingloriously done by self-orientalizing depiction of Chinese culture and people (qtd. in Gang 77). Such effect of the literary market Frank Chin calls "neo-orientalism." Although originating from orientalism, neo-orientalism no longer comes from the West, but directly from the East: " Intellectuals from the East win the readers and the market through self-orientation and the West encourage them to do so for they help to testify the correctness of orientation and reinforce the dominant position of the western culture towards the East" (Gang 80). Casting aside for a moment the question whether Kingston did or did not extricate *The Woman Warrior* from the trap of self-

orientation, the reality is that her work performed a similar function in the publishing industry as described by Gang. The editors of a major collection of interviews with Kingston, Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin, recollect that "some young writers complained to her that they were getting 'a generic Maxine Hong Kingston rejecting letter' from publishers looking for Kingston imitations" (*Conversation with MHK* vii).

The latter issue touches on the (ethnic) author´s responsibility to sociological representativeness and authenticity of her literary work´s subject. The heated debate over the veracity of Chinese myths and portrayals of Chinese culture in *The Woman Warrior* chiefly among the Chinese American community was triggered primarily due to the difficulty of its classification and the fact that it received an award by *The National Books Critics Circle* for the best book of nonfiction published in 1976. Furthermore, what the uninformed, uncritical reader finds under *The Woman Warrior* Wikipedia entry is: in the book Kingston "blends autobiography with old Chinese folktales. What results is a complex portrayal of the 20th century experiences of Chinese-Americans living in the U.S. in the shadow of the Chinese Revolution" (*Wikipedia*) and therefore a reading bearing this kind of information in mind can possibly lead to misleading interpretations of this work.

In the following part of this chapter, I will address two dominant arguments of the critical circles related to the nature of Kingston´s depiction of her Chinese American lived experience as mentioned above which can be seen as occupying opposite ends of the spectrum. These two arguments will then provide the subject matter for the textual analysis in the next two subchapters.

One end of this spectrum represents the necessity of social responsibility of the ethnic writers. Since the output of these authors is limited and, by implication, its circulation among the mainstream readers insufficient the importance of such literary works´ representativeness is increased. Therefore, the burden of "dual authenticity" on

ethnic writers cannot be played down as they are naturally viewed as "spokepersons of the 'ethnic' experience" (Woo 173). Ya-jie Zhang claims that if read in China with enough cultural background, *The Woman Warrior* would be perceived as "somewhat twisted, Chinese perhaps in origin but not really Chinese anymore, full of American imagination" (Wong 17). However, in the American environment or generally in the Western world, where the knowledge of Chinese history and culture is scarce, the book is predisposed to be misread and possibly reinforce the racial and cultural prejudiced stereotypes among the dominant American (Western) population.

The other end of the spectrum occupies the counter argument to the previous one discarding the author´s function of a historian or a sociologist and defends artistic individuality in literary works. Along these lines, Wong defends Kingston´s right for the extravagance of her "self-actualization" and claims that although purported to be an autobiography, *The Woman Warrior* should be read as "a sort of meditation on what it means to be Chinese American" (Wong 45). According to her, not even proper autobiography can be understood as giving objective picture of the socio-historical conditions of a given time and place, neither can be representative of a whole community and thus cannot be fully trusted (Wong 38). Even Kingston herself when reproached by other Chinese Americans such as Frank Chin voiced her objection: "why do I must 'represent' anyone beside myself? Why should I be denied an individual artistic vision?" (qtd. in Li 53).

In addition, another view supplementing the complex nature of this problem which should, however, be perceived as the extreme on this end of the spectrum is Gabriele Schwab´s conceptualization of literature as "imaginary ethnographies," that is a "medium that writes culture within the particular space and mode of aesthetic production" (Schwab 2). Drawing on this notion, Schwab focuses on the ways literature "records, translates, reshapes the internal processing of culture" and thus is able to take

on the force of cultural resistance and undermine habitual cultural codes (Schwab 7). With inspection of Kingston´s musings on her own writing and her role as an author, it can be argued that her vision is in accord with Schwab´s.

In the face of the present discussion, Kingston believes that her aesthetics and politics are inseparable. She maintains that "An artist changes the world by changing consciousness and changing the atmosphere by means of language" so has to "use and invent a beautiful, human, artistic language of peace" (*Conversations with MHK* 169). Being a political activist engaged in anti-war protests, Kingston denounces violence and embraces writing which, in her own words, is her "best weapon" (*Conversations with MHK* 20). In a way, Kingston conveys a similar sense of establishing a more peaceful world as Gayatri Spivak does, their shared departure point being mere imagining of the possibility. For Kingston "language might move the heart, and later the world" (*Conversations with MHK* xviii).

3.3. *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* IN THE TRAP OF NEO-ORIENTALISM

In this subchapter I will illuminate the reasons why certain parts of *The Woman Warrior* are liable to be accused of self-orientalizing tendencies by providing concrete examples of readings oriented towards this phenomenon.

Throughout the text the narrator, who is considered to be Kingston herself, first-generation born Chinese American, strives to reconcile her Chinese ancestry which is, however, only mediated to her second-hand by her parents as she has never been in China, and her life in America. The search for her identity is a long process filled with feelings of frustration and displacement as she is torn between two worlds without really belonging into either of them. By exchanging her Chinese voice for the American one, she gradually manages to "exorcise," as Ken-fang Lee calls it, both the American

and Chinese ghosts from her life. Although leaving her Chinese home "in order to see the world logically," (WW 237) the narrator does not become assimilated by the dominant culture completely. Towards the end of the story, as a fully-fledged individual, she tells her mother that she, as the whole Chinese community does, talks-story as well. Therefore, no longer considered by her as cultural baggage, she preserves the continuation of her ancestral tradition. Viewed as a whole, Kingston´s story cannot be perceived as subscribing to the neo-orientalist discourse per se, nevertheless, in an attempt to negotiate a number of contradictory discourses at once, namely Chinese patriarchal values, Western autobiography and Chinese-American assimilation, the text does lend itself to a reading susceptible to neo-orientalist criticism at certain moments.

In his essay, Xu Gang offers two main trends traceable in writings tinted with neo-orientalism. The first one consists in highlighting the alienation and backwardness of the Chinese "other" and the Chinese traditionally patriarchal society whereas the second involves intensifying superiority of the western world by contrasting the historical China with the present United States (Gang 80).

In the first story opening the book, the "No Name Woman," which the narrator learns from her mother, Kingston revisits a tragedy of her aunt who after giving birth to an illicit child committed suicide. Breaking the codes of chastity in Chinese patriarchal society and thus bringing disgrace to her family, the aunt becomes a "no-name woman" who "has never been born" (WW 18). The real punishment was not the raid of her family´s house by the angry villagers but the silence surrounding her existence. The reason why Kingston´s mother tells her the story is to teach her the morals. Although embedded in the patriarchal China in 1924, the implications would be the same for her daughter living in American Chinatown as were for her aunt: "'Now that you have started menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don´t humiliate us. You

wouldn´t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful'" (WW 5).

Interpreted through the lens of the neo-orientalist critique, both points articulated by Gang above can be found in the story. By transplanting the oppressive patriarchal values and practices of 1924 China into Chinese enclaves of modern America, it seems as if the misogynist tradition was in effect even decades later. Moreover, assuming that the story comes from an authoritative source, the uniformed American readers accept it as a fact and therefore the prejudiced stereotypes are consolidated. As her mother refuses to give her more information about the possible circumstances of her aunt´s adultery and the whole situation, the narrator tries to generate her own meanings first by situating the story within Chinese context: "My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil ... she obeyed him; she always did as she was told" (WW 7). Then, in order to explore the relevance of the story to the world she lives in, Kingston reconstructs it under different conditions. In the United States, the world of freedom and individualism, her aunt becomes a "wild woman ... free with sex" (WW 9, 10). By contrasting the degree of women´s personal freedom in China several decades ago when the villagers punished the narrator´s aunt "for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (WW 14) and the land of the American Dream, Kingston confirms Orientalist view of China, the more as she never raises her voice against the established sexism.

The next story for analysis, "The Shaman," gives an account of Kingston´s mother, Brave Orchid, as an independent woman, well- respected doctor when living in China but becoming rather a misfit in the United States, losing her prestige first toiling in laundry and then on tomato farms in order to be able to support her family. Recognizing the value of education in feudal China, Brave Orchid decides to enrol in

medical school of midwifery where she learns both the ancient cures and western discoveries and is promised to gain knowledge "wider than that of any other doctor in history" (WW 74). Depicted as "brilliant, a natural scholar" (75) and one of the best students, she is welcomed "with garlands and cymbals" riding in "a sedan hair" (WW 90) on her arrival back to her village. Nevertheless, her life takes on a different direction with her immigration to the United States in 1940 to join her husband who left China several years earlier. With the prospect of earning good money to send back to poor relatives in China, Brave Orchid, having to abandon her medical profession (without objection), ends up slaving in a family laundry business from 6.30 a.m. until midnight. Finding herself in a new social reality, she often complains about the "terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away" (WW 122) as she has not stopped working since she entered the country.

Although the language barrier of the first-generation Chinese in America is mentioned several times throughout the book, for example when the narrator has to translate for her mother in a pharmacy, which is often stereotyped as a state of aphasia in immigrants, the fact is that Kingston never poses a question why her mother has to work so hard. The readers are merely presented with the fact that the Chinese immigrants can hardly support themselves and are struggling to survive. Drawing on the deep-rooted prejudice of China as a poor and backward country, they can be easily mislead to assume that the standards in America and China are so different that what is considered to be top notch in China is simply not good enough in the United States. In in order to be able to shed some light on the situation, Yuan Shu proposes to look at the socio-political history of America in the early twentieth century, information which Kingston fails to integrate in her story and which, according to him, would help to extricate the story from the possibility of being accused of having Orientalist disposition. In connection to this, Shu suggests exploring the story against the

background of Chinese immigrants´ American experience, times of severe institutional racism in the United States. Excluding women from getting adequate work training promoting integration, language barrier, separation of Chinese-American businesses from the national economy trapped unskilled workers in hard working conditions (Shu 214, 215).

Owing to the fact that Kingston´s mother "is not soft" (WW 69), once being compared to a "dragoness" (WW 79) by her daughter, Brave Orchid strives to retain her dignity and sense of pride and keeps sending money to her Chinese relatives. Her work attitude, strong survival instincts and need to stay occupied prevent her from slacking. Answering to her daughter why she does not want to retire now that she could Brave Orchid explains: "I can´t stop working. When I stop working, I hurt. My head, my back, my legs hurt. I get dizzy. I can´t stop" (WW 124). At the same time she concedes how harsh the working conditions for immigrants are: "I have worked too much. Human beings don´t work like this in China" (WW 123) and that her life definitely is not what it used to be: "You have no idea how much I have fallen coming to America" (WW 90).

Calling for challenging the stereotypes imposed on peoples of color set to maintain superiority of white western population, Chinese American purists demand that the depiction of protagonists in literary works should promote positive view of Chinese people and beware of depicting them as foreigners and outsiders in the new American environment. Despite the fact that Kingston´s *The Woman Warrior* is at moments somewhat opaque because some of the life realities are hidden under the visible surface, and therefore not always immune to Orientalist criticism, Kingston expressed her opinion on this issue very clearly: "How dare they call their ignorance our inscrutability!" (qtd. in Lokugé 29).

3.4. *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* AS A CULTURAL TRANSLATION

"We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we´re no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot" (Kingston, *Woman Warrior* 125)

Embarking on her pacifist literary project, what Kingston aims at in *The Woman Warrior* is a cultural translation that would fuse the horizons of the East and the West and ideally result in a new robust cultural identity. Her wish to bridge the gap between the dominant and the marginal cultures and languages may seem as a daunting task, nevertheless, Kingston´s motivation is strong as at stake is nothing less than human lives. Similar to a linguistic translation, the same applies to a cultural translation too: "Far from reproducing the source text, a translation rather transforms it by inscribing an interpretation that reflects what is intelligible and interesting to receptors" (Venuti193). However, never communicating in a placid manner, a translation can become even "extremely violent" as the project of translation necessarily entails "asymmetries and power struggles" (Bolaki 40). In trying to "figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fit in solid America" (WW 6), Kingston fights her mythical battle with the help of her pen. In one of her interviews, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the title of her book, emphasizing "warrior," primarily because of its connotations of war. What she intended to demonstrate in *The Woman Warrior* is that "there are other ways to fight wars than with swords" (*Conversations with MHK* 48).

Returning to the story of the "No Name Woman," Kingston faces her first translation. The story of her adulterous aunt who drowned herself and her illegitimate

child in a well and was punished by her family by erasing her from their memory cannot be translated unequivocally as the original is incomplete. Since "Kingston´s mother will add nothing unless powered by Necessity ..." (WW 6) and her aunt will not speak for herself, by devising her own versions of the story Kingston takes on a role of her interpreter. What she comes up with, however, are two rather extreme translations: her aunt was either a rape victim or a frivolous woman "free with sex" (WW 10). Unlike her descendants who punish the aunt by denying her ghost peace as they do not provide her with paper goods such as paper spirit money, paper houses, paper chicken, and rice so that she has to steal from other ghosts, the narrator offers her aunt a different piece of paper in an attempt to appease her ghost, her writing. However, as it seems, the narrator´s translation was not really successful as she says: "My aunt haunts me ... [and] I do not think she always means me well" (WW 19). As the aunt´s ghost is not satisfied with the narrator´s interpretations of her story, perhaps meaning that the divergence from the original was far too big, albeit not intentionally, the ghost may be trying to let the narrator know that she should continue and think of another version.

As a translator of Chinese realities and myths for the target American cultural milieu and an artist of high qualities at the same time, Kingston´s undertaking inevitably becomes a subject to constant decisions about the performance of the very act. Giving way to her artistic vision, Kingston does not think of Chinese myths as sacrosanct. On the contrary, she refigures them to serve her purpose, which is the construction of her Asian American identity. In the author´s words: "We have to do more than record myth ... The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way." Instead of dwelling in the sentimental past, which usually does not trouble us anymore in the present, Kingston suggests that myths might be of good use in our lives and help us to "come to terms with what it means to be alive today" (*Conversations with MHK* 18).

In the second chapter called “The White Tigers,” the author reinvents a folk story, the ballad of Mulan, which has been part of Chinese oral tradition for almost fifteen hundred years. According to this legend, Mulan is a woman warrior who after mastering the martial arts returns home to take her father´s place in the imperial army and in male disguise fights the invasions of Huns. After ten years of her devoted service, Mulan restores her peaceful life of a woman. The other model for Kingston was the story of Yue Fei, a general in Song Dynasty who had his back inscribed with words expressing his fealty and patriotism. In “The White Tigers,” Kingston´s project of translation represents bridging the divide between the mythical world of the swordswoman and the real world of the narrator whose apt description directly follows the account of Fa Mu Lan´s life starting with words: “My American life has been such a disappointment” (WW 54). By drawing parallels between the two worlds she conveys the sense of the essential difference between them, the arms used in their battles. While the woman warrior does not have a single doubt about where her home is, Kingston cannot even figure out “what [is] her village” (WW 54). In her American life, the old couple serving as gurus to the woman warrior becomes “a medium with red hair” (WW 61), glorious fighting and killing is “slum grubby” (WW 59) and the purpose of her mission is not noble as her enemies are racist and tyrants “business-suited in their modern American guise” (WW 57). Although the narrator claims that “the swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar,” (WW 62) both of them having the “words at our backs,” (WW 63) what sets them apart is the way of solving conflicts. In spite of the fact that throughout the story the narrator plays with the idea of real killing and the necessity to learn about dying, at the end she recognizes the difference between myth and reality, which is in Stella Bolaki´s view a sign that Kingston internalized the conventions of her social milieu (48). Kingston, as a pacifist, does not kill but “reports” as “the reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words”

(WW 63). Her anger directed towards both the Chinese and American societies is not released with violence and blood but with ink by the means of her writing. The narrator´s vengeance in the form of reporting is thus reporting on the injustices done to her and her family by the racist white society which tore down her parents´ laundry and replaced it by a parking lot. Reporting on the injustices done to them by the tyrants who "for whatever reason can deny my family food and work" (WW 58) but also reporting on the sexist Chinese patriarchal society which forces their women to become mere wives and slaves. Not even in this case does Kingston provide a faithful translation of the source text, domesticating it for the target audience. The fact that the narrator has "so many words ... that they do not fit on [her] skin" (WW 63), testifies to the existence of the "untranslatable" between the two cultures, to something that got lost in the process of translation.

The last chapter of the book, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Ripe" is divided into two parts, each illuminating different stages of Kingston´s Asian American identity formation. The first part portrays the immigrant´s silent period. On her journey towards the reconciliation between her Chinese heritage and her American self, the narrator´s struggle becomes evident in the very act of defining and locating herself within two substantially distinct language paradigms. As the narrator´s starting point in the United States is zero knowledge of the English language, also the development of her identity in this world is hindered. According to Sapir-Whorf´s hypothesis about the relation between language and reality, language´s power over her mind causes the narrator´s displacement. The translation between Chinese ideographs and English alphabetical system is thus the basis for her identity quest.

I could not understand "I." The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I," assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? ... I stared at the middle line and waited so long for its

black centre to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it. The other troublesome word was "here" ... . (WW 193)

The second part of the chapter depicts the narrator´s increasing ability to express herself in English, to translate her Chinese inner world, however, not without a cost. She and the other immigrant children are called by the villagers "a kind of ghost" (WW 213, 214). "They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves like ghosts" (WW 213). Eventually, the state of in-betweenness brings the narrator too much confusion since she does not feel to be part of the Asian (American) minority neither the American majority, which makes her want to abandon her ancestral past. She does not want to hear any more of the Chinese stories as "they have no logic" (WW 235) and "logic [is] the new way of seeing" (WW 237). Exchanging "mysteries" for "simplicity" (WW 237) is a sign of her assimilation.

The last story about a poetess Ts´ai Yen born in 175 A.D. closing *The Woman Warrior* provides the model for Kingston´s book in which she describes her own experience of cultural appropriation by the means of the language and lens of the culture appropriated. According to the original story, Ts´ai Yen was captured by Huns in Northern China and is forced to live by "barbarians" in their land (WW 242) where she gives birth to two children. Expressing her homesickness and sadness about the fact that her sons do not understand her language, Ts´ai Yen composes songs mixing lyrics in her Chinese language and barbarian music, one of which, after she is ransomed and returns home, is passed down to her descendants. This time Kingston does not recourse to translation in order to make the story relevant to her life, she is rather a listener in this particular instance. In her own story, achieving a certain kind of equilibrium between the immigrant generation and the American born, coming to terms with her hybrid identity, Kingston proves that she was not wholly absorbed and assimilated by the

dominant society but that she merely appropriated its values and life style. At the end of the book, before the story of Ts´ai Yen is told, Kingston says: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk-story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (WW 240). Stella Bolaki proposes that by emphasizing the importance of the song that "translated well" (WW 243) Kingston redirects the attention from the difference in the endings of the original Chinese story where the protagonist returns home and her own story of not returning to her ancestral land (Bolaki 53). In this way, Kingston announces that the outcome of both her endeavor to translate between distinct cultures and therefore also of the process of her Chinese American identity formation was satisfactory. As captured in the introductory quote to this section, the narrator – Kingston herself voices her awareness of the dynamic nature of her cultural identity: "We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we´re no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet?" (WW 125) and hence embraces her existential hybridity.

4. *RED SORGHUM*

4.1. *RED SORGHUM* IN THE WEST

As described in chapter two, for thousands of years China was a home of a civilization with a wholly separate tradition from the Western one with regard to its history, culture, philosophy and intellectual thought. Based on the inductive mode of thinking, from the particular to the universal, as opposed to the deductive West, the underlying principles of Chinese philosophy embody the search for universal formulas leading to balance, harmony and equilibrium and ultimately to the state of universal peace and world of oneness. Assuming "moral superiority" and cherishing its tradition, China had been trying to protect its humanistic, spiritual essence from, although scientifically superior, otherwise morally corrupted, aggressive, unstable West until the beginning of the twentieth century (Pattberg). This was particularly true for Chinese literature which, as a self-sufficient entity characterized by its long history, maturity, and richness did not feel in need of external stimuli. The first time China opened its doors to foreign cultures and influences was at the turn of the twentieth century with the May Fourth Movement[1] when Chinese writers began to absorb Western literary trends through translations of foreign literature. However, the establishment of the People´s Republic of China in 1949 drove China once again into seclusion and literature was brought under strict political control. In reality, this control was introduced by the Chinese political leader Mao Zedong already in 1942, was most severe during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and lasted until his death in 1976, imposing ideological

[1] May 4, 1919 was a monumental day in modern Chinese history on which thousands of students protested in Peking against the Versailles Peace Conference and the humiliating treaty with Japan signed by the Chinese government. The May Fourth Movement was established in 1917, taking its name from the incident in 1919 and lasted until 1921. It was a socio-political reform movement directed toward national independence and rebuilding society and culture, in its nature anti-Confucian and partly pro-Western (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

requirements on Chinese literary production. All literary works and performing arts created in this time were to deal with politicized topics which served the propaganda of the regime and ideological education of the people. With the end of Mao Zedong´s leadership, China entered new era of its history, opening itself to the Western world and implemented a reform of its stagnating economy. It was also in the last decades of the century that a new wave of globalization, the exclusive product of the West, reached the borders of China. Still rather sceptical to having its literary heritage contaminated by other cultures, China embraced the economic aspect of globalization more willingly than the cultural one fearing the negative side of globalization, homogenization of national cultures, in order to stimulate the rapid development of Chinese economy. Nevertheless, China benefitted from the internationalization of the literary marketplace as well. On the one hand, with the introduction of translations of Western works in the East Chinese authors, recently liberated, discovered new sources of inspiration as to the subject matters and writing techniques, rather surprising to them due to years of China´s isolation. Consequently, Chinese writers began experimenting both with domestic and borrowed writing styles and several of them became known internationally, including the gifted Mo Yan. On the other hand, among the positive impacts of globalization is primarily the fact that China was finally given the opportunity to present its unique culture and literature to the world and break free from the crisis of representation.

While it is generally true that circulation and fate of literary works in other environments than its original is heavily dependent on the medium of translation, this is even more evident in the case of translations from Chinese. Ning Wang argues that the lack of competent translators capable of translating ideographic Chinese into elegant idiomatic forms of the consumer cultures´ languages is the main reason hindering the Chinese texts from penetrating the world literary sphere on a larger scale but also the discovery of Chinese masterpieces for the World literature canon (304).

Drawing on the world system of economic relationships, Franco Moretti discloses that the world literary system functions on a similar basis. It is one but unequal (149). However, Johan Heilbron amends this view by claiming that the sphere of transnational cultural exchange operates relatively autonomously and cannot be seen as merely derivative of global economic relationships. Looking at translations from a sociological perspective, Heilbron sheds light on the dynamics of the world-system of translation based on a core-periphery structure. According to him, the international translation system should be seen as a hierarchical organization with central, semi-peripheral and peripheral languages in which the English language assumes a "hyper-central role" (434) roughly since the end of the Second World War. By definition, "the larger share in the total number of translated books worldwide," the more central a language is (Heilbron 433). As the size of the individual language groups is not the decisive factor of the degree of its centrality, among the peripheral languages as of 1978 were for example Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, among the semi-peripheral Spanish, Swedish, Czech and central English, French, German, and Russian (Heilbron 434). Although this system is a subject to change over time, given its historical development, major shifts of power within its structure are rather long-term processes. Heilbron sums up the rules of this realm in a following way: "translations flow more from the core to the periphery than the other way round" (435) and "the more central a language is in the international translation system, the smaller proportion of translations into this language" (439).

Following the trajectory of the literary works of a Chinese author Mo Yan in a global context, 2012 Nobel Prize laureate in Literature, it becomes obvious that given the fact that all his works were originally written in peripheral Chinese he must have been either very lucky with regard to his translators or extremely talented, or, both. First appreciated on a national level, the recognition of Mo Yan´s works´ great artistic value

spread beyond home and finally found its destination at Howard Goldblatt, the master English-language translator of contemporary Chinese fiction, who, enchanted by the novel *Red Sorghum* (1986), asked the author for his permission to translate it and locate a publisher. Earning high praise for his 2003 translation which was listed by *World Literature Today*[2] as the best foreign book of that year, Goldblatt has so far undertaken translation of seven of Mo Yan´s novels. By successfully translating Mo Yan´s literary works into English, the ligua franca of today´s world, Goldblatt managed to endow his works with a "continued life" (Benjamin n. pag.) and thus preventing them from being confined merely to the context of their origin. In this view, he has played an invaluable role in enabling the West to engage with Chinese culture on a deeper level. Nevertheless, at present, Goldblatt is just one of the many translators bringing Mo Yan to the world. It is estimated that for example translations of the *Red Sorghum* exist also in French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Hebrew, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Korean, Vietnamese. Given the fact that only one Swedish Academy member could read Chinese at the time of Mo Yan´s Nobel Prize nomination, the rest was logically dependent on one of the translators´ work. Recollecting the event of the award´s reception, Goldblatt says: "I take pride in the fact that the head of the Nobel Laureate Committee told me in Stockholm how critical my English translations were in selecting Mo Yan as the 2012 laureate" ("Translating Mo Yan" n. pag.). The question that arises not only in this particular case but with the authorship of translated literary works in general is: to what extent does the translator own his rendition of the original? Although awarded for the author´s own creations, it is obvious that translations are not only of crucial importance within the Nobel Prize sphere but that earning this prize is directly contingent on them. It does not seem, however, that Mo Yan is troubled by the situation.

[2] *World Literature Today*, founded as *Books Abroad* in 1927, is an American magazine of international literature and culture published at the University of Oklahoma.

When asked by Goldblatt a question about the very execution of one of the translations, his response was: "Do what you want. I can´t read what you´ve written. It´s your book" (Goldblatt n. pag.).

In his article "World Literature and the Dynamic Function of Translation" Wang Ning addresses the issue of the relation between the Nobel Prize and canonicity, with which the Western concept of World literature is commonly conflated. Dismissing the view that the Nobel Prize wields merely symbolic power resting on the prestige it gained throughout years, which does not automatically make its recipient canonical, Ning holds a belief that the prize "certainly elevates" the oeuvre of the laureates "to the rank of world literature" (Ning, World Literature 9). Officially, Mo Yan´s works´ literary merit for which he was awarded the prize is his "hallucinatory realism" by means of which he "merges folk tales, history and the contemporary" (*Nobel Prize*). While the recognition of the singularity of Mo Yan´s idiom serves as a testimony of his aesthetic advances with which Mo Yan contributes to the realm of the World literature, the fact of his popularity among readers and publishers worldwide, Damrosch´s criterion of circulation, is, in fact, a sign that his works are imbued with another essential quality qualifying it as World literature. This quality can be described in terms of the universality of Mo Yan´s themes, transcending their particular social, political and historical context – subject matter which will be analyzed in the author´s novel *Red Sorghum* in subchapter 4.3.

4.2. MO YAN

Guan Moye, known as Mo Yan – "Don´t Talk" chose this pen name to honor his mother´s warning against speaking his mind outside under the repressive Communist

regime in China. Born in Northeast Gaomi Township of Shandong Province into a poor peasant family in 1955, he had to leave school at the age of twelve and become a farmer at the time of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution[3] suppressing intellectual education imposed by Mao Zedong. Despite his enthusiasm for education and reading, his access to literature in his teenage years was restricted mainly to revolutionary novels in the socialist realist style. Since he wished to leave his rural hometown and hard labor, he decided to join the People´s Liberation Army at the end of the Revolution and began writing while still serving as a soldier, however, without much success. In the post-Mao era, Mo Yan was exposed to the newly emerging forces of modernism through translations of foreign authors such as William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Márquez as well as his countrymen´s works creating under the "seek cultural roots" movement and gradually developed his own distinctive fictional voice. Pursuing his dream of becoming a writer, Mo Yan grasped the opportunity to study at the People´s Liberation Army Arts College for two years where he soon published his novella "A Transparent Red Radish" earning him instant interest of critical circles. Extremely productive, he was admitted into the Chinese Writers Association in 1986, establishing himself officially as a nationally recognized writer. In 1987 Mo Yan put together his five novellas into his first novel *The Red Sorghum Family* which was also later adapted for a film. While producing numerous short stories and novels, Mo Yan obtained a master´s degree in Literature from Beijing Normal University in 1991. Among his other work translated into English that won him wide acclaim are: *The Garlic Ballads*, *Explosions and Other Stories*, *The Republic of Wine, Shifu: You´ll Do Anything for a Laugh, Big Breasts &Wide Hips*, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, *Sandalwood Death*, *Pow!*

[3] The aim of the Cultural Revolution (1966- 1976) was to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant political ideology within the Communist Party of China by discarding capitalist and traditional elements from the society. The movement paralyzed the country politically, economically and socially.

4.3. *RED SORGHUM* AS A WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Similarly to Maxine Hong Kingston´s work, Mo Yan´s sparked bitter controversy among his compatriots too, however, for a different reason, highlighting the difficult position of writers in contemporary China in general. Since he was announced the Nobel Prize winner in Literature in October 2012, Mo Yan has been a target of a heated debate over his literature and political views running around perhaps the whole world. China accepted the news with pride and big celebrations as Mo Yan was the first Chinese citizen to receive the award and thus symbolically testifying to China´s long awaited global acknowledgement not only as an economic power but as a cultural centre as well. Nevertheless, Mo Yan is not exactly the first Chinese person to win the prize. The first was Gao Xingjian in 2000 who emigrated two years earlier to France and therefore was not officially celebrated by the Chinese Communist Party. The criticism aimed at Mo Yan deals with his "apparent acquiescence to the Chinese government´s repression of dissidents" (Knight 69) stemming from two main facts. The first being the nature of his open political statements and actions such as his participation in the event of hand-copying Mao Zedong´s influential speech "Talks at the Yan´an Forum on Literature and Art" in commemoration of his seventieth anniversary in which he states that artists who do not commit themselves to the Party´s ideology should be punished. Moreover, Mo Yan is also chairman of the Chinese Writer´s Association, an organization supported by the government censoring dissident authors. The second fact is for some the mere reality that Mo Yan is not himself an open reflexive dissident in his works. The author is in his response to this topic rather unapologetic as captured in his Nobel Lecture delivered in December 2012:

> You will find everything I need to say in my works ... As a member of society, a novelist is entitled to his own stance, and viewpoint; but when

> he is writing he must take a humanistic stance, and write accordingly. Only then can literature not just originate in events, but transcend them, not just show concern for politics but be greater than politics (*Nobel Prize*).

Unlike Kingston who connects her aesthetics, writing and actions to politics as she wishes to change the atmosphere in the world, Mo Yan, whose position of a citizen and writer is complicated by the regime, asks his readers to disregard his very own person. He wants his readers to look in his stories for reflections of human lives and hearts set up as mirrors to their own. Even though always embedded in particular socio-historical contexts, when stripped off the layers of culture created by people, the essence of a human life can be seen as universal. Therefore, Mo Yan focuses on individuals, individual will and problematizes the bare nature of human existence.

> I know that nebulous terrain exists in the hearts and minds of every person, terrain that cannot be adequately characterized in simple terms of right and wrong or good and bad, and this vast territory is where a writer gives free reign to his talent. So long as the work correctly and vividly describes this nebulous, massively contradictory terrain, it will inevitably transcend politics and be endowed with literary excellence (*Nobel Prize*).

However, Mo Yan is far from being apolitical in his literary works. He does voice his political criticism and reveals social pathologies in them, just not overtly. He manages to skillfully censor himself by resorting to the "gray zone," a space where "the government suffers heterodoxy as long as writers camouflage their dissent in literary metaphor" (Knight 70).

The *Red Sorghum* is an epic novel set in Mo Yan´s hometown Northeast Gaomi Township of Shandong Province, spanning the history of a peasant family from 1923 to 1976. The first-person omniscient narrator, who assembles his family´s

chronicle, imagines the experience and heroic achievements of his ancestors against the real historical background of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) during which the Japanese invaded China with mass killings and abhorrent cruelty. Lacking functioning central government, social and civil institutions failed to protect Chinese citizens not only from the outside but also to keep order within individual regional townships, leaving dark memory of immense suffering and poverty in China´s history. Applying his singular vision, blending realism and fantasy, folktales, and magical elements, Mo Yan three-dimensionalizes a linear historical narrative and creates a unique imaginative space.

As Robert J.C. Young formulated it, in general, World literature is "literature of such quality and insight that it transcends its local context to establish itself as universal, shared by all cultures" (214). In the case of Mo Yan´s *Red Sorghum*, its special insight can be defined in terms of its philosophical depth with which the author comments on human existence. In this work, Mo Yan explores various "nebulous terrains," as he put it in his Nobel Lecture, by problematizing established binary categories.

The most apparent subversion of binaries in the *Red Sorghum* is the one of past and present. By manipulating time, constantly moving back and forth, abandoning any chronological order of events, the author makes the readers have to piece the story together for themselves. According to Inge M. Thomas, this thoroughly modern narrative technique challenges "the notion that history as truth is ultimately knowable" (n. pag.). This sense is further amplified by the instability of the narrative voice as the point of view sometimes switches between characters and sometimes the same episode is told from multiple perspectives. Moreover, even the credibility of the I-narrator is at times undermined too, such as when he does not know what he is logically supposed to know:

> A bare-assed little boy once led a white billy goat up to the wee-covered grave, and as it grazed in unhurried contentment, the boy pissed furiously on the grave and sang out: 'The sorghum is red – the Japanese are coming- compatriots, get ready – fire your rifles and cannons - ' Someone said that little goatherd was me, but I don´t know. (RS 10)

or when he mysteriously knows about things logically not accessible to him from any kind of source (Grandma died before the narrator was born): "[Father] never knew how many sexual comedies my grandma had performed on this dirty path, but I knew" (RS 12). Deprived of a coherent picture at any given time, the readers might come to the conclusion that "whatever truth resides in the narrative is the truth of the human heart, not human event" (Thomas n. pag.).

In the *Red Sorghum*, the focal aspect of the novel resides in the author´s probing of the human hearts. Mo Yan presents a whole range of complex characters with rich inner lives, driven, next to history, by instincts, burning desires, passions, and powerful emotions. Endowed with contradictory attributes, the narrator´s ancestors do not fit into neatly delineated categories of a hero or a villain. Thus, another boundary blurred by the author is the good, bad divide. Granddad Yu Zhan´ao is depicted simultaneously as a bandit, murderer, gambler, adulterer, sedan bearer, and heroic Commander Yu leading his village troop in the anti-Japanese resistance independently from the Communist or nationalist-led forces. Defending his status when called a bandit, Granddad´s articulation of his reasoning: "Who´s a bandit? Who isn´t a bandit? Anyone who fights the Japanese is a national hero" (RS 26) suddenly reverses the common understanding of the concepts of good and evil. Defending their country against merciless brute enemy, killing is justified in the name of higher good. However, Mo Yan complicates the moral framework even more by humanizing the Japanese soldiers too, commenting on them as "basically decent men" (RS 98) and providing the

readers with their perspective of suffering equal to that of the Chinese. By this act, Mo Yan universalizes human war experience by highlighting the pointlessness of human losses. This sense is further intensified in a scene in which a mass grave with bones, skulls and skeletons accidentally opened up and "not even the provincial party secretary could have told which of them belonged to Communists, which to Nationalists, which to Japanese soldiers, which to puppet soldiers, and which to civilians" (RS 144).

Similarly to Granddad, Grandma is also an embodiment of diverse characteristics. Even though portrayed as a traditional woman wishing for herself "a good husband, handsome and well educated, a man who would treat her gently …" she is primarily a powerful figure, "a hero of the resistance, a trailblazer for sexual liberation, a model for woman´s independence" (RS 16). Married by her parents to a wealthy leper in exchange for a mule, Grandma decides to recast her fate and takes action into her own hands. By committing adultery with Granddad who later kills both the leper and his dad and living together without marriage, Grandma transgresses moral values of traditional patriarchal society. On the day she encourages Granddad and Father to ambush the Japanese, which is the scene with which the author opens the whole story in the year 1939, Grandma is killed by a Japanese bullet in the battlefield. As life drains out of her body, she meditates on her past decisions and bravely justifies them:

> Have I sinned? Would it have been right to share my pillow with a leper and produce a misshapen, putrid monster to contaminate this beautiful world? What is chastity then? What is the correct path? What is goodness? What is evil? You never told, so I had to decide on my own. I loved happiness, I loved strength, I loved beauty, it was my body, and I used it as I thought fitting. Sin doesn´t frighten me, nor does punishment,

> I´m not afraid of your eighteen levels of hell. I did what I had to do, I managed as I thought proper. I fear nothing. (RS 55)

Granting his characters individual will and responsibility for their actions and moral dilemmas can possibly be seen as sinking into the gray zone mentioned previously, allowing Mo Yan to challenge the political status quo. By depicting Grandma, Granddad and many others as not succumbing to the society´s pressure and not blindly observing the rules imposed on them to preserve obedience, enduring cruelty and killing to gain freedom, Mo Yan subverts the authoritarian Communist government and celebrates individual autonomy. Next, the same subversive tendency of Mo Yan´s may be noticed in his manipulation of time and point of view analyzed earlier by which he manages to challenge the notion that history is " a self-evident truth" (Wang n. pag.). Commenting on Chinese Communist artistic and political theory, David Der-Wei Wang points out that throughout the thirty years of Mao´s regime, "history" has become unitary, unquestionable, "self evident" truth by means of which the government maintained its authority and still fends off threats of alternative views.

Finally, with closer look at the red sorghum, its nature and metamorphosis, it becomes obvious that the plant is endowed with symbolical significance. As the "epitome of mankind" (RS 250), its red color signifies blood and its individual stalks of flesh stand for human beings. Comparing the majestic red sorghum representing the glorious past of the narrator´s heroic ancestors with the hybrid green sorghum of the narrator´s generation, "unfilial descendants who now occupy the land pale," the narrator, although "surrounded by progress," feels "a nagging sense of our species´ regression" (RS 10). Returning to the village after ten years to learn the stories of his family, he finds himself standing before his Second Grandma´s grave "affecting the hypocritical display of affection I had learned from high society, with a body immersed so long in the filth of urban life that a foul stench oozed from I pores" (RS 249).

Relying on the parallel made between the sorghum and people, Mo Yan expresses his deep disappointment and dissatisfaction.

> Hybrid sorghum never seems to ripen. Its grey-green eyes seem never to be fully opened. I … look out at those ugly bastards that occupy the domain of the red sorghum. They assume the name of sorghum, but are bereft of tall, straight talks; they assume the name of sorghum, but are devoid of the dazzling sorghum color. Lacking the soul and bearing of sorghum, they pollute the pure air of Northeast Gaomi Township with their dark, gloomy, ambiguous, faces. (RS 250)

Once again, the text lends itself to being recognized as a social criticism, criticism of those not brave enough to fight for freedom, the degenerate and inferior to those not afraid to raise their voice under repression. However, it is not clear whether Mo Yan considers himself to be one of these hypocritical individuals or whether the act of encoding true meanings into metaphors is perceived by him as heroic.

Embedded in a very specific context notwithstanding, the *Red Sorghum*´s singularity consists in its universalizability. This goes as far as not having to be read as a story about China in the past or contemporary China or any China at all but the possibility to comprehend the text´s moral message on a completely universal level, delivering a warning about any kind of totalitarianism, oppression and injustice of any time.

4.4. *RED SORGHUM* IN TRANSLATION

Translation between Chinese and English entails many more problems that might be apparent at first sight. The first major difficulty arises from the fact that these languages make use of different systems, whereas English is an alphabetical language within

which symbols express the sounds of speech, Chinese ideographic system consists of ideograms directly expressing ideas and meanings. The second issue dealt with by translators of such texts is that each of these languages belongs to a different language family, English is an Indo-European language, Chinese a Sino-Tibetan. Practically, Chinese-English translation thus means: virtually non-existent correspondence between semantic items, different and inconsistent sentence structures, random punctuation and increased interpretative difficulty. Attempting to convey what translators of texts between these two language experience, Howard Goldblatt, the only English translator of Mo Yan, says:

> For us it's a process of absorbing a phrase or a sentence or more to determine its intent and then recreating it in our own language, staying close to the original wherever possible, striving to capture images, mirroring language register and the like, but usually in a new structure, often with different words. Two translations of the same Chinese text by experienced translators might well strike a reader as fundamentally different; retranslating them back into Chinese would produce wildly divergent texts. ("Translating Mo Yan" n. pag.)

Next, embedded in significantly different cultures, customs, religious believes, living conditions, and history, each language possesses its own culturally specific words, precluding easy transfers from one language into the other. The core that can be carried over includes for example plot, characterization, dialogue or a point of view. The aspects that defy translation represent denotations, connotations, idiomatic expressions and culture-specific symbols.

Although praising World literature for its ability to "deliver surprising cognitive landscapes hailing from inaccessible linguistic folds" on the one hand, on the other Emily Apter warns in her book *Against World Literature: on the Politics of*

Untranslatability against its tendencies to universalism. Fearing the possibility that distinctiveness and diversity of cultures could be flattened out by insensitive use of cultural equivalents and substitution in translations, Apter calls for "the right to the Untranslatable" (8) and recognizing the importance of non-translation, mistranslation and incomparability (4). Equivalence has been a major controversial issue in translation studies and theory. Even though it represents the central concept and a requirement in translation, it is also criticised on the grounds of being imprecise and creating a false illusion of symmetry between languages. In this section, I will explore the way Howard Goldblatt approaches this phenomenon in Mo Yan´s *Red Sorghum*. Basically, he describes his strategy in the following manner: "I weigh the necessity of making every alien reference or concept clear to my reader; as often as not, I leave it unexplained, welcoming the reader to skip it, figure it out, or curse the translator" ("Translating Mo Yan" n. pag.). Generally, Goldblatt does not cater for the needs of the readers by means of footnotes or endnotes in his translation of the novel. Mostly, he protects the right of incommensurability of Chinese culturally loaded words and phrases by transplanting them into the target text unchanged, occasionally adding his explanatory note right into the text. One of the words belonging to the lexical gap category in the Chinese language is a "kang," a heatable brick bed or a ceramic stove used in rural northern China. This word is retained in the translation several times without any explanation provided. Nevertheless, its basic meaning can be grasped from the context quite easily. "Whether my grandma ever loved him or whether he ever lay down beside her on the kang has nothing to do with morality" (RS 16). Nor does Goldblatt look for an equivalent of a "fistcake." Its first appearance in the text might thus bring about a sense of confusion for the readers: "Commander Yu spat out angrily, 'You can´t scare me with the Wang regiment´s flags and bugles, you prick. I´m king here. I ate fistcakes for ten years, and I don´t give a damn about that fucking Big Claw Wang!'" (RS 26). Even though the

context conveys the sense of someone´s great power eating fistcakes for such a long time, the concept itself remains rather inaccessible to the target readers. The next word for consideration is "li," Chinese unit of measurement. The first time this word appears, Goldblatt intervenes and offers a conversion by means of which he shows a domesticating tendency of his translation. "... the marshy plain, which measured sixty by seventy-odd li – or about twenty by twenty-five miles ..." (RS 18). Chinese sign which means "blue-flower-porcelain," concept inseparable from Chinese rice-eating culture, is made by the translator more explicit by changing it into "white ceramic bowls with blue floral patterns" (RS 20). The next area requiring special attention is the one of dealing with idiomatic expressions, phrases heavily embedded in individual cultures. In all examples provided, Goldblatt preserves the Chinese version despite the fact that the English language does own crude equivalents in some cases. The first one: "Marry a chicken and share the coop, marry a dog and share the kennel" (RS 64) could possibly become "Where the needle goes, the thread follows." Another one "Your dad´s no high-ranking noble, and *you´re no gold branch or jade leaf*" (RS 64) shows certain similarity to the English "you are no golden goose." The fact that Goldblatt retains Chinese expressions in his translation produces a special effect on its readers, definitely invoking a sense of being presented with a text originating in a foreign culture. Nevertheless, the translator´s work can be perceived as very sensitive and skilful.

Since Goldblatt´s English translations of Mo Yan´s works give the impression of having been written originally in English owing to their excellent readability and also helped the author to gain the Nobel Prize, it can be said that these literary works, the *Red Sorghum* among them, definitely gained in translation, illustrating Damrosch´s second descriptive point of World literature. In addition, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Mo Yan´s works, disseminated by means of translation, played a crucial role in introducing modern Chinese culture and aesthetics to the rest of the world.

Conversely, by the same token, the West´s demonstrated interest in such works serves as an indicator of its openness to deeper engagement with the East and possibly a sign of the East´s improved status in the West´s eyes. Permeating the whole body of this thesis, Mo Yan´s statement on literary circulation addressed to Goldblatt aptly encapsulates the role of the World literature and the message of this thesis: “your work is a bridge that helps people to understand and respect each other” (qtd. in Goldblatt n. pag.).

CONCLUSION

The concept of World literature was first enunciated by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1827 at a time of improved communication between nation-states, increased exchange on a transnational level and decreased importance of the individual national borders. Witness to the change of literary flows, Goethe viewed his *Weltliteratur* as a transnational grid, a place enabling foreign participation, nevertheless, its scope was still limited to the area of Europe. With the course of time, World literature came to be associated with canonicity resulting in the various attempts at compiling world literature anthologies listing national masterpieces. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century marked by a new wave of globalization, the original sense of World literature was rediscovered, this time in a different framework, moving beyond Eurocentrism towards a planetary scale. One of the most distinct voices on the contemporary World literature scene, David Damrosch, proposed a new approach towards this phenomenon, approximating the one of Goethe´s. For Damrosch, World literature should be seen as a mode of reading and circulation of texts beyond their context of origin either in translation or their original language, encompassing the world in its totality.

One of the greatest merits of World literature recognized not only by both Goethe and Damrosch but also by other literary scholars, such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, is its historical-philosophical-humanistic spirit. Enabling cross-cultural encounters on an imaginary level, World literature as a vast cognitive landscape is believed to advance mutual understanding among people and train tolerance between different cultures. Spivak contends that the engagement with different cultures through reading practice can function as an "ethical motor" capable of undermining the ideological field and manifesting itself first purely in human minds and later possibly in human actions, too. Such a premise serves as an overarching theme of this thesis which

is an analysis of the Chinese American *The Woman Warrior* by M. H. Kingston and Chinese *Red Sorghum* by Mo Yan in an English translation by Howard Goldblatt. Whereas Kingston openly denounces violence and writes literature of peace, *The Woman Warrior* can be perceived as an embodiment of the reconciliation between the American and the Chinese cultures, Mo Yan´s overt display of inhuman cruelty in his *Red Sorghum* hides beneath the surface, due to the Communist censorship, criticism of authoritarian regimes and suppression of freedom.

The objective of this thesis was to create a site of transaction between the East and the West by illustrating the various relationships arising when these literary works enter the world and are situated in the world literary context. Both novels managed to gain wide readership and achieve a certain degree of circulation, complying with Damrosch´s central requirement laid on the works of World literature. *The Woman Warrior* is considered to be the most anthologized and taught book by a living author in the North American colleges today and was announced as the best book of nonfiction published in 1976 by the National Book Critics Circle. The English translation of the *Red Sorghum* was listed by *World Literature Today* as the best foreign book of 2003 and its author won the prestigious Nobel Prize in 2012.

In the thesis, *The Woman Warrior* and the *Red Sorghum* each were looked into from the "window on the world" perspective, another way in which World literature is commonly conceptualized, whose criteria are anthropological and informational. Viewed through this particular lens, both works sparked controversy over their sociological representativeness and the manner they reproduce reality. *The Woman Warrior* was accused of self-orientalizing depiction by which Kingston allegedly contributed to the consolidation of the prejudices directed towards the Chinese and the ethnic American-Chinese in the Western society. Despite the fact that through close reading these tendencies are possible to detect, Kingston´s self-orientation was

unwitting and perhaps caused by the multi-layerdness of her text lending itself to diverse interpretations. Moreover, it can also be argued that aiming at creating literature of peace, certain aspects of Kingston´s novel simply gave way to her higher goals. Finally, the author´s opinion should not pass unnoticed; Kingston not only claims her right to her artistic individuality but also blames the Western readers´ ignorance for imposing stereotypes on her work. The Chinese author of the *Red Sorghum*, Mo Yan, became a subject to controversy connected to his apparent approval of the Chinese government´s repression of dissidents soon after receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature. Criticized for not denouncing the Communist regime´s practices in his literary works primarily by Chinese dissident writers, Mo Yan asks his readers to look into his writings more deeply. Reading his *Red Sorghum* metaphorically, Mo Yan´s covert subversion of the regime and criticism of oppression comes to the surface.

Finally, both novels were discussed with regard to their own translations. Kingston´s cultural translation is a negotiation between the world of the Chinese immigrants and the dominant American society. Striving to establish and promote peaceful world, *The Woman Warrior*, in Kingston´s words, translated well. Breaking through the boundaries of individual states, cultures, languages and clearly delineated identities, the main protagonist succeeds in adopting a hybrid identity, not making her attached exclusively to one particular place and equipping her with a planetary citizenship at the same time. The act of translating Mo Yan´s works into other languages played an indispensable role in introducing the writer and Chinese literature to the world and in endowing Mo Yan´s works with a "continued life." The English translation of the *Red Sorghum* by Howard Goldblatt can be understood as another hybrid creation depicted in this thesis. A blend of Chinese history, culture and Western interpretation expressed through the English language, the *Red Sorghum* ceased to be a

strictly Chinese product. In spite of the losses for the Western readers caused by untranslatability, the text gained in many ways, becoming a piece of World literature.

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ENGLISH RÉSUMÉ

This thesis examines the American-Chinese novel *The Woman Warrior* by M. H. Kingston and the English translation of the Chinese *Red Sorghum* by Mo Yan with respect to their position in the world literary context.

The concept of World literature was first enunciated by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1827 and has been understood in several different ways since then. The analysis of the selected literary works pivots on David Damrosch´s contemporary conceptualization of the world literary paradigm as a transnational network, sharing and developing Goethe´s main idea behind the concept.

The objective of the thesis is to provide a meeting place of the East and the West and illustrate the various relationships that arise when *The Woman Warrior* and the *Red Sorghum* enter the world. As a cross-cultural site, the realm of World literature is endowed with a humanistic potential, representing the overarching theme of this thesis. Since the engagement with foreign cultures on an imaginary level is believed to promote understanding among people of different origins, the importance of the reading practice in today´s globalized age is considered by the literary scholars as invaluable.

ČESKÉ RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá postavením literárních děl Válečnice americko-čínské spisovatelky Maxine Hong Kingstonové a Rudé pole čínského spisovatele Mo Yana v kontextu světové literatury.

Koncept světové literatury poprvé formuloval Johann Wolfgang von Goethe v roce 1827 a od té doby prošel různými proměnami chápání. Analýza vybraných děl vychází ze současného pojetí tohoto paradigmatu Davida Damrosche, který nazírá na podstatu světové literatury podobně jako Goethe a chápe ji jako transnacionální systém.

Cílem této práce je vytvořit místo setkání východní a západní kultury a názorně ukázat, jakými proměnami a vztahy díla Válečnice a Rudé pole prochází při vstupu na světovou literární scénu. Jakožto místo mezikulturní výměny, sféra světové literatury skýtá humanistický potenciál, který se stává ústředním tématem této práce. Jelikož je světová literatura považována za fenomén, který umožňuje prostřednictvím četby, tedy alespoň pomyslně, zprostředkovávat a tudíž prohlubovat mezikulturní porozumění, je její role v dnešní době deformované globalizací chápána mnohými literárními vědci jako nedocenitelná.