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Storytelling, Family History, and Cultural Legacy

In Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

and

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*

By Nellie Ceceallya Toner

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Introduction

My thesis explores how the narrators in *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior* selectively construct their family histories through storytelling. In so doing, I delineate the inextricable web of recollection upon which the narrators rely. Because the narrators' present concerns and interests influence their views, they frame the past based on their present times. Memory makes up another important web factor. Recalling details from the past requires the narrators to recollect that past within the context of family memories. Furthermore, cultural histories only develop and become legacies when shared with and acknowledged by other family members—via the oral tradition. Since no direct line to the past exists, the web also involves the complex and inexact act of telling and retelling the past through translated versions. Translating recollections may capture parts of the past but not all: translating involves changing an original. Nevertheless, constructing histories depends on acts of translating.

The narrators' translations offer insights into family histories. Though members are connected through each other and their roots, they have different experiences and perspectives, and they have choices in shaping their own histories. Family members selectively engage in every part of the web: negotiation of time; memory; discursive material; stories which, in turn, can be narrated through others; and translations.

My thesis postulates that along with the storytelling web of connections, both novels depend upon the strategies of juxtaposition, subversion, and distilled silences to selectively construct histories and to open up rhetorical spaces for discursive thought. My analysis illuminates these strategies and explains their rhetorical significance in the narrators' construction of histories. Primarily, the narrators' storytelling establishes cultural legacies while empowering the narrators to dramatically express their own histories. In so doing, the narrators ensure they have a voice in their family ethnic histories rather than allowing those

outside such histories the ultimate power of historical renderings.

I situate my thesis primarily within four theoretical frameworks found in the works of philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the historian Hayden White, the philosopher and feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero, and intra- and inter-lingual translation theories discussed in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet's edited *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* and *The Craft of Translation*.

In his book, *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs posits that groups such as families socially construct what he calls "collective memories" which become family legacies. Halbwachs posits that memories become "common to a group" through relationships which have formed in recent or past times. Recalling such memories requires group members situating themselves "in the perspective" of a group. In this way, a "totality of memories" exists as common to a group. "Based on such memories, the family group" retrieves and reconstructs associated memories in logical fashion. Halbwachs states, "To be sure, family memories

resemble each other in that they refer to the same family. But these memories differ according to many other relationships" (52). Halbwachs continues by explaining that similar family memories represent "a sign of a community of interests and thoughts. It is not because memories resemble each other that several can be called to mind at the same time. It is rather because the same group is interested in them and is able to call them to mind at the same time that they resemble each other" (52). Hence, Halbwachs points out how family members, through recall and recollection, seem to share legacies even when memories do not emerge similarly between members.

In the framework of Halbwachs' theory, recalling memories involves situating ourselves within a social group dynamic. Our memories catalyze as socially relational. Even differing memories cannot disconnect themselves from group memories held in common. Despite influences outside a family group, members recall memories with similar "interests and thoughts." The cliché "no [woman] is an island" proves true. Every

slate of memory is never a clean slate. Family memories "hang together" via family connections and roots.

The storytellers in *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior* situate themselves within family "collective memories" as they construct and reconstruct their multicultural histories. The process involves both retaining memories and molding new "collective memories" because changing times elicit different interests and concerns. Newer generations, for instance, draw from passed down "collective memories" in ways uniquely related to them. Indeed, the family histories of the narrators Brave Orchid and Maxine Hong Kingston, and Pauline and Nanupush, collide, diverge, and overlap as the narrators hold onto family legacies, shape new ones, and relate to their present times.

Within the context of Halbwachs' related theory termed the "presentist" view, the narrators focus upon the past in terms of the present. Halbwachs views the past as "shaped by the concerns of the present" because the "beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the present

shape the various views of the past as they are manifested respectively in every historical epoch" (25).

When reconstructing histories, a "counterposing" of the present upon the past occurs. By implication, "history" changes since interests and concerns vary through time. Hence, discursive conversations unfold differently. A certain present-ness of the past pervades while the past proves inevitably restructured to suit present needs. While past memories cannot be perfectly recaptured, its "shades" of "truths" may be preserved. Understanding the past allows groups and individuals to maintain continuities even amidst the inevitable newness that each successive historical epoch brings.

In *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior*, the narrators selectively construct family histories because they specifically choose what to draw from and how to translate their memories. For instance, Pauline and Kingston reconstruct family histories by recollecting memories within group frameworks which differ from those of Nanapush and Brave Orchid. All the storytellers in the novels construct their histories very purposefully to

shed light on the past as connected with the present. The narrators choose how to shape the past by manipulating their memories to suit rhetorical purposes concerned with the present.

I also situate the novels' rhetorical storytelling within the context of Hayden White's theory underscoring the selective construction of history. White posits a "deep level of consciousness on which a historical thinker chooses conceptual strategies by which to explain or represent his data" (x). In other words, the historical thinker strategically conveys the past through a purposeful design which divulges certain "data." This "data" is rhetorically represented along each point of the retelling history course (in the story's "chronicles"). Coalesced, the "data" reveals discursive material about history. What, how, and why the historical thinker represents information proves very purposeful.

In his book, *Metahistory*, White propounds history as a structured "narrative prose discourse" (ix). This discourse, White explains, is strategically molded; "data" becomes uncovered from within the "chronicles"

buried in the stories. The connections between the "chronicles" give strength and significance to the story. According to White, the reconstruction of history involves a degree of invention. White states, that "chronicle" and "story" render a "historical account" (5). He posits that "both represent processes of selection and arrangement of "data" from the unprocessed historical record in the interest of rendering that record more comprehensible to an audience" (5). White contends that "historical work represents an attempt to mediate among what" he calls "the historical field" of unprocessed information (5). In both novels, the narrators express histories that have been largely unrepresented in historical renderings.

Accordingly, in the context of White's theory, constructing history involves using a framework of narrative prose discourse. This method allows for communicating historical data not found in historical records. Utilizing particular strategies within a specific framework to construct histories enables buried and unheard histories to unravel and find voice. The

structural components of constructed histories create discourses through textual rhetoric. Information discursively shared via narrative prose allows an audience to better comprehend what really happened in the past. The significance of the past may be communicated through multiple perspectives. Such proves the case in the context of *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior*. The storytellers selectively construct family histories and open up discourses through their narrative prose. A series of "data" within story "chronicles" coalesce to divulge discursive material.

Socially constructed histories gather importance through particular concepts shared by the narrators. Where gaps exist, invention engenders plausible historical explanations. As a general example, Kingston can never convey a complete version of her family's histories and neither can Nanapush. They use invention to fill in gaps. Nevertheless, as ethnic narrators, they render histories perhaps not processed in "mainstream" historical records. Through storytelling, the narrators use acts of translation to construct and convey their

histories. In a sense, they serve as historians. White states:

I believe the historian performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was really happening' in it. This art of prefiguration may, in turn, take a number of forms, the types of which are characterizable by the linguistic modes in which they are cast.

(x)

Situating my analysis in the context of White's theory, I point to both novels' renderings as selective historical data with discursive material. I show how "chronicles" coalesce to form "data" which gives meaning to the totality of the stories. This "data" explains the significance of "what was really happening" in the stories. As an example, Nanapush exists as a communal figure who must pass on the oral tradition steeped with cultural histories to his granddaughter Lulu. He refuses

to let his Chippewa family culture disappear. Although his lifestyle changes with the times, he participates in change only to ensure the survival of his people. Yet he continues to uphold communal ways and the tradition of storytelling. On the other hand, Pauline, who speaks in monologues, represents fragmentation and confusion within the Chippewa community. She speaks incessantly to no one in particular and wishes for her unique story to be heard. Although fractured, her story exists within the family histories of the Chippewas. As another example, Brave Orchid selectively shares the past with her daughter to teach her lessons and to offer her a glimpse into a past only the mother experienced. Nanapush also shares with Lulu a past she can never truly know. By providing vestiges of that past, he shares with Lulu their family roots. Specific "data" becomes revealed through textual rhetoric engendered by storytellers unfolding multiple histories. Halbwachs' theory on memory and White's theory on history as a narrative prose discourse converge in the context of my analysis.

Selectively constructing histories through narration reveals purposeful discursive material.

Additionally, I draw from Cavarero's theory of the "narratable other." In *Relating Narratives*, she posits that personal stories become narratable when shared with others. In the reciprocity of having our stories retold, the meaning of who we are becomes real. For Cavarero, the "uniqueness of each life" becomes conveyed when shared with others (ix). According to Cavarero, we depend "upon the other for the narration of our own life story" (ix). Our stories prove possible only in relational to others. (xvii) She further explains that "a 'narration' takes shape discursively; it unfolds in a given language, with a given style, employs certain terms, and draws upon relatively determined conventions—historical and otherwise" (xxi). She views narration as composed of "rhetorical strategies" (83). I concur with Cavarero's assertion that what gets recounted becomes adaptive "as much as possible to the perspective, narrative position of the other" (83). She states that human beings belong to communities and "cannot refrain

from taking the other into consideration" (88). Not unlike the other theorists, she posits purpose as catalyzing historical reconstructions. Relevant to Halbwachs' theory, the "position of the other" is framed by present concerns and interests.

In the context of Cavarero's theory, my analysis elucidates how and why discourses are borne from the storytelling quality in *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior*. On the one hand, narration requires specific strategies (similar to White's theory). On the other hand, the narrators depend upon each other as witnesses in retelling story roles. Without witnesses, histories would not exist. Even in Pauline's case, Nanapush retells part of her histories and she in turn retells his. Additionally, by inference the reader serves as another witness to the narrators' historical constructions. The livelihood of one's histories depends on "the necessary other." Such proves necessary in the novels' manipulation of selectively constructing histories and producing rhetorical text.

Family histories in both novels can only materialize through the sharing and passing down of the oral tradition. Narrating the other ensures family histories survive. In consonance, multiple perspectives engendered through storytelling create a fuller portrayal of past histories framed by present concerns and interests. Certainly, the construction of histories involves a high degree of translation. To that end, I draw from inter- and intra-lingual translation theories collected in *Theories of Translation* and *The Craft of Translation*, edited by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet.

Translation theorists such as Ortega Y Gasset (93-112) underscore translation as approximating an original concept while never arriving at an exact replication. According to the theorists in John Biguenet's editions, attempts at conveying concepts behind words and the context from which words originate involves creativity and persistence. Translation proves quite complex and inexact for many reasons. Language changes with the passage of time and between private and public spheres. Language varies within cultural settings and is

determined by social needs. In the mix, the changing perspective of the translator effects her rendered translations. Complicating the translation process, as Octavio Paz states, language itself is "already a translation—first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase" (Paz 154). Christopher Middleton refers to translations as "semantic glide[s]" where "no signs hold still and "direct 'meanings' are being twitted or deflected" (Middleton 126-127). In this vein, oftentimes literal translations cannot properly capture an "original" concept. The translator oftentimes must use creativity in best capturing a concept from the past. For instance, in both *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior*, as shown later, silence becomes distilled and translated, not literally but creatively.

In the context of the novels, historical translations cannot equate to direct representations. Nevertheless, a certain ethereal quality exists in the word. An affinity of expression to which the listener can relate allows shades of meaning to become conveyed,

as articulated by translation theorist Hugo Friedrich in "On the Art of Translation" (11-16). In constructing histories through acts of translation, truths become revealed. Similar to White's theory of uncovering "data" from within the "chronicles" of a story, translation allows "data" to be conveyed. Additionally, Middleton contends that a certain "glide of association" comes through during translation (Middleton 126-127). Hence, although inexact, translating discursive material to a degree is possible. As an example, *Brave Orchid* and *Nanapush* cannot precisely convey their family hardships or sources of pride rooted in their past. Yet they can pass on traces of such histories and keep their family legacies alive. An association between the present and past is traced through the storytelling tradition.

In short, my thesis highlights how the narrators in *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior* selectively construct their family histories through storytelling—which establishes cultural continuity and empowers the narrators to tell their own histories. I underscore the rhetorical "data" captured within the storytelling. I situate my analysis

within the context of the four theoretical frameworks, namely "collective memories" and "presentist" views; history as a narrative prose discourse; the "narratable other"; and translation theories. Family members purposefully engage in every part of this recollection web. Since the elements in the web intertwine, my analysis combines observations of these connections. In so doing, I focus on how the narrators powerfully and selectively construct family histories through the techniques of juxtaposition, subversion, and distilled silences. In both novels, the narrators' stories juxtapose each other. Hence, in each novel the reader hears two story versions from two different narrators during the storytelling. In trying to verbalize their unique histories, the narrators subvert each other's historical renderings. Also, claims in the stories become subverted when evidence in the stories point in other directions. Furthermore, all the narrators distill silences by verbalizing hidden or secret histories.

Competing Stories, Historical Renderings

In *Tracks*, the native Chippewa dueling narrators Nanapush and Pauline use "presentist" lens to selectively construct their histories from different vantage points. Each narrator takes turns in storytelling, Nanapush in the odd chapters and Pauline in the even chapters. In the unfolding of their stories, the narrators often aim at subverting each other's constructed histories by challenging the other's story as less credible. In "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," Nancy J. Peterson states, "Because of different identities and allegiances, Nanapush and Pauline narrate contrasting interpretations of the historical moment that unfolds in *Tracks*" (988). Observing how one storyteller tries to subvert the other's story opens up the discourse of why the narrators hold different perspectives. I agree with Peterson. In the competing stories, the narrators' different "identities and allegiances" become apparent.

Concurrently, from Chippewa roots, parts of Nanapush and Pauline's stories confirm each other. For instance,

Fleur continuously exists in the background as a legendary part of their heritage. Both narrators voice an admiration for Fleur who lives as a native dependent upon the land and the old ways. Fleur exists as a force who must remain honored and in the fabric of the oral tradition. Her silence in the background becomes distilled as both Nanapush and Pauline give her a voice through their respective narrations. While she does not tell her story to them, they serve as her voice in many instances. Importantly, through their retelling of her story, they ensure she becomes a "narratable" legacy in their oral tradition.

Both narrators honor their family roots as linked to each other through Fleur's character. Under different circumstances, Fleur entered the narrators' lives. Nanapush saved Fleur during times of sickness and became her spiritual father. Pauline encountered and became drawn to Fleur while working in Argus. Throughout the novel, Pauline returns to visit Fleur and attempts to form a communal bond with Nanapush's clan—which includes Fleur. Pauline never succeeds at solidifying this bond.

Nevertheless, the "data" buried in the story's "chronicles" points to the need for native family members to honor and recognize their roots through the oral tradition, despite differing backgrounds. Their roots bind them to a common heritage.

As a tribal elder in his fifties, Nanapush's "collective memories" encompass his communal experiences of having lived successfully on vast lands as a hunter, trapper, and trader. Since young Lulu has been influenced in an Anglo boarding school, and finds perplexing her mother's decision to place her there, Nanapush's role is to draw her back into her culture and bring clarity to her dilemma. He must pass on to her the complexities associated with their histories, including Fleur's desperate measure to keep Lulu safe as tracts of land were dangerously cleared and forcefully taken. Therefore, Nanapush selectively reconstructs histories so his granddaughter Lulu can come to grips with the seriousness of her people's losses and understand her mother's desperate act. Through storytelling, Nanapush also tries to instill in Lulu pride of her heritage.

When speaking of the Anglo government's detrimental affect on his native Chippewa, Nanapush states, "That's when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees . . . diminished to ashes by one struck match" (225). Nanapush translates his thoughts from his native perspective. Without a long, detailed explanation, he powerfully conveys his disappointment. He does not specifically name the documents but rather focuses on the paper element. His translation is a cultural one. From his communal perspective, he finds enigmatic how paper can hold so much power; it can easily turn to ash. Paper cannot appropriately represent his people or their rich cultural heritage. Paper should not hold restrictions on or dictate rules to a people who lived successfully and unrestrained on vast lands. On the other hand, communal ways and the oral tradition prove long-lasting and reliable. Paper cannot replace such bonds and traditions of knowledge. Nanapush's selective construction of

histories proves rhetorical in relaying the detrimental effects of colonialism.

Having cleverly managed to bring Lulu back to the reservation, Nanapush must properly convey their native histories to Lulu so that new generations will keep their rich family cultures alive through the oral tradition. He also hopes to guide Lulu in continuing with old ways while also adapting to changing times for survival. In "Writing History and the Self after Foucault," Silvia Bizzini states:

The possibility of putting into practice the idea of new forms of subjectivity is related to our capacity to see and think of ourselves as historical subjects and, as a consequence, to consider ourselves as subjects that are not subjected to an immutable identity but possess the possibility of change. (57)

Relating Bizzini's theory to Nanapush's storytelling, we see that Nanapush purposefully constructs histories to help Lulu understand her heritage. Nanapush shapes a "new form of subjectivity." By sharing family histories

with Lulu, Nanapush underscores himself and his people as historical subjects. The force of change in historical subjects proves imminent as newer generations like Lulu form clans. In the context of Halbwachs' theory of the "presentist" view, present concerns frame the past. Noting devastation suffered by his people, Nanapush calls on the past to explain why the Chippewa lifestyle changed. Before the arrival of the colonists, their communal close-knit lives allowed them to harmoniously work together and live off the land. Witnessing a fractured community, it becomes even more important for Nanapush to pass on the oral tradition to Lulu. Through this tradition, their Chippewa history will survive.

Nanapush begins telling Lulu stories about their people's hardships resulting from colonialism. He recounts the diseases that wiped away natives' lives when they were crowded onto reservations, sharing how his entire family died from what Father Damien called "consumption." Highlighting this word as "foreign" equates to Nanapush's selective construction of history pointing to what occurred when the foreign disease

infiltrated and devastated his people's lives. During his exposure to disease, Nanapush almost dies with his clan. However, he ends up saving himself by "starting a story" (46). In other words, by continuing to tell his communal cultural story, he survives. Herein, he provides Lulu with a clue as to how she too can keep her family histories alive: via the oral tradition and by holding onto old ways and her cultural legacy.

Assigning her a valuable role, Nanapush tells Lulu that she is "the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared when, along with the first bitter punishments of early winter, a new sickness swept down" (2). As a child of the "invisible," she has the ability, through translations, to keep traces of their family histories alive. As translation theorist Hugo Friedrich states, "the power[]generated by an original . . . becomes the creative impulse of the translation" (16). Sure Lulu cannot precisely recapture the past, but she can translate—and therefore preserve—its "shades" of "truths." The power of Nanapush's stories may have a lasting effect on Lulu translating, and therefore

preserving—the Chippewa's culture and histories.

Nanapush feels he must pass on the torch so Lulu may keep her cultural roots alive. Continuing with his storytelling, he passes on images of the past and speaks of survival and a refusal to give up land by not signing government documents.

I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager. (2)

In recalling the past, he speaks of the old ways and of times changing when Anglos encroached upon his people's land. In the act of recalling, he translates the past and admits that his tales come from inexact memory.

Perhaps he did not guide the very last buffalo hunt. He could have noticed the hunt being amongst the last. The point is to show the disappearance of old ways of living.

Herein lies the inventiveness to which White states is necessary in constructing histories.

Nanapush states to his granddaughter, "My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know" (2), meaning he cannot translate with precision past events. Lulu can never completely understand and experience the Chippewa past. Nevertheless, the oral tradition serves as a historical track to step foot onto shades of the past and claim rootedness. Nanapush offers Lulu a glimpse into changing historical times. By sharing his stories, he allows himself to become a "narratable other" who Lulu can include in her retelling of the Chippewa's histories. Nanapush selectively shares "collective memories" with Lulu. He has many memories from which to draw but he chooses what to share with Lulu to help her understand the past and cherish family histories.

While the sufferings of the past exist in silence and cannot find full representation in language, translations help shed light on the past. Nanapush states:

In the terrible times, the evils I do not speak of, when the earth swallowed up all it had given me to love, I gave birth in loss. I was like a woman in my suffering, but my children were all delivered in death. It was contrary, backward, but now I had a chance to put things into proper order. (167)

Without providing overt details, Nanapush connects the past with the present. His translated version of the past proves quite dramatic. He does not need to be literal. He connects the past to the present when retelling Lulu about her frostbitten state upon arriving at his doorstep one day with bad news. "Putting things in proper order" means not giving up. Remembering what he had lost in the past, he treasures what he has in the present. Hence, he lets Lulu know that he had to focus on warming her up and helping her get well. Though Lulu has no direct line to the past, Nanapush's translations sufficiently convey hardship and hope: birthing loss and holding valuable the new generation. The "chronicles" in

the story Nanapush tells repeatedly point to his rhetoric of his people's survival as critical.

While upholding the importance of traditional ways, Nanapush illustrates to Lulu that survival also depends on adaptation to change. Nanapush depicts how he adapted as necessary without turning away from communal bonds and traditional ways. He shares with Lulu how he had to use the documented word and bureaucratic practices to return Lulu home. He used trickery to prove paternity. In light of a "presentist" strategy, he retells the story about Lulu's birth and Father Damien's blessing of her along with the formality of the birth certificate. At the moment, when no other family members were available, Father Damien needed to formally finalize Lulu's birth certificate. Nanapush stepped in, gave Lulu her name, and indicated that she was a Nanapush. Even though he turned to the colonial method of formal documentation, he did so with communal bonds in mind. He shares with Lulu how his people survived by using their minds to outwit colonial powers. Beyond his individual character, Nanapush's story shows how natives resorted to colonial

ways of written documents for their own benefit. As Shelley Read states, such stories can allow Lulu to "define herself historically as a product of tribal traditions and pressures from the white community" (78). Essentially, through Nanapush's constructed histories, Lulu can understand and appreciate her family ways. She can hold onto traditions such as storytelling. Yet she must also practice adapting to changing times. Again, calling upon and understanding the past serves concerns of the present.

Nanapush also tells Lulu stories about the so-called "progress" brought on by colonialism which entailed capitalism infiltrating their ways of life. "Our trouble came from . . . liquor and the dollar bill. We stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step" (4). Upon trying to change their livelihood to farming, many natives turned to capitalism, believing it would benefit their daily lives. However, capitalism led to the downfall of many Chippewa. Unsuccessful in making a living as farmers, they sold their land allotments to

make ends meet. Oftentimes, Chippewa took steps without understanding the ramifications stipulated in government documents. This change in livelihood led to family member's consumption of liquor and extreme value placed upon money while their hunting, trapping, and trading communal ways dwindled. Along with the cutting down of trees and loss of land, natives experienced fragmentation and splintering of communal bonds.

Calling upon his memories, Nanapush explains to Lulu why fellow Chippewas face difficult circumstances. Had their old ways been untouched, their lives would be harmonious today. Ultimately, the root of cause in their hardships was not their own doing. Dependency upon colonial ways proved detrimental. Becoming a "narratable other," Nanapush can depend on Lulu keeping Chippewa family histories alive via the oral tradition. If newer generations do not share their family histories, the past will be burned like a match stroke upon paper.

In selectively constructing the past, Nanapush's rhetoric shows "progress" as hindering successful communal ways. However, situated in the present, he

delineates that there is no turning back. In the context of White's theory of facts buried in "chronicles," Nanapush portrays a character cognizant of changes in his environment, a character who negotiates change without disconnecting from his culture. Through his necessary interaction with the colonial world, he takes on multiple identities as he speaks, reads, and writes in English and interacts with those outside his Chippewa community as necessary. For example, to maintain land and family cultural ways, Nanapush mediates between his people and the encroaching government. He reads treaties and translates for his people. Very importantly, he manages to legally record himself as Lulu's father and later attain her birth certificate. This necessary bureaucratic adaptation allows Nanapush to return Lulu to the reservation and shorten her time in the colonial boarding school. Based on her clothing upon their reunion, it becomes evident she has undergone a degree of "deculturalization" in the Anglo governed institution. Nanapush's duty lies in also mentally returning Lulu to the tribe. He uses the oral tradition in that vein.

Shelley Reid states that Nanapush's character proves quite metaphorical, as "His life story is the tribe's life story; his adaptation to a new bureaucratic identity at the end of the novel literally and figuratively ensures the survival of the tribe, a tribe whose future is clearly tied to young Lulu's self and story" (79). Herein lies the importance of newer generations making sense of who they are by understanding their roots. So long as newer generations like Lulu honor their family histories by translating the past, family histories can become legacies. As "collective memories" are shared with newer generations, family descendents maintain ties and find meaning. Even though adaptations must inevitably take shape with the passage of time, continuities remain in place throughout family histories. In the context of Nanapush's story, the strength of and ties to family legacies can avert members from becoming completely assimilated into Anglo ways.

Through the act of constructing histories via storytelling, Nanapush gives voice to his Chippewa perspective. He distills silences by bringing to

fruition perspectives not documented in formal government papers or recorded in versions such as Pauline's. Translating his histories allows for a marginalized voice to possess power in historical recordings and messages. Passing down histories through a traditional means empowers survival of his family histories. Lulu represents the new generation who will serve as a repository of family histories, maintaining roots which continue spreading into new directions while encapsulating past histories. Each time stories are shared about the Chippewa, individuals become "narratable others" in the cultural legacy of the oral tradition.

Having shared aspects of Nanapush's "collective memories" used to selectively construct family histories, I turn to study Pauline, whose voice also exists in Chippewa histories. She enters the novel as a fifteen-year-old orphan from the Puyats clan of "mixed bloods" (Canadian Native American). In juxtaposition to Nanapush's narration, she fervently competes with his constructed histories as the "other" voice. Though speaking in monologues, she shares her unique histories

and tries to subvert Nanapush's perspectives. Contrary to Nanapush, she meshes her Anglo and native perspectives. By the end of the novel, she almost entirely renounces her native heritage through assimilation of colonial ways and thinking. Furthermore, she does not possess a "collective memory" comprising a solid communal lifestyle. Like Nanapush, she too experiences losing her family to disease, yet her loss occurs while very young and without having established firm roots and family bondage. At times, Pauline's narrative takes on more of a text-like quality of reporting; at times it employs the storytelling quality of sharing legends. These qualities relate to her double heritage and hybrid position. Overall, her perspectives run counter to Nanapush's, yet her story is a thread within Chippewa histories.

Early in the novel, Pauline reconstructs her histories as tied to "skimmers in the clan for which the name was lost" (14). This first chronicle (using White's term) indicates her initial uprootedness and lack of family cultural grounding. She states that in the winter

of 1912 she heard no word from her family and that "No one knew how many were lost, people kept no track . . . Sometimes in my head I had a dream I could not shake. I saw my sisters and my mother swaying in the branches, buried too high to reach, wrapped in lace I never hooked" (15). Since a very young child, she experiences loss and confusion over her own history. Her tragedy at a particularly young age proves psychologically damaging. Hence, her memories of her family past are limited and marginal compared to Nanapush's.

At an impressionable age, Pauline gained exposure to colonial ways and believed she saw Anglos living more prosper lives. Furthermore, she observed natives adapting to Anglo ways in daily practices such as valuing goods, money, and Catholicism. She does not experience the enlightenment of family histories through the oral tradition as Lulu does. Early on, Pauline is at a disadvantage because she does not come to understand her roots and true family histories. Hence, she draws from past memories with images of Anglos living happier lives, not suffering the hardships experienced by her family and

clan. When she translates her past, she produces very limited and perverted versions. By implication, the "chronicles" in Pauline's story establish her as one example of those Chippewa who experienced confusion and fragmentation from colonialism.

Pauline admits that "even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language" (14). To devalue her native tongue and place importance on English shows her early partial departure from her native heritage. The socially constructed "collective memory" from which Pauline recalls the past limits her vantage point. She continually draws from this particular memory base of a "lost clan member," using her unique perspective. As Lewis A. Coser states in his introduction to Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory*:

Collective memory . . . is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion. Nor is it some mystical group mind. As Halbwachs specifies in [his book]: 'While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base

in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember.' It follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society. . .

[F]amilies . . . have distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. It is, of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past . . . 'Every collective memory' . . . requires the support of a group delimited in space and time' (Halbwachs 22)

The context of Halbwachs' theory helps to underscore the reasons as to how and why Pauline's "collective memory" endures and draws strength. Over time, Pauline's fragmented family had socially constructed memories which highlight Anglos as living better lives and demark Chippewas as living limited and backward lives. By continually drawing from this "collective memory" over the period of her life as tied to her own fragmented

identity, Pauline allows such memories to endure and remain as a strong presence. She contributes to an enduring collective memory base.

Unlike Nanapush, who lived a successful tribal" life before he witnessed the devastation from colonialism, Pauline's recollections exist in an entirely different world. Currently, as a nun who works at converting natives, her selective reconstruction of history sheds light on her current perspectives and ways of life. As an adult, it would seem that Pauline should realize she denies her past. Yet her early life tragedies affect her at a deep psychological level and do not allow her perspectives to broaden. In the past, she welcomed assimilation as her best chance at survival. Never sensing a belonging to either Anglo or native families, she finds an alternative existence as a nun. In this position, she lives on the reservation amidst the Chippewa while at the same time practicing Anglo religious indoctrination. She leaves native life while still remaining close. She does not live within an Anglo social network yet upholds colonial ways of assimilation.

Even in this "middle ground" she does not find peace of mind. The "chronicles" in her story document her particular circumstances: confusion, uprootedness, and instability.

In trying to make sense of her present, Pauline draws from an unstable and tragic past. She recalls witnessing and experiencing fragmentation in her people. Influenced by what she thought of as prosperity in colonial living, she remembers proceeding to the Anglo town of Argus to make a living and improve her life. In Argus, she quickly becomes attracted to material goods. For instance, she finds appealing the leather shoes worn by Anglo girls (15). Her narrow lens inclines her to see the "progress" brought on by colonists as improvements. While noticing the changing Chippewa environment, she feels that had the Chippewas learned to successfully farm their lands, they would not have lost them. This perspective comes from her limited vantage point.

Ambiguously, throughout the novel, Pauline also continually feels drawn to her native heritage, particularly after meeting Fleur at the butcher shop in

Argus. At the shop, Fleur tries to make money to save her land. Pauline cannot help but feel a family connection with Fleur, through whom she also becomes connected to Nanapush and the Pashkaws. In the town of Argus, Pauline realizes:

I tried to stop myself from remembering what it was like to have companions, to have my mother and sisters around me, but when Fleur came to us that June, I remembered. I made excuses to work next to her, I questioned her, but Fleur refused to talk about the Puyats or about the winter. She shook her head, looked away. She touched my face one day, as if by accident, or to quiet me, and said that perhaps my family had moved north to avoid the sickness, as some mixed-bloods did. (15).

From that moment on, Pauline seeks Fleur's companionship throughout most of the novel. This "chronicle" defines the need for family members to hold onto roots in pursuit of meaning and stability. But according to her recollection of her meetings with Fleur

as well as Nanapush, Pillagers, and the Pushkaws, she never feels accepted into their clan of "old" and "new" family members (70).

In light of Pauline's perspective, she tries to join the clan but always feels like an outcast. Orphaned at and experiencing tragedy since very young, her historical grounding becomes more tenuous when she interprets the Nanapush clan (Nanapush, Pillagers, and the Kashpaws) as not welcoming her. As Fleur and Eli become a couple, Pauline views Fleur as more distant. Also, confirming why Pauline feels unaccepted into the clan, Nanapush admits to viewing Pauline as "an unknown mixture of ingredients" (39). He states, "We never knew what to call her, or where she fit or how to think when she was around. So we tried to ignore her"(39). The "data" found in the "chronicles" points to Pauline's lack of stable identity and unrest as likely causes of the clan not knowing how to fully relate to her. In her monologue, Pauline states, "I began to believe the Kashpaws and Pillagers didn't like to have me around . . . there was something in the air. They held back from

me" (71). Even when Pauline shares with Nanapush what happened to Fleur in the town of Argus, Nanapush brushes off her concern, stating, "The jealous hens like to squawk" (53). In juxtaposition, however, Nanapush also admits to Lulu that he knew something was terribly wrong when Fleur returned from Argus. It could be that Nanapush subverts Pauline's story simply because he does not want rumors to spread.

According to Pauline's view, Nanapush does not give her voice a chance or consideration. Feeling alone and confused, she gradually and then drastically succumbs to assimilation. Through the juxtaposition of stories, however, the reader learns Pauline's translations of her past histories are problematic. In Nanapush's story, which has more credibility, Pauline visits and is never being turned away. His clan is concerned that Pauline is not eating enough, needing to fill up her skinny frame. Even Pauline's story includes a scene whereby she exudes a terrible smell from not washing as a religious punishment. Fleur and Lulu immediately proceed to wash

and cleanse Pauline in a tub. Yet Pauline does not focus on how the clan tries to accept her.

In continual conflict with identity issues and a sense of not belonging, Pauline turns to life as a nun. In her desperate and confused state, she even denies her own child and gives it up. Her assimilation means giving up her own bloodline. In her selective construction of family histories, her reasoning for her life's path comes into view. She goes as far as believing that she can help the Chippewa through religious indoctrination. Having assimilated into Anglo life and Catholicism, she views colonialism as progressive and Chippewa life as depraved. She states:

Our Lord, who had obviously made the whites more shrew, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank.

(Erdrich 139)

Pauline's confused state of limited and narrow "collective memories" lead her to the preceding conclusion. She refuses to understand the detrimental

effects of colonialism and the successful communal lifestyles natives held on land. Ambiguously, in this very passage, it becomes obvious that while Pauline loses cultural ties with her family histories, she also does not hold strong ties with colonists, as evidenced in the words, "the whites," which leaves her outside this grouping.

She neither feels a sense of complete belonging with the Chippewa nor with the Anglos. So she undergoes a complete change of life with the new name Leopolda. She states, "I tried out the unfamiliar syllables. They fit. They cracked in my ears like a fist through ice" (205). The very name represents her psychological state.

Pauline's storytelling, while containing elements of Nanapush's styles (i.e., magic, legend, stretches of truths), proves chaotic and confusing. She urgently wishes to be heard as her voice competes with and juxtaposes to Nanapush's, yet she speaks in monologues. Her disjointed storytelling contains discourses (in the context of White's theories) on the "decultured" subject. The "chronicles" within Pauline's story suggests that

Chippewa histories include members who lived fractured lives resulting from colonialism. In their confused state, they may have felt abandoned and misunderstood. Hence, they may have decided to undergo complete lifestyle changes. Perhaps clans also cut off ties with family members who seemed too distant to live communal ways. Since Pauline speaks in monologues, it is the reader who can pick up clues buried in the "chronicles" while trying to make sense of Pauline's constructed histories. The juxtaposition of competing narrators allows differing perspectives to shed light on histories experienced by Chippewas.

The technique of subversion in the novel takes the form of Nanapush and Pauline trying to subvert each other's legitimacy and compete for being heard. Each claims the other talks incessantly and stretches the truth. Nanapush states that once Pauline wags her tongue, she becomes "worse than a Nanapush . . . given to improving truths" (39). Yet each narrator also admits to actively playing a part in verbosity and in having difficulty translating their memories with precision.

According to translation theorists such as Octavio Paz, reconstructing the past into language can never result in exactitude (Paz 155). Paz contends that an original moment cannot be fully recaptured. Furthermore, in both cases, the narrators' stories and pertinent perspectives cannot equate because they draw from polarized "collective memories."

While admitting to the inherent problems with accurate memory, Pauline selectively constructs her family histories. She shares how she "talk[ed] aloud" and brought "the whole of what had happened" in Argus (Fleur's rape) "back to life" (65). Showing the unreliability of her disclosed history, she states that Margaret Kashpaw "pulled the truth or some version of it out of me, I don't know how" (65). She also states that "at . . . times" a "moment is erased" (27). She vacillates over who put the latch on the refrigerator that killed the men who raped Fleur. Sometimes she recalls her cousin Russel sliding and locking the iron bar across the meat refrigerator; other times, she recalls being responsible for locking the freezer where

the guilty men huddled. Her constructed histories change according to what she recalls at given moments. The preceding incident demonstrates the distilling of historical silences. While incomplete, the translation makes an aperture for shades of meanings. The discursive content propounds that perhaps natives engaged in desperate acts to save their families from harm, or to avenge the horrific. Such a past is not easily translated into words.

In Nanapush's case, he admits to Lulu of stretching the truth and talking incessantly. He states, "Even a sledge won't stop me once I start . . . I talked both languages in streams that ran alongside each other, over every rock, around every obstacle" (7), and "The waters were so muddy I thought I'd give them another stir" (61). "There were so many tales, so many possibilities, so many lies" (61). He tells her about how he extended his name through trickery and made her his legal daughter (61). As translation theorist Hugo Friedrich contends, an "approximation" of original concepts comes through during translations. Without being able to completely share his

histories, Nanapush's translation of his past strategically reveals how natives outwitted colonists at their own game. Natives learned the rhetoric behind using government documents, treaties, and laws to benefit their own families. Instead of succumbing to and losing "paper" battles, natives won the better end in many cases. Through the oral tradition, Nanapush continually shares his family histories and ensures he is a "narratable other." Despite the many plausible versions of his people's histories, he wants Lulu to retell his story.

The native narrators' use of juxtaposition and subversion prove essential in selectively constructing histories. The narrators elucidate the tensions when the Turtle Mountain Chippewa experienced fragmentation from colonial encroachment. As Peterson states, "Nanapush and Pauline's points of view are both necessary to provide an 'indigenous' account" (989) of the historical period in the novel. The competing narrators' stories intersect to show that each storyteller took steps at survival although along different routes. Their unique

experiences led them to differing paths. The "chronicles" of their lives form differing histories, which taken together, give a broader picture in reconstructing their past via varying perspectives. In his selective construction of histories, Nanapush demonstrates that he held onto communal ways while adapting to his changing environment to ensure his family's continual cohesiveness. In Pauline's selective construction of histories, her character represents confusion, fragmentation, and deculturalization.

The folding and colliding of the narrations underscore a greater significance in their rhetorical significance. In *Relating Narratives*, Paul A. Kottman provides an introduction whereby he shares Cavarero's theory of a "link between narration, and the revelation of 'who' someone is through that narration . . . a new sense of politics, an alternative way of understanding human interaction" (ix). This theory proves applicable in analyzing closely what the characters of Nanapush and Pauline represent beyond their individual selves. Belonging to a family culture of storytelling, they must

talk and tell "versions of truths." Nevertheless, these translated recollections portray shades of "truths" in their family histories. Following the constructed histories in the novel, both family bonds and breakages make up Chippewa histories. As a whole, the reconstructed histories show that Chippewas have no one view about their past.

In *Word by Word: The Language of Memory*, Jonathan Morse posits, "The history of our lives is a continuous translation of acts into words" which "originate in a part of reality" (14). Although difficult and imprecise, Nanapush and Pauline must tell their stories, and they must translate their histories into words. As competing narrators, their stories shed light on the bigger picture of complexities of the Chippewa histories. Nanapush can look back and understand how he maintained family ties through his actions. Pauline can look back and still be confused. A reader of Pauline's histories can infer why Pauline continually feels drawn to the legendary Fleur, the embodiment of communal ancestral heritage. The reader can also infer how much Pauline wishes to belong

to the Nanapush, Pillagers, and Kashpaws clan; otherwise, why would she keep returning to the clan? Knowing one's roots is, after all, a human endeavor.

Toward the end of the novel, when Fleur loses her child and Pauline tries to religiously convert the deceased infant, Fleur slaps Pauline. Confused, Pauline gives up on clan life. Her monologue shows her extreme confusion and insulation, tied to the Anglo encroachment upon Chippewa land and ways. Observing the framework of and "chronicles" in both stories illustrates the Chippewa's tragedy of family disintegration. Likewise, it also illustrates survival through persistence.

As Frederic Jameson states in *The Political Unconscious*, "We must . . . repudiate a conception of the process of mediation which fails to register its capacity for differentiation and for revealing structural oppositions and contradictions through some overemphasis on its related vocation to establish identities" (42). Jameson further aptly brings up the inadequacy of placing family structures as related to "society at large" into "a common denominator or assimilating them in such a way

as to lose the quite different specificities of the destiny of the individual subject" (43). In an analysis of the narrators' reconstructed histories, divergences clearly exist. Interestingly, even Nanapush's family histories do not exist as static. His character fulfills father, uncle, grandfather, government employee, tour guide, translator, love consultant, keeper of old ways, adaptor of new ways positions, and more. From a Canadian Chippewa background, Pauline's histories vacillate between two worlds and an in-between world of complete loss. Quite likely, her fractured experience opens up a dialogue about what may be considered relevant in an Anglicized history about Chippewa's histories.

In the context of Jameson's theory, the juxtapositions and subversions in the stories uncovers multiple perspectives as innately existing within family histories. Political reasons abound in what the narrators share with their audience: a nonstatic, complex portrayal of Chippewa histories. White also points to rhetoric found within histories. For instance, Nanapush obviously serves as a voice for his people in contrast to

Pauline's monologue. Even though Pauline does not tell her story to a particular audience, it becomes evident that her stories too should be heard and considered. When she shares stories she deems important, as in Fleur's rape, she feels "set free of the tale" and "walks lighter" (Erdrich 54). Nanapush confirms this part of Pauline's story in the overlapping of their tales. Fleur's rape exists as another of Pauline's life tragedies which haunts her. Pauline has to distill such silences she has suffered. She has to tell her fractured story.

In her exploration of Chippewa family histories, Erdrich calls on divergent narratives to open up a dialogue for discussion of multiple perspectives. Even before the narrators draw from their memories to selectively construct histories, the prelude to the novel attests to the Chippewa histories as nonstatic and open to various interpretations. Erdrich ascertains that the "story comes up different every time and has no ending" (preface). Regardless of different histories existing within Chippewa experiences, the preservation of family

cultural histories depends upon the tradition of storytelling. Through very specific rhetorical techniques, Nanapush and Pauline's selectively constructed histories shed light on their particular perspectives and the significance of their unique histories making up part of the Chippewa experience.

Mother and Daughter Stories, Meshing Histories

In *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator Maxine Hong Kingston retells and translates her mother Brave Orchid's talk-stories. At the same time, she tells her own stories. Through storytelling, they both selectively construct family histories. The juxtaposition of talk-stories by Brave Orchid and Kingston shows the differing and related histories both share as they engage in constructing and reconstructing their histories. If the novel only included one of their voices, their varied histories would not be revealed. While the mother and daughter share family memories, they also each draw from different memory bases. They were born in different countries and times.

Brave Orchid's home country is China. She comes from a Cantonese patriarchal background and from a time of hardship such as famine, sickness, wars, and communism. As an immigrant, Brave Orchid transports her cultural ways to America, including her oral tradition which keeps her family histories alive. Her storytelling influences Kingston's daily life since her mother's

stories prove hypnotic and magnetic. So long as her daughter can narrate and honor the mother's stories, the "narratable other" in the form of Brave Orchid and her family cultures and histories survive.

As the daughter of Chinese immigrant parents, Kingston has her ancestral roots in a China she has never known. She only experiences her mother's China through her mother's translations in the form of talk-stories. Kingston can hardly tell when her mother's reconstructed histories are just stories or based on fact. She does not always understand the points her mother makes; much gets lost during translation since mother and daughter hold different perspectives associated with different times and places. At the same time, much gets captured as Kingston vicariously travels to her mother's distant China and inventively fills in missing pieces from her mother's stories. Kingston eventually learns to make sense of her mother's past and learns to better understand her family histories and roots.

Kingston lives most fully in her present Californian world and molds her own histories, which also contain

continuities of her family roots, particularly the tradition of storytelling. Kingston states, "[My] mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities . . . Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America" (5). While listening to her mother's constructed histories, Kingston questions that past and tries to figure out how her family roots tie in to her present. In so doing, she finds ways to relate to the past. Hence, she often recreates her mother's past to suit her present interests and concerns. Kingston admits that her own storytelling includes "twists" into particular "designs" (163). She realizes that she changes histories through her storytelling because she molds them to fit specific purposes. In this sense, she connects with her ancestral histories. As Halbwachs states, the "beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the present shape the various views of the past as they are manifested respectively in every historical epoch" (25).

Very directly, a grown Kingston states, "I went away to college—Berkley in the sixties—and I studied and marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy . . . I refused to cook. When I had to wash dishes, I would crack one or two . . . I burn the food when I cook. I do not feed people. I let the dirty dishes rot" (47). Through her mother's storytelling, Kingston learns of a patriarchal world where particular gender roles become stereotyped. Also, since her mother has noted boys being more valuable than girls who can be sold as slaves, Kingston states she did not become a boy regardless of her educational and civil rights participation achievements. Kingston misinterprets her mother's translations. However, when better analyzing her mother's stories, Kingston finds that her mother has been conveying to Kingston messages that portray women as powerful and valuable. She learns that when her mother seemed to devalue the daughter as a girl, she was talking in "opposites." She was passing on family histories to which Kingston could relate.

In the first chapter, "no name aunt", Brave Orchid draws from the "collective memories" of her family and neighbors once living in a Chinese village. At the onset of her daughter's menstruating cycle, Brave Orchid only extrapolates and selectively constructs family histories she can manipulate to warn her daughter against becoming pregnant. In telling the story about Kingston's "no name aunt," Brave Orchid subverts her family's code of silence. She shares the forbidden history of an adulterous aunt who becomes pregnant and later commits suicide and plugs up the village well with her dead newborn. Although Brave Orchid should not share a story about a "disgraced" aunt who otherwise would remain in the dust of history—as intended by the family—as never have been born, she purposefully retells the tale to her daughter:

You must not tell anyone . . . what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born . .

. I remember looking at your aunt one day when she and I were dressing; I had not noticed before that she had such a protruding melon of a stomach . . . She could not have been pregnant, you see, because her husband had been gone for years. No one said anything. We did not discuss it. In early summer she was ready to have the child, long after the time when it could have been possible. (3)

Brave Orchid goes on to describe the villagers raiding her home, where the "no name aunt" also lived before giving birth in a pigsty and committing suicide. Villagers left the family home a mess, scattering and breaking household items, killing farm animals, and smearing blood everywhere. She admonishes Kingston, "Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (5).

Hence, Brave Orchid recalls specific memories from her past to teach her Californian daughter a lesson against becoming pregnant at the wrong time. The

captivated Kingston listens to her mother dramatically reiterating, "Don't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born" (15).

By sharing a story that "should not be told," Brave Orchid practices subversion and therefore exposes a family secret history. She distills a silenced past and gives voice to a family member. From a "presentist" view, she purposefully reconstructs parts of a history to serve a motherly role and to impart a warning to her daughter. At the same time, the story proves too dramatic and sad to forget. In telling her daughter the story, she constructs a history to be retold via the oral tradition. Otherwise, why would Brave Orchid construct and share the history with such dramatic effect? The history must be shared. The history must come into existence out of the dust of silence. In the context of White's theory, the reiteration of the story and the need to keep it a secret makes up the "data" indicating that the "no name aunt's" history must be told.

No longer in China or within the village where the aunt's history was meant to die, Brave Orchid can reflect back on the past while tying it to present concerns. Having transplanted herself in California, Brave Orchid no longer lives within the village where "collective memories" are held by village members. While Brave Orchid draws from "collective memories" tied to her village, she is not bound to recall everything. What she presents proves quite selective. In doing so, she gives meaning to the aunt's life. Brave Orchid has admitted to sometimes coding her language with the opposite of what she says (203). When Brave Orchid asks Kingston not to tell anyone about the aunt, she decides to keep the aunt's history alive so the aunt's position as family member may remain historically true.

In passing down her stories, Brave Orchid's "collective memories" also now encompass her present life as a mother trying to protect her daughter. Hence, the history of the aunt has already been changed.

As Kingston interprets her mother's story, she can tell that her mother witnessed the raid and that the

story contains elisions. She realizes that her mother will add nothing more to the story "unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life" (6). In yearning for knowledge of her family cultural roots and trying to understand how such histories tie in with her Californian life, Kingston analyzes the significance of her mother's stories. Kingston also tries to fill in the gaps by creatively coming up with her own versions.

Kingston moves on to juxtapose her mother's constructed history of her aunt through an act of re-interpretation. Her translated version is affected by her own perspectives and understandings. She connects many details she has learned about her mother's life in China via her mother's talk-stories. For instance, she knows about men having "hurry up" weddings followed by traveling to America—known as the Gold Mountain—and leaving families behind (3). By deduction, she realizes that her aunt and uncle had to be a couple who did not know each other well, and that the "preservation" of "dreams" proves difficult (8). In other words, the aunt's vision of a happy life upon the return of her

husband seems far-fetched since when—and if—this would occur proves unknown. Oftentimes, husbands did not return home; instead, they started new families in America. Her aunt's husband could have been gone for a very long period. Her aunt could have fallen in love with another and, out of loyalty, kept secret the name of her lover (8). Then again, a man could have commanded her aunt to have relations with him, only to betray her and organize the group of violent home raiders. The aunt felt the safest place for her and her newborn girl, under the social conditions of her time, was together in death. This way, they could rely on each other and would not suffer social humiliation and hardships. Additionally, the villagers looking down upon another mouth to feed in times of famine (13) would not make the mother and infant suffer further.

In her retelling, Kingston selectively reconstructs a history for her aunt that exposes no disgraces but rather logical and understandable possibilities of why the aunt had relations with another man. She reconstructs her aunt's history based on her "presentist"

lens. The time of famine in China and outlook of women in small villages exists far, far away from Kingston's direct "collective memories." She cannot relate to such a time. Yet she must connect such a story to her life in order for the story to have meaning.

Pondering her aunt's history, Kingston moves on to envision her aunt plucking away temple and eyebrow hairs by rolling a double strand of thread over these facial areas, just like Kingston's mother did for her. She remembers this part of her own history, stating, "It especially hurt at the temples, but my mother said we were lucky we didn't have to have our feet bound when we were seven. Sisters used to sit on their beds and cry together, she said, as their mothers or their slaves removed the bandages for a few minutes each night and let the blood gush back into their veins" (9). Of course, Kingston must relay through storytelling her strong feminist voice and make a comment based on her present history as a strong woman: "Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound. It was a woman who invented white crane boxing only two hundred

years ago" (19). By inference, Kingston shares the fear she believes men have towards women, so much that they try to physically control them. As a maturing young lady, Kingston is also constructing her own histories and laying a foundation for herself, away from a patriarchal framework to an independent womanhood.

Back to the aunt, Kingston states, "I hope that the man my aunt loved appreciated a smooth brow, that he wasn't just a tits-and-ass man" (9). Kingston meshes her personal history with that of her Chinese roots. She finds a way to relate to her mother's past and uses her own language to describe her hopes for the aunt she never met. I agree with Shelley Reid's observation regarding Dennis Tedlock and Arnold Krupat's explanation that "any story that is told is always a version of the story, altered as the storyteller sees fit to keep the audience interested, make a specific point, or add a personal interpretation" (69). Indeed, translation theory points to the varying and changing perspectives of the translator influencing the shape of her rendered translations. From a "presentist" lens, Kingston

reconstructs her aunt's history by including plausible details that seem real to Kingston. From her contemporary California life perspective, Kingston views the social ostracizing of the "no name aunt" as preposterous. How can her aunt have been expected to wait for a husband she knows little about who may never return? The rationale seems farfetched.

In reconstructing her aunt's history, she understands less and less why the aunt received such treatment from the villagers and her own family. She feels the aunt's worst treatment was her "family's deliberately forgetting her" (16). Reflecting on her aunt's life, Kingston states, "Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (8). Hence, her aunt's past must somehow connect with Kingston's present (in the context of Halbwachs' theory). Otherwise, Kingston would have no reason to reconstruct her aunt's history which ties into Kingston's family roots. In trying to relate to her family distant histories, Kingston finds a source of reconciliation. She calls her aunt her "forerunner" (8), someone who went

against the grain of social expectations. In this way, the aunt is similar to Kingston, the swordswoman, who cuts away at stereotypes and wrongdoers through her storytelling.

Although I can appreciate Dwight McBride's statement in "The Ghosts of Memory; Representing the Past in *Beloved* and *The Woman Warrior*" about the "no name aunt's" suffering exceeding "the limits of her life" since the haunting of her story endures (162), I find that both *Brave Orchid* and *Kingston* give voice to an aunt who had none. They distill a history of silence and re-file it in a history of worthy family cultural memories. Both change their family cultural history by reconstructing the aunt's history with value and meaning. They voice the aunt as holding a place within their family's histories.

Now the "collective memory" encompassing the aunt's history has been reinvigorated and come to include the influences of *Brave Orchid* and *Kingston*. In acknowledging the aunt's history, threads of historical continuity exist in both the mother and daughter's lives.

At the same time, each of their personal histories exists as unique. The subversion of a cultural code, the juxtaposition of two storytellers, and the distilling of the aunt's silenced voice serve as techniques to construct histories through storytelling.

In the third chapter, "Shaman," Kingston employs the skill of talk-stories to selectively construct histories about her mother's experiences as a medical student in Canton and later as a respected doctor in demand. Her mother enters a women's medical school at a more mature age than the other students. Brave Orchid's young appearance does not draw attention to her twenty years seniority. Of the "one hundred and twelve students," she succeeded at graduating amongst the persevering total thirty-seven graduates (64). Drawn to her mother's past, Kingston begins by examining her mother's medical diploma, embossed with a picture of her mother at age thirty-seven, not smiling. "Chinese do not smile for photographs" (58) Kingston states while recalling her mother's confusion over her daughter grinning in pictures: "What are you laughing at?" (58). This brief

passage sheds light on even trivial matters in the women's different perspectives. Kingston moves on to translate the story of her father in the Gold Mountain with plans to rejoin her mother in China. While apart, the father regularly sent money home to the mother. Since her mother's two children had died (details of which Brave Orchid shares very little), Brave Orchid decides to spend the money on her medical career. Kingston opens the story: "Once in a long while . . . my mother brings out the metal tube that holds her medical diploma . . . When I open it, the smell of China flies out, a thousand-year-old bat flying heavy-headed out of the Chinese caverns where bats are as white as dust, a smell that comes from long ago, far back in the brain" (57). I find this statement quite poetic and beautiful, significant of how humans tend to cherish their roots, no matter how distant their origins. Even though China proves quite distant to Kingston, she feels a gravitational pull toward China, the country of her heritage—a country only known to her via her mother's storytelling. The enthusiasm over her mother's diploma

and China show Kingston connecting with her mother's past. The daughter finds her mother's professional achievement as formidable, one not considered usual in her mother's times and worthy of historical recording via the oral tradition. Through the selective construction of histories, *Brave Orchid* metaphorically represents the strong woman warrior: intelligent, witty, and unrelenting in fulfilling her wishes. The "narrative prose discourse" propounded by White points to *Brave Orchid* as one example of a Chinese woman who decenters the traditional stereotypical image. Through her selective construction of histories, *Brave Orchid* illustrates her position as one of strength.

Kingston goes on to assess that in her mother's China "not many women got to live out the daydream of women—to have a room, even a section of a room, that only gets messed up when she messes it up herself. The book would stay open at the very page she had pressed flat with her hand...my mother would live for two years without servitude. She would not have to run errands for my father's tyrant mother" (61). In reconstructing this

history, Kingston pays homage to her mother, denoting the significance of her mother's position as a female medical student. From a "presentist" view, Kingston relates to her mother's history as connected with the history she plans on shaping for herself. Kingston states, "To shut the door at the end of the workday, which does not spill over into evening. To throw away books after reading them so they don't have to be dusted . . . other women besides me must have this daydream about a carefree life" (62). Kingston finds this scene attractive and pursuable. This scene rancorously subverts other parts of the novel, wherein the mother tells Kingston to expect growing "up a wife and a slave" (20). Of course, when Brave Orchid makes such demeaning comments, she "speaks in opposites."

Voicing the common sayings with which she grew up, her mother repeats phrases such as "'There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls'" (46) and "'When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls'" (52). The speaking of opposites confuses Kingston as she cannot easily tell the truths

from the fictions. Yet in freeing up the silences of what females may wish as goals and success, stories such as Brave Orchid's medical student and doctor experiences subvert utterances of expected female subjugations.

Reconstructing her mother's history, Kingston sees that woman from Brave Orchid's times did not live identical and/or only socially controlled lives. Kingston becomes part of a new "collective memory" shared with her mother. Kingston relates and connects with this memory of her own personal histories. On the other side of the coin, Kingston only knows what her mother selectively shares with her. Perhaps more exists to the story, even negative details Brave Orchid finds not purposeful to share. After all, she only talk-stories that which she wishes to share with her daughter.

Once Kingston introduces her mother's story in "Shaman," she translates Brave Orchid's dialogue while including her own interpretations. Her mother tells Kingston that "students fought over who could sit next to me at exams. . . One glimpse at my paper when they got stuck, and they could keep going" (63). Revered highly

as a scholarly student, Brave Orchid shares that doing well did not come easy. She secretly studied for hours while others slept. (64) In hearing her mother's stories about the haunted room at the college, Kingston imagines her mother secretly studying in a ghostly room: "Maybe my mother's secret place was the room in the dormitory which was haunted. Even though they had to crowd the other rooms, none of the young women would sleep in it" (64).

The incident serves as an example of historical changes occurring as Kingston reconstructs histories in terms of the present. Her view of her mother has always been one of strength. She describes her mother as having "dragon claws" and "red sequin scales" despite holding inner fear (67). Indeed, Brave Orchid shares with her daughter a talk-story about assuaging her classmates' fears by getting rid of the ghost haunting a room. In an episode, her mother arranges a ritual to get rid of a ghost by burning it. "'Whup. Whup' My mother told the sound of new fire so that I remember it" (67), the memory becoming a collective one shared by mother and daughter.

Relaying the past in terms of the present, Kingston states, "When my mother led us out of nightmares and horror movies, I felt loved. I felt safe hearing my name sung with hers" (76). Her mother's histories also include those of her daughter and vice versa. Even though they come from different worlds, their roots and histories cannot be severed. Kingston connects with the reassurance her mother's classmates felt. Also in terms of the present, Kingston refers to her mother as a "modern woman" who said our "spells in private" (76). Brave Orchid has told her daughter, "The old ladies in China had many silly superstitions" (76). Living in a different time, her mother realizes that histories change. She now questions some of her family cultural belief systems while maintaining others in privacy. The history Brave Orchid constructs for herself remains nonstatic since she retells stories while she experiences changes.

As Brave Orchid continues her storytelling, she recalls graduating from medical school. Again, she selectively constructs histories relating to strong

women. She tries to teach her daughter about confidence and success. In the story, after graduating, Brave Orchid proceeds to the market to buy a slave. There, she passes parents pushing their daughters forward and then "clutching" them back. She would not buy girls from these lachrymose parents (79). She passes chanting girls for sale: "We've been taught to bargain. We've been taught to sew. We can cook, and we can knit" (79). Brave Orchid moves toward and acknowledges a sixteen-year-old girl with a strong heart. She shares with her daughter, "I would not have sold a daughter such as that one" (80). After querying the girl with questions and feeling very satisfied with her responses, she complains to the dealer, "I will have to waste months training this girl" (81). Speaking the opposite of what she feels, she strikes a bargain with the dealer (81). Leaving the market, she tells the girl, "I am a doctor" and "I shall train you to be my nurse" (82). She goes on, "Yes, we fooled [the dealer] very well" (82). Hence, in this act of subverting the slave girl's actual worth in gold, the young lady moves on to become a nurse and a smart

counterpart in Brave Orchid's plan to swindle a dealer. Interestingly, as soon as Brave Orchid secured an important position, she felt compelled to play a part in a slave girl becoming a nurse. Brave Orchid strategically planned for and attained a position of power, and as soon as she had the opportunity she also helped empower another woman. The rhetoric found in these "chronicles" points to the importance of women helping each other become empowered.

Relating to her present world, Kingston admits she feels envy towards the bought slave. She states, "My mother's enthusiasm for me is duller than for the slave girl" (82). When prodding her mother on how much she paid for the slave as compared to how much her mother paid the hospital for her birth, she learns that her mother paid fifty dollars for the slave and two hundred dollars for the daughter. Her mother adds, "During the war, though, when you were born, many people gave older girls away for free. And here I was in the United States paying two hundred dollars for you" (83). Later, in an outburst, Kingston expresses to her mother how much she

despises the many demeaning statements about girls. The problem arises in the mother and daughter's differing histories with differing "collective memories." Kingston cannot always understand her mother, a woman whose histories include the common act of bargaining. Her statement to her daughter about paying two hundred dollars for her does not translate to her mother's value of her daughter. Yet Kingston cannot understand this concept. As a wise woman who reached her goals through wit and careful planning, Brave Orchid sometimes turned to acts of careful bargaining. Kingston misinterprets her mother's rationale. Quite awkwardly, even in department stores, Kingston has experienced Brave Orchid's aggressive bargaining, where her mother has "prodded and pinched" her daughter to translate bargaining messages to the sales people.

Continuing the storytelling about her mother as a traveling doctor, Kingston relates the present to that past. Kingston begins, "When the thermometer in our laundry reached one hundred and eleven degrees on summer afternoons," she would hear "another ghost story" (87).

"One twilight, my mother began, and already the chills travelled my back" (87). In her dialogue, Brave Orchid also uses a "presentist" view: "To get home I had to cross a footbridge. In China the bridges are nothing like the ones in Brooklyn and San Francisco" but rather "made from "rope" (87). She tells a tale of "smoky columns spiraling up" along the bridge and "wind rushing between the smoke spindles," forcing her to collapse on the bridge as it rocked violently, the wind whipping her hair (88). After some moments, the smoke spindles disappeared. "She used the bridge often but never encountered those ghosts again" (88). In "Fractured Frames: From Memory to Memoir," Mary Farrell posits that Kingston uses ghosts as a method to "doubt and hesitate so often about what really happened and how" (107). I agree with Farrell in that Brave Orchid's experiences of hardship cannot always find translation into descriptive words. Instead, using the "ghost method" serves to somehow express the fuzziness of memory, the impossibility of putting aspects of memory into precise words. During Brave Orchid's medical career, she often

visited villages where the suffering she encountered was indescribable. The "ghost scene" on the bridge may pertain to the unease Brave Orchid felt knowing that on the other side she would attend to terribly suffering patients.

In her own interpretation of her mother's constructed history, Kingston states, "Medical science does not seal the earth, whose nether creatures seep out, hair by hair, disguised like the smoke that dispels them" (83). Her mother's medical responsibilities included helping birth defective infants, facing human anomalies, and witnessing suffering. The silenced episodes of Brave Orchid's experiences find voice through ghostly metaphors, histories difficult for Brave Orchid to decipher, understand, and include as her own. In her medical profession, Brave Orchid faced sufferings she cannot translate into words. In turn, Kingston also cannot find linguistic expression to what her mother shares. Possible conceptual images hover over words, but cannot fit into them. In this vein, the historical continuities into Kingston's life take shape in the lure

and creation of legends like Kingston's version of the warrior woman.

In trying to understand the many histories her mother shares via talk-stories, Kingston states that immigrant parents "stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear" (87). At the receiving end, Kingston tries to make sense of passed down family histories as related to her current Californian present. She tries to illuminate and unravel confusion by turning on "lights before anything untoward makes an appearance" (87).

In the last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," a reconciliation between Brave Orchid and Kingston's differing perspectives surface. After years of hearing demeaning sayings directed towards her as a girl, from her own mother, and mistakenly picking up clues which she believes signal her mother's view of her as a stupid and ugly girl to be sold as a slave or wife, Kingston explodes. She states, "I'm smart . . . I can do all kinds of things . . . I can get into colleges . . . I won't let you turn me into a slave or a wife . . .

I'm getting out of here" (201). The mother and daughter's differing "collective memories" and unclear translations have become chaotic. A frustrated Kingston states, "And I don't want to listen to anymore of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won't tell me a story and then say, 'This is a true story,' or 'This is just a story.' I can't tell the difference" (202). Screaming back and appearing hurt, her mother gainsays, "You can't listen right . . . We can't sell people . . . can't you take a joke? You can't even tell a joke from real life . . . Can't even tell real from false . . . What makes you think you're the first one to think about college? . . . [Chinese] like to say the opposite" (202-203).

Brave Orchid's talking in opposites has already been established in the chapter "White Tigers," where Kingston states, "She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman . . . I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (19-20). Regularly, her mother told her stories about swordswomen. Kingston states, "Night after night my mother would talk-story

until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep" (19). Unlike everyday speaking, talk-stories contain rhetorical messages. These messages are Kingston's mother's way of giving Kingston "stor[ies] to grow on" (5), of sharing the oral tradition and keeping their family cultural histories alive. In constructing and reconstructing family histories, *Brave Orchid* has repeatedly highlighted women as strong and intelligent.

"A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" ends with a story belonging to both Kingston and her mother, which she affirms "translated well" (209). The first part of the story belongs to the mother and the second part to the daughter. This story demonstrates that two histories can come together harmoniously yet remain distinct. The histories mesh well, despite their two differing parts. Also, this act demonstrates the process of historical change. The beginning of the tale recalls *Brave Orchid's* grandmother's insistence that all the family attend the theater, regardless of the tendency for bandits to raid

empty households. She orders her family to leave their home's windows and doors open for the raiding to result in less of a mess. Instead of striking the house, the bandits show up at the theater. Hiding well and staying safe amidst the commotion, the family all returned home later, proving to the grandmother that attending the theater made them "immune to harm" (207). Before the story crosses into a different history, the first part's message emerges as the survival of families who support each other and remain connected. Rhetorically, the message applies to Kingston and her mother.

The next part of the story belongs to Kingston, who imagines the performances at the theater including the story of Ts'ai Yen, an A.D. 175 poetess captured by barbarians. Toward the end of the tale, the barbarians hear Ts'ai Yen's song of her yearnings for China and her family. She sings in consonance with the barbarian's flutes. Kingston narrates, "Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. Sometimes they thought they could catch barbarian phrases about forever wandering" (109). Within this

talk-story, the message voiced emerges as the possibilities of people with different backgrounds somehow relating through shared experiences. When returning to her homeland, Ts'ai Yen "brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is 'Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,' a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments" (109).

Ending the last chapter, Kingston reconstructs her mother's histories while transitioning them to also belong to her. Although she allows continuity between the previous story and her continued story, in the end she creates her own histories. Interestingly, her version turns to the history of a poetess, tied to the literary present life of Kingston.

In "Feeding the 'Hunger of Memory' and an Appetite for the Future," Barbara Waxman poignantly states that:

this talk-story . . . is a perfect negotiation, in structure and symbolic content, of Hong Kingston's American auctorial identity and her Chinese aesthetic and

political identifications . . . it made a successful discursive and aesthetic negotiation between the two cultures, just as Hong Kingston's text does . . . Her re-creation of the tale is an individuating act that separates herself, American-born, from her Chinese mother while at the same time acknowledging her cultural and emotional debts to *Brave Orchid*. It marks her entry into mature adulthood and emblemizes her creation of her literary or storied self . . . Through her tale, Hong Kingston feeds the hunger of ancestral and family memory while satisfying her appetite for her future as an American author. (215-216).

Although Kingston must draw from her roots to construct her own personal histories, she realizes that many dynamics are at stake in understanding the self. She asks, "[H]ow do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is

Chinese?" (5-6) Ultimately, Kingston constructs her own histories, which contain family cultural histories yet also contain other intricate histories. Certainly, aside from one's family cultural histories, humans have many other complex histories related to identities. The experiences of life stages, education, work, interests, hobbies, goals, friendships, relationships, and much more form each of our unique histories. And no person, regardless of one's background, can exist under a static category because change and continuity exist within every person's life. We hold onto and respect our roots while extending them in the direction of our desires.

Concluding Thoughts

I limited my thesis to focus on the way the narrators in *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior* selectively and rhetorically construct their family histories through storytelling and, hence, empower themselves with a voice in telling their own unique, nonstatic histories. In so doing, I underscored the connections between storytelling, family history, and cultural legacy along with the novels' powerful and particular strategies of using the web of recollection and the structure of juxtaposition, subversion, and distilled silences to express multicultural historical renderings. Anchoring my findings, I situated my thesis primarily within the theoretical frameworks of Maurice Halbwachs, Hayden White, Adriana Cavarero, and intra- and inter-lingual translation theories discussed in Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet's edited collections of *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* and *The Craft of Translation*. With the goal of offering well-

researched and analyzed findings limited to my thesis, I realize that I have barely touched on a complete study of *Tracks* and *The Woman Warrior*.

There are many other discourses worthy of study as directly related to both novels. For instance, spending more time on the importance of family cultural roots may be considered. Both novels point to the narrators' continual consideration of their roots. Finding their very selves means understanding and appreciating their roots. Not grasping or feeling rooted leads to fracture and instability, as in Pauline's case. What is it about multicultural roots that causes groups to cultivate such roots? Why do humans naturally seem to need rootedness? This nostalgic longing occurs repeatedly in both novels. The lasting effects of colonialism would also prove a worthy study. What effects has colonialism had on changing lives in terms of language, traditions, beliefs, loyalties? How have connections between differing cultures produced something positive? A study of what gets captured and lost through translation would prove quite interesting and revealing. What do members of

ethnic groups practice to keep their cultures alive, aside from the oral tradition? What about the language used in the novel. What patterns occur and why? For instance, difference in speech patterns may reflect class, region, and upbringing.

A close look at gender roles and a feminist approach to reading the novels would also prove quite instructive. In *Tracks*, Fleur's very strong presence as a woman who hunts, adamantly tries to keep her ancestral land, and possesses power over all the men in the novel could be studied more closely. In *The Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid and Kingston, born in different countries and times, demonstrate prowess and empowerment. Written during the Women's Movement, the novel cacophonously asserts that women have always possessed a powerful social position. Evidence exists throughout history, even during Brave Orchid's traditional life in China. Brave Orchid represents other traditional women who found ways around social constrictions. She could pretend to follow social rules when in fact she was "swindling" such rules to, ultimately, reach her own goals. Her subtle way of

securing a "slave girl" an empowering life proves case in point. Although social stereotyping of gender roles may pervade in society, women have always found ways to "fight back and win." An analysis of family relationships would also engender other worthy discourses. In the case of Nanapush, he illustrates the strength of elder tribal members ensuring a rich heritage for newer generations. In so doing, he solidifies the livelihood of cultural continuation and appreciation. In the case of Brave Orchid and Maxine, their relationship proves a balancing one. Brave Orchid must pass on her oral tradition to Maxine and keep family histories alive. At the same time, she only discloses to Maxine that which Maxine can learn from as a daughter and treasure in her multicultural identity. Concurrently, as Maxine participates in the shaping of her family histories, Maxine finds ways to relate the past to her present needs and concerns. Surely, a focus only on memory and how memory captures or changes histories would also be enlightening. The dynamic memories voiced by the narrators who live different lives highlight the

multiplicity of perspectives. These multiple perspectives, as we have seen, are influenced by the narrators' unique positions. Voicing their unique perspectives empowers the narrators to share their own histories—of course, via the richness of storytelling.

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