

# Real, or just imagination?

Business



“ The Woman Warrior” by Maxine Hong Kingston is a memoir that is quite revolutionary. When it was written, memoirs had a more strict structure and usually followed a certain chronological pattern. The narrator dances through time, talking about the past, then flashing back to the present.

In addition, in a few chapters of the book, the word “ I” is seldom mentioned as the stories of Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid unravel. Most of the memories Kingston describes in her book are based on talk-stories, told to her by her mother, Brave Orchid. However, these talk-stories are full of ambiguity and sometimes lack detail, making Kingston use her imagination to fill in the blanks. Therefore, even though “ The Woman Warrior” is a memoir that uses first-person narration, like all other memoirs, there is much confusion created by the narrator as the reader finds it difficult to separate fact from fiction. That confusion is first created when Kingston recalls her mother telling her the talk-story of No-Name Woman, Kingston’s aunt who killed herself and her newborn baby when her fellow villagers cast her out. When Brave Orchid tells the talk-story, she uses very few details, since that woman brought disgrace and shame to the family and everyone pretends she was never even born.

When Kingston fails to see a reason why her aunt would ever have a child with anyone but her own husband, she starts imagining different possible situations that could explain her aunt’s position. As all this is intertwined with Brave Orchid’s talk-story, one cannot tell what really happened and what is imagination. Another time when it is impossible to separate fiction from reality is when Kingston tells the story of Fa Mu Lan, a mythical woman warrior. In that chapter, Kingston takes on the very character of Fa Mu Lan

and tells the myth through first-person narration. For those who have not heard the original Chinese myth, the changes that Kingston makes to the story might be unnoticeable. However, one can never be too sure as to the accuracy of the myth told by Kingston, for all the facts fit together, yet do not seem perfectly logical.

It becomes even more difficult as Kingston begins comparing herself to Fa Mu Lan and her accomplishments. The chapter titled “ At the Western Palace” is yet another time when the narration completely confuses readers and makes them wonder. Although this is Kingston’s memoir and she is the narrator, she is not present during most of the happenings in that chapter. They were told to her by her sister, who found everything out from their brother who took Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid to Los Angeles to look for Moon Orchid’s long-lost husband. In this chapter, one cannot be sure about anything, since all three siblings can add things to the original story to make it seem more interesting or logical. Whether Brave Orchid really tried to hit Moon Orchid’s husband or it was just a figment of someone’s imagination, the reader cannot tell.

Once again, very unclear narration. In “ The Woman Warrior”, what is fiction and what is real, no one really knows. Nevertheless, it is why Kingston uses these memories to find her own voice that matters. They help her illuminate the dark corners of her past and look up to a brighter future as a more complete self. As for whether or not the things in the book really happened— one can only guess.