



## The Fifth Book of Peace

By Maxine Hong Kingston

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## **The Fifth Book of Peace By Maxine Hong Kingston Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In September 1991, Kingston (The Woman Warrior; China Men; etc.) drove toward her Oakland, Calif., home after attending her father's funeral. The hills were burning; she unwittingly risked her life attempting to rescue her novel-in-progress, *The Fourth Book of Peace*. Nothing remained of the novel except a block of ash; all that remained of her possessions were intricate twinings of molten glass, blackened jade jewelry and the chimney of what was once home to her and her husband. This work retells the novel-in-progress (an autobiographical tale of Wittman Ah Sing, a poet who flees to Hawaii to evade the Vietnam draft with his white wife and young son); details Kingston's harrowing trek to find her house amid the ruins; accompanies the author on her quest to discern myths regarding the Chinese Three Lost Books of Peace and, finally, submits Kingston's remarkable call to veterans of all wars (though Vietnam plays the largest role) to help her convey a literature of peace through their and her writings. Kingston writes in a panoply of languages: American, Chinese, poetry, dreams, mythos, song, history, hallucination, meditation, tragedy—all are invoked in this complex stream-of-consciousness memoir, which questions repeatedly and intrinsically: Why war? Why not peace? The last war on Iraq and the current one meld here, as do wars thousands of years old. Complicated, convoluted, fascinating and, in the final section, poignant almost beyond bearability, this work illuminates one writer's experience of war and remembrance while elevating a personal search to a cosmic quest for truth. This is vintage Kingston: agent provocateur, she once again follows her mother's dictate to "educate the world."

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From [The New Yorker](#)

When, fourteen years ago, Kingston embarked on a sequel to her delightful novel "Tripmaster Monkey," she called it "The Fourth Book of Peace," echoing a half-remembered Chinese legend about Three Books of Peace. But the manuscript was destroyed in a fire—a suggestive occurrence to Kingston, because the books in the legend were also burned. Here she re-creates her lost fictional narrative and sets it alongside an account of her life after the fire, so that the Vietnam-era doings of her antic hero, Wittman Ah Sing, who moves to Hawaii to evade the draft, are juxtaposed with her own experience teaching writing workshops for veterans of Vietnam and other wars. The book is rich in empathy and moral conviction, but Kingston is such an exuberant storyteller that fans may regret that the fictional part remains unfinished.

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From [Booklist](#)

Revered memoirist, fiction writer, and "woman warrior" Kingston's long-awaited new book begins in 1991 when she and her family perform fire rites for her recently deceased father on the same day that a forest fire consumes her Oakland home, taking with it the only copy of the manuscript of a novel titled *The Fourth Book of Peace*, which was inspired by the ancient Chinese tale of three legendary Books of Peace deliberately burned by the powers-that-be. *The Fifth Book of Peace*, a radiant quartet of discrete sections rich in myth, metaphysics, social critique, and story, grew out of Kingston's struggle to come to terms with her daunting losses, and to transform her suffering into a new understanding of the suffering of everyone who survives violent upheaval and tragedy, especially in war. "Fire" is an intense report on the inferno. "Paper" recounts her search for the original Books of Peace. "Water" is a compelling and piquant novel about a Chinese American draft resister who leaves Berkeley for Hawaii during the Vietnam War. And "Earth" is a profoundly moving chronicle of the writing workshops Kingston organizes for war veterans. Wise, warm, empathic, and spellbinding, Kingston grapples with the spiritual toll of war and the elusiveness of peace in this many-faceted and involving spiritual meditation on the healing power of story and the challenge of

acting on one's beliefs. *Donna Seaman*  
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