Necessity and Extravagance in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: Art and the Ethnic Experience

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Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, by its very commercial success and its popularity with the literary establishment and the mainstream audience, seems to have become ideologically suspect to some Asian-American critics.¹ Jeffery Paul Chan faults Kingston for mistranslating the Cantonese term “ghost” and giving a distorted picture of Chinese-American culture based on her “unique” experiences.² He also expresses distress at the fact that the publisher passed *The Woman Warrior* off as nonfiction when it is obviously fiction, a practice he attacks as belittling of Chinese-American experiences and creative efforts. Chan sees Kingston’s sensibility as having been “shaped by a white culture predisposed to fanciful caricature of a Shangri-la four thousand years wise, but feudally binding.” Benjamin R. Tong goes even further than Chan and accuses Kingston of being “purposeful” in mistranslating Chinese terms to suit white tastes so that her book would sell better.³ “She has the sensibility but no conscious, organic connection with [Cantonese] history and psychology,” Tong concludes. “[I]f she and I were ever to meet, she would know that I know she knows she’s been catching pigs [tricking whites out of their money by giving them what they think is Chinese] at too high a price” — “the selling out of her own people.”

These are grave charges. They are worth examining in some detail since the unspoken assumptions on which they rest pertain to the important issue of how one conceives of Chinese-American literature, and, by extension, ethnic literature in America. First, the depiction of “unique” experience in literature is deemed reprehensible because it threatens to “distort” Chinese-American reality. Secondly, fantasy drawing on traditional Chinese culture (in which *The Woman Warrior* abounds) is considered exotic “fanciful caricature,” presumably because social reality is given short shrift. As for the translation of Chinese terms, while most translators would agree that a word

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may be variously rendered depending on context, the Chinese-American writer is proscribed from exercising such discretion. A weightier task awaits her, namely, educating the reader about the reality of Chinese-American life. To this end, only one translation, with all the “right” connotations, is acceptable.

Chan’s and Tong’s assessment of The Woman Warrior brings to mind similar strictures against writers of other ethnic groups. For example, according to Luis Davila, there is a tendency among critics of Chicano literature to dismiss the use of fantasy as a “frivolous luxury” at odds with a firm grip on “social reality,” and the “vendido” label is freely bandied about. Implied in all such accusations of “selling out” is the premise that a definitive version of the life of an ethnic group exists, one which it is the ethnic writer’s moral responsibility to present. To do anything else is unconscionable, and crass ulterior motives are the only explanation. Presumably, this definitive version would represent the given ethnic group in a favorable light, purged of annoyingly “unique” features, and free of useless fantasy which diverts attention from the sordid facts of oppression in American society.

In what does the “standard” version of Chinese-American reality—which Kingston is supposedly guilty of distorting—consist? Who, in Chan’s and Tong’s view, is to legislate for the writer in choice of subject matter, adoption of tone, sifting of cultural traditions, portrayal of sex roles, degree of explicitness in expressing opposition to racism, and a myriad other issues likely to surface in ethnic literature? When one scrutinizes the concept of typicality—which, for racial minorities, is notoriously vulnerable to the vagaries of the dominant ideology, as Chan and Tong are no doubt aware—one realizes a simple truth. While one can speak of the Chinese-American experience, the Asian-American experience, or the minority experience for convenience, in contexts where generalization is needed and not detrimental to the nature of the discipline, no such thing exists in literature, where (to borrow from William Blake), “to particularize is alone distinction of merit.” Without the particular—the author’s multifarious experiences, some frequently encountered in her ethnic group, some not, filtered through the idiosyncrasies of her sensibility and style, and above all, competently evoked—our apprehension of the general is merely cerebral, our claim of empathy a sham.

That said, however, it should be acknowledged, in equally certain terms, that given the realities of current American society, no ethnic writer, however privileged individually, can totally escape the collective historical experience of oppression, and that the very act of
writing and getting published is itself a political statement. We have, then, two apparently contradictory claims on the ethnic writer: one, a fundamental human need to affirm the specificities of one’s personal experience, however “atypical,” especially when the redemption of a painful past is at stake; and the other, a no less compelling imperative to express solidarity with those whose sufferings take similar forms from similar causes, such that one’s gift of writing becomes more than a tool for individual therapy or gratification.

Interestingly enough — perhaps surprisingly to those critics for whom The Woman Warrior is merely a capricious if highly readable personal chronicle — Kingston is by no means silent on how these competing claims on the ethnic writer might be resolved. The major terms of the protagonist’s struggle toward a balance between self-actualization and social responsibility are here identified as “Necessity” and “Extravagance,” after two key passages in the opening section of the book, and the working through of the reconciliation in all its complexities will be the subject of this paper.

The struggle of the artist/protagonist is defined a few pages into the book, in the chapter “No Name Woman,” where Maxine engages in an imaginative reconstruction of the life and suicide of her father’s sister in China. This young aunt, married to a man who had emigrated to the U.S. and left at home for years as a “widow of the living,” scandalized the village by getting pregnant; after a raid on her house by vengeful villagers, she threw herself into the family well, taking the newborn baby with her. Maxine’s mother, Brave Orchid, is niggardly with details; the story is told primarily as a warning to a girl who has just reached puberty. “Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you” (5).

My mother has told me once and for all the useful parts. She will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life. She plants vegetable gardens rather than lawns; she carries the oddshaped tomatoes home from the fields and eats food left for the gods. (7)

The code of Necessity that Maxine’s mother lives by is a legacy from her native land, where scarcity of resources has given rise to a rigid, family-centered social structure; the hierarchy spelling out privileges and obligations for everyone governs priority in the distribution of resources. As an immigrant to the U.S. scratching out a
living for a family of six children, Maxine's mother has become all the more confirmed in her adherence to Necessity. Unfortunately for her daughters, however, women are at the bottom of the pecking order in traditional Chinese culture; even in America they are daily reminded of their worthlessness. When Maxine seeks a way out of her humiliating and frustrating predicament, she turns to someone who seems to have made a statement against the dehumanizing demands of Necessity by doing something "useless" — getting pregnant when there were already far too many mouths to feed.

Adultery is extravagance. Could people who hatch their own chicks and eat the embryos and the heads for delicacies and boil the feet in vinegar for party food, leaving only the gravel, eating even the gizzard lining — could such people engender a prodigal aunt? To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was a waste enough. (7)

Adultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food. (15)

Maxine sees a clear parallel between her aunt's tragedy and her own deprivations as the daughter of immigrants. Even as a little girl, she felt silently reproached whenever she submitted to the natural instinct to play, to do something just for the sake of doing it; all the children "paid in guilt" after having fun — an ice cream cone, an American movie, or a carnival ride. "Whenever we did frivolous things, we used up energy; we flew high kites" (6). The image of flying, of "[coming] up off the ground," (7) contrasts with the linear image of the riverbank, which suggests purposefulness, direction, containment, control. A line turned in upon itself is a circle, associated in the protagonist's mind with the round mooncakes, round doorways, round windows, round tables, and round rice bowls of the Chinese (15), signifying a traditional way of life which has become mindlessly self-perpetuating; if a symbol of perfection and self-sufficiency, a circle also represents confinement. Maxine tries to fathom the consequence of challenging tradition — a centrifugal tendency — by meticulously imagining the aunt's last night, and the lesson is far from reassuring: "the black well of sky and stars went out and out and out forever . . . An agoraphobia rose in her, speeding higher and higher, bigger and bigger, she would not be able to contain it; there would be no end to fear" (16). Here is the dark side of flying — fear, loneliness, eternal banishment from the familiar, even death. Is the aunt's act of Extravagance worth it?

When the young protagonist of *The Woman Warrior* tries to answer this question, she is not simply dealing with the "How far to go?"
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kind of question that American sex education makes it its mission to clarify for adolescents and that Maxine's mother, in her own way, seems to have anticipated from her American-raised daughter. Sexual desire, "primitive" in origin, profoundly pleasurable, and intensely private, is an apt metaphor for the basic human drive to seek individual fulfillment. It is no accident that a book which otherwise hardly concerns itself with sex devotes its entire first chapter to the issue of how the no-name aunt got pregnant, for the way the event is thought of sets the terms for the protagonist's growing up. It is only by meditating on what the aunt went through — here I use meditate the way one speaks of medieval Christian mystics meditating on the passion of Christ or the martyrdom of the saints, referring to a deliberate and painstaking act of immersion in another's experience as a means to self-knowledge and spiritual liberation — that the young Maxine is able to determine what degree of concession to Necessity and what degree of commitment to Extravagance would feel right. She cannot arrive at an answer intellectually, nor can any ready-made answer handed over to her serve in her complicated navigations through the perilous landscape of her Chinese-American girlhood. Everybody knows that a certain amount of concession to Necessity is inevitable, but at what point does the "work of preservation," which "demands that the feelings playing about in one's guts not be turned into action" (9), become tyrannical? What if these "feelings playing about in one's guts" get too urgent to be ignored? If, as Schiller puts it in his famous dictum from the Aesthetical Letters, man is "completely a man only when he plays," Extravagance will have its say somehow — if not accompanied by creative joy, then by a tragic sense of dedication to a cause which, in the last analysis, may be the only worthwhile one: doing something not because one has to but because one wants to. Easily mistaken for hedonism, Extravagance in this sense is actually the essence of being human; without this kind of Extravagance, life is bondage, drudgery, mere animal existence.

In reading the first chapter of The Woman Warrior (as indeed in reading all the others), it is essential for the reader to recognize that the author is not at all describing events which actually took place. Charges of inaccurate portrayal of traditional Chinese culture miss the point of the book entirely. Kingston has never made any claims, explicit or implicit, to historical veracity. If she seems to highlight the savagery and cruelty of Chinese mores, or at least the Cantonese peasant version of them, it is because her protagonist perceives, in what glimpses she can catch of this (to her) alien culture, some "objective correlative" of her feelings toward the role played by Ne-
cessity in her own Chinese-American life. The fate of a woman such as her aunt may have been better in real life, or it may have been worse. Historical correspondence does not matter. "Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (10). What Maxine says here about the aunt applies to all aspects of Chinese tradition touched on in her story. It is true that Kingston, the author, does not always give clear reminders to the reader as to where "fantasies" end and where "reality" begins (which, by the way, is one of the complaints voiced by a disgruntled white critic, as if it were unthinkable that a Chinese-American author could adopt this common literary device from choice, not incompetence). Typically, a section of the meditation begins with brief syntactic cues suggesting conjecture — "perhaps" (7), "it could very well have been" (9), "she may have been" (12), "he may have been" (13), "she may have gone" (17), "it was probably" (18) — then almost imperceptibly slips into the simple past tense which lends greater concreteness and immediacy to the imagined happenings. Different versions of the event of getting pregnant are tried out, none verifiable; in a way, even the aunt hardly needs to have existed. In this sense the chapter is confusing. But that precisely is the point. The process of wresting "ancestral help" entails a laborious and active penetration of what hitherto has only been forbidden territory in one's mind. (To someone like Brave Orchid, for whom "ancestral help" comes readily in the form of culturally programmed responses, such a process is, needless to say, unjustifiably extravagant.)

Many pictures of the no-name aunt emerge from the protagonist's efforts at imaginative reconstruction. She may have been a frightened victim of rape (8), a "wild woman . . . keeping rollicking company" (9), a spoiled only daughter (12). But the one most appealing to Maxine is that of a woman who rebels against the code of Necessity. In an impoverished environment where a woman's chief function was procreation — and only the useful kind, producing sons to supply extra labor and carry on the family name, counted — she dares to pay attention to such a useless thing as beauty, in her lover as well as in herself.

She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk — that's all — a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. (9)
To sustain her being in love, she often worked at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination. (10)

At issue is not a relationship in the modern sense of the word, intimate interactions between two people sharing their lives, rendering mutual emotional support, exchanging ideas. Nor is physical appetite the main point; that could have been satisfied by any man and did not serve to distinguish the no-name woman. The protagonist hopes “that the man my aunt loved appreciated a smooth brow, that he wasn’t just a tits-and-ass man” (11). The aunt is seen chiefly as an artist; without benefit of clay, paint, pen or musical instrument, she worked in a dangerous medium — her life — eventually sacrificing herself for the few ephemeral manifestations of sensuous beauty which came her way: “a charm that vanished with tiredness, a pigtail that didn’t toss when the wind died” (9). “The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (14). The actual content of the private life probably did not matter; it was the idea of it which they abhorred, for private lives would threaten the social hierarchy which safeguarded the survival of the family, the clan. To the protagonist, a life totally unrelieved by Extravagance would have been unthinkable; she surmises that, even in a country where women went about their work like “great sea snails,” bent under wood, babies or laundry, “there must have been a marvelous freeing of beauty when a worker laid down her burden and stretched and arched” (11). The inspiration she gives herself through her aunt, her “forerunner” (9), is that such “freeing of beauty” is indeed possible and desirable. The warning she draws is that there is a high price to pay for violating the authority of Necessity.

The lesson is repeated when the protagonist is told the story of the “village crazy lady.” Although not a “Gold Mountain wife” left alone at home, the village crazy lady was, like the no-name woman, implied to be an “inappropriate woman” who “[longed] after men” (108). Compared to the aunt, who killed herself after her house was raided by masked villagers, the crazy lady was more directly the victim of mob violence: she was stoned to death. Yet the reason why she had to die seems more obscure than ever, and once again it is up to the protagonist to piece together a version of the story that would make sense to her. How much detail is actually supplied by the mother is impossible to determine, but what Maxine has chosen to
recount constitutes a kind of morality play which once again gives her pause in her inclination toward Extravagance. Echoes of the story of Orpheus, the archetypal artist who charmed nature with his music and was eventually torn apart by frenzied Thracian women, can be found throughout the story. The setting was an idyllic summer afternoon, with babies napping in the grass, bees humming, cows, goats, ducks and chickens mingling with humans, and river water playing over the rocks in the sunshine. The crazy lady, if not an active tamer of nature like Orpheus, definitely partook of natural innocence, “[greeting] the animals and the moving branches as she carried her porcelain cup to the river” (111). Like Orpheus, she was a music-maker, “singing” kneeling as she filled her cup. She also danced swaying on her tiny bound feet: “she began to move in fanning circles, now flying the sleeves in the air, now trailing them on the grass, dancing in the middle of the light” (111). The figure of her flinging droplets of water about from her cup reminds the reader of many other images of life and grace (in the religious sense): the goddess Nu-Wa in Chinese mythology who created human beings by flinging about droplets of mud, the heavenly fairy maiden in Chinese folklore who showered flowers from the air, the “sweet dew” of Buddhist teachings. As the little mirrors on her headdress — one recalls how art is often spoken of as mirroring life — cast rainbows over everything, Brave Orchid “felt as if she were peering into Li T’ieh-kuai’s magic gourd” (111) — yet another allusion to the magical powers of the artist. Here was simply a childlike human being who took delight in her world and her creativity. But to the villagers conditioned to find a purpose and use in every activity, such a state of being was no less than subversive. They could not remain for very long “idle above their fields,” “godlike” (110), neither hoeing nor weeding. Watching the crazy lady in her bright clothes, they soon started a rumor that she was signalling Japanese bombers with her mirrors, and as the rumor gathered momentum they began to stone her. The crazy lady, unschooled in the code of Necessity, at first thought that her persecutors were playing catch with her — “at last, people to play with” (111). But it did not take her long to discover that they were after her life. Although Brave Orchid, the matter-of-fact lady doctor, suggested simply taking away her mirrors, the villagers ignored her offers of intervention and reduced the crazy lady to a “mass of flesh and rocks” (112).

A gestalt emerges in the young protagonist’s world: those women who take pleasure in the world of the senses, who heed their emotions, who want to experience the fullness of their being, are considered improper; contributing nothing useful to the larger social unit,
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they are doomed to be martyrs of a lost cause. When the desire for Extravagance was clearly isolated and readily attributable to insanity, as in the case of the crazy lady, Brave Orchid could afford to recognize it in her conscious mind as something spontaneous and human — “She’s only getting drinking water . . . Crazy people drink water too” (112). But when it was embodied in a form which entered into social interactions and had consequences on the social fabric, as in the case of the no-name woman, Brave Orchid became intolerant, priding herself on being a tough, no-nonsense woman who “did not ‘long’” (108). Weakness, both in a practical and a moral sense, is inseparable from the inclination toward Extravagance.

Moon Orchid, Brave Orchid’s sister, whose comic-tragic story of trans-Pacific husband-reclaiming makes up the fourth chapter of The Woman Warrior, provides yet another example of this weakness, as if the young protagonist were not convinced enough of the penalty in store for her should she be tempted to emulate the aunt who “crossed boundaries not delineated in space” (9). Moon Orchid’s very name evokes beauty, evanescence, softness, femininity, poetry, the yin, in contrast to her sister’s militant name, Brave Orchid. Brave Orchid dismissed her sister as the “lovely, useless type” (148), silly, always “laughing at nothing” (135). Reminiscent of the village crazy lady, Moon Orchid was small and delicate, “with little fluttering hands” (136), and was fond of ornamenting herself, wearing pearls around her neck and on her earlobes. As with the crazy lady too, “bright colors and movements distracted her” (142). When she first arrived from Hong Kong, she unpacked beautiful gifts for all her relatives, “[laughing] softly in delight” (139) as she showed off jewelry, embroidered silk, and intricately cut-out paper dolls. When put to work by Brave Orchid in the family laundry, Moon Orchid tangled up thread, “[played] with the water jets dancing on springs from the ceiling” (158), and giggled at customers. In contrast to this grown-up child of an aunt, all of Brave Orchid’s children knew how to operate the machinery even when they had to stand on apple crates to reach the controls (159). Moon Orchid’s ineptness at work, her lack of serious purpose, her aesthetic bent, her air of innocence, all put Moon Orchid in the ranks of the doomed. Indeed, she too died for being the kind of person she was, sacrificed like the no-name aunt and the village crazy lady to a cause whose worth the protagonist is attempting to determine for herself.

It would have been tempting to describe Moon Orchid as being responsible for her own tragedy by offending the spoken or unspoken dictates of Necessity. Then the forces in the conflict would have been all neatly lined up, with Brave Orchid grimly championing Necessity
while the other artist figures invited self-destruction through self-indulgence. Superficially, such a view does seem plausible. Brave Orchid’s practical bent was evident everywhere. Unlike Moon Orchid, she did not wear any jewelry; rings “got in the way of all work” (141). From Moon Orchid’s hoard of treasures — to Brave Orchid mere “scraps” wastefully transported across the ocean — the immigrant woman took only “what was useful and solid into the back bedroom” (141). Brave Orchid’s practice of Necessity was a constant source of embarrassment to her children. In American department stores, she prodded her children to translate her haggling into English (96). She brought two huge shopping bags of food to the airport where she went to meet Moon Orchid’s plane, exasperated at her children who squandered money on snacks and pay TV’s (132). She forced her children to wear the gaudy shoes that another aunt from Hong Kong sent them: “they would be sorry when they had to walk barefoot through snow and rocks because they didn’t take what shoes they could, even if the wrong size” (139). This frugal habit of mind, engendered in the villages of Canton and reinforced by years of slaving away in a Stockton laundry, could result in great insensitivity. Her children used to be horrified to find her throwing scraps of chicken into her constantly simmering pot of chicken feed (143). They used to hide under the beds with ears plugged up “against the sounds of slaughter in the kitchen, the bird screams and the thud, thud of the turtles swimming in the boiling water” (106). But to Brave Orchid, squeamishness of any kind was a luxury — an Extravagance — that the serious-minded could not afford. That’s why she could “eat anything” — “raccoons, skunks, hawks, city pigeons, wild ducks, wild geese, black-skinned bantams, snakes, garden snails, turtles . . . catfish” (106). This Rabelaisian list, in part an “anti-exotic” jab at Chinatown tourist types whose understanding of Chinese-American life is limited to admiration for the bastardized Chinese food served up in restaurants, is at the same time a measure, only half-satirical, of the lengths to which Necessity can drive one in one’s struggle for survival. The long section in the middle of the third chapter, “Shaman,” where fabulous tales of big eaters in Chinese legend are recounted along with outrageous descriptions of impossible foods the Chinese have been known to relish, is thus only apparently a digression. It has an important lesson to teach: “Big eaters win” (105). The root of the figurative term “swallowing something,” in the sense of meekly accepting an injustice or repressing an emotion, is eating, and both levels of meaning apply painfully to the life of the Chinese-American immigrant, who not only has to produce food for the family, but also has to endure the humiliation
inflicted by racists like the "Noisy Red-mouth Ghost" at the laundry who enjoyed his own "No tickee, no washee" jokes (123). If one can eat anything, one can draw maximum sustenance from minimal resources, turning even the seemingly useless into the useful. Taken to its logical extreme, the emphasis on usefulness becomes a kind of secular puritanism for which Brave Orchid’s warning against toadstools serves as a motto: "If it tastes good, it’s bad for you" (108).

If Brave Orchid were nothing but a mouthpiece for the demands of Necessity, nemesis of the weaklings who could not steel themselves against diminishment of life and sensibility, the protagonist would probably have had an easier time growing up under her shadow. She needed only to rebel to find her path in life. But the truth is that, given human nature, extravagance would make its promptings heard somehow if suppressed for too long. In the drama of “At the Western Palace,” confusingly enough, it turns out upon closer analysis that it was actually Brave Orchid who took it upon herself to defend Extravagance. Moon Orchid, despite the attributes which bespeak an affinity with the no-name woman and the crazy lady, was a loyal follower of the doctrine of Necessity, content to be provided for by her absent husband. Well-fed and clothed, with a maid to serve her and even a college education for her daughter, Moon Orchid found little to complain about, although the “feelings playing about in [her] guts,” had she allowed herself to listen to them, might have led her to the kind of “longing” that the no-name aunt experienced. She would have passed her entire life half-waiting for a definite word from her husband had Brave Orchid not taken matters into her own hands, scheming for years to get her sister into the U.S. To circumvent immigration restrictions, she married her niece off to a rich tyrant with citizenship papers so that a slot would be created for Moon Orchid; she sent Moon Orchid the plane ticket as well as daily letters to encourage her to come. All this, in the eyes of the Brave Orchid who told the didactic tale of the pregnant aunt, would have been utterly wasteful. Why did she do it against what the “mature” part of her would call her better judgment?

From the way the protagonist recounts the Moon Orchid story — the episodes taking place at home probably based on direct observation, the episodes taking place in Los Angeles elaborated from her siblings’ brief, casual accounts — it is clear that Brave Orchid did not arrange the “reunion” for Moon Orchid, although ostensibly she was simply playing the role of the dutiful, protective older sister. Rather, she was doing it for herself. Her excitement at the prospect of a dramatic confrontation was palpable. She was obsessed with the details of the scheme. When should Moon Orchid make her entrance?
Should she do it when only the husband was at home, or when only the “little wife” was at home, or when both were at home? Should she dye her hair to compete with the younger “little wife,” or should she leave it white to impress upon her husband how much she had suffered through the years? What kind of dialogue would be exchanged between the characters? Would it come to a scuffle? As she tried out the various versions of the event, she kept chuckling and exclaiming to herself: “Yes, coming with you would be exciting” (167), “Oh, this is most dramatic” (169). In short, she was playing — acting as an artist. She was like a movie director giving vent to her fertile imagination, fascinated by infinite possibilities, rearranging this detail or that, hoping, like the no-name woman at her toilet, to hit the “right combination” that would achieve the greatest impact on the intended audience. At times Moon Orchid would get into the spirit of the thing and offer her own scenarios. At times she “seemed to listen too readily — as if her sister were only talking-story” (151). When it finally came down to doing it, Moon Orchid was scared: “I can’t do that in front of all those people — like a stage show” (174). Brave Orchid pooh-poohed her apprehensions away as if it were mere stage fright. What she had forgotten was that she was playing not with words or pigment but life — and not her own life but another human being’s. The no-name woman played with her own life and paid for it. Moon Orchid, the protagonist’s other aunt, had no interest in doing so but paid all the same with her sanity (and eventually her life too) for her sister’s bit of Extravagance.

Brave Orchid said, “Oh, how I’d love to be in your place. I could tell him so many things. What scenes I could make” (146). At the actual confrontation, when pressed by Moon Orchid’s husband for a valid reason for bringing his wife over, Brave Orchid could only mutter lamely, “You made her live like a widow” (178). Ironically, then, Brave Orchid ended up defending the no-name woman, whose sin was not being able to bear “living like a widow.” When the husband argued that, in the practical sense, Moon Orchid did not live like a widow, he was simply and matter-of-factly giving Brave Orchid a taste of her own medicine. She herself had upheld through her life the supremacy of Necessity. At a loss for a satisfactory retort, Brave Orchid implicitly admitted defeat by resorting to her most characteristic turn of mind to salvage a situation that had gotten out of hand: “The least you can do,” she said to the husband, “is invite us to lunch” (179). The development of the broad farce into a full-blown tragedy was to take a while yet, but Brave Orchid was preserved from a devastatingly full recognition of her responsibility only by being so thoroughly and obstinately consistent in her con-
scious maintenance of Chinese values. When Moon Orchid started voicing paranoid ideas which could be interpreted as cursing her nieces and nephews, Brave Orchid, defining her moral obligations strictly in terms of the concentric circles of relationships that made up traditional Chinese society, stopped taking care of Moon Orchid and placed her in a mental hospital.

The question posed earlier about Brave Orchid’s motives for engineering Moon Orchid’s “reunion” with her husband can be rephrased thus: Why did Brave Orchid end up championing the cause of the no-name woman? In what ways was she like the prodigal, so that she felt empathy with her sufferings? Of course, Brave Orchid, typical of the women of the seafaring regions of Canton from which most early Chinese-Americans originated, was herself left at home as a “Gold Mountain wife.” Like Moon Orchid’s husband, “year after year” the protagonist’s father “did not come home or send for her,” but he “did send money regularly” (71). In the meantime, she had to be the dutiful daughter-in-law and serve her husband’s “tyrant mother” (73). For two decades she led the life of a “widow of the living.” These superficial similarities provide some basis for Brave Orchid’s unconscious identification with the no-name woman, but an adequate explanation must account for the fact that, unlike her sister-in-law, Brave Orchid did rejoin her husband, and that by socially recognized standards she did settle into a satisfactory life with him. An explanation for the urgency of her last fling with Extravagance must be sought in something deeper.

It seems that Brave Orchid’s meddling in Moon Orchid’s affairs represents an attempt to justify not so much her earlier tenure as abandoned wife as her life in the U.S. Not only did the latter require of her greater physical stamina, but it also called for greater sacrifices of her selfhood, for at the time of her immigration Brave Orchid had already had a taste of self-actualization in the form of a happy balance between Necessity and Extravagance: she was a respected lady doctor who was performing a vital function in her society but at the same time enjoying what she was doing. Indeed, the enjoyment came primarily not from the usefulness of her work but from the opportunity it provided for experiencing unchecked her powers as a creative human being. She was intelligent, a shrewd reader of human character, a fearless traveler, filled with curiosity about her world. In making her rounds as a doctor, she was able to indulge freely in her appetite for experience without incurring the wrath of society. It would be an oversimplification to credit Brave Orchid with awareness of the nature of her decision to study and practice medicine; product of a transitional period in Chinese history, she
had compartmentalized her various and often contradictory beliefs, taking pride at being an independent professional woman as well as a shrewd bargainer who got herself a slave girl/nurse at a reduced price. When she finally made the move to rejoin her husband in the U.S., there is no evidence in the book of any conscious resentment on her part. But there are hints that the life she led after immigration represents a deplorable falling-off, a drastic and prolonged constriction of her being that silently called out for vindication. All of a sudden she was transformed from a complete human being enjoying the exercise of all her faculties into a work machine; as an immigrant wife she laundered, pressed, and folded from 6:30 a.m. till midnight, learned to carry hundred-pound sacks of rice up and down stairs, and raised six children born after her mid-forties (122). True to her schooling in Necessity, she did not ponder why she had to suffer thus; it was simply axiomatic that a Chinese wife would follow her husband when sent for. But a sense of having lived in vain inevitably accompanied her resumption of the traditional roles of a woman. She took the readiest explanation for her disenchantment that came to hand: things were so much worse because she was living in an alien land. “This is terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away” (122). When it became increasingly plain that she was never going to return “home” to China, she needed another way to assuage this feeling of having been cut off from life. A chance to wreak vengeance on Moon Orchid’s husband, who dared and managed to find fulfillment in “ghost country” (and as a doctor too!), was a chance to vindicate the code by which she lived but whose desirability and justice she never bothered to examine.

The meaning that the story of Moon Orchid holds for the protagonist is complex and manifold. At the most obvious level, all Brave Orchid’s daughters saw their aunt as a victim of man’s infidelity; their mother told them vehemently — though totally without rational cause, since their father was already seventy years old — to prevent a “little wife” from entering their family. But an intriguing statement is found after the sentence describing the daughters’ reaction: “All [Brave Orchid’s] children made up their minds to major in science or mathematics” (186). What do science and mathematics have to do with a story of unsuccessful husband-reclaiming? What is the logic binding this apparent non sequitur, which seems significant enough to be the concluding sentence, to the rest of the chapter? Perhaps, as can be seen in the vast numbers of Asian-Americans in scientific fields today, a career in science or mathematics represents financial security and upward mobility for immigrant families; a desire to pursue such a career can be
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interpreted as a desire to defend their mother against the need to be dependent on their father. It also seems to be an affirmation of Brave Orchid’s belief in Necessity, in that the scientific discipline, or at least the popular perception of it, refuses to have anything to do with the “feelings playing about in one’s guts.” The children seem to have been reacting strongly against the messiness of human involvements in general, preferring instead the clean and elegant, if sterile, constructs of the mind. In the protagonist’s version of the Moon Orchid story (the reader realizes only at the beginning of the next chapter that, despite the conventional appearance of “At the Western Palace” as a more or less self-contained short story, the events narrated are merely imagined), the lesson derived from the fate of the no-name woman and the crazy lady is once again confirmed: one invites disaster whenever one strays from the prescribed path of Necessity and gives in to the instinct to “play,” to seek fulfillment beyond what creature comforts and a rather unreflecting kind of social approval can give.

Yet by portraying her mother as deriving vicarious gratification from shaping Moon Orchid’s life in hopes of some spiritual reward, the protagonist is, at a deeper level, affirming a faith quite contrary to what she is supposed to think. If not even Brave Orchid was exempt from the call of Extravagance, may it not be that Extravagance really should not be gainsaid? Given short shrift by Brave Orchid, that model of efficiency, good sense and moral strength, Extravagance claimed her in old age, possessing her, driving her to a singlemindedness normally reserved for the conduction of the serious business of survival, all the while duping her into believing that she was still her no-nonsense old self. The question that Maxine must resolve is what to do with this irresistible but seemingly ruthless force in human nature, without which life would be barren but with which life would likewise be painful because of the impossible choices that it forces one to make. Using Joseph L. Henderson’s term in his discussion of the embodiment of ancient myths in modern life, we can say that she is torn between “containment” and “liberation,” “discipline” and “adventure,” “security” and “freedom,” twin impulses which often appear in the guise of “virtue” in conflict with “evil.” The reconciliation of these opposites has been the preoccupation of human consciousness since ancient times, although the specific form taken by both the contradiction and its resolution varies from culture to culture. Luckily for the protagonist, unquestioning allegiance to Necessity is not the only quality that Brave Orchid has passed on to her. It was just as well that Brave Orchid was an imperfect exemplar of the philosophy she professed;
otherwise, her daughter might have been totally crushed. As it were, Brave Orchid violated her own teaching repeatedly, not only in her manipulation of Moon Orchid’s affairs but also, more importantly, in her “talk-stories.” In the same way that the heroic feats of the swordswomen in her “talk-stories” negate her endorsements of traditional Chinese sayings on the worthlessness of women, the plenitude of enchanting images called forth by her nightly narratives contradicts the austerity of her explicit instruction. Perhaps the protagonist’s early characterization of her mother should be revised: in telling stories, Brave Orchid would add nothing unless she thought she was powered by Necessity. She might have thought she was serving as a custodian of Chinese tradition when she filled her daughter’s mind with fantastic legends; in fact, however, Extravagance got in through the back door, endowing her ostensibly didactic tales with magic. In the final analysis, what Brave Orchid did as unwitting wordsmith probably provides the most potent inspiration to her daughter in her quest for a wholeness which would reconcile Necessity and Extravagance.

The second chapter of The Woman Warrior, “White Tigers,” represents the protagonist’s most sustained excursion of the imagination in order to capture the “feel” of this wholeness. As wish-fulfilling fantasy, Maxine’s account of the apprenticeship of Fa Mu Lan reflects her deepest psychological needs; by examining the arrangements she chooses for the legendary heroine, we can see what is unwelcome or lacking in her own life. In place of parents who created chaos in her life by failing to understand her, Fa Mu Lan was given two sets of parents: her biological parents, reduced to distant figures who wished her well but could not interfere in her growing up; and her spiritual mentors, a wise, old couple who anticipated all her emotional needs while inculcating inner strength in her. In place of inexplicable men who required her to adopt various patterns of femininity as a precondition to finding her attractive, Fa Mu Lan was given a painless courtship and marriage: her childhood playmate, now grown up, vowed unconditional and undying love for her at a “spirit wedding” conducted while she was perfecting her martial arts skills in the mountains. As a woman warrior who fought in disguise, Fa Mu Lan was given the freedom and power of a man while retaining the secret satisfaction of knowing that she was more than just another man, however competent (to fantasize herself merely as a man would have deprived the protagonist of this pleasure). The woman warrior could have her cake and eat it too: Fa Mu Lan bore a child between battles, product of an equal and loving relationship with her husband, and miraculously nobody noticed the changes in
her body. In contrast to the centrifugal movement and agoraphobia experienced by the no-name aunt during her childbirth, Fa Mu Lan saw her soon-to-be-born baby "in dark and silver dreams" as "falling from the sky, each night closer to earth, his soul a star" (47). Most importantly, Fa Mu Lan's career shows how one can rise above Necessity and exercise Extravagance without compromising one's ties to other human beings. A long period of voluntary submission to discipline is a prerequisite of attaining a higher state of being — this is what is missing in the lives of the weaker women in whom the protagonist attempts to read her own fate, and this, ultimately, is the only way out of her dilemma. Appropriately, then, she begins her spiritual quest by having her alter ego follow the call of a bird (24), that time-honored symbol of transcendence.

Fa Mu Lan was chosen in her childhood to be the savior of her people, but paradoxically she herself had to choose too, between blind obedience to a more mundane concept of Necessity and willing commitment to what might be called a Higher Necessity. To train as a warrior, she would have to give up performing her duties as an ordinary villager's daughter, and at first this disturbed her. Emotionally she was as attached to her parents and their standards of right and wrong as any seven year old. Although she certainly did not enjoy her chores, initially they constituted, she felt, her only function. The old man posed the choice thus: "You can go back right now if you like. You can go pull sweet potatoes, or you can stay with us and learn how to fight barbarians and bandits" (27). When Fa Mu Lan decided to stay with the old couple for fifteen years, she was opting not for a softer life but a more exacting one that involved emotional detachment as well as physical pain. Yet the chance to learn to do one thing well at a time, just for the sake of doing it well, was itself an Extravagance that she enjoyed.

I worked every day when it rained. I exercised in the downpour, grateful not to be pulling sweet potatoes. I moved like the trees in the wind. I was grateful not to be squishing in chicken mud, which I did not have nightmares about so frequently now. (35)

The essence of the martial arts exercises is controlled exuberance. Unlike the no-name woman, the village crazy lady or Moon Orchid, Fa Mu Lan was not simply giving free rein to her natural inclinations. If she was an artist, it was because she chose to study to become one, reconditioning every part of her body and mind in order to attain perfect coincidence of thought and act. By the time she was ready for her survival trial, she had mastered the art of running blindfold so well that she could virtually fly: "I ran and, not stepping
off a cliff at the edge of my toes and not hitting my forehead against
a wall, ran faster. A wind buoyed me up over the roots, the rocks,
the little hills” (29). Here is the image of transcendence again — not
just a matter of letting go now but a flawless fusion of freedom and
discipline. Fa Mu Lan’s entire sojourn in the high mountains was a
preparation for her triumphant return to the lowlands of everyday
human existence.

The element of conscious choice is integral to the concept of a
Higher Necessity. When Fa Mu Lan reached menstruating age, the
old woman exhibited an attitude toward her sexuality directly op-
posite to Brave Orchid’s: instead of scaring her into suppressing her
sexual desire, the old woman quietly celebrated her coming of age
but asked her to put off having children for a few more years. When
Fa Mu Lan suggested using her newly acquired skills of control to
stop the bleeding, the old woman replied, “No. You don’t stop shit-
ting and pissing . . . . It’s the same with the blood. Let it run” (37). In
other words, the discipline called for by the warrior’s vocation is not
just inhibition, which is merely the flip side of letting go, but a ma-
ture recognition of one’s full, natural being coupled with an equally
mature recognition that gratification of it awaits accomplishment of
a more serious purpose. Under the old couple’s tutelage, Fa Mu Lan
adopted a vegetarian diet. When she ran out of food on her survival
test and a rabbit materialized within her reach, instead of using her
martial prowess to kill the rabbit for food, she chose to warm it by
adding another branch to the fire. (It was only then that the rabbit
immolated itself for her as a gift.) This voluntary renunciation of
killing and extension of love again constitutes the antithesis of Brave
Orchid’s teaching: her cult of indiscriminate eating as a means to
conquering adversity is based on a dulling of sensibility, an impair-
ment of her humanity. On the other hand, the warrior should not be
indiscriminately tender-hearted either, or she will get no work done.
What she should strive for is a kind of flexibility, moving between an
almost impersonal, godlike compassion for suffering humankind —
“I bled and thought about the people to be killed; I bled and thought
about the people to be born” (39) — and a selective attention that
closes a “wooden door” on individuals about to be sacrificed in the
cause of justice but releases feelings toward those who will survive
to be loved. Her self-sufficiency is not selfishness but a reconciliation
of self and world, grounded in an illusionless understanding of the
nature of things and one’s role in the overall scheme.

At the physical nadir of her trial, Fa Mu Lan was granted a vision
of enlightenment in which, in common with mystical traditions East
and West, the essence of the cosmos was perceived as a dance.
I saw two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances. They turned so perfectly that together they were the axis of the earth's turning. They were light; they were molten, changing gold . . . . And I understand how working and hoeing are dancing; how peasant clothes are golden, as king's clothes are golden; how one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman. (32)

The dance is a fit metaphor for the perfect union of Necessity and Extravagance. Dance without the necessary constraints of form would be mere random movement, without the extravagant freedom of energy a mechanical abstraction. When Fa Mu Lan was finally ready to do battle, she went forth as a dancer consummately skilled in the martial arts whose useful work of vengeance — the "killing and falling" (33) — was a kind of dancing too.

It is easy to detect the parallels between Fa Mu Lan's war on the wicked barons and the protagonist's — and here she merges into Kingston the author of The Woman Warrior — act of breaking silence to tell about her Chinese-American girlhood. The protagonist has many enemies. There are the "business-suited" (56) "stupid racists" (58) who took her parents' laundry away for urban renewal, who made jokes about "nigger yellow," who fired her when she protested against their insensitivity. There are the communists in China who took away her parents' farm. There are the Chinese values which put "double binds around [her] feet" (57) by teaching her that submission was the price of being loved by men. There are the American values which were impossible for the Chinese-American girl to practice without causing her to violate her native culture. All the suffering she had undergone growing up as a Chinese girl in America calls for some justification. Comparing herself to Fa Mu Lan, the protagonist writes:

What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance — not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words — "chink" words and "gook" words — that they do not fit on my skin. (63)

By "reporting," Kingston hopes to assert, like Fa Mu Lan, the common humanity of all without glossing over the injury sustained by the individual. The discipline that Kingston has had to submit to as a writer concerns not only craftsmanship but also an enlargement of her sympathies so that her stories would not just have an axe to grind. "I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (35).
The protagonist has tried various other means of coping with the more obvious manifestations of Necessity in her life. With regard to her mother, she tried “not [speaking] words to give her pain” (119); she tried getting straight A’s to bring honor to the family; she tried rebellion, breaking dishes and making herself sloppy to avoid getting married off. With regard to American society, she tried getting the approval of “ghost teachers” by winning awards, conforming to American standards of femininity to attract men, “[marching] to change the world” (56) at Berkeley in the sixties. However, all these pragmatic solutions proved unsatisfactory because one thing or another would be left out: there would be no room for paradoxes in such pedestrian, narrowly goal-oriented action aimed at individual redemption. In late adolescence, the protagonist decided to voice all her discontent about her life by blurting out “a list of two hundred things that [she] had to tell [her] mother” (229); as superficially similar as this act was to the “reporting” of the female avenger, it was in fact different and more limited in nature. It was a means of personal therapy, “to stop the pain in [her] throat” (229), and even as such it was not truly effective because it was based on an unfair fastening of responsibility on one party, when the truth was far more complex.

And suddenly I got very confused and lonely because I was at that moment telling [my mother] my list, and in the telling, it grew. No higher listener. No listener but myself. (237)

If “the true things about [the protagonist]” (229) are to be told, they must not be told to just one person but to all who, in one way or another, share her suffering. To say so is utterly consistent with the recognition that there is “no higher listener” but oneself. In the same way that Fa Mu Lan’s practice of the martial arts and Brave Orchid’s practice of medicine are at once individual fulfillment and fulfillment of a communal purpose, Kingston’s “reporting” goes beyond an artless, impulsive outpouring of grievances and achieves the status of a universal statement. The reason it is able to transcend commonplace usefulness in the service of a higher use is that it has been transformed by the discipline of an artist into a blindingly intricate “knot” (190). The “[twisting] into designs” (189) of what might have been told straightforwardly seems to be a waste of energy; this Extravagance, however, is crucial to the success of the “reporting.”

It is only at the end of The Woman Warrior that the reader is finally given a story exemplifying the positive consequences of abandoning oneself to art. Brave Orchid’s mother once ordered her entire household to attend a play instead of staying home behind locked doors to guard against bandits, as caution would suggest. The bandits did
strike — at the theater — but every member of the household some-
how made it home safely, “proof to my grandmother that our family 
was immune to harm as long as they went to plays. They went to 
many plays after that” (241). The moral drawn by the grandmother is 
simplistic, but the story is a corrective to the many other tales of 
women who suffered for Extravagance upon which the protagonist 
has been meditating. At last her own inclinations are given a stamp 
of approval by the matriarch; for once art is valued as a communal 
activity beyond petty disputes of its utilitarian value. “I don’t want 
to watch that play by myself. How can I laugh all by myself? You 
want me to clap alone, is that it? I want everybody there. Babies, ev-
erybody” (241). The picture of the family at the theater is reminiscent 
of a scene in the Fa Mu Lan fantasy: after the woman warrior tried 
and executed the oppressors, the villagers tore down the ancestral 
tables. “We’ll use this great hall for village meetings,’ I announced. 
‘Here we’ll put on operas; we’ll sing together and talk-story’” (53). 
Perhaps, after The Woman Warrior and its likes Chinese-Americans 
will have a new kind of art in which vengeance is no longer such a 
burning issue.  

For the moment, when American society remains 
racist and Chinese tradition restrictive, the writer can only seek her 
own resolution starting from the only life she knows. 

When Kingston expressed, through the protagonist, a desire to be 
accepted by her people — “The swordswoman and I are not so dis-
similar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I 
can return to them” (62) — was she anticipating the kind of charges 
about “selling out” that the book drew from hostile Chinese Ameri-
can critics? A work that begins “You must not tell anyone . . . what I 
am about to tell you” (3) is perhaps bound to be fraught with misgiv-
ings. If the ethnic writer, by virtue of belonging to a misunder-
stood group, is saddled with the duty of disseminating a kind of average 
version of the group’s image, then Kingston has obviously avoided 
this Necessity. Her imaginative penetrations of particular experi-
ences relevant to her unique struggles can be viewed as a kind of 
Extravagance, easily interpreted as frivolous, self-alienating, self-
serving or worse. However, if our foregoing analysis of the enter-
prise of the book holds, the ethnic writer has no other choice but to 
honestly seek the balance between Necessity and Extravagance 
which feels right to a person of her particular temperament, back-
ground and capabilities. The Higher Necessity for the sake of which 
she withholds cruder if more immediately tangible judgments on the 
Sources of injustice concerns, ultimately, all humanity. Without a 
profound faith in the ability of human beings to understand each 
other despite their differences, the act of writing and getting pub-
lished would not make much sense for the ethnic writer or, for that matter, for any other writer, since even within a socially recognized category such as an "ethnic group," diversity is necessarily great. The story of T'sai Yen, the Chinese woman poet who spent twelve years in exile among barbarians and brought back a song which "translated well" (243), concludes The Woman Warrior, hinting that effective art should be able to reduce the effects of cultural differences and touch upon common human feelings. Both the "barbarian" flute-players and the "civilized" singers were, after all, engaged in the same search for that clear, high note — "an icicle in the desert" reconciling paradoxes — which would have the power to disturb and communicate.

It would be naive to expect that, given the nature of human beings in general and American society in particular, gross misreadings of ethnic literature due to ignorance and prejudice would soon cease simply because ethnic writers do a good enough job as artists. For this reason there continues to be a place for polemics, and the kind of work Chan or Tong does in demolishing popular stereotypes about Asian-Americans continues to be useful. But if stereotyping is damaging, it is precisely because it denies an individual's "uniqueness." To demand orthodoxy in the treatment of ethnic experiences is to subscribe to a narrowly utilitarian theory of literature, and the price one pays for this simplification is the same as the price one pays for the censorship of Extravagance seen repeatedly in this study: a reduction in the fullness of life, a shrinking of the self to meaner if more manageable proportions. As the protagonist writes of her leaving home:

I learned to think that my mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, TV dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (237)

While relishing a chance to live "ghost-free," she also notes with wistful regret that getting down to the business of day-to-day survival entails a diminishment: "Now colors are gentler and fewer; smells are antiseptic" (238). A bold act of retrieval and active exorcism is still in order. An understanding of the complex dialectics between Necessity and Extravagance is especially crucial for Asian-Americans, who as a group have been curtailing their artistic activities in the interest of success; like Brave Orchid's children, they favor science and mathematics and other such practical pursuits. Kingston is not the first or the only Asian-American writer to delineate the
tension between Necessity and Extravagance. Wakako Yamauchi, for example, in "Songs My Mother Taught Me," records the tragedy of an immigrant family torn by the conflict between the spartan survival mode of the father and the yearning for experience of the mother. David Henry Hwang, in his play The Dance and the Railroad, deals with the relationship between work for oneself and work for others — the martial arts practice of a Chinese opera singer and the drudgery of a railroad worker — in a manner highly suggestive of influence by Kingston; his Family Devotions sets the philistinism of first generation Chinese-Americans against the artistic proclivities of the second. But The Woman Warrior is so far the most comprehensive exploration of the subject. Its complexities remind one that the last thing one needs for ethnic literature is the requirement that it set forth "correct" ideas. As Patricia Lin Blinde observes in her study of the meaning of form in The Woman Warrior, Those who enforce laws, systems, and values even in the arts are capable of tyranny, Kingston seems to suggest, and the true artist must rise above the dictums as to what can or cannot be counted as art. As a writer with this vision, Kingston's task is thus not one of drawing corresponding portraits of any single verified situation; her task is to record the struggle of the human imagination as it attempts to make sense of the input of human fictions, fictions which pour in from all facets of quotidiem living under the rubric of culture, philosophy, and history. (70)

Notes
1. The book won the National Book Critics Award for the best work of nonfiction published in 1976 and was rated by Time magazine as one of the ten best works of nonfiction in the 1970s. New York Times critic John Leonard calls it "one of the best [books] I've read in years."
7. Following the practice of some students of autobiographical literature, I will identify the nameless protagonist in The Woman Warrior by the author's first
name. Of course, in a fictional work billed as autobiography, the distinction between narrator and author is not always clear, but some form of separation is desirable not only for ease of reference but also to avoid keeping the “real-life” figure too much in the picture.


11. But note that even in China Men, her next work, Kingston has found it necessary to speak up for Chinese-Americans by inserting a section explaining the injustices the group has undergone. She hopes, however, that this technically “clumsy” practice “will affect the shape of the novel in the future. Now maybe another Chinese-American writer won’t have to write that history.” See Timothy Pfaff, "Talk with Mrs. Kingston," New York Times Book Review, June 18, 1980.


Works Cited


