Introduction

On several occasions Maxine Hong Kingston made it clear that The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts and China Men were “conceived [as] one huge book” and that she wrote much of the two books at the same time. In the end, this epic book project proved unwieldy and was broken up into the separate life stories of the male and female characters. Hong Kingston would later rationalize this gender division by arguing that the women’s “lives were coherent; there was a woman’s way of thinking. My men’s stories seemed to interfere. They were weakening the feminist point of view. So I took all the men’s stories out, and then I had The Woman Warrior.”

The parting of the ways between the women’s and men’s stories, and between The Woman Warrior and China Men, is the subject of this book. This parting may have made good literary sense, in light of the complicated lifelines Hong Kingston was working to unravel and then weave artistically back into one coherent text. She did not, however, foresee that her excision of the men’s perspective and consequent strengthening of a feminist point of view would allow readers to focus exclusively on The Woman Warrior and in large part to overlook the sequel that followed with China Men. Though Hong Kingston herself was adamant that, to understand each book, it was necessary to read the other and appreciate how they build on one another, and though her life writing has generated sustained scholarly interest, studies of The Woman Warrior have shown no great imperative to bring China Men back into the picture. Yet the author herself felt that China Men rounded off her autobiographical journey through fiction and that, although she began “the quest for self by understanding the archetypal mother” in The Woman Warrior, she became “more whole because of the ability to appreciate the other gender” in China Men.

Hong Kingston’s mature thoughts on finishing the two books point the way for my own study. On reflection, she came to feel that “I’ve gone as deeply into men’s psyches as I can, and I don’t find them that different. I
care about men...as much as I care about women.”3 This compassionate recognition, in turn, made her feel that a reconciliation does eventually takes place in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*—not only between the opposite sexes, but also between the daughter narrator and the mother and father whom she opposes throughout the two books. I therefore propose to read her divided texts in the inclusive spirit of the feminist critic King-Kok Cheung, who argued that the time had come to show similar sympathies and work with those in gender and ethnic studies to “look at women and men together.”4 My study of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* aims to subvert the gender separatist readings that have not only kept these two books apart, but also resulted in a disproportionate feminist emphasis on the daughter’s growing relationship with her mother in *The Woman Warrior* to the exclusion of her corresponding search for greater understanding of and closeness to her father in *China Men*.

One of the central preoccupations of feminist criticism has been to look for the imprint of the absent mother in the text whether she is literally represented there or not. Even when she is unmentionable, as in the case of the “No Name Woman,” the mother is a presence who haunts, troubles, or overshadows *The Woman Warrior*. However, while *The Woman Warrior* restores the maternal figure to textual prominence, it also appears to corroborate the bleak view that “barely known, scarcely knowable, the ‘absence’ of fathers permeates feminist stories.”5 Yet *The Woman Warrior* was not the end—or even the beginning—of Hong Kingston’s life stories. *China Men* was published on the heels of this first book; and the author underlined the fact that many of the men’s stories were written at the same time or, in some instances, even earlier than the women’s stories that make up *The Woman Warrior*. In her men’s sequel, the author tracked the history of the father who has often been ignored in feminist critiques, and who is extracted from her first book, but who nonetheless leaves traces of his original presence in *The Woman Warrior* even when he appears absent or vacant.

In her 1986 interview with Hong Kingston, Paula Rabinowitz remarked on the way the author “played with intertextuality in the two books, where an insignificant reference in one of the books will be elaborated to a great extent in the other one” (70). Yet there has been surprisingly little critical follow-up on this early insight. A notable exception is Leslie Rabine’s feminist and psychoanalytic reading of the two novels, which explores the textual crossroads where the separate lives of the men and women converge or collide.6 My project builds on the work that critics such as Leslie Rabine and King-Kok Cheung began some time ago with a close, comparative analysis of Hong Kingston’s two gender companion texts. To
carry out such an intertextual study, I will trace the cross-references that run through the two books and discuss the alternative readings that arise when the life story of the father or mother missing from one text is found in a passage of the other.

Such an intertextual reading of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* is a more ambitious and difficult project than it might first appear. Both feminist and psychoanalytic theory concur in the view that the representation of the father and mother is constructed through a complex interplay of social and psychic, inner and outer reality. In order to appreciate both books, it is necessary to consider the imaginative process by which parents and family relations are internalized, recalled, and transformed in the running narrative of self-representation. Ruptures in either text suggest not only the contingent pressures of living, but also the fact, as Hong Kingston admits, that her stories have a “constant breaking in and out of the present and past . . . but the past breaks through and changes and enlightens the present, and vice versa” (Rabinowitz, 68). The way in which the past lives on like a “ghost” in the present of her writing is also consistent with the psychoanalytic premise that psychic existence involves a continuous and edgy movement back and forward in time as the subject struggles over a lifetime to create a coherent and mature narrative account of herself. In this connection, although King-Kok Cheung recognizes the “double-voiced discourse” pervading Hong Kingston’s two texts and outlines the parallels, her reading is still based on a linear model of development in which there is self-evident and implicitly steady progression from “The Woman Warrior . . . related primarily by an adolescent girl groping for a viable female identity [to] China Men . . . presented by a woman capable of grasping the tangle of race and gender in Chinese America and of extending her feminist sympathy to men.”7 Current autobiographical theory is more inclined to see self-representation as a complex synthesis of personal history, private fantasy, and compensatory fictions embedded in a larger family, social, or ethnic narrative.

As a feminist and psychoanalytic reader, I am interested in doing what such women critics have noted but not worked through in detail: trace the play of difference and resemblance, of separation and convergence, and of juvenile insight and “adult wisdom” that characterizes the daughter narrator’s tangled stories of her Chinese family. For, as she admits near the end of *The Woman Warrior*, “Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs. . . . There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. . . . If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker.”8 The reader is warned here of the risks of trying to figure out how Hong Kingston’s life writing has been fabricated: that of tying oneself up in
knots or being “blind” to the textual whole. Mindful of the dangers, I outline theories of intertextuality that suggest how a written work is situated in a web of textual relationships and how that network is created through the critical interchange between the reader and writer. For, as Julia Kristeva theorized, “the writer’s interlocutor, then, is the writer himself, but as reader of another text. The one who writes is the same as the one who reads.”

Although Hong Kingston’s writing has elicited a strong response from readers, it has not always been the chord of sympathetic identification that she hoped for, but, on the contrary, one of marked antipathy. In particular, the anger that drives the daughter narrator to take up her pen in revenge against her family has provoked bitter debate in the Asian American literary community between her male and female readers. My own intertextual reading of The Woman Warrior and China Men sees it as imperative to find common ground for dialogue among women and men with material cultural, ethnic, and historical differences. Hong Kingston’s autobiographically inspired narrator is painfully aware that the first step forward is, paradoxically, to delve into the deeper conflicts underlying old family quarrels and grievances. Initially, the desire for revenge drives her to take up her pen in The Woman Warrior, but a countermove toward understanding and acceptance gradually tempers her narrative resentments. I believe that, when The Woman Warrior and China Men are read against the grain of one another, the reader becomes caught up with the narrator in the complex “translation” of the desire for revenge into a movement toward recuperation and reconciliation. This involves aghast recognition of how compassion can arise out of the strong impulse to hurt or destroy others. In a psychoanalytic sense, the corresponding moment occurs for the daughter narrator when she acquires the maturity to dispense with the coping strategies of splitting and scapegoating that lead to gender division and maltreatment in both The Woman Warrior and China Men and learns to live with the tension of entertaining both aggressive and affectionate feelings for her two parents.

Maxine Hong Kingston is an author whose life writing crosses cultural boundaries and academic disciplines. To begin with, her work was taught in English and literature departments. With the explosion of interdisciplinary studies within the academy, however, her work began to feature importantly in women’s studies and Asian American studies and in courses examining identity politics, the Chinese diaspora, postcolonialism, postmodernism, autobiographical narration, family history, myth, folklore, and oral storytelling. Since The Woman Warrior first appeared more than twenty-five years ago, Hong Kingston has enjoyed a phenomenal rise in popularity and literary importance and has now secured a place in the American canon as the
living author most frequently taught at U.S. universities. The development of women’s and gender studies and the mainstreaming of feminism in literature departments have also helped to make textual interpretation of *The Woman Warrior* a “growth industry.” The interest in this touchstone work is undiminished, and intertextual study of *The Woman Warrior* in relationship to *China Men* will uncover an intricately worked story/life line, one that should attract a new generation of readers to her writing.

**Approach and Argument**

I take the author at her word and begin this intertextual study with the opening story of *The Woman Warrior,* “No Name Woman.” I read her name back into this story by speculating on the identity of the father of her child. This search leads to *China Men* and to a greater appreciation of its pivotal position in “trying to name the unspeakable” in *The Woman Warrior* (13).

In Chapter 1, I make my case for an intertextual reading of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men.* I start with Michael Riffaterre’s definition of the intertext as “one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance” and argue that *China Men* is a text that the reader must know for a more comprehensive understanding of *The Woman Warrior.* I proceed to set out the key ideas of intertextuality that were expounded by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s and suggest how they correspond to Hong Kingston’s own writing and reading practices as articulated in the literary interviews she has given since *The Woman Warrior* was first published in 1976. I note that Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality arose out of her engagement with Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of heteroglossia and dialogism. Whereas Kristeva muted the assumption of intersubjective communication implicit in Bakhtin and shifted attention from utterance to textuality, Hong Kingston’s talk-story mediates between the Bakhtinian idea of a polyphonic interplay of voices and Kristeva’s concept of writing as a “mosaic of quotations” (*Desire in Language*, 66). Indeed, one of Hong Kingston’s most distinctive literary characteristics has been her willingness to experiment with different voices and translate their speech into a textual collage. As she remarked, “When I wrote *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men,* I was trying to find an American language that would translate the speech of the people who are living their lives with the Chinese language.” The particular challenge that she faced as an author, however, was finding words that communicated the oral character of Say Yup, a local dialect spoken by her Cantonese relatives that has no written language.
To be sure, I argue that the clash between mother and daughter in *The Woman Warrior* is not simply intergenerational or intercultural, but interlinguistic, with Brave Orchid a bard in a culture of oral storytellers and the tongue-tied daughter a scribe of her mother’s talk-stories and finally literary writer in a world of English letters. Whereas the narrator’s mother is a maestro of spoken language, her father is a master of sullen silence in *China Men*, and the very fact that he constitutes what Kristeva calls “an anonymity” or “an absence” is what prompts his daughter to fill in his “blank space” (*Desire in Language*, 74) with stories that attempt to reconstruct his past history and heritage. In *The Woman Warrior*, she paid tribute to her mother’s “great power” (25) to talk-story; in *China Men*, she recuperated her father’s lost power as a scholar poet who was trained in the intertextual practice of reading, writing, interlocution, and commentary. Together, her mother and father demonstrated that spoken and written language exist in dynamic relationship, as do the reader and writer in Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality.

In interviews, Hong Kingston has emphasized the fact that her identity as a writer was inseparable from that of “a person who has built my mind on what I read.” In fact, she understood intertextuality as the work of appropriating “these books and this language—the American language” and country, and she imagined herself as part of a far-flung dialogic community of “writers both living and dead” who call out to one another across a vast continent of cultural space and historical time.

Kristeva’s theories of intertextuality were linked to her own interest in psychoanalysis and her Bakhtinian perception that, if words are connected to utterance, they must also resonate with remembered voices and emotions that retain primitive life deep within the psyche. Kristeva reasoned that “we would have to turn to the psychic aspect of writing as trace of a dialogue with oneself (with another)” (74). In fact, Hong Kingston described the production of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* to Arturo Islas as an arduous and seven-year-long rite of psychoanalytic passage in which “you go into the subconscious by not writing and then you make it normal consciousness by writing.” She was also reluctant to classify *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* categorically as either family history or fictions, but argued, “I am writing biography and autobiography of imaginative people. I am writing about real people, all of whom have minds that love to invent fictions. I am writing the biography of their imaginations.” In a homely anecdote, she even suggested that her extended family’s oral tradition of talk-story was intertextually connected to dream narrative and analysis. “When I go to Asia—I look up my relatives. One of my aunts in Hong Kong came to pick me up. The first thing she asks is ‘How is your mother and what is she dreaming?’”
Indeed, Hong Kingston made it her mission to devise a new kind of writing textually woven of her people’s dreams, hopes, fantasies, ghosts, illusions, and disillusionment. Yet the psychic life of her Chinese male relations was less accessible than that of the women, because, as she says, “Memory just hurts them, because they can’t go home” (Rabinowitz, 69). Furthermore, their psychic defense against the pain that the memory of the past and the loss of home evoke was repression. In The Woman Warrior, therefore, the onus of recollection and interiority falls on the Hong family women. Indeed, one of the reasons why Hong Kingston’s book of life was broken into two separate books was that the men themselves were “broken off from their background” (Rabinowitz, 69), and from the underlying family history, mythology, and gossip that give ordinary life its shimmering texture.

When Hong Kingston made the editorial decision to cut the men’s stories out of her first book, she did not eradicate them altogether from her narrative. Instead, they subsided into the textual unconscious of The Woman Warrior. Their eventual reassembly and publication as China Men in 1980 would mark the return of the repressed. Accordingly, Riffaterre argues that intertextuality “repress[es] a meaning in the process of conveying one” and that the relationship of an intertext to a text resembles that of the unconscious to consciousness (“Compulsory reader response,” 77). Thus, the developmental relationship of China Men to The Woman Warrior can be said to resemble that of latent intertext to manifest text and of the unconscious to consciousness. Because I see China Men as a crucial intertext that was largely but not entirely taken out of The Woman Warrior, I will begin my intertextual reading in the next chapter by focusing on the traces of China Men that remain in the women’s stories.

In Chapter 2, “The Woman Warrior’s Traces of a Dialogue with China Men,” I argue that the intertextual logic of The Woman Warrior and China Men requires the reader to seek multiple entry points into the two books and to trace the men and women who do not only lead parallel lives in their respective books but occasionally surface in the textual narratives of their gender opposite. I then turn to the problem of the narrator’s father, who maintains an obstinate silence in both books and who is a major stumbling block to his daughter’s quest for answers. I argue that the father’s silence conditions the narrator to listen for the “unspoken in all discourse” and to hear what Malini Schueller calls the “Otherness of language, the potential of words to always carry echoes of other words.” I go on to suggest how the men and women’s stories double back on one another, by a comparative reading of Woman Warrior’s “No Name Woman” and China Men’s...
“The Brother in Vietnam” and by showing how the latter story shows the author’s preoccupation with war—and peace—throughout the two books. In retrospect, Hong Kingston regretted naming her women’s book after the warrior Fa Mu Lan and wished that she had ended “the feminist war” in *The Woman Warrior* with a story of a female war veteran who becomes a peacemaker like “The Brother in Vietnam” in the closing pages of *China Men*. I argue that even a story that seems to have little to do with modern warfare such as “No Name Woman” illustrates how the birthplace can become a battlefield and depicts women as the casualties of savage infighting. “At the Western Palace,” the fourth story of *The Woman Warrior*, is a comic reprise of the battle of the sexes and foretells that the women’s dominance of Hong Kingston’s first set of stories is nearing an end. Both this story and “Shaman,” which precedes it, can be read to show that, whether male or female, the principal family members are all victims of posttraumatic stress, like the returning veterans of Vietnam or displaced refugees of war.

I then return to the opening of *The Woman Warrior* and begin to read “No Name Woman” and the father’s withdrawn and guarded behavior in this and the other stories of the first book as symptomatic of a traumatized family. In response to the question of how she managed to break through the family’s wall of silence and shame prohibiting her from telling the story of the “No Name Woman,” Hong Kingston admitted that it was not easy. The daughter’s desire to read between the lines and imagine the life story of her aunt—a narrative her father has repressed—compels her to try and rescue not only his sister, but also him, from the psychic underworld where they languish. In other words, I regard the fate of the father and aunt, brother and sister, youngest and most beloved members of their natal family, as intertextually linked through the two books. Nevertheless, in saving her aunt “from the no-nameness, the nothing, and creat[ing] her again” (Skenazy, “Kingston at the University,” 119), Hong Kingston ran the risk of suppressing or even killing her father off as a character in *The Woman Warrior*. It is the work of the intertextual reader to keep the father alive, to “save” what Kristeva calls the idea of the imaginary father and to be on the lookout for his presence, if only as “the possibility of absence, the possibility of love, the possibility of interdiction but also a gift.”20 Kristeva’s idea of the imaginary father can mediate between the daughter narrator’s sense of her mother, Brave Orchid, as an overwhelming presence in *The Woman Warrior* and her father as a distant or absent figure in the text.

In the remaining part of this chapter, I read the traces of *China Men* back into the interpretative analysis of *The Woman Warrior* by a close reading of the passages where the father appears in each of the five interlocking
stories that constitute the first book. I proceed to suggest how these readings alter critical assumptions predicated on a complete textual break between the women and men. In particular, I pursue the intriguing question of why the narrator’s father was “the only brother who never went back to China having once been traded for a girl” (WW, 17). What prevented him from going back home? I speculate that his fate may have been intertwined with that of his no name sister, indeed that his early experience of being traded on the cheap for a girl foreshadows his Chinese immigrant experience of being cheap labor and of being identified with “women’s work” that is beneath him in racist America. I argue that such an intertextual reading shows not only that there are correspondences between the lives of the men and women, but also fosters critical sympathy for the similar hardship and suffering they experience though socially kept apart and polarized by gender and racial prejudices. I further suggest, citing parallels with the nineteenth-century Chinese intertext Flowers in the Mirror, by Li Ruzhen, that the daughter’s retrieval and reinvention of the story of her father’s “little sister” in “No Name Woman” also signal her determination to bring him back to life and out of his equivalent status as no name man in The Woman Warrior. I argue in the conclusion of this chapter that, although the aunt’s name has been struck from the family book of life, she retains the uncanny status of missing person in the family and draws continual attention to the textual unconscious where the lost loved one continues to reside as a disturbing memory, reproachful voice, or haunting face. Indeed, she is an important missing link in the intertextual process of reconstructing the original book of life composed of men’s and women’s stories that were broken in two and divided between The Woman Warrior and China Men.

In Chapter 3, “Traces of Incest in ‘No Name Woman’ and The Woman Warrior,” I start by suggesting that the need of the daughter narrator to “remember Father’s drowned-in-the-well sister” in “No Name Woman” (WW, 13) may have assumed a particular urgency, in light of the depiction of both parents as becoming old and as no strangers to death in the two books. “No Name Woman” depicts the aunt as an uncanny figure who violates the natural cycle of long life expectancy among the narrator’s Chinese family and who ushers the reader from birth to death in the space of only a few violent pages. I cite Freud’s psychoanalytic reading of “The Theme of the Three Caskets” to suggest that the aunt is depicted as both a goddess of love and death and one who remains fatalistically silent rather than disclose the name of the father of her child.

I then propose that “No Name Woman” can be read to suggest that the “private life, secret and apart” (WW, 19) for which the aunt is punished
may be her father’s incestuous love for her. I further suggest that the daughter narrator may wish to provoke her own father “to speak up with the real stories if I’ve got you wrong,” as she does later at the start of China Men.21 The word “incest” is mentioned only once in “No Name Woman” (18) before plunging down, when the aunt jumps to her death in the family well, into the textual unconscious of the two books. The young daughter narrator first hints at the “never-said” within the “crowded house” where the attractive aunt—who turns both young and old male heads—resided with her parents (17). Even as the narrator works up the courage to say the word “incest,” which is taboo, she begins to retreat from the idea that the father of the aunt’s child could have been someone within the paternal family. “He may have been somebody in her own household, but intercourse with a man outside the family would have been no less abhorrent” (18). Yet Sidonie Smith rightly wondered in a footnote to her reading of this story why “this married aunt [was] living with her own parents rather than with her in-laws. And who had been the stranger, or was he a stranger, who had entered her house/womb.”22 The narrator herself provides one possible explanation when she alludes to the widespread social practice of sim-pua marriage. “Among the very poor and the wealthy, brothers married their adopted sisters, like doves” (19). In the first part of this chapter, I explore the textual possibility that the aunt was a sim-pua, or “little daughter-in-law,” adopted and reared to marry a foster brother in the Hong family. In his study of sim-pua marriages in rural Taiwan, Arthur Wolf saw proof of the so-called Westermarck effect: that early familiarity among siblings effectively prohibits incest and often discourages later sexual intimacy between individuals who are not blood relatives but have been raised together as brother and sister.23

In the second part of this chapter, I consider to what extent the allusion to a sim-pua marriage might be a smoke screen that neutralizes, but does not altogether dispel, the fears of incest in the narrative subtext. Whereas the Westermarck hypothesis is that the incest taboo expresses a natural sexual aversion between conjugal partners who have been reared intimately together since early childhood, the Freudian argument is for a naturally occurring attraction, especially between the parents and child in the triangular family romance. Father-daughter incest has been described as “the best kept secret,”24 a crime that fathers can commit in the name of love and that daughters can confuse with parental care and attention. Because incest is often committed in stealth and requires such a comprehensive denial of sexual predation, members of the family who “name the unspeakable” (WW, 13) often struggle with strong feelings of guilt, shame, and dis-
loyalty and can mistakenly feel that it is not incest, but their reporting of it, that is the crime. The narrator’s mother warns her daughter, “Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her [the aunt] could happen to you” (WW, 13). She may be expressing the fears a woman’s cycle carries, that sexual history will repeat itself and that incest is a story that can be transmitted intergenerationally.

The daughter narrator shows a transgressive desire not simply to repeat, but to elaborate on, the little she is told and so recover the lifeless bodies of the aunt and her child from the family well, where they drink the cold waters of oblivion. I read this well as representational of the male unconscious that keeps women down, and that becomes the textual unconscious of The Woman Warrior, and as symbolic at the same time of the subversive powers of women as the fount of new life. The intertextual allusions in this story to Hawthorne’s Scarlet Letter further signal the daughter narrator’s sympathetic identification with fallen women whose impure bodies were wellsprings of life.

In her study of father-daughter incest, Janet Liebman Jacobs argues that is not the daughter victim’s reporting of the incestuous crime per se, but the creative reassembly of the broken pieces of her life through such therapeutic activities as writing, art, or spirituality that can be crucial for her recovery. I conclude this chapter by suggesting how the narrator writes the victimized daughter back into being. I suggest how she replays and recomposes this sexual trauma in “Shaman.” Janice Haaken has observed that “the trauma story [can] anoint the survivor with a heroic status—as the bearer of unspeakable truths.” I go on to show how the colorful fantasy of male-inspired heroism and retribution narrated in “White Tigers,” with its controlling myth of the woman warrior, resembles the compensating fictions that incest victims imagine to articulate their conflicted desire to be safe from, to be saved by, and to save the father figure. I close by suggesting how the behavior, mood swings, and appearance of the narrator in The Woman Warrior, especially in its ending story, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” conform in certain key respects to the pathologized coping strategies of daughter victims of paternal abuse.

In my final chapter, “The Search for the Father in China Men,” I point out that the daughter narrator of China Men engaged as a child in the imaginary activity of “Talking Men” (181), and I suggest that this activity shows that she never lost interest in her father or ceased carrying on an inner dialogue with the talking men who represent lost parts of himself or are his past relations and likenesses. The men whom she now allows to talk for themselves in the narratives of China Men gradually restore the father to his
rightful place at the heart of the family. Moreover, the narrator’s recollections of “the father places” (CM, 240) that she secretly explored as a child make her feel or make believe that she had a hidden connection with him. These father places introduce the reader not only to the child’s imaginary, but also to the textual unconscious that links *China Men* with *The Woman Warrior*. I go on to suggest that the older storyteller of *China Men* recalls the young girl’s fictions with intertextual awareness of a tradition of reading children’s literature seriously, and I draw parallels with *Alice’s Adventures Underground* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. Indeed one of Hong Kingston’s early incentives to write came from her avid reading of Alcott, recognition that she “wasn’t those March girls,” and sympathetic identification with the “funny-looking little Chinaman” in one of Alcott’s works (Hoy, 62; Blauvelt, 83). But I argue that, although the author insisted that she wrote against the white American grain of Alcott, she in fact unconsciously appropriated a number of Jo March’s key characteristics for her own narrator. What is more, Alcott’s *Little Women* and *Little Men* may have planted the idea of organizing her family history into the gender narratives of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*.

I proceed to point out that, if the women in the Hong family orally transmitted the men’s stories, the paternal grandfather was a crucial provider of their source material; however, the daughter narrator has her own mother, Brave Orchid, to thank for the fact that his reminiscences were not lost. “MaMa was the only person to listen to him, and so he followed her everywhere, and talked and talked. What he liked telling was his journeys to the Gold Mountain” (CM, 127). Her mother and paternal grandfather’s shared gender recollections are, in turn, intertextually reconfigured in *China Men*. I go on to show how her father’s father is crucial to the family saga that begins to unfold in the first story of *The Woman Warrior* and that is played out in *China Men*. I reread this grandfather’s exhibitionism in “No Name Woman” to suggest that his exposure of his penis expresses a desire for a daughter that is inconceivable in traditional Chinese patriarchy and that becomes pathologized. I turn to the marital tensions between Grandfather Ah Goong and his wife Ah Po, and I speculate how the gender role of this Hong family matriarch might be factored into his sojourner life of hard labor, loneliness, and vagrancy in America. I examine Ah Po’s besotted relationship with BiBi, “the little heart” (CM, 15) and youngest son of the Hong family—destined to become the daughter narrator’s morose and forbidding father—and I suggest that he grows up to replay his own father’s disappointment with life and alienation from his family.

Finally, I trace what Hong Kingston memorably described to Jody Hoy.
as her “search for my father, or all of us searching for our fathers” (56). I start by noting that the narrator’s father, BaBa, would follow in the footsteps of his own father, Ah Goong, by sacrificing his life for the welfare of his family. The daughter’s retrospective view of her father as a “good” provider is tinged with the guilty recognition that “in our role as children of our parents . . . we do kill something vital in them . . . [and] contribut[e] to their dying.” 27 I argue that narration is the atonement structure in which this daughter brings together seemingly irreconcilable images of fathers, seeks “revenge,” and makes restitution to them. I return to Ah Goong’s pathological habits of exhibitionism and masturbation and reread these acts as a metaphor for the wasted lives of the fathers in China Men. I suggest that the language of these passages conveys the narrator’s attempt to redeem the barren years of her grandfather’s and father’s history.

In an interview with Marilyn Chin, Hong Kingston revealed that she “started out a poet” (90). In “Shaman,” she honored her mother, Brave Orchid, as a homeopathic poet—natural storyteller and healer—who read the beat of the pulse and listened to the rhythm of sick and healthy body language. Her father, BaBa, is dignified in the early stories of China Men as both a scholar and lover of poetry. Indeed, one of the most poignant hardships her father must suffer in America is that his interest in poetry no longer earns him respect, but derision. Through her life writing, Hong Kingston lifts her father out of his exile from poetry and reshapes him as an imaginative man who had the literary “power of going places where nobody else went” (CM, 238). I conclude by suggesting that the daughter narrator herself undergoes a symbolic rebirth through recollection and writing and determines to bring her father back from the underworld where he lies low as a character throughout The Woman Warrior and for long periods of China Men. I close with the view that she returns her father to a full and meaningful existence by restoring poetry to its once-honored place at the “center” of his life.

Notes


8. See Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts (London: Picador, 1981), 33 and 147, for the previous two quotes. I shall cite this edition parenthetically throughout this study.


13. See Paul Skenazy, “Kingston at the University” (1989), 144; Jody Hoy, “To Be Able to See the Tao” (1986), 50–51; and Rabinowitz, “Eccentric Memories” (1986), 72; all in Conversations.


15. See Rabinowitz, 75, and Kay Bonetti, “An Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston” (1986), 37, both in Conversations.


21. See Maxine Hong Kingston’s sequel to The Woman Warrior, China Men (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 15, which I will cite parenthetically throughout this study.


