Maxine Hong Kingston
by Charles L. Crow
Maxine Hong Kingston

By Charles L. Crow
Bowling Green State University

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho
Copyright 2004
by the
Boise State University Western Writers Series

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Crow, Charles L.
Maxine Hong Kingston / by Charles L. Crow.
p. cm. — (Boise State University western writers series ; no. 162)
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Kingston, Maxine Hong—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Women
and literature—United States—History—20th century. 3. Chinese
Americans in literature. I. Title. II. Series.
PS3561.I52Z64 2004
813'.54—dc22
2004018379

Western Writers Series
English Department
Boise State University
1910 University Drive
Boise, ID 83725-1525
(208) 426-1190
wws@boisestate.edu
http://english.boisestate.edu/westernwriters

Printed in the United States of America by
Boise State University Printing and Graphic Services
Boise, Idaho
Maxine Hong Kingston
Maxine Hong Kingston

“The history of the intermingling of human cultures is a history of trade—in objects like the narwhal's tusk, in ideas, and in great narratives.”

—Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*

*The Woman Warrior* (1976), Maxine Hong Kingston's first book, made her famous. Her arrival coincided with, and helped to fuel, an awareness of literature by women and ethnic minorities, and a change in the literature studied in high-school and college classrooms. Today Kingston is one of the most frequently taught of living American authors. Her works are studied in courses in English, women's studies, Asian studies, ethnic studies, postmodern literature, postcolonial literature, “magic realism,” history, and autobiography. Discussion of Kingston has in fact changed our understanding of several of these categories.

These different venues and critical approaches suggest Kingston's complexity. Her works defy easy categories. Booksellers and libraries have difficulty deciding where to place her books. Is *The Woman Warrior* a novel or an autobiography? Does *China Men* belong in the history section, or in fiction? Indeed, Kingston's work, throughout her career, has been about breaking boundaries. Like the Monkey King of Chinese folklore, she is a trickster, a shape-changer, and eludes all attempts to confine her. She is best viewed from several angles at once; there is no single approach that defines this author.
Yet among the ways to understand Kingston, there is one that Kingston has often mentioned herself. She is a westerner, a Californian. She was formed by the Central Valley town of Stockton, where she was raised. Though not a poetic location, Stockton is still what "home" means to her, and it is the place where stories come from. She was also shaped by Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay region, where she studied and worked for nine years, including most of the 1960s, that critical decade. She returned to the Bay Area after living in Hawai'i for seventeen years, and lives there now. Kingston's sense of origin as a westerner provides an anchor, a self-definition, which in no way contradicts her role as a cosmopolitan person in the greater world. Until recently (see Crow, "Maxine," and Comer), this western dimension of Kingston's life and work has been ignored. Yet she has always been at pains to describe herself as a westerner and a child of the Great Central Valley. Among the wide range of texts (Chinese, European, North and Latin American) Kingston references in her own writing, she alludes often to works by California natives and California sojourners: Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack Kerouac, Lew Welch, and others. She pays homage to John Steinbeck, and especially to Cannery Row (1945), which, in mixing poetry and prose (i.e., the translated Sanskrit poem recited by Doc near the end) anticipates her own genre-bending experiments (see Yalom 16). Recently, with fellow western writers and scholars James Houston, Jack Hicks, and Al Young, she has edited The Literature of California (2000), an anthology for high school and college use.

To see Kingston as a western writer—as she wishes—requires also that we consider the west in a new way. The American west is closely linked with the notion of the frontier, which was both a space and a process. If we think of the frontier as the historian
Frederick Jackson Turner defined it, that is, as the product of a line of European settlement moving westward across the landscape from the eastern seaboard, we leave out (with much else) the role of the Chinese in building the west. A large part of Kingston’s writing, in fact, has been an attack on this version of American history, and has attempted to “reclaim” America from it.

Recent scholars have revised Turner’s notion of the frontier in useful ways. Annette Kolodny, for example, defines the frontier as a terrain in which newcomers encounter an established population, producing “collisions and negotiations” between cultures and interactions of languages and texts (Crow, Companion 45). Kingston’s forefathers were frontiersmen, in Kolodny’s sense, in Hawai’i and the American west in the nineteenth century. But so were Kingston’s immigrant parents. Stockton’s Chinatown in the twentieth century was still, in this sense, a frontier community. As a writer Kingston herself is a borderlander, a frontierswoman, and the crossing of boundaries and the collision of languages and texts defines her work.

If Kingston was shaped by a region and a frontier, she was also the product of a time, and, of course, a family. This study will stress her westernness and her generation—another under-represented factor in past discussions of the author. Yet no graphing of time and place can account completely for the emergence of an artist. She is not typical of very much. Kingston has described herself as a highly eccentric person, from an eccentric family. (One of her sisters rated the family as an “eight” on a one-to-ten scale of oddness.) Her writings reveal the development of great talent threatened at times by madness, struggling for expression, and mastering a mighty rage to seek reconciliation, community, and peace.
STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

The cities of California’s Great Central Valley are strung along old Highway 99 from north to south: Redding, Red Bluff, Chico, Sacramento, Stockton, Modesto, Merced, Fresno, Tulare, Bakersfield, with smaller towns as links between them. This is California’s agricultural heartland, one of the richest farming areas in the world, and a different region altogether from Hollywood or the cities along the coast. It is flat, often dusty, and would resemble areas of the middle west or south were it not for the towering Sierras, sometimes visible through the shimmering haze. It is punishingly hot in the summer, often blanketed in fog—“tule fog” in the regional parlance—in winter. Tourists passing through this region find virtually nothing that is picturesque, and little to distinguish one of these cities from another, as their names flash by on signs for freeway off-ramps.

Yet, as California’s great activist historian, Carey McWilliams, wrote over seventy years ago, the bland appearance of California’s agricultural interior conceals “many secrets from a casual inspection,” and has “a melodramatic history” (Factories in the Field 5, 7). In a 1989 interview with Paul Skenazy, Kingston echoed McWilliams: “There’s all kinds of secrets in these wonderful Valley towns. So, one of my goals in writing WW [Woman Warrior] and CM [China Men] was to get that idea of the San Joaquin Valley into the books and let the world know of that amazing life that takes place” (Skenazy & Morten 116). Each of the valley’s cities and towns has a distinct past, and often a distinct ethnic demographic, as provided, for example, by Fresno’s Armenians and Volga Germans, or Kingsburg’s Swedes. The history, secrets, and amazing life of these communities have been the rich mother-lode for the valley’s writers.

Stockton is both a valley agricultural town and a seaport, at the head of the tidewaters of the San Joaquin River. Freighters can
load near the city center and descend by the Delta Waterway to San Francisco Bay, sixty miles away. It is a town with a past running back to the Gold Rush, when it was a jumping-off place for the mines of the central Sierra. There is still a street called El Dorado (where the Hong family ran their laundry). The notorious bandit, Joaquin Murrietta, once rode through town. The last surviving pony express rider, William Campbell, died in Stockton in 1934, only six years before Kingston’s birth.

Stockton is also a railroad town, at one time the junction of three lines, the Santa Fe, the Southern Pacific, and the Western Pacific—railroads originally built, as Kingston reminds us in *China Men*, by Cantonese labor.

Old by California standards, some of Stockton’s leafy neighborhoods, with their wide lawns and frame houses, resemble streets in New England or the Middle West, and Stockton is therefore a favorite location for Hollywood filmmakers. The scene in a recent movie you thought was filmed in Vermont or Ohio may have been shot in Stockton. But the town also has a gritty, working-class edge, which is well-captured in the novel *Fat City* (1969) by Kingston’s contemporary, the other Stockton novelist, Leonard Gardner. Kingston was not raised in Stockton’s tree-shaded, prosperous and photogenic streets, but in a poor, multiracial neighborhood near the city’s skid row.

In 1940, when Maxine Ting Ting Hong was born, Stockton had about 48,000 residents. (There are now over 260,000.) According to the *WPA Guide to California*, published in 1939, the source of much of this background, about ten per cent of Stockton’s population was “Mexican.” There were also Basque shepherders and a remnant population of “Hindus” or “Sihks,” terms which the writer seems to believe are identical. No mention is made of Chinese American residents by the guidebook. This invisibility or erasure of her people would be something that Stockton’s most famous native daughter would undertake to correct.
THE GENERATION OF 1940
YEAR OF THE DRAGON

While writers come from different backgrounds and families, many share a pattern so common that it is almost expected. During the childhood of the artist, the family is in, or it soon enters, a period of economic decline. The father dies or suffers financial reversals, or otherwise becomes ineffectual. The strong parent is the mother. Often resentful and rebellious against expectations and family hopes placed upon him or her, the young artist withdraws into the consolation of private fantasies and creates an alternative world. Consider how many well-known authors easily spring to mind who came from this childhood: Hawthorne, Melville, Clemens, Alcott, Freeman, Dresier, Chopin, Zola, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Plath. The list could easily be extended. Perhaps the familiar author whose childhood most resembles that of Kingston is Willa Cather, who was also the oldest child in a large family overflowing a small house. The Cathers had seven children, the Hong six. Maxine Hong, like Willa Cather, suffered a mysterious, possibly psychosomatic childhood disease that kept her in bed and happily reading for months. Each young woman left her confining home town for the intellectual freedom of her state’s public university. Cather intended to study medicine; Kingston engineering. Both switched to English and journalism, both went on to forge careers in the greater world, but returned to their childhood to resolve their deep conflicts about it in their writings. Both succeeded in reconciling (in Cather’s words, which she learned from Jewett) the parish and the world.

Yet however closely someone’s life fits a pattern, it is still unique. Maxine Ting Ting Hong was born to a specific family, at a particular time. The time, 1940, was one of uneasy calm in the United States (as California historian Kevin Starr has recently reminded us in Embattled Dreams). The effects of the Great
Depression still lingered, but economic recovery had begun. The country was at peace, and many Americans hoped that it would avoid being swept into another world conflict, as it had been a generation earlier. Yet the war already had begun in Europe and Asia. Kingston’s mother in fact had escaped from a war zone, and the war would come to the United States little more than a year after Kingston’s birth.

The Second World War would shadow Kingston’s childhood. One of her earliest memories, in fact, is of being taken crying from a war movie. This memory is in several ways significant, and anticipates her lifelong hatred of war, her work as a peace activist.

But had she been born at a later time, her early memories of visual media would have been from television, not movies. Her generation was the last in this country whose infancy and early childhood would not be dominated by TV. It would appear later in her school days, so that a sequence in The Woman Warrior is shaped like an episode of I Love Lucy; but the story-telling media of her formative early childhood were radio serials, comic books, and movies, all of which are echoed in her own writing. Soon she would encounter the real books that would stoke the imagination of an omnivorous reader.

She was also born to a family of storytellers, poets, and singers. Into the ears of young Maxine came classic Chinese poetry and the vernacular tradition of folktales and sagas which is the essential background of Chinese novels and opera. And, as every reader of Kingston knows, she heard stories of her parents’ life in China, their village, their families, and their secrets.

The language of the home, and of the stories and poems, was a dialect of Cantonese called Say Yap. Public school, of course, was in English. Thus she grew up on a linguistic frontier, and learned, with some effort, to cross back and forth across that border. Much of her career has carried forward the activity of translating,
reconciling, and explaining (to herself, and others) that was her childhood. A key event occurred when she was eight or nine years old, in fourth grade: unexpectedly, without premeditation, she wrote a poem in English. She knew, from this moment, that she was a writer.

Before this, she had invented a game she called "talking men"—quite different from the "talk story" of her mother. "Talking men" was shared with no one, not even the sister who was her "almost twin." Stories came to Kingston, often beginning not with words, but with visual imagery. Images grew into pictures, into scenes like plays, that could be drawn or painted or formed into words in Chinese or English. In kindergarten Kingston covered pages with black ink or crayon, leading teachers to think that she was retarded. But, in her mind, the pigment represented a black curtain, about to rise and reveal the images she knew were behind. (She tells us this in the preface to Through the Black Curtain, a limited edition collection of readings from her first two books, and from the then in-progress Tripmaster Monkey.) Thus her long apprenticeship as an artist would be a search to bring her stories from behind the curtain, either in words or visual images.

Kingston's childhood and adolescence were troubled and in some ways rebellious. She recalls that she did not know what it was like not to be angry. The normal state of her early years was rage: rage directed against her parents, and against the insults she suffered as a girl and young woman and as an Asian in a racist culture. Writing and painting—letting the stories out from behind the curtain—were a defense against the madness that stalked her during these years. Something of a misfit in high school, as talented artistic people usually are, she was a brilliant student, published an essay in a national competition, and won a scholarship to the University of California.
Kingston's university years, 1958-1962, conclude the post-World-War II period of American life. The University of California at Berkeley, the state's flagship of public higher education, enjoyed public esteem and a legacy of generous support going back to the Progressive Era: this also would soon change. In this atmosphere of twilight glow, Kingston entered the university as an engineering major. She had a talent for mathematics. It was seen as a duty of bright American students to help overcome Soviet technological dominance in the era following the launching of the satellite Sputnik in October, 1957. Doubtless her parents expected her to succeed in a difficult and practical field; at the same time, Kingston hints in *The Woman Warrior* that the austere world of math and science offered a refuge from the complex emotions of her upbringing.

But the Bay Area was, as it still is, the west-coast headquarters of American "bohemian" life, of resistance to conventional behavior and thought. It is also the center of American pacifism. Only a few years before, the Beat giants Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg had walked the streets south of campus, in the life described by Kerouac in *The Dharma Bums*, which was published in 1958. Existentialism and Zen were discussed in coffee houses on Telegraph Avenue; across the Bay was Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore, and poetry and jazz were to be heard in North Beach, or on the pioneering independent FM station, KPFA. Foreign movies could be seen at Pauline Kael's Cinema Guild. (Everyone's favorite movie, says Sunny in *Tripmaster Monkey*, is *Jules and Jim*.) So, sometime in the dying moments of the Eisenhower administration, Kingston changed her major to English.

During her undergraduate years, Kingston read voluminously, grounding herself in British and American literature. Her protagonist and alter-ego, Wittman Ah Sing, shows something of the
intellectual pride of English majors of that era; his contemptuous dismissal of “soul-narrowing” subjects like Sociology is a characteristic note (Tripmaster 76). She also read English translations of the great sixteenth-century Chinese sagas Monkey (or Journey to the West), Romance of the Three Kingdoms, and The Water Margin (or Outlaws of the Marsh), which she had glimpsed as a child through Cantonese poetry and opera. She enjoyed her studies, but seems to have found no special mentor among the English Department’s excellent faculty, and chafed under the New Critical approach that dominated English at the time, and the endless writing of formal essays. Later she would whimsically suggest that the enthusiasm shown by English majors in demonstrations during the Free Speech Movement and anti-Vietnam war protests owed something to their anger at “all that essay writing.” Her essay against essays, “Useful Education,” collected in Hawai’i One Summer, would unconsciously echo a piece written some 90 years earlier for San Francisco’s avant-garde periodical The Wave by another former Berkeley English student, Frank Norris. Like Kingston, Norris railed against all those formal “themes,” and argued that “the best way to study literature is to try to produce literature” (McElrath and Burgess 181). Kingston, one should add, would not appreciate this comparison, since she considers, with some cause, Norris to be an anti-Asian racist. Nonetheless, a number of strange parallels exist between Norris and Kingston, extending even to the prematurely gray hair of each writer. Moreover, Norris was the first novelist of genuine talent to write of Kingston’s Great Central Valley.

Among Kingston’s fellow students at Cal were, most famously, Frank Chin, her future rival and bitter antagonist, whom Kingston says she knew by reputation but never met. And there were other creative and unconventional individuals: the poet Diane Wakoski, for example (who graduated two years before Kingston,
in 1960), and Lillian Feyderman, later a professor of American Literature, who worked her way through college as a stripper at the President Burlesque in San Francisco, as she recently described in her autobiography, *Naked in the Promised Land* (2003).

Shortly after her graduation, she married another of her creative classmates, the actor Earll Kingston. She returned to campus to complete her California secondary teaching certification, and taught high school English and mathematics in Hayward, down the East Bay, for five years, while Earll taught at Berkeley High. Meanwhile, she was drawn into the political activism of the period.

The 60s, in many ways, can be said to have begun in Berkeley. The year after her graduation, 1963, in which she would later set *Tripmaster Monkey*, was on the cusp between two distinct periods, and in many ways the end of an era that seems, in retrospect, simple and innocent. (It was, indeed, in some ways like the year of her birth, 1940, a clear historical boundary.) In the fall of 1963, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. The following autumn, an ill-advised attempt by the Berkeley administration to close a “Hyde Park” area along Bancroft Way touched off a series of nonviolent protests by students, which became known as the Free Speech Movement. In response, a backlash against the Berkeley “riots” was orchestrated by conservative newspapers such as William F. Knowland’s *Oakland Tribune*. This backlash eventually would erode public support for affordable public higher education in the United States.

The Free Speech Movement initiated a period of student protests around the country. As the involvement of the United States in southeast Asia escalated, student demonstrations on speech and civil rights issues shifted to antiwar protests. Public sentiment was increasingly divided, and the response of authorities increasingly violent, in Berkeley and elsewhere. In spring 1970, the
shooting of students at Kent State University in Ohio closed out the decade.

"The 1960s," Kingston told William Satake Blauvelt, "were some of the most important years of my life and they go into forming me and the country the way it is now" (Skenazy & Morten 77). Tripmaster Monkey is obviously a novel about the beginning of the sixties, and The Fifth Book of Peace about the 60s and the long aftermath of the Vietnam War; but the decade forms the context, in less obvious ways, for The Woman Warrior and China Men as well. Kingston found the early sixties a fine time to be young. She broke some rules and celebrated a new sense of freedom. But as the Vietnam war grew, she involved herself in political resistance, returning to the campus to participate in protests against the war. Like many young people of the time, she experienced both exhilaration and disillusionment. By the late sixties, she and her husband were anxious for a change of scene. In 1967 they moved to Hawai'i, where she would raise a son, continue to teach and to participate in the antiwar resistance, and write.

THE WOMAN WARRIOR AND CHINA MEN

During her years in Hawai'i, Kingston wrote and discarded a book about which we know nearly nothing, except that it served its purpose as an apprentice piece. When The Woman Warrior appeared in 1976, it showed an artist in full command of her craft. The Woman Warrior and China Men came from a single original text, over which Kingston worked for several years, and which were separated at a late stage of composition. These twin books present the techniques and issues Kingston has pursued ever since.

Kingston takes many of the realities of her childhood on a cultural and linguistic frontier, and elevates them into the themes and methods of her art. Her narratives, as noted before, are all
about border crossings, in some sense: borders of language, culture, literary genre, and even of gender. (Thus the heroine Fa Mu Lan, the Woman Warrior, disguises herself in men’s armor.) The stories are also about the act of story-telling. The “talk story” of her childhood, and her parents’ often mysterious changing of their personal histories, have been elevated to a postmodern, self-referential narrative technique. Stories are told, translated, adapted, revised, and sometimes refuted, throughout her books. There are competing storytellers, as there were in her childhood, who often contradict one another, but sometimes collaborate. And there are potential or silenced storytellers who struggle to find their voice, to tell their story.

THE STORY OF A BAD GIRL

The first storyteller who must find her voice is the artist herself. *The Woman Warrior* is a mixed-genre work, but at bottom it is a novel about a girl growing up in California, overcoming various obstacles, and becoming the writer who has composed the work we are reading.

In novels about growing up (called Bildungsromane), and the variant about the education of an artist (Künstlerromane), there are certain predictable patterns. The young person struggles against barriers, including her own youth and ignorance, and an indifferent or cruel society. She searches for a working philosophy of life and a vocation, and hopes to find mentors or guides (see Buckley, *Season of Youth*).

The central issue in Kingston’s development as an artist was her relationship with her parents, who were both true and false mentors for her. Her father, Tom Hong, was classically educated in China, and had been a poet and teacher before coming to the United States. Her mother, Brave Orchid, was a gifted storyteller, spinning tales from personal history, her own imagination, and
Chinese classics. Both anticipate, and serve as models for, the artist their daughter would become. Her love and gratitude to them fill the pages of her work. Yet so does her frustration and anger. Growing up in a borderland between cultures and languages, she was expected to understand customs of China that were never adequately explained to her, and was punished for violating them. She felt she was being raised for life as a wife or a slave in a long-ago China, while her attempts to create a new Chinese-American identity for herself were blocked and undervalued. Her father punished her with silence; her mother, with her storyteller's voice.

The long struggle for a satisfactory relationship with her parents is the primary source of the anger that filled her early life, and her first two books. This anger goes far back into her childhood, and antedates her rage against the racism and sexism of the larger society—which were, in many ways, easier objects for her resistance. This anger at times even threatened her sanity.

Brave Orchid, Kingston's mother, the central figure of *The Woman Warrior*, was a powerful, controlling, talented, perceptive, obtuse, comic, generous, miserly, nurturing, and thoroughly maddening woman, as her daughter describes her. We accept that Brave Orchid was drawn from life, but she is also a complex and memorable literary creation. She appears in the first sentence of *The Woman Warrior*, and is a strong presence in *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *To Be the Poet*, Kingston's most recent books, where the death of both parents is recorded. *The Woman Warrior* is the account of Kingston's growing up in conflict with Brave Orchid, and of finally bringing the voices of the two storytellers into harmony.

The opening of *The Woman Warrior* is surely one of the most brilliant in American literature: "'You must never tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you.'" It's all there, the whole book that will follow. We understand immediately that the
book will be about the daughter’s defiance of her mother, and her betrayal of the secrets she is forbidden to reveal. Light will be shown into the dark corners of a family and a community. We should see that in this contest of storytellers, the daughter has finally won: she has turned the mother into a character in a narrative that she, the daughter, controls. Yet, as the voices of both women are present in this first sentence, the opening is in a sense a collaboration (if an unwilling one), and thus points the way toward the reconciliation in the last section of the book.

The story that Brave Orchid tells her daughter is that of the No Name Woman, the aunt in China who drowned herself and the newborn baby she bore out of wedlock. No Name’s fate is intended as a cautionary tale, or a kind of puberty rite for Brave Orchid’s now adolescent daughter. The mother intends to instruct her daughter on the community’s standards of female purity, and the penalties for violating them. “Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful” (WW 5). Kingston rewrites the story as a feminist parable, in which No Name drowns herself in the family’s well not in shame, but in spite, a protest against a patriarchal culture. Such defiance Kingston has made her own.

This transaction on Kingston’s linguistic frontier—a story from Say Yap translated into English and rewritten to modify its meaning—is typical of The Woman Warrior and Kingston’s career. A similar process occurs in “White Tigers,” the book’s most frequently reprinted chapter. “White Tigers” is based on a ballad taught her by Brave Orchid, though Kingston has turned it into a complex symbol of her own self-definition and resistance. “She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (20).
"White Tigers" does not begin with Brave Orchid's original version of the Mu Lan story. Instead, we are plunged immediately into a fantasy sequence told in the first person. The abrupt switch from the starkly realistic story of No Name to sword and sorcery fantasy puzzled early readers of the book, still confuses some beginning students, and has engendered a long and often silly critical discussion over the "authenticity" of the Mu Lan story told here, and Kingston's right to modify it. One might note that well-known stories from the "small" or vernacular tradition in China, as opposed to classical poetry and philosophy, are seldom fixed in a single canonical form, but move from oral tales and ballads to novels and opera, and such forms as paper cutouts and puppet shows. Today, incidentally, one can see the legacy of Mu Lan in a form of exercise called "Mu Lan Fans," practiced in public parks in China by groups of women (who use fans and swords). Mu Lan is also the name of a brand of motor-scooters. No one, as far as I know, boycotts the scooters or the exercises for reasons of literary authenticity.

But surely the narrative makes clear that "White Tigers" is not a scholarly translation of a Chinese text, but a child's fantasy. The fantasy is constructed of the materials available to the young Maxine: her mother's oral version of the Mu Lan story and other heroic sagas from China; superhero comic books of the 1940s and 50s and their radio and movie serial equivalents. The fantasy would have taken further shaping in Kingston's later childhood and early maturity from Kung Fu movies from Hong Kong and Japanese samurai movies by directors like Akira Kurosawa.

Young Maxine used the Mu Lan story as Tom Sawyer used Robin Hood or stories of pirates, as a source of imaginative play that gave the child a sense of power and satisfaction not available in everyday reality. Her parents were confusing mentors, not adequately explaining her Chinese heritage, punishing her for violat-
ing rules and customs she had never heard of. They are replaced in her fantasy by the beautiful magical couple, who take her into the mountains for training in martial arts. They are the perfect teachers her parents had failed to be (as all parents fail to be, for that matter), understanding her perfectly, and developing her talents for use in a great cause, and never discriminating against her because she is female. Then she is taken down the mountain to assume the role of Fa Mu Lan, the woman warrior, avenger of wrongs, who commands an army in a popular uprising against a corrupt emperor who has lost the “mandate of heaven.”

The image of herself as Fa Mu Lan, the warrior-avenger, fearlessly joining battle with oppressors, while Kuan Kung (Guan Goong), god of war and literature, rides before her, is obviously central to Kingston’s self-definition. “The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar” (53), she writes in the last paragraph of “White Tigers.” Kingston imagines bitter words carved on her own skin like those on the back of her warrior: words of racial and sexual oppression, which she must avenge. This sense of herself as a swordswoman strengthened her when, for example, she confronted a racist boss when she worked as a secretary in Oakland. She would continue to modify and refine her version of the Mu Lan story throughout her career, and she revisits it in The Fifth Book of Peace and To Be the Poet.

But, like Tom Sawyer slinking home after playing in the woods, the child Maxine returned from the world of sword-fighting fantasies to confront her powerlessness and frustration. “My American life has been such a disappointment,” she writes (WW 45). In her fantasy, she could kill the evil landlord who cites insulting proverbs about girls. In her Stockton childhood she is unable to confront the great uncle who bombards her with the same misogynistic slogans, and who yells “no girls” when he invites the boys of the family to go on a walk with him. She has a long list of
I had vampire nightmares; every night the fangs grew longer, and my angel wings turned pointed and black. I hunted humans down in the long woods and shadowed them with my blackness. Tears dripped from my eyes, but blood dripped from my fangs, blood of people I was supposed to love. (190)
But finding her voice, she saves herself, retains her sanity, matures, and becomes an artist.

A key transition is the childhood fight with a Chinese-American classmate who cannot speak. In a long, nearly dreamlike sequence, Maxine beats and tortures this girl, who still refuses to respond. While this incident may have actually happened, in *The Woman Warrior* it becomes an emblem of her struggle to free herself from silence. The silent girl, one of many doubles for Maxine in the narrative (like the clever and always obedient slave girl bought by her mother in China) represents a path that Kingston must reject in order to form her mature American identity. Similarly, the often-discussed scene in which Maxine finally explodes and tries to tell her mother of the 207 things she wants to tell, the emotional climax of the book, is an essential step in her long apprenticeship and liberation.

In the end, Kingston tells us, she left Stockton, “went away to college—Berkeley in the sixties—and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy” (47). In the present in which she is writing in her book, “I continue to sort out what’s just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living” (205).

The final chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” is written in this mature present, as a demonstration of what Kingston has accomplished. She has been accepted by her mother as someone who also can “talk story.” The story of Ts’ai Yen is from the outset a willing collaboration, unlike the story of No Name. Ts’ai Yen is a Chinese princess who is kidnapped by barbarians, bears children who cannot understand Chinese, and who turns the sound of barbarian reed pipes into songs in Chinese when she is repatriated. The tale is itself an illustration of a frontier, where languages and texts interact. Told again, taken from the Chinese west to the American west (i.e.,
from the extreme of one Chinese borderland to another), and translated by Kingston into English, layers and layers of implication are added, and the narrative resonates with the life stories of three women artists: Ts'ai Yen, Brave Orchid, and Kingston, all frontierswomen who have brought songs and stories across linguistic borders. As Kingston says, in the words that end the book, “It translated well.”

Yet, it should be added, the truce between mother and daughter remained an uneasy one. In The Fifth Book of Peace, Brave Orchid confronts her daughter with the consequences of violating the first commandment of The Woman Warrior: “You must never tell anyone [. . .] what I am about to tell you.” Seeing a scroll of family history, Kingston tries to borrow it, but provokes an angry rebuke from Brave Orchid: “They hate you [. . .] You must know, they hate you. [. . .] The Han people, the T'ang people hate you for writing books [. . .]. You tell on them. You point them out” (55).

The villagers are still watchful.

GODS AND TRICKSTERS

China Men (1980) continues the themes of voice, storytelling, history, and myth begun in The Woman Warrior. As in the earlier book, and befitting their common origin in a single ur-manuscript, Kingston employs a similar narrative style, with bits of apparently unrelated and digressive material laced together by often subtle thematic connections. As the first book largely concerns Kingston’s mother and her aunts, and the life of women and girls, the second concerns her father and male ancestors; if Fa Mu Lan and Ts’ai Yen were heroic presences behind and within The Woman Warrior, an equivalent role in China Men is played by Guan Goong, the God of War and Literature.

China Men’s first two chapters, “On Discovery” and “On Fathers,” establish the range of narrative forms—the two ends of
the book’s keyboard, so to speak—that Kingston will employ: a retold Chinese story and a fragment of memory from the author’s very young girlhood.

Tang Ao was a fictional Chinese explorer who “came upon the land of women,” and was captured and turned into a serving girl. Beginning China Men with this tale suggests a complicated agenda. Kingston had endured criticism from male Chinese-American writers and scholars for adapting Chinese classics in The Woman Warrior. The attacks from novelist and playwright Frank Chin were especially savage, and personal. Chin accused her of writing a “fake” book, and pandering to white readers’ taste for exotic, “oriental” tales. Kingston refuses to retreat from her use of Chinese stories, and nails her colors to the mast in the first chapter. One of the issues of the book, in fact, will be about the way old stories are adapted in a new land, and new stories and customs created. Such storytelling is her right, Kingston insists, and true to the experience of Chinese people in America.

The Tang Ao story is cruel and funny, describing the capture and torment of the Chinese adventurer as his feet are bound, ears pierced, eyebrows plucked, and he is trained in feminine graces. This opening recalls, of course, the gender-bending episode of The Woman Warrior, in which Mu Lan dresses in armor and impersonates a man, and suggests that gender roles are constructed by culture or authority. The story, as retold by Kingston, also echoes a European story well known to students of California (and later excerpted in The Literature of California, coedited by Kingston). Las Sergas de Esplandián (1510), by the Spanish romancer Garcí Ordóñez de Montalvo, tells of an adventurer who found an island called California, ruled over by a race of splendid dark-skinned women warriors, whose armaments were entirely of gold. When Spanish explorers under Cortés first visited California, which they believed to be an island, they named it after the island of
Ordoñez’s romance. Thus California began as a literary concept in the European imagination before it was attached to North America. As Kingston retells the story of Tang Ao, the Chinese explorer was looking for the Gold Mountain, the Chinese term for America, and especially for California, when he was captured by Amazons. Kingston thereby places the Tang Ao story alongside the Spanish one, and claims an origin for California in Chinese literature and imagination; she will continue this process of “claiming America” throughout the book. The Chinese, as well as Europeans, invented and built America, the West, and California.

Yet the process was often painful and humiliating. Tang Ao’s story anticipates the legal restrictions imposed upon Chinese that Kingston recounts in “The Laws” later in the book. It recalls, also, the way that Chinese men often were forced in America into menial occupations they would not have chosen in China. For example, Kingston’s father, Tom Hong, once a poet and teacher, became, like many Chinese, the owner of a laundry—a business with traditional feminine associations.

The Tang Ao story is followed by the brief, enigmatic chapter “On Fathers,” which is an early memory of Kingston’s childhood: of going out with her siblings to greet their father, and discovering that the approaching man was not the real father, but someone who only looked like him. As in The Woman Warrior, China Men will contain much personal history, and we will see many key moments in the development of the artist. This section also suggests the elusive quest for the father, and Kingston’s other male ancestors. Are we greeting the real man, a creation of the artist’s imagination, or an impostor? Fathers seem, indeed, difficult to verify. Even their names are evasive. Kingston’s father, for example, has more than one name. Even in English, he is Tom and he is Ed (variants on Thomas Edison); he gave a different Chinese name to the demon police each time he was arrested in raids on the
gambling house he managed in Stockton. Kingston is even not sure of the date of his birth, or where or when he entered the United States. The stories she is told by her parents change, in part because they no longer trust their children with secrets, raised as they were among ghosts and demons. Kingston's father and other male ancestors at times seem like tricksters, the shape-changers of folklore, and it is not surprising that the author will counterpoint her narrative of these men with stories of Chinese and Polynesian trickster-heroes.

Kingston's father was sometimes "lighthearted," playing with the children, but more often he was silent or angry, muttering obscenities in Cantonese. Since there are from him "No stories. No past. No China" (14), she will have to make up stories for him. She declares, "I'll tell you what I suppose from your silences and few words, and you can tell me that I'm mistaken. You'll just have to speak up with the real stories if I've got you wrong" (15). Thus Kingston gives voice to the voiceless, as she did with her aunt, No Name Woman. From scraps of stories and hints provided by, for example, old photographs, she spins not only the story of her father's life, but "Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Islands," "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains," and various great uncles and cousins.

These are very American stories. In titling one of her chapters "The Making of More Americans," Kingston plays with the title of Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans (1925), and stresses the parallels of Chinese emigrants with those from Stein's Europe. Imagining her father, unhappy as a schoolteacher in China, deciding to join his uncle and other men of the extended family who are returning to America, Kingston rhetorically asks, "[H]ow could they not go to the Gold Mountain again, which belonged to them, which they had invented and discovered?" (43).
The stories of these men seem very solid and real, and of course are based on historical fact. Grandfather is a representative laborer on the Central Pacific railroad, tunneling through the Sierras, and laying track on the way to forging the link at Promontory Point in 1869 that joined America by rail. Great Grandfather cleared land in Hawai‘i and planted the cane that created an economy for the new territory. Nonetheless the inner life of these figures, even her father, is entirely imagined, invented as if they were characters in a novel. In their stories Kingston imagines the interaction of Chinese and American language and culture, and the imaginative space that the China Men create in the contact zone between them. On a smaller scale, she presents her ancestors doing what she has done as a writer. The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountain, Bak Goong, forbidden speech while working, learns to express himself by disguising his single-syllable Chinese words as attacks of coughing. He invents “shout parties” in which he and his fellow Chinese laborers dig holes in the ground and scream their sorrows and grievances into them. “We can make up customs,” Bak Goong asserts, “because we’re the founding fathers of this place” (118). These lost voices Kingston imagines herself hearing, as she, the mature writer living in Hawai‘i, walks in the cane fields planted by men like her great grandfather.

Throughout China Men, Kingston continues the pattern established in the first chapter, and earlier in The Woman Warrior, showing the passage of customs and stories across the linguistic frontier. We read the story of Lo Bun Sun, a Chinese adventurer who alone survives a shipwreck off an island, salvages materials from his damaged ship, adapts to life on the island, and later rescues a native from execution by cannibal enemies, and befriends him. Most first-time readers will be part way through this story before they realize, with an amused jolt, that they are reading a
variant of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a great narrative which has crossed the American-Chinese frontier and returned. Kingston heard this version in Chinese as a girl, which she translates for us, and had her own surprise in school upon discovering the English original.

**THE OATH OF THE PEACH GARDEN**

Among many Chinese stories brought to America, Kingston especially highlights one told in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (attributed to Lo Kuan-chung and first printed in 1512 A.D., though it apparently existed in earlier versions), which has been adapted also for the stage and opera. The story, set in the late second and early third century A.D., concerns three young men, Liu Pei, Chang Fei, and Guan Goong (also transliterated as Kuan Kung or Kuan Yu), who take a vow in the year 184, the famous “oath of the peach orchard,” that they will faithfully support one another in a struggle to unite and purify China. They keep this oath of fidelity as they grow in power and they battle other warlords for control of the homeland. Ultimately they all fail, but are revered for their courage, patriotism, and loyalty. One of them, Guan Goong, enters the Chinese pantheon as the God of War and Literature.

The oath of the peach garden is present in *China Men*, if only in ironic implication, even before it is specifically mentioned. When Kingston’s father comes to America, he first establishes himself in New York with three friends, who join together to run a laundry. They live a carefree bachelor existence, working hard but enjoying time off in the city, dressing well and even dancing with blonde demonesses. But when Brave Orchid arrives, the friends betray Tom (Ed) Hong, and cheat him of his part of the business. Tom and Brave Orchid then enact a typical American story, going to California (“which was the real Gold Mountain anyhow”) to start
again. The betrayed Tom Hong never found loyal friends like those of the peach orchard, however, and perhaps for that reason never reached his potential in America. Kingston compares him, rather, to Ch’ü Yüan, author of the “epic elegy” Li Sao, a true-hearted scholar who lived his life in exile, his great merit understood only after his death.

The Three Kingdoms tale comes explicitly to China Men in the story of Kingston’s grandfather, Ah Goong, the railroad builder. After the railroad is built, the grandfather flees the great “driving out,” in which Chinese are massacred in several western states. Reaching Sacramento, Ah Goong attends a Chinese theater, where he finds himself watching a play based on the Peach Orchard Oath and the deeds of Guan Goong in Romance of the Three Kingdoms. In a complicated passage, Kingston imagines Ah Goong’s response, and claims a kinship with the Chinese hero-god:

Ah Goong felt refreshed and inspired. He called out Bravo like the demons in the audience, who had not seen theater before. Guan Goong, the God of War, also God of War and Literature, had come to America—Guan Goong, Grandfather Guan, our own ancestor of writers and fighters, of actors and gamblers, and avenging executioners who mete out justice. Our own kin. Not a distant ancestor, but Grandfather. (149-50).

Again, the great stories have crossed frontiers, and are adapted to a new land. Ah Goong witnesses the birth of a Chinese American theatrical tradition, the tradition that Wittman Ah Sing would try to revive in Tripmaster Monkey.

Kingston would continue to evoke Guan Goong (Kuan Kung) in her later writing, and evokes him as the patron of English majors and writers. “Kwan Kung, the god of war and literature, rides before us” (HOS 45). But she would also critique and revise the
inherited story. After all, as she reminds us at the end of *Tripmaster Monkey*, the three heroes of the peach orchard ultimately lost. Guan Goong was captured and executed. Properly considered, the *Three Kingdoms* story proves the futility of war. Kingston also would come to despise the popularity of another ancient Chinese text, *The Art of War*, which is much admired by her arch-rival Frank Chin (who wrote an introduction to a recent edition). In celebrating Guan Goong as god of both war and literature, Kingston feels that Chinese tradition has joined together what should be put asunder. It is appropriate, then, that *China Men* concludes with two anti-war chapters, “The Li Sao: An Elegy,” and “The Brother in Vietnam.”

The last three chapters of *China Men* display Kingston’s typically subtle transitions and connections. “The Li Sao: An Elegy,” the story of that poem’s author, Ch’ü Yüan, links “The American Father,” to “The Brother in Vietnam.” Like Ch’ü Yüan, Tom Hong was a poet who lived in poverty and exile. Ch’ü Yüan was a minister who was driven out because he advised his king against war. In Kingston’s telling, Ch’ü Yüan, like her brother (Joe, though she does not use his name), was a pacifist hero, someone who was not seduced by the glamour of war.

The chapter “The Brother in Vietnam” evolved from an essay Kingston drafted even before she began *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. Though “the brother” joined the Navy and served on an aircraft carrier that launched strikes against North Vietnam, he remained untouched by the war ethos. He spent his tour of duty teaching basic literacy classes to poorly educated seamen on his warship. To Kingston, her brother is a true war hero, though, unlike the warriors of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, he performs no deeds of traditional martial valor. His success is simply that he survived and did not kill anyone.
Kingston’s brother serves as a surrogate here for her own revulsion over America’s misadventure in Southeast Asia. Kingston, her husband, and son led their own lives of resistance at the time, which she would later transform into the story of Wittman, Taña, and Mario in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. “The Brother in Vietnam” is a point on the story-line of Kingston’s anti-war activism that leads back to the small girl carried screaming from a war movie during World War II, and forward to the white-haired author led away by police from the Code Pink demonstration against the war in Iraq.

**THE COWGIRL IN THE CELLAR**

Like *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* weaves back and forth between early memories (greeting Father, crying in the movie) and the present or recent past (swimming off Chinaman’s Hat in Hawai‘i, standing in the cane fields). As in the earlier book, she explores her own development into the artist whose work we are experiencing. One such key moment, which is indeed among the most revealing in all her work, describes her hiding in the cellar of her parents’ Stockton home while her great uncle Kau Goong, the former river pirate, stomps around above her, bellowing her name, trying to summon her for some menial, girl-appropriate chore. Her hiding place is significant, for it is one of the dark places she enters to liberate her imagination. In the cellar, she explains,

> I thought over useless things like wishes, wands, hibernation. I talked to the people whom I knew were not really there. I became different, complete, an orphan; my partners were beautiful cowgirls, and also men, cowboys who could talk to me in conversations; I named this activity Talking Men. (*CM* 181)

This brief but highly compressed passage, like the “White Tigers” chapter in *The Woman Warrior*, offers an insight into the secret
One day in 1988, three years before Tom Hong’s death, the Hong family gathered at the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. There Tom Hong presented to the library a copy of a pirated Chinese translation of *China Men* that he had carefully annotated in the margins. Thus the elderly poet, scholar, and laundryman responded to his daughter’s challenge, “to speak up with the real stories if I’ve got you wrong.” The resulting double text is a perfect frontier artifact, constructed on the borderlands of nation, culture, language, gender, and generation. Like the story of Ts’ai Yen in *The Woman Warrior*, it is clear that *China Men* “translated well,” and brought together father and daughter in collaboration and reconciliation.

"YOU CAN TELL ME THAT I'M MISTAKEN"

One day in 1988, three years before Tom Hong’s death, the Hong family gathered at the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. There Tom Hong presented to the library a copy of a pirated Chinese translation of *China Men* that he had carefully annotated in the margins. Thus the elderly poet, scholar, and laundryman responded to his daughter’s challenge, “to speak up with the real stories if I’ve got you wrong.” The resulting double text is a perfect frontier artifact, constructed on the borderlands of nation, culture, language, gender, and generation. Like the story of Ts’ai Yen in *The Woman Warrior*, it is clear that *China Men* “translated well,” and brought together father and daughter in collaboration and reconciliation.
HAWI'I ONE SUMMER:
THE ESSAY AS ROMANTIC ART

The eleven essays of Hawaii'i One Summer were written in 1978, collected with a preface in a limited edition in 1987, and reissued in paperback with another preface by the author in 1998. These casual pieces, most written as a column for the New York Times, display the author's life as she was completing China Men. Her situation was rapidly changing as her reputation grew, the poverty of her early, barefoot, dumpster-scavenging days in Hawaii'i already seeming distant. This sense of change, mutability, would mark the two prefaces of the collection, nine and eleven years later, as the summer of 1978 became increasingly remote. Throughout the essays the reader will encounter material to be used in Tripmaster Monkey and, especially, The Fifth Book of Peace.

Despite Kingston's postmodern techniques, she is at root a romantic. Like all romantics, she values spontaneity, intuition, and natural, organic shapes; she dislikes institutions, rules, routine, and rigid forms. The romantic seeks moments of transcendence when the imagination seems to break free of physical restraints; the function of art is to create such moments, and to try to capture them, ultimately impossible as this may be. Kingston had encountered these ideas many times in her studies, in such writers as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, and Walt Whitman. But Kingston found the version that meant most to her in the Beat, neo-romantic sensibility of California poet Lew Welch. Kingston and her husband Earll met Welch before their departure from California in 1967. (Welch disappeared in the California mountains in 1971; his body has never been recovered.) One of his sayings Kingston has kept over her desk throughout her career and always presents to her students at the beginning of her courses: "I never worry about beauty, if it is accurate there is
always beauty. I never worry about form, if it is accurate there is always form” (HOS 65).

The romantic notion of organic form (here re-expressed by Welch) is at variance with the traditional essay, as it was taught to Kingston in college, in which the form comes first (as she saw it), and the content poured into it. As in all of her books, Hawai’i One Summer is about its own form; its notion of the essay is much freer and more spontaneous, capable of describing nearly amorphous, shape-changing experience, like the nudibranch (sea slug) she and a friend find on a beach in Hawai’i. The thing accurately described creates the form and beauty of the essay. The pieces of Hawai’i One Summer recall a life spent in search of moments of beauty and freedom from control, and also those times and situations that threaten the imagination of the artist.

As a child, Kingston had escaped the ruled lines and rote copying of “gems” in Mrs. Garner’s fourth grade by writing—suddenly, unexpectedly—a poem. “The poem was about flying; I flew” (HOS 42). The imagery of flight links her birth as an artist with her swimming with fins and a snorkel tube to Chinaman’s Hat, a small island off O‘ahu: “Snorkeling is like flying; the moment your face enters clear water, you become a flying creature” (30). The mature artist captures and shares the ecstatic moments in her elegant description of gliding through and over “spring forests and winter forests” and “golden rooms, which we entered from dark hallways” (30, 31). Similar moments are experienced by Kingston’s teenaged son Joseph and his friends as they surf the perfect tubes and curls at Sandy Beach. Kingston presses the boys to find language to convey this feeling and searches the meager literature of surfing for adequate descriptions.

Against these moments of romantic liberation are the mundane details of ordinary life, and the institutions and structures of society which confine and grind the spirit. Washing dishes, which
Kingston hated, was a symbol of drudgery that confined the imagination (21). (Also, clearly, an unresolved relationship problem, which Kingston would draw upon in *Tripmaster Monkey.*) High school, also, that enemy of individualism, was an unhappy era for Kingston, as for most creative people. The approaching tenth reunion of Edison High, class of ‘58, creates mixed emotions. Though she is living every depressed high-school student’s fantasy, a triumphant return with a reputation sufficient to crush all competition, she recalls with dread and anger the cliques, the pecking orders, the exclusions (9-13).

Similar feelings are evoked by the recent “Talk Story” ethnic writers conference in Honolulu in 1978. This symposium, organized by the revered Professor Stephen Sumida, is famous as a foundation event in the academic discipline of Asian American Studies. It is also famous, or notorious, for the “brawl” that broke out among the Chinese American writers. There was antagonism between mainland and island Chinese Americans, and especially between the women and the men. As the most celebrated and successful of the writers present, who had put into usage the very term “talk story” that gave a title to the conference, Kingston was caught in a crossfire. Attacked by Shawn Wong, an ally of Frank Chin, Kingston experienced the growing hostility of Chinese American men against their successful female counterparts (48-49). For Kingston, whose values have always favored conciliation, collaboration, and inclusion, the conference must have seemed a great deal like high school.

Finally, several lines of inquiry and reminiscence in *Hawaii’s One Summer* subtly converge on a writer mentioned only once, in passing, near the end: “John Gregory Dunne (Portsmouth Priory ‘50) said to his wife, Joan Didion (McClatchy High ‘52), ‘It is your obligation as an American writer to go to your high school reunion.’ And she went. She said she dreamed about the people for a long
time afterward" (13). For any woman writing essays in the 1970s, Didion loomed as an inescapable presence. Her cool, ironic, minimalist voice was an authoritative standard. She was, moreover, a Cal English major (class of 1956), a native of Sacramento who had written about the Central Valley and about Hawai‘i. In spite of this apparent common ground, the WASP princess Didion shares almost no values with Kingston. They would have sat at different tables in the high school cafeteria, rivals and antagonists. Not being Frank Chin or Shawn Wong, Kingston does not attack her adversary. But the collection as a whole clearly announces that Didion’s competition is in the field, banners flying.

**OF TIME AND THE MONKEY**

*Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), like all of Kingston’s works, recapitulates and revises her earlier books, as it anticipates the next. It also responds to critics, as Kingston tries, in a familiar pattern, to draw other voices into dialogue and collaboration. While *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* had brought literary prizes, recognition, wide sales, and substantial income to Kingston, there was, and still is, a vocal coterie of nay-sayers. Most articulate, and damaging, were Frank Chin and his fellow editors, Jeffrey Paul Chan and Shawn Wong, who had together produced the important anthology, *Aiiiiiieeee*! (1974). As noted before, Chin, leader of the attack, had accused Kingston of writing a “fake book,” promoting ethnic stereotypes about Asian Americans, and substituting her own private fantasies for the real history of Asians in America.

Kingston’s response to Chin in *Tripmaster Monkey* is partly high-spirited mischief. She chooses as her hero an aspiring Asian American Berkeley poet and playwright, when there was only one such person in the 60s, Frank Chin. In equating her protagonist with the trickster-hero of *Journey to the West* (also called *Monkey*),
Kingston makes a monkey of her enemy. The Monkey King was imprisoned under a stone for centuries for his misdeeds, then released by the goddess Kuan Yin, who makes him undertake the journey to the west (that is, India) to recover sacred Buddhist texts and bring them to China. Kingston equates the narrator of *Tripmaster Monkey*, who often scolds and teases Wittman, with Kuan Yin. Thus Kingston assumes the role of a goddess in dragging Frank Chin out from under a rock and forcing him to perform community service. If Chin has accused Kingston of writing a fake book, Kingston responds by catching him and putting him right into “His Fake Book.” (Kingston always has insisted, perhaps with a wink, that the subtitle of the book refers to the “fake books,” collections of simple melody lines, used by jazz musicians as the basis for improvisation [see Skenazy & Morten 77]. The explanation does not quite make sense, but it’s her story, and she’s sticking to it.)

Kingston doubtless knows that Chinese novels can be used as weapons of vengeance. According to legend, Xiaoxiaosheng, putative author of the sixteenth-century erotic classic, *Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi Men and His Six Wives* (also known as *The Golden Lotus*), sent a copy of the book to a rival author. Knowing that this enemy habitually moistened his finger with his tongue as he turned the pages, Xiaoxiaosheng had poisoned the corner of each leaf. His rival read the spicy novel avidly, and died.

Though Kingston sent Chin a poisoned book and put her finger in his eye, she nonetheless seems to have taken some of his criticisms seriously. Indeed, she may have been doing so as early as *China Men*. Attacked for ignoring the real history of Chinese Americans, she responds with her chapter “The Laws,” dropped like a great block of Sierra granite into the middle of the book. You want history, here it is. After reading this chapter, no
American has the excuse of ignorance about the systematic oppression directed against Chinese. Likewise, no one can say that Kingston has not done her part in educating Americans about this past.

The historical concerns of Tripmaster Monkey are two: the tradition of Chinese theater in America, and the era of the 1960s.

Wittman, who is both Frank Chin and Kingston-as-a-tall-man (another of her gender-switching tricks), intends to revive the theater of Chinese Americans, which had flourished from the gold rush into the early twentieth century. Kingston already had evoked this tradition in the Peach Garden play she imagines witnessed by her grandfather in China Men. As we will see, Wittman's attempt to produce a new play in this tradition for an inclusive American audience involves him in a struggle with ethnic stereotypes, another issue Kingston had been accused of ignoring, or pandering to.

Kingston also intends to evoke the beginning of the 1960s, indeed, the invention of the 60s, a time that by 1989 already had begun to seem long ago and far away, viewed through its own wrong-end telescope of stereotypes about hippies, drugs, and riots.

The great fact of the 1960s, of course, is the war in Vietnam, which at the beginning of the decade was still invisible, a speck on the horizon, a few "advisors" sent to a distant land. Here's the problem about writing about the time just before a great event or tragedy: how to respond to the knowledge, the great overhanging irony, that is yet unknown to the people of the time? It is impossible for us to view those young Englishmen dressed in straw hats and blazers, playing croquet on the sunny lawn early in the summer of 1914, without knowing of the great flesh-grinding maw that will open in August, and this awareness shapes our response to their game and their every joke and gesture. All novels and films about the early 1960s that were written later display this double
awareness. For example, George Lukas's *American Graffiti* (1973), is set in one night in June 1962, where the innocent-seeming games of the new high-school graduates are given special neon-lit intensity by what is unacknowledged until the last frames of the film, and we learn that the sweet and goofy Terry ("Toad") will die a soldier's death in Vietnam.

Lukas keeps a strict firewall between his 1962 action and coming events; no character shows any awareness, or even makes a reference to the future that the audience knows. Kingston's use of the 1960s is more complex and tricky, as her headnote before the table of contents alerts us: "The fiction is set in the 1960s, a time when some events appear to occur months or even years anachronistically." The basic technique is to anchor the action in the early 60s, in what is a slightly adjusted 1963, while there is a continual flow of references and allusions from the late 60s, so that we are given an out-of-focus double vision, and continually reminded of the changes ahead for this rapidly evolving era.

Wittman is the same age as Kingston, and events occur a year and a season after his/their college graduation in 1962. It is autumn 1963, with the production of Wittman's multi-day pageant ending on Halloween. The year is never given, apparently because Kingston wishes to avoid evoking the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which would occur the following month, November. But the cultural ambiance, films, music, fashions, and general mood of the narrative are true to the 1963 setting. Thus critics such as the usually astute Krista Comer are off the mark in wondering why Kingston does not depict "hippies handing out flowers" in Golden Gate park (Comer 106). These things were a long time in the future, at least two or three years. (Two or three years is indeed a long time in a period of rapid change.) Looking at photographs of the Free Speech Movement in Fall 1964 and Spring 1965, that period of riot and anarchy in our media-distorted cultural memory,
many today are surprised to see young men with closely trimmed hair and sportcoats and ties carrying picket signs, young women in neat skirts and dresses. The party at the home of Lance and Sunny in Oakland, with the bright young graduates speaking of books and films and comic books and music, is an exact recreation of an exciting time energized by the breaking down of the wall between high and popular culture. ("We're such geniuses," says Wittman, "we know how to like anything" [114].) The uglier aspects of the drug scene, the violent clashes between students and police, students tear-gassed and even shot down on campus, were yet to come.

The anachronisms, however, can be found everywhere. As a minor example, Taña tells Wittman, on the way to Reno, that she was taught to drive by Steve McQueen. The joke makes no sense unless we remember Peter Yates's 1968 film *Bullitt* and its ten-minute long tire-burning car chase through the streets of San Francisco. (More subtly, Taña drives the same Porsche Speedster as Frank Bullitt's girlfriend, Cathy.) While in most ways Wittman's character is from the early 60s, he would not have said "I am so fucking offended" to an audience in 1963. No one would have. In 1968, perhaps. More importantly, there are far more references to Southeast Asia and Vietnam than there would have been at the beginning of the decade, when most Americans were scarcely aware of that corner of the world. This continual bleeding back from the end of the era to the beginning undercuts, or casts a sad ironic light on, Wittman's theatrical success. He is trying to create community at the very eve of the most divisive episode of the American twentieth century. There are no unqualified triumphs in Kingston's narratives.

Yet the idea of community is of vast importance to Kingston, and its appearance here signals a permanent change in her thinking. From *Tripmaster* onward, Kingston turns away from the
Romantic-Modern celebration of the artist as a tormented loner (which in fact was the role she had lived herself) to the artist as community-builder. There would be no more Joycean “silence, exile, and cunning” (Portrait 247). The plot of Tripmaster Monkey is simple: the artist comes out of his lonely room, and puts on a play in which, literally, everyone he knows is persuaded to participate.

Wittman’s play and Kingston’s novel are mirrors of each other. Both reflect Kingston’s theory of the “global novel.” Since Americans come from everywhere, all literary traditions should be drawn upon by American authors. Wittman’s play will meld the high and low western culture displayed at Lance and Sunny’s party with vernacular Chinese classics. As we understand the pageant through Kingston’s description of the rehearsals and the performance, it is based on The Journey to the West, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, and The Bandits of the Marsh, (also known as The Water Margin, The Water Verge, and All Men Are Brothers), which is a mighty cycle of stories about 108 bandits, most resembling, in European literature, the Robin Hood tales. But the Chinese stories expressionistically merge and blend with western material, in both senses of “western.” Nearly every European and American author mentioned earlier in the book seems to contribute, as well as such specifically Californian figures and events as Joaquin Murietta (the “Mexican Robin Hood”) and the visit of Rudyard Kipling to San Francisco. The effect of this synthesis, or at least its intention, is to purge the Asian stories of their presumed exoticism and reveal the parallels between Chinese and European experience in North America. The play also demonstrates Kingston’s continuing belief that traditional stories should be dynamic and adaptable, something she had always insisted upon in the face of criticism since The Woman Warrior.

As the text of the play stresses inclusion and reconciliation, so does the cast and performance. Wittman’s pageant reconciles the
tensions of the plot and brings together extremes of character and culture. The potentially destructive triangle of Wittman, Taña, and Nanci (which could have produced a quite different outcome) is rendered harmless. Wittman’s mother and his rather weird father are reconciled, and they with the woman who may or may not be Wittman’s grandmother, who had been abandoned on Donner Pass. The tension between Wittman and his best friend Lance Kamiyama is dissolved. Long-established Chinese Americans come together with the FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) kung-fu students. The Yale Younger Poet is drawn out of his storeroom and joins a community of artists. Bureaucracy (the unemployment office clerk) proves amenable to art, as do the proto-Yuppies (an anachronistic term), Lance and Sunny. The survivors of a Chinese theatrical tradition, Ruby Long Legs and the Flora Dora Dancers, leave retirement to join a new experimental theater. The play is the resolution, the denouement of the novel.

Wittman’s story and his play have a guarded, qualified success. It is a success, of course, for a writer actually to complete any work; a greater success for it to be published or performed. Wittman forges a company, finds a theater hall, and fills it. His audience grows through the several nights of performance, and rewards him with applause. Few playwrights achieve more.

And yet, is he understood? Wittman and Kingston struggle with the conflicting expectations of a culturally and racially mixed audience, the classic problem of straddling two stools that has long bedeviled ethnic American authors. Frank Chin had attacked Kingston for being insensitive to this issue, but she shows here her long and deep understanding of it. Earlier in the novel Wittman views the movie West Side Story (1961), and through his reactions Kingston deconstructs the racial subtext that is largely invisible to white audiences. Wittman returns to the issue of cultural stereotyping in his long rant to the audience on closing
night. He reads to the audience reviews from newspapers which praise the play, but use terms like "exotic" and "east meets west." These are, of course, the same expressions with which The Woman Warrior had been greeted on its publication, and which show that, fundamentally, the critics simply did not understand what Kingston was about. Similarly, the narrator's description of the audience during Wittman's rant suggests that the white members still "tune out" the "racial stuff" that they need to understand.

Thus a fragile community, still troubled by barriers to communication, comes together briefly, on the eve of the divisive war in Vietnam. As the novel ends, the narrator as Kuan Yin summarizes Wittman's experience in staging a play based in part on the war story of Three Kingdoms: "Studying the mightiest war epic of all time, Wittman changed—beeen!—into a pacifist. Dear American monkey, don't be afraid. Here, let us tweak your ear, and kiss your other ear" (340). With these words of playfulness and pacifism Kingston anticipates the sequel of Tripmaster Monkey, which would take her over a quarter of a century to complete.

THE FIFTH BOOK OF PEACE AND TO BE THE POET

Suddenly free from the lie
that my parents had me
for the purpose of torturing
me.

How did I become convinced
of such craziness?
And how did I get free?

—To Be the Poet

Kingston's recent two books close a phase in her career and announce its next stage. The Fifth Book of Peace is the planned sequel to Tripmaster Monkey, though in its long, agonized, and
public gestation, it became something more. The first sentences of *To Be the Poet* announce its purpose: “I have almost finished my longbook. Let my life as Poet begin.” In spite of the difference in these books’ size, they are companion pieces, nearly twins. Both explore Kingston’s evolving attitudes toward her parents, who are dead as the books are concluded, and her commitment to peace activism. Both end with a return to the story of Fa Mu Lan, with which her career began.

**LONGBOOK**

Kingston had written, she tells us, 156 pages of a novel describing the life of Wittman, Taña, and their son Mario in Hawai’i, after they left Berkeley in 1967. The novel’s title, which was to be *The Fourth Book of Peace*, referred to three legendary books that may have existed in ancient China about the arts of peace. As everyone interested in Kingston knows, the only draft of the novel was burned, along with Kingston’s home and everything in it, when a fire swept through east Oakland and Berkeley on October 22, 1991.

Kingston was on her way back from Stockton, where she was participating in a ceremony for her father, who had died a month before, when she heard the news of the rapidly-spreading fire on her car radio. Speeding back over the Altamont Pass, and parking at the periphery of the fire, she made her way through police lines and jogged through burning and just-burned neighborhoods, hoping to reach her home in time to salvage the book and essential family relics. But she found only a smoldering ruin.

The story of the loss of *The Fourth Book of Peace* becomes the first section of *The Fifth Book of Peace*. The new book is not just a recreation of the burned novel, but a hybrid work, with autobiographical sections surrounding the interpolated, rewritten work of fiction. As noted before, all of Kingston’s works are in part about
themselves, about the way they came to be created. This reflexive, postmodern turn is especially insistent in *The Fifth Book of Peace*, and in *To Be the Poet*.

The first section of what Kingston called her “longbook” (for both its length and the time of its creation) will be its most successful for many readers. “Fire” tells of the destruction of her home and its aftermath. Her account of slipping past police lines and endangering herself in a desperate attempt to reach the house, and the manuscript, is inherently engaging. Equally strong is her subtle use of the found symbols of the home’s ruin. Kingston returned repeatedly to the site of the house to comb through ashes, and the shards and fragments she finds, as well as the occasional salvageable pot or spoon, trigger memories and reflection on her loss. She sifts her memories, as she sifts the ashes. Kingston remembering, interlacing past and present, writes the kind of multi-layered narrative we saw before in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*.

As she tries to assess her loss, Kingston is at first gripped by the powerful idea that she is being punished by her father. The month-after-death ceremony was done a few days early, for the convenience of family members. Thus once again Kingston, and her five siblings, have failed in the old customs. The ceremony in Stockton involved burning paper offerings for her father; for not doing it right, the bad eldest daughter has been punished with fire.

This idea, which plays to her old belief in her father as a blame-giver, is replaced by another. Kingston has been given a vision of war. This is what war means, the burning of homes. Thus the author prepares for a final evaluation of her role as daughter, and a return to the pacifist principles announced at the end of *Tripmaster Monkey*.

The next section, “Paper,” is a return to the core subject of her first books, her interaction with her parents. Once again she visits
with her elderly mother, who now answers questions to which Kingston earlier had to guess the answers. Her parents’ real emigration story is finally told, which contradicts some of the misinformation of *The Woman Warrior*. (Her mother came through San Francisco, not New York, for example.) Her mother finally trusts her with this knowledge. And her own true genealogy is revealed: she is descended from “Sung Chew, the Artist Emperor” (58). Like Liu Pei, the hero of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Kingston has imperial blood. As her mother had once taught her the ballad of Fa Mu Lan, she now tells her of another woman warrior, and, in a spectacular demonstration of her virtuosity, she sings her daughter a complete opera based on this other warrior, Ming Hong. Kingston gives us only a sketchy summary of the story of Ming Hong; she is no longer trying to match her narrative skill against her tutor and rival artist. Rather, Kingston announces that she is abandoning the solitary labor of prose, and especially fiction, and will seek “a community of like minds” (62) to help her complete her book.

**IN SEARCH OF A HAPPY ENDING**

The story of Wittman in Hawai’i, then, when we reach it in the section “Water,” is offered as a last example of the fiction-writing phase of her life. Reconstructed at an effort at which we can only guess, “Water” tells of the departure of Wittman, Taña, and their son Mario for Hawai’i, as they flee the increasing violence of (and against) Berkeley. Obviously a thinly masked account of Kingston, her husband Earll, and their son Joseph, the novella beautifully evokes the family’s early impressions of Hawaiian landscape and people. There Wittman and Taña, like Maxine and Earll, practice their beliefs, live simply, shelter deserters from the military, and create anti-war theater at a deserters’ sanctuary. However, the story resists a happy ending. The two deserters sheltered by Taña
and Wittman are without ideology and conviction and act like spoiled children in their hosts' home. Taña and Wittman also witness distressing hostility and racism by Hawaiians against anyone who is not "local." Thus two well-meaning VISTA volunteers are chased out of the rural community near Wittman's home by neighborhood thugs because they are black.

The term "local" in Hawai'i is a complex one, implying inclusion because one is either native Hawaiian or Asian with deep roots on the islands. For some islanders, one also must know Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) to be local. Kingston had long residency in Honolulu and was named a "Living Treasure of Hawai'i." However, she was not really local. Her participation in the "Talk Story" conference in 1978, as well as her writing the introduction to the ensuing anthology, Talk Story: An Anthology of Hawaii's Local Writers, edited by Eric Chock, et al (1978), created resentment among island writers, who saw Kingston as part of a cultural colonization of Hawai'i by Asian-American mainlanders. (See Kwon in Crow, Companion 459-60, 470.) One may speculate that this exclusion by locals was one reason why Kingston and her husband left the islands. (Their son Joseph, however, remained in Hawai'i.)

Perhaps because the story of Vietnam resistance in Hawai'i lacks a happy ending, perhaps simply because of fatigue, "Water" ends with a perfunctory summary of the family's later years there. The family is a success because Mario grows up with pacifist values. Kingston hurriedly concludes the story of her fictional counterpart, as if anxious to return to the mainland, and her own rededication to activism after the burning of her home.

The last section of The Fifth Book of Peace is the story of the veterans' writing workshop that Kingston founded in Berkeley, and that occupied much of her energy for the decade of the 90s. This is the last of her attempts to give voice to the voiceless. She begins with a detailed account of the first day of the workshop on
June 12, 1993, her nervous walk though the streets south of the Berkeley campus, her arrival at the Faculty Club, and her first meeting with the group of veterans (most, not all, from the Vietnam war) who aspired to write of their wartime experiences. This workshop would grow over time; new writers joining even as some of the older ones died. It acquired a northern California retreat, Green Gulch Farm. Other published writers, like Larry Heinemann, author of Close Quarters (1977) and Paco’s Story (1986), would visit. Buddhist ideals increasingly shaped the culture of the group. Ultimately the group, rather awkwardly accompanied by a BBC film crew, attended a retreat at Plum Village in France, a Buddhist commune founded by Vietnamese monks.

The history of the writer’s workshop is intercut with other episodes in Kingston’s life, such as her summer visits to Grand Canyon, where Earll worked in a pageant about John Wesley Powell. In all of these bits of personal history, we learn of Kingston’s success in forming her “community of like minds.” The reader is also given a movingly brief account of her mother’s death.

Near the end of the book, Kingston describes how, at a meeting in Plum Village, she chants the Ballad of Fa Mu Lan (or Fa Muk Lan) that she had learned from her mother. She now gives it to us in its entirety. “I have told her story as a women’s liberation story, and as a war story. But I now understand it, it is a homecoming story” (390). Like The Odyssey, classical Europe’s supreme homecoming story, it is about war and its aftermath. The greatest achievement of Fa Mu Lan was not her triumph in battle, but her ability to put her armor aside and resume a life as a woman of peace.

Back at Green Gulch Farm, Kingston, like Fa Mu Lan, disbands her group of veterans. It is a somewhat contentious meeting, yet Kingston hopes that each veteran has reached the end of his or
her odyssey, and can live at peace. We may recall also perhaps, that as a book about the aftermath of the 60s, The Fifth Book of Peace echoes many novels of that era, and of the Beats in the 50s before them who helped create the 60s sensibility. The end is always collapse, falling apart, the group of friends breaking up, Jack and Neal setting off in different directions.

But in an epilogue, Kingston tells us how members of the group came together again, the day after the attacks of September 11, 2001, at Green Gulch Farm, for consolation and a renewed dedication to Peace. And on International Women’s Day, March 8, 2003, Kingston, the Berkeley peace warrior, was arrested, along with her “sister writers—Rachel Bagby, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, and Terry Tempest Williams” (402), at the Code Pink demonstration outside the White House. Offering this proof of her own moral courage and steadfast values, she ends the book with an admonition to all readers to create “One peaceful moment.”

**RECONCILIATION**

*To Be the Poet* is a glimpse into Kingston’s mind as she completed the longbook, a process that had become so burdensome that she acknowledges that she had thought of returning her advance to the publisher and abandoning the project. She comments on the longbook’s progress, and once even introduces her arithmetical calculations, the kind every freshman composition student has made, of how many words she still must write and how long it will take to write them. The two books even share an ending. Kingston concludes each by quoting “The Ballad of Fa Mu Lan,” and tells us that finishing the short book taught her the way to conclude the long one. With The Fifth Book of Peace finally behind her, Kingston celebrates the closing of a phase of her career, and enters her sixties with a commitment to writing verse.
To Be The Poet is based on a series of three talks she gave as the William E. Massey lectures at Harvard University. This series had produced such distinguished precedents as Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992). An experimental, mixed genre work, typical of Kingston, To Be The Poet seems less a trilogy of formal lectures than selections from a poet’s notebooks, prose jottings, and passages which are partly or fully developed into lyrics, so that the whole book is part way to becoming a cycle of poems. The form is appropriate to the subject, which is transformation, becoming another kind of writer, and learning to live a simple life in which poetry can flourish.

This life is now one in which she has come home, and solved the contradictions of her earlier struggles. The burned house has been replaced, on the original lot, by a new home designed by Kingston’s brother Norman. The ash-filled garden has been replanted, in part with cuttings from her parents’ old Stockton home. She writes at her parents’ venerable rolltop desk, originally salvaged from the gambling house, brought from Stockton, using ink that her father had ground and mixed in the old Chinese way.

From the moment my father died
9 years ago, I see him in clouds,
and he is the rabbit in the full moon.
My mother is not everywhere.
She seems to be in me.
Somehow I continue in her
Whenever I am happy in the trees, the hills, the air. (76)

At the end of the longbook she had reported her mother’s death, and the vision one of Kingston’s nieces had of her “walking on top of the clouds. Brave Orchid was smiling, meeting Father, who was smiling too, holding open a shawl for her. Ancestors surrounded
them. They walked all together into the sky” (5BP 397). Brave Orchid and Tom Hong have become the magical beings, the perfect tutors for which the rebellious child in Stockton had wished, long ago.

The challenge of Kingston’s career, as she enters her sixties, is that the subject and motive of her earlier writing now seem exhausted. The anger against her parents that had fueled her early writing and given it its edgy energy, has been left in the ashes of the fire, and is replaced with calm and reconciliation. With her writing of narrative over, at least for the moment, her poetic subjects appear to be the “moments of peace” she urged at the conclusion of the longbook, and the acts of war that still stir her outrage and compassion. Her last, short book announces her intention to be “the” poet, not “a” poet, a suggestion that her ambition still smolders, and that more books will appear from behind the black curtain.
Selected Bibliography


—. “Maxine Hong Kingston.” *Lyon, Updating the Literary West 360-66.*


About the Author

CHARLES L. CROW was born in California in 1940 and studied for his postgraduate degrees in English at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s. He is Professor Emeritus of English at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where he specialized in literature of the American West and Gothic American literature. He is the editor of A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America (2003), and American Gothic: An Anthology, 1787-1916 (1999), and wrote the chapter on Maxine Hong Kingston in Updating the Literary West (1997). He has also published studies of such American authors as Mark Twain, W.D. Howells, Frank Norris, Jack London, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and Hisaye Yamamoto. His booklet Janet Lewis was published in the Western Writers Series (1980). He was a visiting professor of American Studies in 1981 and 1985 at the University of Salzburg, Austria, and Senior Fulbright Lecturer of American Studies in the Czech Republic in 1998-99, and was a visiting scholar at Xi'an Foreign Languages University, Xi'an, China, in 1999 and 2001.

Acknowledgements

This long-evolving project benefited from the steady encouragement of three editors of the Western Writers Series: James Maguire, Sean O'Grady, and Tara Penry.

Cover portrait of Maxine Hong Kingston by Gail Evenari, courtesy of Gail Evenari.


Editorial Assistant at Boise State University: Shannon Mahoney
Western Writers Series

Founded in 1972, this continuing series provides brief but authoritative introductions to the lives and works of authors who have written significant literature about the American west. Our attractive fifty-page booklets are useful to the general reader as well as to teachers and students. Titles include:

3 JOHN MUIR by Thomas J. Lyon
4 WALLACE STEGNER by Merrill and Lorene Lewis
5 BRET HARTE by Patrick Morrow
19 ROBINSON JEFFERS by Robert J. Brophy
23 GERTRUDE ATHERTON by Charlotte S. McClure
30 CHARLES WARREN STODDARD by Robert L. Gale
41 JANET LEWIS by Charles L. Crow
44 DOROTHY JOHNSON by Judy Alter
57 JAMES WELCH by Peter Wild
59 RICHARD HUGO by Donna Gerstenberger
67 WILLIAM EVERSON by Lee Bartlett
74 SIMON ORTIZ by Andrew Wiget
84 KENNETH REXROTH by Lee Bartlett
90 DAVID HENRY HWANG by Douglas Street
96 PAULA GUNN ALLEN by Elizabeth I. Hanson
110 ISHMAEL REED by Jay Boyer
124 RICHARD RONAN by Jan VanStavern
125 JANET CAMPBELL HALE by Frederick Hale

130 GARRETT HONGO by Laurie Filipelli
131 ALBERTO RÍOS by Peter Wild
133 JOY HARJO by Rhonda Pettit
135 READING RICHARD BRAUTIGAN’S TROUT FISHING IN AMERICA by Joseph Mills
137 READING WILLA CATHER’S THE SONG OF THE LARK by Evelyn Funda
142 READING GARY SNYDER’S MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS WITHOUT END by Eric Todd Smith
148 URSULA K. LE GUIN by Heinz Tschachler
149 NEW FORMALIST POETS OF THE AMERICAN WEST by April Lindner
155 FRANK CHIN by John Charles Goshert
158 READING LOUISE ERDRICH’S LOVE MEDICINE by P. Jane Hafen
159 MICHAEL MCCLURE by Rod Phillips
160 LAWSON FUSAO INADA by Shawn Holliday
163 ANA CASTILLO by Sara L. Spurgeon

See our website for additional titles:
http://english.boisestate.edu/westernwriters