Fiction and Autobiography: Spatial Form in *The Golden Cangue* and *The Woman Warrior*

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> Every explorer names his island Formosa, beautiful. To him it is beautiful because, being first, he has access to it and can see it for what it is. But to no one else is it ever as beautiful — except the rare man who manages to recover it, who knows that it has to be recovered.
>
> ——Waler Percy, *The Message in the Bottle*

Eileen Chang's *The Golden Cangue* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* are both works of twentieth century literature by women writers which depict the worlds of women of inferior status in traditional Chinese and modern Chinese-American communities. Through fiction and what we would hold is its sister genre, autobiography, these authors portray the relations between mothers and daughters in China and the United States who, because of a combination of oppressive social conditions, sexual stereotyping, and character are involved in a life-or-death struggle to survive. Indeed, so powerful has been the appeal of these works that non-Chinese readers may be tempted to view them as sociological documents, rather than as creations of an imaginary world or as experiments in self-discovery. For most native Chinese it is hopefully safe to say that the harsh world of *The Golden Cangue* is no more, while many Chinese-Americans may not recognize the Chinatown of *The Woman Warrior* or believe that it has ever existed. Yet such is the sweeping force of both works that they are felt to be revelatory. While we cannot in the body of this paper do more than suggest some of the sociological reasons for the wide reading of *The Golden Cangue* and *The Woman Warrior,* we will argue that the nature of their attractiveness has more to do with the fact that they both belong to a borderline of genres.

Neither is quite "pure" as fiction or autobiography. Each contains aspects of both genres which make them persuasive unions of fantasy and fact.

Perhaps it is the creative use of stereotyping, especially of bizarre shocking content, which is the initial basis of fascination. The female protagonist of *The Golden Cangue*, Ch'i-ch'iao, tells her 13-year-old daughter, Ch'ang-an, that "men are all rotten without exception," thus effectively dooming her to a single life.[1] To be forewarned is to be [sic]. In *The Woman Warrior* there is a litany of popular sayings which debase and stereotype females and which are a central part of the autobiographer's daily agony: "girls are maggots in the rice;" "it is more profitable to raise geese than daughters;" "feeding girls is feeding cowbirds;" "when you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers;" "when fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls."[2] Modern persons are not supposed to believe in ghosts, but they are environmental presences in *The Golden Cangue* and omnipresent in *The Woman Warrior.* To the autobiographer's mother, Black Orchid, America is a land of ghosts and apparitions which she sees everywhere: Taxi ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts, Black Ghosts, White Ghosts, Newsboy Ghosts, Gypsy Ghosts, Well Ghosts, Milk Ghosts, Mail Ghosts, Garbage Ghosts, Social Worker Ghosts, Public Health Nurse Ghosts, Factory Ghosts, Jesus Ghosts, Burgler Ghosts, Hobo Ghosts, Wino Ghosts. *The Golden Cangue* is marked by allusions to Chinese customs, traditions and practices which are debilitating and constricting: filial piety, hierarchical relations among family members, blind obedience to parents, the subservience of women to men outside the household and the dominance of women within, opium addiction, concubinage, bound feet and the importance of "face" rather than self in society. Images of China and things Chinese in *The Woman Warrior* are violent plays on stereotypes. Chinese eat anything from chicken embryos to owls; the author's mother keeps a monkey's paw in a kitchen jar as a condiment. Relatives in Communist China lie to their overseas family members about hardships to get them to send money. Young girls are bought and sold as slaves and concubines. "Chinese people are very weird," say the autobiographer's siblings describing the behavior of an elder aunt visiting from Hong Kong.[3] She hounds them about their American home and describes their activities outlound to herself in Chinese. It is the exploitation of this "weirdness" – the sexual cliches, the existence of ghosts – and the explication of systemic oppressive customs which first draw the reader.

The dramatic unfolding of bizarre characters and shocking incidents in *Momoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts,* as *The Woman Warrior* is subtitled, won for Maxine Hong Kingston the National Book Critics Circle award for the best work of non-fiction in 1976. But beyond superficial aspects of content appeal in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Golden Cangue,* we believe that it is the shaping of worlds of space and time through the blending of fiction and autobiography which is the source of their aesthetic appeal and which calls for exploration. C. T. Hsia considers *The Golden Cangue* "the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature" and lauds its psychological realism and the author's knowledge of the manners and mores of the decadent upper class. "... but what elevates this perception and this realism into the realm of tragedy is the personal emotion behind the creation, the attitude of mingled fascination and horror with which the author habitually contemplates her own childhood environment."[4] It is the autobiographical dimension of the novel which he feels makes *The Golden Cangue* ultimately compelling. On the other hand, *The Woman Warrior* is an autobiography, a "memoir," as it is subtitled, but in its coining of a Chinese-American idiom, the dramatic alternations between mythic and mimetic modes, the exploration of character, and the experimentation with narrative point of view, it intimates a work of fiction.

Let us examine these suggestions in greater detail by considering *The Golden Cangue* and *The Woman Warrior* in terms of both fiction and autobiography. In this effort, we shall want to review some of the literature on autobiography to understand the parameters of that genre and its possible relations to fiction. Lastly, we shall focus on the common use of one aspect of style, spatial form, which indicates how the genres overlap and why they may differ. Through spatial form the whole harmonious world of fiction is created, while by the same means the evolving ever incomplete self of autobiography is identified.

The Golden Cangue may be readily considered in terms of traditional Western characteristics of fiction. It is a long, novella length, work of the imagination, a portrait of a whole complete world, which may be approached through a study of character, narrative point of view and structure. Ch'i-ch'iao's brilliance, cruelty and insecurity are uniformly present throughout the story, marking her as a "flat" static character, whereas her daughter, Ch'ang-an, is a "round" dynamic personality. Initially an innocent naive girl with a capacity for selfless love, she emerges as the "spit and image" of her mother who manipulates others to maintain her own security. The narrator enjoys the vantage point of an omniscient being who reveals the thoughts and feelings of characters and who occasionally is wont to inject an editorial explanation, e. g., "solace is purely spiritual but is used here as a euphemism for sex."[5] More rarely, the narrator is no longer an outside effaced observer with a privileged view but becomes a dramatized "I," a participant with a restricted view as in the novella's opening sentence with its enigmatic teasing emphasis on "we": "Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night . . . maybe we did not get to see the moon of thirty years ago."[6] Structurally, *The Golden Cangue* enjoys parallels with a work of traditional Chinese fiction, the *Dream of the Red Chamber,* about which Eileen Chang has written critical studies and in fact imitates in *The Golden Cangue.* Ch'i-ch'iao reminds us of the brilliant cruel Wang Hsi-feng (Phoenix) of the *Dream,* and the story's movement from outer to inner circles, from the discussion of servants of the household to that of family members, parallels the structure of the *Dream* whereby the reader moves from the creation myth to Lin Tai-Yü's entry into the inner sanctum of the Chia family household. Or, we may view *The Golden Cangue's* structure in Western terms: a set piece of dialogue between servants introduces the major character who is then revealed sequentially as the novella progresses.

We think of *The Golden Cangue* as an autobiography, of course, partly because we are shaped by the *Dream* and the reading experience of a tradition which insists that novel is a disguise of a real life and that fiction is historically and biographically accurate if only we read correctly. But we should not wish to search *The Golden Cangue* for Eileen Chang's personal life. We do suggest that formally in its exploration of spatiality this novella may be read as a counterpart to autobiography.

The case for *The Golden Cangue* as a work of fiction seems more obvious if only for the fact that we are more familiar with the characteristics of fiction as a genre. A plethora of critical studies dispel the myth that autobiography is the "most elusive" literary genre in which generic boundaries between it, on the one hand, and the novel, poetry or a dissertation on the other slip away. Autobiography does not seem to be "an intractable area" that is much more "lawless and various" than others.[7] Yet these studies are for the most part relatively recent and we have not yet assimilated this research into our critical consciousness. Furthermore, despite some scholarly attention to autobiography in China, it would seem that autobiography is largely a Western phenomenon, as Georges Gusdorf suggests. He observes that in primitive societies and advanced societies dominated by myths of eternal recurrence (Chinese notions of "dynasty" might be relevant here), or of salvation by way of depersonalization (India), the self is part of community. There are a number of specific roles played by members, but little consciousness of self as a unique unrepeatable phenomenon who desires to endure as an individual in memory. Traditions of Christian asceticism, of confessional self-examination, of Renaissance and Romantic emphases on the individual, and of psychoanalysis are absent in premodern China. Rembrandt painted 62 self-portraits. Has any Chinese artist done the equivalent? Comparatively speaking, there is a dearth of autobiography in the Western sense in Chinese literature – a fact which may also explain why autobiography has been of lesser critical concern in Chinese studies.[8]

In the West, interest in autobiography is on an altogether different scale. The popularity of *The Woman Warrior* in the United States, for example, belongs to a resurgence of interest in autobiography which has been stimulated by authors themselves. "We may prize this literature more today than twenty years ago," writes Robert F. Sayre, "mainly because contemporary Amerian writers as varied as Norman Mailer, Lillian Hellman, Malcolm X, Maxine Kingston, and Vladimir Nabokov have gradually made us extrasensitive to all autobiography." As a work of Chinese-American literature, *The Woman Warrior* is also part of the trend among oppressed minorities to use autobiography, according to Sayre, "to rise from the status of the unknown and inarticulate."[9] Furthermore, the modern appeal of *The Woman Warrior* as an autobiography reflects contemporary fascination with and anxiety over the self.[10]

As a woman's autobiography, *The Woman Warrior* may be representative of a type. According to Mary G. Mason, women commonly envision the woman's self in terms of another consciousness after a pattern of "alterity and equality."[11] Maxine Hong Kingston sees herself in relation to an anonymous aunt who committed suicide after bearing a child out of wedlock, a woman warrior who was not held back by pregnancy and childbearing from revenging her family, a mother who controlled the unknown by "talk-story," an aunt who was abandoned by her American emigrant husband, and a young school girl who tortured her classmate. As a woman who fantasizes about an inversion of roles, who becomes a powerful "woman warrior" in a mythic world in contrast to the obsessively shy girl growing up in a California Chinatown, Kingston is a figure of "liminality," Victor Turner's word for the suspension of social and normative structures and escape from inherited female roles. But her story lacks the turning points, climaxes and conversions which are more typical of male autobiographies. Her extraordinary adventures and experiences are rather an extension and continuation of everyday experiences she has growing up in her family. Accordingly, *The Woman Warrior* is an exception to Turner's theory of liminality and as such is similar to medieval women's autobiographies studied by Caroline Walker Bynum.[12]

While *The Woman Warrior* may be termed an autobiography in the most literal sense, a biography of a person written by himself or herself, a work of "writing" (*graphe*) about the "life" (*bios*) of the "self" (*autos*),[13] what is fascinating about it is its varied form which, as Jean Starobinski believes is true of autobiography in general, has no single generic style.[14] Autobiography, accroding to Northrop Frye, is "prose fiction," and in the writer's act of selecting and ordering is parallel to imaginative discourse.[15] Yet, writes Louis A. Renza, autobiography is not solely imaginative art. Like other autobiographies, *The Woman Warrior* is partly a personal-historical document subject to external verification. At the same time, it is what Renza calls a "dramatic performance," a view of the past by way of the present, a work of "narrative design" which "concedes life to an aesthetic setting." For him this concession to aesthetics makes its content untrustworthy. He feels autobiography is an impossible self defeating genre, for it "allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self-representation." It is "an endless prelude: a beginning without middle (the realm of fiction), or without end (the realm of history); a purely fragmentary, incomplete literary project, unable to be more than an arbitrary document . . . ."[16]

We would argue that it is the arbitrariness of *The Woman Warrior* which is the key to its appeal. Its concern for narrative design and aesthetic setting in the style of a dramatic performance is a creative attempt to express the identity of the mysterious evasive self. "Every autobiography," writes Georges Gusdorf, "is a work of art and at the same time a work of enlightenment; it does not show us the individual seen from outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been."[17] It is this imaginative artefact we celebrate in *The Woman Warrior*. As a dramatic self-portrait, *The Woman Warrior* is what William L. Howarth terms "a double entity," a series of reciprocal transactions between narrator and protagonist who merge into one by the end of the autobiography. There are two levels of time (past and present) and two planes of space (China and the United States, fairy tale and mundane life) presented through the "strategy" of drama:

we have a series of sensational adventures, an emphasis on character, scene and event rather than ideas. The narrator herself as well as other figures in her life appear as performers. "The dramatic autobiographer plays so many roles," says Howarth, "from naif to schemer, that his (her) exact identity is often a mystery."[18]

It is her awareness of this mystery that Maxine Hong Kingston proclaims at the beginning of *The Woman Warrior* and which she dramatizes throughout her autobiography:

> Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?

In her portrayal of this mysterious self, the writer does not imagine one that is eternal, unchanging, private and hidden, but a self that is inside time and which she dramatizes through a series of public masks: daughter, student, warrior, lover, mother.[20] These masks and their creator's concern for the shape of the work as a whole, as well as for an external world are signs of a fuller autobiographical art which shows affinities with imaginative writing.[21]

These introductory remarks on autobiography and fiction lead us to look specifically at spatial form in *The Golden Cangue* and *The Woman Warrior,* an aesthetic technique common to both which reveals relations between genres. The basic characteristics of spatial form have been outlined by Joseph Frank in his essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," and have been further explicated by numerous critics since Frank's seminal article first appeared in 1945.[22] Spatial form is identified as a development in modern fiction and poetry whereby techniques are used to subvert sequence, chronology and the linear flow of words. A synchronic rather than diachronic thrust is created through the juxtaposition of elements, and the discontinuity and fragmentation of narrative. Connectedness is established by means of recurring leitmotifs, images, word play, analogies and contrasts, and the overall aesthetic impression is one of a timeless unity and a feeling of illumination and tranquility. The work appears not to be mimetic of some external reality, and characters and actions do not develop. The momentum of the work moves backward and sideways rather than forward. Because of defamiliarization techniques and parataxis, the point of view is ultimately the readers who is forced to suspend judgment until the pattern and form of the work as a whole may be apprehended. This requires re-reading of a text and it is the reader who in effect "composes" the fiction or poetry.[23]

The Golden Cangue and *The Woman Warrior* may not be identified as pure examples of spatial form (whether fiction or autobiography) since neither work entirely abandons chronological sequence. Yet they illustrate the invalidity of understanding literary works as strictly temporal media. Obviously, the spatial arts – painting and sculpture for example – rely more on the element of space to enhance the effect of simultaneity, while in the temporal arts such as literature and music the element of time is paramount in the unravelling of an entire work. Nevertheless, there are no absolutely clear-cut distinctions between the two. While in the spatial arts there can be found the time dimension, the element of space also tends to intrude upon the temporal arts and creates what Joseph A. Kestner calls a "spatial secondary illusion."[24] Let us examine this intrusion of spatial form in narrative fiction and autobiography through the examples of *The Golden Cangue* and *The Woman Warrior.* In the former we shall focus attention on three fundamental aspects of narrative, language, structure, and reader perception, while in the latter we shall consider the mixture of modes and point of view.[25]

In a sense, *The Golden Cangue* is a work of tremendous time-consciousness. The narrative opens with a reference to "Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlit night,"[26] and throughout the work there are incessant indications of the contrast between "now" and "then."[27] However, this illusion of temporality is counterbalanced by the author's manipulation of language. The lineal flow of time is stemmed, and in its place a sense of synchronic presence informs the whole text.

One remarkable feature of language in *The Golden Cangue* is syntactic complication. Through various devices such as parallelism, incremental repetition, word play, and ellipsis, the lineal progression of narrative is retarded and the spatial dimension is added onto the text. The paragraph describing Ch'i-ch'iao's state of mind when her brother-in-law visits her in her new home is a typical example:

> Ch'i-ch'iao bowed her head, basking in glory, in the *soft music* of his voice and the *delicate pleasure of this occasion.* So many years now, she had been playing hide-and-seek with him and never could get close, and there had still been a day like this in

> store for her. True, half a lifetime had gone by – the flower-years of her youth. Life is so devious and unreasonable. Why had she married into the Chiang family? *For money*? No, *to meet Chi-tse, because* it was fated that she should be in love with him. She lifted her face slightly. He was standing in front of her with *flat hands closed on her fan and his cheek pressed against it. He was ten years older too, but he was after all the same person.* Could he be lying to her? He wanted her *money* – the money she had sold her life for? The very idea enraged her. *Even if* she had him wrong there, could he have *suffered* as much for her as she did for him? Now that she had finally given up all thoughts of love he was here again to tempt her. His eyes – *after ten years he was still the same person. Even if he were lying to her,* wouldn't it be better to find out a little later? Even if she knew very well it was *lies,* he was such a good actor, wouldn't it be almost real? [italics added] [28]

The ellipses and interpolations here cut off the flow of the narrative and, eventually, the flow of time. The parallel construction of "the soft music . . . the delicate pleasure" as well as "flat hands closed on her fan . . . his cheek pressed against it," or repetitions of word groups like "soft," "already," "for," "fan," "money," "suffered," and "lying" have the same effect of shattering lineal time. The device of incremental repetition is perhaps the most typical and significant. The two passages – "He was ten years older too, but he was after all the same person" and "after ten years he was still the same person" – for example, are but one thing stated in a slightly different way. While thematically they point to the idea of cycle so predominant in *The Golden Cangue* which abolishes the illusion of chronological time, stylistically through variation in repetition they also contribute to a sense of discontinuity and fragmented momentum which highlight the synchronic aspect of narrative.

The prevalence of pictorial images – itself an illustration of the intrusion of spatial media (painting) into the temporal arts[29] – also enhances the spatial illusion of *The Golden Cangue,* and Eileen Chang is particularly adept at the use of colors. The colors she frequently employs are red and green, black and white, and blue and yellow, in which the "sensory impression"[30] is so strong through juxtaposition of conflicting colors that the reading tempo cannot but be retarded, and time eventually seems to stand still. The street scene following the dialogue between the two maids Feng-hsiao and Little Shuang, for example, leaves a strong visual impression with its layers and layers of gorgeous colors, and borders on imagistic writing in the juxtaposition of selective views from the street:

> It was almost dawn. The flat waning moon got lower, lower and larger, and by the time it sank, it was like a red gold basin. The sky was a cold, bleak crab-shell blue. The houses were only a couple of storeys high, pitch-dark under the sky, so one could see far. At the horizon the morning colors were layers of green, yellow, and red like a watermelon cut open – the sun was coming up.[31]

With the depiction of a horizon which seems to be ever expanding, the lineal process is again distorted.

The effect of montage, however, is the most conspicuous in another street scene viewed from a window by Ch'i-ch'iao:

> The tiny shrunken image of a *policeman* reflected faintly in the top corner of the *window glass* ambled by swinging his arms. A *rickshaw* quietly ran over the policeman. *A little boy* with his long gown tucked up into his trouser waist ran kicking a ball out the *edge of the glass. A postman* in green riding a bicycle superimposed his image on the policeman as he streaked by. All *ghosts,* ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence . . . *What is real and what is false*? [italics added][32]

Here the window sill may well serve as the frame of a picture, in which the effect of montage is achieved by the simultaneous existence of several seemingly unrelated images. The illusion of simultaneity, moreover, is enhanced by the deliberate manipulation of the impressionistic effect of blurring. The running over of the policeman's shadow by a rickshaw, and the "xeroxing" of a bicycling postman onto the policeman, all indicate that they are identified with one another, and are chains of an everlasting cycle. In this perpetual blur, indeed, one seems to lose one's sense of time, and cannot really distinguish what is real from what is false. Ghosts seems to haunt the whole world and integral to that spatial illusion in *The Golden Cangue* is the spatial illusion that the daughter of Ch'i-ch'iao is "the spit and image of Ch'i-ch'iao."[33]

The two street scenes discussed about are typical of the many descriptive passages in *The Golden Cangue* which are juxtaposed with passages of another nature, namely, the dialogue portion. Inherent in the structure of *The Golden Cangue,* indeed, is the coexistence of these two kinds of passages. If dialogue, being speech, inevitably implies a time dimension, then the descriptive passages appear to move in another direction. One can never deny that there is always a sense of the passing of time in *The Golden Cangue.* However, the sense of timelessness as conveyed by the descriptive passages is so full that the pretensions of temporality are shattered. Through the interplay of time and timelessness, there eventually arises an architecture of order which largely transcends temporality. "Only through time time is conquered," says T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets,* succinctly expressing this modern temper.

The dialogue portion, nevertheless, serves still another function. If in line with Kestner's notion of "geometric spatiality,"[34] one views Ch'i-ch'iao as a "point" on a "plane" of society, then the dialogue portion as a whole is actually a scenic method on the part of the author to characterize Ch'i-ch'iao through juxtaposition of several scenes. Indeed, as Henry James asks: "What is incident but the illustration of character?"[35] While evolved through time, the individual dialogues, however, do not gain any significant meaning until seen in juxtaposition with one another. It is only through a thorough assessment of all the dialogue scenes that the roundness of Ch'i-ch'iao as a character fully emerges, and partial perception is avoided by grasping all the dialogue scenes in a totality. The historical time is, consequently, rendered invalid, if not completely abolished.

This reliance on a reading which transcends sequential time, moreover, is what casts the reader and the reading process in an extremely important light. In appreciating *The Golden Cangue,* the reader has to take in the various symbols, the multiple nuances of language, and filter them through his or her own mind. There is, as Wolfgang Iser points out, "a dialectical relationship between text, reader, and their interaction,"[36] and time itself is, eventually, reversible. In fact, Eileen Chang has meant to invite the reader to an active role through her invocation of the editorial "we" in the very first paragraph of *The Golden Cangue,* the success of which depends on the functioning of what Joseph Frank calls "reflective reference,"[37] i.e., the web of references of the several parts of a work. Frank's argument is that this is "the key to spatial form"[38] since it is by reflective reference that the spatial illusion is largely rendered possible through the simultaneous presence of the various elements of the work in the reader's consciousness.

Thus, through its use of many elements of the spatial arts, *The Golden Cangue* reveals a rapport with many modernist practices in literature. And because of its spatial form, moreover, the text reads as a "perpetual present."[39]

The Woman Warrior may be best revealed as a spatial autobiography. While it describes a period from girlhood through middle age, the five sections of the memoirs are juxtaposed and discontinuous, thus creating a synchronic sense of time. As we noted earlier, the narrator identifies her self through a pattern of alterity and similarity. She appears as two selves, autobiographer and protagonist, external observer and internal participant, and these duos are understood in relation to the *personae* of lover, swordswoman, shaman, abandoned wife, and neurotic child which separately dominate each of the five sections of the autobiography. Spatial form lends itself well to *The Woman Warrior* for the techniques of juxtaposition, discontinuity, and fragmentation allow for the exploration of two selves or aspects of self which is so typically a concern of autobiography. At the same time, with the exception of an emphasis on the incomplete self which distinguishes *The Woman Warrior* from the whole formally integrated world of *The Golden Cangue,* the spatial form of this contemporary autobiography allies it with modern fiction. Maxine Hong Kingston mixes the modes of myth and history, historical biography and poetic drama, dream and waking reality, the past and present. She juxtaposes in a discontinuous narrative metaphoric language and reportage, fairy tales of ancient China and factual accounts of daily life in a Chinese laundry in California, her training to be a victorious swordswoman in a world of fantasy and her desultory performance in elementary school.

Besides this subversion of sequence, modes and space and time which enhance the exploration of self in this particular type of autobiography, there are other features of spatial form which give the work continuity. The most important are the recurring illuminative moments of shock which serve to shatter a temporal orientation:

> To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear.[40]

The Woman Warrior is rich in "the language of impossible stories" which is the connective force in this spatial autobiography, and madness, eccentric behavior, vulgar colloquialisms, and violence are its leitmotifs, as in *The Golden Cangue.* The narrator hopes the village man who seduced her aunt was not "just a tits-and-ass man."[41] Her grandfather is said to have been:

> different from other people, "crazy ever since the little Jap bayoneted him in the head." He used to put his naked penis on the dinner table, laughing.[42]

Her parents in the dream world of an ancient fairy tale carve written Chinese characters of revenge on their daughter's back:

> My mother caught the blood and wiped the cuts with a cold towel soaked in wine. It hurt terribly – the cuts sharp; the air burning; the alcohol cold, then hot – pain so various . . . . If an enemy should flay me, the light would shine through my skin like lace.[43]

Her mother's story of being a midwife and delivering a baby born without an anus brings to the autobiographer's mind the violent practice of infanticide:

> "The midwife or a relative would take the back of a girl baby's head in her hand and turn her face into ashes," said my mother. "It was very easy." She never said she herself killed babies, but perhaps the holeless baby was a boy.[44]

The mother tells her daughter that she cut the frenum of her tongue so that she would not be tongue tied. It is a make believe "talk-story," but the narrator does not know it is false until she grows up. She speculates:

> . . . maybe she snipped it with a pair of nail scissors. I don't remember her doing it, only her telling me about it, but all during my childhood I felt sorry for the baby whose mother waited with scissors or knife in hand for it to cry – and then, when its mouth was wide open like a baby bird's, cut.[45]

In these "talk-stories" the incidence and language of violence coalesce, thus unifying the fragmented narrative with shock waves which dispel our sense of time.

In addition to the use of violent imagery, the spatial form of juxtaposed discontinuous narrative is linked by motifs which occur in different sections. The warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan, of the "White Tigers" section reappears as a paper doll an aunt brings as a gift from China for the Chinese-American children born in the United States. The daughter protagonist who goes off to the mountains to become a warrior woman is analogous to her mother who trains to be a doctor in "Shaman." The little girl who does marvelous somersaults in the elementary school yard in "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" and talks to the "adventurous people inside my head" is parallel to the magical heroine of "White Tigers."

The most commonly used technique of spatial form in *The Woman Warrior* is that of defamiliarization, especially through the subversion of narrative roles and the mixing of genres. In the final section of her autobiography, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," the autobiographer identifies her role as writer as that of a traditional knot-maker:

> Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker.[46]

The "cruel knot" that she ties through the medium of spatial form is the story of her complicated self. Every story that is told has many versions and a knot of many strands. In the section, "At the Western Palace," the autobiographer describes the encounter that takes place among her aunt, her aunt's unfaithful husband, and her mother in Los Angeles. Later the section appears to have been a biographical account by a brother who was a first hand observer. Not until the final section, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Ripe," do we discover that the autobiographical and biographical accounts were fictions. That section begins with a statement that undercuts the validity of the previous one: "What my brother actually said was . . . ." This is immediately followed by a clarification which contradicts the first one:

> In fact, it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her. His version of the

> story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs.[47]

This habit of being an "outlaw knot-maker," of twisting bare facts into myriad designs, is at the heart of this modern autobiography and is what constitutes its spatial form:

> "The difference between mad people and sane people," Brave Orchid explained to the children, "is that sane people have variety when they talk story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over."[48]

An aunt talks incessantly of the "Mexican ghosts" who are coming to kill her, while Maxine Hong Kingston tells numerous versions or "talk-stories" of the same incident. Not only are there various versions, there are varieties of approaches. In "No Name Woman," for example, the autobiographer tells the story of an anonymous aunt who bore an illegitimate child and killed herself, a story which her mother passed on with the admonition that she tell no one else.[49] By keeping silence, the author claims she has participated in the family's desire to punish her aunt. Haunted by her aunt's ghost, the writer devotes "pages and pages to her," but allows that "I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide . . . ."[50]

In "telling on her," Maxine Hong Kingston turns autobiography into biography and then into fiction. As in the account of her mother's training to be a doctor, or her aunt's visit to Los Angeles, she retells what she has heard, then speculates on what might have happened, and finally makes journalistic fact the stuff of imaginative fiction. "Perhaps," she wonders, her aunt encountered her lover in the fields.[51] "It could very well have been" that she was a wild woman.[52] Speculative language yields to fiction that has no basis in fact. The writer charges her aunt's lover with leading a raid against her aunt's family. She claims her aunt keeps the man's name to herself through her labor and suicide.[53] Delivery and death are described in graphic detail though here is no observer. In the fantasy of "White Tigers" Maxine Hong Kingston listens to her mother "talk-story" at bed time. There is a transitionless gap in the text, and suddenly she is following the call of a bird that flies over the roof and leads her to a land of blue oxen, blue dogs, and blue people where an old man and woman teach her to be a swordswoman, to grow bigger and smaller, to fly, and to become a female avenger.[54] Again without transition from dream to waking reality, she is back home. "My American life has been such a disappointment," she says, blandly juxtaposing the mythic and mimetic modes.[55]

From time to time, the writer subverts sequence and expectations of the role of the narrator by shifting point of view. The first person "I" becomes a third person distant observer. She calls her father "Brave Orchid's husband" and her mother "Brave Orchid" in "At the Western Palace." Distancing herself from her own autobiography, she writes the biography of someone she does not know. "None of Brave Orchid's children was happy like the two real Chinese babies who died," she notes in the voice of a third party, recording matter-of-factly the births and deaths of what were in fact two of her siblings in China.[56] The narrator herself is glimpsed through the consciousnes of her aunt, Moon Orchid. She appears to be:

> an oldest girl who was absent-minded and messy. She had an American name that sounded like "Ink" in Chinese. (Maxink?) "Ink!" Moon Orchid called out; sure enough, a girl smeared with ink said, "Yes?"[57]

Such is the teasing method of the writer who continually defamiliarizes autobiography and renders it biography and fiction.

Parallels between the novella, *The Golden Cangue,* and the autobiography, *The Woman Warrior* are numerous – the common subject matter of the relation between mothers and daughters in the context of inferior social status, mental illness as a response to that context and idiosyncratic behavior as a way of resisting control, and the use of language and "talk-story" as a weapon for empowerment, release and security. There are many differences as well. Eileen Chang is shaped by the Chinese literary tradition, especially the example of the *Dream of the Red Chamber,* in her writing of fiction, while Maxine Hong Kingston seems moved by the contemporary American consciousness of ethnic writers of autobiography. The common formal feature in these respective works of fiction and autobiography we have noted is that of spatial form. In both works we see that the spatial and temporal arts overlap. The juxtaposition and montage of scenes creates a spatial illusion in which a synchronic view either dominates the diachronic, or is in a dialectical relation. The sense of an everlasting cyclic movement is more felt in *The Golden Cangue,* while in *The Woman Warrior* we realize that a cycle is ended. Maxine Hong Kingston will not become her mother as does Ch'i-ch'iao's daughter, Ch'ang-an. In both works, but under very different guises, distinctions between the real and unreal are blurred. *The Woman Warrior* offers numerous versions of "talk-stories" by first and third person narrators. In *The Golden Cangue,* the grafting of street scenes and views from upper story windows blend the true and the false. *The Golden Cangue* differs in its unique use of dialogue as a spatial element, its syntactic complication to retard narrative and its timeless pictorial imagery. In *The Woman Warrior,* it is "the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly," rather than beautiful "Japanese sayonara words,"[58] the violent shock of language and episode which are the connective issue in a spatial illusion. Both worlds are haunted by ghosts, a blend of dream and daily mundane existence, and a mixture of myth and history.

Despite certain differences, it is the common ground of spatial from which indicates the blending of fiction and autobiography in these two works of twentieth century literature. Both writers share a concern for patterns in their writing and in the lives of protagonists, whether they be fictional characters or dramatic personifications of self. Anxiety about self is as central to the autobiography as it is to the novella. In contrast to *The Golden Cangue, The Woman Warrior* is directly self critical writing in which the author confronts the problem of the temporally bound self in relation to history, family and two cultures. Not only does she view the past from the perspective of the present, she looks forward to a future, whereas *The Golden Cangue* envisions an enternally recurring past which is certain.[59] We may see in the titles of these literary works an indication of their structure and meaning. Autobiography has been termed a metaphor of the self seeking completion.[60] "Woman Warrior" symbolizes a search for self-realization which is still unfinished when the autobiography closes. "Golden Cangue" not only points to the pain of greed. It signifies the ponderous weight of self and society in a finished world illuminated by spatial fiction.

Notes

1. 天下的男子都是一樣混賬。
   Chang Ai-ling, *Chin Suo Chi,* 金鎖記 , published in her *Collected Stories* (Taipei, 1968), p, 179. Subsequent references to original Chinese text are from this edition. English translation by Eileen Chang, *The Golden Cangue,* in Joseph S. M. Lau, C.

T. Hsia, Leo Ou-fan Lee, eds., *Modern Chinese Stories & Novellas, 1919-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 546.

2. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1977), pp. 54, 62.
3. "At the Western Palace," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 183.
4. C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction,* pp. 398, 407.
5. *The Golden Cangue,* Chang trans., p. 554.
   Collected Stories, p. 193:安慰是純粹精神上的，這裏却做了肉慾的代名詞。
6. *The Golden Cangue,* Chang trans., p. 530.
   Collected Stories, p. 150: 三十年前的上海，一個有月亮的晚上……我們也許沒趕上看見三十年前的月亮。
7. See James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical,* ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3-4. John Pilling, *Autobiography and Imagination: Stories in Self-Scrutiny* (London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-2.
8. For autobiography as a Western phenomenon, see Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography,* ibid., pp. 29-36. For two scholarly studies of autobiography in China, see Rodney L. Taylor, "The Centered Self: Religious Autobiography in the Neo-Confucian Tradition," in *The History of Religions* 17 (1978), 266-83; Pei-yi Wu, "Self-Examination and Confession of Sins in Traditional China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* 39 (1979), 5-38.
9. Robert F. Sayre, "Autobiography and the Making of America," in Olney, *Autobiography,* ibid., pp. 147, 166-7. William C. Spengemann claims that literary modernism is synonymous with autobiography. See his *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. xii.
10. James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment," op. cit., p. 23.
11. Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in Olney, *Autobiography,* pp. 210-1.
12. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality." Forthcoming in *Anthropology and the Study of Religions,* ed. Frank E. Reynolds & Robert Moore.
13. See Roger J. Porter & H. R. Wolf, *The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopt., 1973), p. 18.
14. Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography,* p. 73.
15. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 307-8. For autobiography as a combination of imagination and fact, see Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).
16. Louis A. Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography,* pp. 270-5, 295. Besides being a dramatic performance, *The Woman Warrior* is a poetic autobiography. The self is revealed by way of symbol, dream, *personae,* and the fictive mode. See William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography,* op. cit., p. 109.
17. Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," op. cit., p. 45.
18. William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography,* pp. 85, 98.
19. *The Woman Warrior,* p. 6.

20. For the two concepts of self in autobiography and the wearing of masks, see Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 5-7.
21. See John Pilling, *Autobiography and Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 2-3.
22. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *Sewanee Review*, 5: 3 (1945), 221-40, 433-56, 643-53, For a collection of subsequent theoretical and critical articles, see *Spatial Form in Narrative*, ed. Jeffrey R. Smitten & Ann Daghistany (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1981).
23. For critical views of the spatial form approach, see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Philip Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," in his *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).
24. Joseph A. Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p. 13.
25. Jeffrey R. Smitten, "Introduction: Spatial Form and Narrative Theory," in *Spatial Form in Narrative*, op. cit., p. 15.
26. *The Goden Cangue*, Chang trans., p. 530.
    Collected Stories, p. 150: 三十年前的上海，一個有月亮的晚上····
27. Some random examples are illustrative:
    Collected Stories, p. 151: 鳳蕭······笑道：「現在顏色衣服不大有人穿了······。」

    p. 158. 她「七巧」就說：「喲！您不知道現在的女孩子跟您從前做女孩子時候的女孩子，哪兒能够打比呀？」
28. *The Golden Cangue*, Chang trans., pp. 543-44.
    Collected Stories, pp. 174-75:

    七巧低着頭，沐浴在光輝裏，細細的音樂，細細的喜悅······這些年了，她跟他捉迷藏似的，只是近不得身，原來還有今天！可不是，這半輩子已經完了——花一般的年紀已經過去了。人生就是這樣的錯綜複雜，不講理。當初她爲什麽嫁到姜家來？爲了錢麽？不是的，爲了要遇見季澤，爲了命中註定她要和季澤相愛。她微微抬起臉來，季澤立在她跟前，兩手合在她扇子上，面頰貼在她扇子上。他也老了十年了，然而人究竟還是那個人呵！他難道是哄她麽？他想她的錢——她賣掉她的一生換來的幾個錢？僅僅這一轉念便使她暴怒起來。就算她錯怪了他，他爲她吃的苦抵得過她爲他吃的苦麽？好容易她死了心了，他又來撩撥她，她恨他，他還在看着她。他的眼睛——雖然隔了十年，人還是那個人呵！就算他是騙她的，遲一點兒發現不好麽？即使明知是騙人的，他太會演戲了，也跟眞的差不多罷？

29. Kestner designates this to be a particular kind of spatiality – that of the "virtual," by which he means "the relation of scene to painting . . . the connection of characterization to sculptural volume, and the clear nexus of novelistic structure to architectural runctional form." See *The Spatiality of the Novel*, op. cit., p. 11.
30. Melvin Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness: a Study in Literary Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 5. Friedman sees this to be one of the devices possible within stream-of-consciousness fiction.
31. *The Golden Cangue*, Trans. Eileen Chang, p. 532.
    Collected Stories, p. 154.

    天就快亮了，那扁扁的下弦月，低一點，低一點，大一點，像赤金的臉盆，沉了下去，天是森冷的蟹殼青，天底下黑漆漆的只有些矮樓房，因此一望望得很遠。地平線上的曉色，一層綠、一層黃、又一層紅，如同切開的西瓜—

一是太陽要上來了。漸漸馬路上有了小車與塲車轆轆推動。

32. *The Golden Cangue,* trans. Eileen Chang, p. 545.
Collected Stories, pp. 177-78.

    玻璃窗的上角隱隱約約反映出弄堂裏一個巡警的縮小的影子，晃着膀子踱過去。一輛黃包車靜靜在巡警身上輾過。小孩把袍子掖在袴腰裏，一路踢着球，奔出玻璃的邊緣。綠色的郵差騎着自行車，複印在巡警身上，一溜烟掠過。都是些鬼，多年前的鬼，多年後的沒投胎的鬼……什麽是眞的，什麽是假的？

33. *The Golden Cangue,* Chang trans., p. 548.
Collected Stories, p. 183: 誰都說她是活脫的一個七巧。
34. Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel,* op. cit., p. 33.
35. Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The American Tradition in Literature,* Vol II, ed. Sculley Bradley, et al. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1974), pp. 591-92.
36. Woflgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. x.
37. Cited in "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," by Jeffrey R. Smitten, in *Spatial Form in Narrative,* op. cit., p. 21.
38. Smitten, p. 20.
39. Roland Barthes. S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), p. 5. According to his distinction between the "readerly" text and the "writerly" text, it is in the "writerly" text that the reader can function actively.
40. "Shaman," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 102.
41. "No Name Woman," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 11.
42. "No Name Woman," *The Woman Warrior,* p.12.
43. "White Tigers, *The Woman Warrior,* p. 41.
44. "Shaman," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 101.
45. "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 190.
46. "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," p. 190.
47. "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," p. 189.
48. "At the Western Palace," *The Woman Warrior,* p. 184.
49. "No Name Woman," p. 3.
50. "No Name Woman," p. 19.
51. "No Name Woman," p. 7.
52. "No Name Woman," p. 9.
53. "No Name Woman," p. 13.
54. "White Tigers," pp. 23-26.
55. "White Tigers," p. 54.
56. "At the Western Palace," p. 153.
57. "At the Western Palace," p. 152.
58. "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," p. 199.
59. For autobiography as confrontation with temporality, see Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience,* op. cit., pp. 11-15, 18.
60. James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 48-50.

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