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Author

CHEUNG, KK

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the 130-year struggle of these Americans to retain their ethnicity. We must wait longer for that much needed textbook.

Susie Ling
*Pasadena City College and
 California Polytechnic University, Pomona*

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES.
 Edited by Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985. 240 pp. hardcover, \$22.00.)

This collection of essays attempts to show the extent to which contemporary female writers depart from the American literary tradition, a tradition which until recently has been dominated by males. Each critic deals with the narrative techniques particular to one of the ten women writers: Ann Beattie, Grace Paley, Annie Dillard, Anne Redmon, Cynthia Ozick, Anne Taylor, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, and Marge Piercy.

The editors ask in the introduction: "Can female authors be said to participate in a literary tradition which has consistently disfranchised and misrepresented women; or has this very disfranchisement and misrepresentation brought about the total displacement of women artists from tradition to the extent that their works depart radically in form and content from those of their male counterparts?" The answers, as given in the various chapters, suggest that female writers both capitalize on and subvert the American literary tradition.

Beattie, Paley, and Tyler, for instance, tantalize and surprise the reader by subverting conventions. Carolyn Porter discusses Beattie's "art of the missing": Beattie composes "without apparent regard for chronology, plot sequence, or thematic development"; the absence of these narrative elements helps to evoke a "vision of a world in a state of lack." Paley, according to Ronald Schleifer, also departs from conventional narration: aiming to illuminate rather than to explain, eschewing the "egotism of meaning" in favor of interpretive possibilities, she forgoes "the symbolical self-reference of the novelist, the psychological analysis that is precluded by the chaste compactness of storytelling." Mary Robertson argues that while Tyler employs a seemingly conventional narrative formula, she disrupts the expectations the family novel generates in the reader.

Rather than abandoning accepted literary techniques, Morrison and Piercy use traditional narrative forms to convey feminist messages. Linda Wagner demonstrates how Morrison employs traditional literary devices to register firsthand impressions of female experience, adapting to her purposes the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Elaine Tuttle Hansen illustrates how Piercy parodies the "soap opera" to achieve similar purposes.

Cynthia Ozick, on the other hand, embeds orthodox messages amidst antirealist techniques of the postmodern antinovel. Ellen Pifer describes how Ozick exhibits "paradoxical originality and orthodoxy": she uses sophisticated self-referential devices and playful literary techniques to convey "a vision of moral and spiritual

truth rooted in the Old Testament and its Ten Commandments." Instead of writing as an omniscient author, she repeatedly challenges and questions her own authority, calling the reader's attention to her fallibility.

No less experimental than Ozick, Redmon and Dillard use nonfictional devices to create fiction. Catherine Rainwater describes how Redmon adapts a musical genre—the fugue—to literature. The reader, like the listener to a fugue, "must learn how to make completions within the text which . . . consists of 'stops and starts,'" "must perceive the unity beneath the surface chaos, make the connections between the fragmentary chapters, and hear the harmony within the dissonance." Dillard's language likewise reveals and conceals. William Scheick discusses how Dillard, who combines elements of the novel with those of the philosophical essay, also conjoins what can be seen and expressed with what is ineffable—to evoke a kind of "conversion experience" in the reader.

Like Redmon and Dillard, Kingston crosses generic boundaries, collapsing the distinctions between the novel and the autobiography. Suzanne Juhasz views Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as embodying "the search for identity in the narrative act" and analyzes the two texts in terms of the protagonist's relation to her mother and father respectively. Juhasz explains, "For Kingston, finding her mother and father is to name them, to tell their stories. . . . But because a daughter's relation to her mother is psychologically and linguistically different from her relation to her father, so is the telling of these stories different." The difference, according to Juhasz, lies in the distance between empathy and sympathy: the protagonist can empathize with her mother, but she can only sympathize with her father.

Kingston herself has offered other reasons for the difference between the two texts: she deliberately inserted historical details in *China Men* because of public ignorance about Chinese Americans: "The mainstream culture doesn't know the history of Chinese Americans," Kingston laments. "That ignorance makes a tension for me, and in the new book [*China Men*] I just couldn't take it anymore. So all of a sudden, right in the middle of the stories, plunk—there is an eight-page section of pure history. . . . It really affects the shape of the book, and it might look quite clumsy" (Timothy Pfaff, "Talk with Mrs. Kingston," *New York Times Book Review*, 15 June 1980).

Nevertheless, Juhasz's analysis in terms of "gender experience" does account nicely for the less abstract and more complex, dynamic, and intensely personal style of *The Woman Warrior*. But although Juhasz finds *China Men* less satisfying, she believes that telling that story is no less important in shaping the identity of the female protagonist and in enabling her to locate her strength: "Taken together, the two texts demonstrate the special power of telling, and especially, of the imagination for women."

Self-expression similarly shapes and transforms identity in Walker's *The Color Purple*. Elizabeth Fifer observes that its main narrator—Celie—grows with her language: she becomes more independent and assertive as she becomes more affirmative and articulate in her expressions. To register this development, Walker employs the epistolary format, which provides both a personalized tone and "a flexible vehicle of narration, varying in style according to the narrator's increasing self-awareness and sophistication. "In *The Color Purple*," Fifer concludes, "Walker's

narrative techniques realize and embody this primary truth: how we tell the stories of our lives determines the significance and outcome of the narratives that are our lives." Yet ironically, it is at the beginning, when Celie speaks in a halting, dialectic voice, that the reader (speaking for myself) finds herself most absorbed in the narrative. To penetrate Celie's thick dialect and to make sense of the startling facts so cryptically presented, the reader must enter into the narrator's consciousness. As the narrator becomes more articulate and coherent, the reader, who no longer has to piece together puzzling details, becomes less actively engaged by the narrative.

Contemporary American Women Writers allows us to see telling unity amidst infinite variety. Although some of the critics may have overemphasized the distinction between male/conventional and female approaches to narrative, the collection of essays reveals striking commonalities among female writers. All the writers under discussion demand active involvement from their readers, who must discern connections, uncover latent patterns, supply missing elements, and generate their own interpretations in the face of fluid and elusive prose.

The editors rightly assert that these writers, who exhibit diverse and intriguing techniques, are likely to influence the continuing development of the American literary tradition. The choice of selections, moreover, shows that the editors recognize the contribution of ethnic writers in shaping the dominant tradition. Although Kingston, Morrison, and Walker are widely read, they are all too often treated as spokeswomen for the minority experience rather than as creative artists. Examining their literary techniques alongside those of white female writers enables us to appreciate their works as serious art rather than exclusively as ethnic literature or simply as popular literature.

General readers and scholars alike will find this book instructive and inspiring. While offering sensitive and intricate analyses, most of the critical essays are self-explanatory enough to serve as an introduction to the various contemporary writers discussed. The useful bibliographies attached to each chapter will persuade general readers unfamiliar with any of the writers to make new acquaintances. Feminist critics already familiar with these writers can now see them in relation to one another, thereby disclosing mutual influences and gaining fresh insights. Above all, aspiring female writers will be enheartened to discover the many living models.

King-Kok Cheung
University of California
Los Angeles, California

INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN AMERICA: PROBLEMS OF ADAPTATION AND ASSIMILATION. Paul J. Strand and Woodrow Jones, Jr. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1985. 182 pp. hardcover, \$32.50.)

As the authors indicate in the preface, this study is the complete analysis of 1981 survey data concerning the needs of 42,000 San Diego area Indochinese refugees. It is the joint effort of the Social Science Research Laboratory of San Diego State University and ACCESS, a San Diego area service provider that was contracted by