

Contemporary Literature

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Good morning, so we continue with our reading of the Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan. And in today's lecture, the keywords as you know some of it we have already seen earlier. So, Chinese-American identities and the duality, the split between the identities. Of course, generational gap that you are talking about in our earlier class and mother-daughter relationships especially in American context. Heterogeneity, this is another an extension of identity. We were talking about hybridity, multiplicity, heterogeneity.

So, all these constructs, they get subsumed under the broader concept of identity. Then, the Joy Luck Club as a postmodernist text which is very extremely important play, novel which appeared in the last, I mean during the last two decades. So, of course, it is, it belongs to this category. And then, the idea of meta-narrative, the technique of meta-narrative as present in the Joy Luck Club.

In the last class, we were talking about how the narrative is interwoven with several stories. Every section, there are four sections in the Joy Luck Club and every section, each section begins with an epigraph. Each section has a story, four stories told by the daughters and the mothers. So, what is a meta-narrative? So, it is a part of, it is a construct of postmodernism, it is a trope of postmodernism. So, as Lyotard says in his Jean-Francois Lyotard in Postmodern Condition, a text which appeared in 1979. So, he says that a key concept is meta-narrative in postmodern condition. So, what is a meta-narrative? It is an overarching mythic narrative, which individuals and societies tell, in order to situate their particular time and place within the context of a larger story. So, it is an over arching mythic narrative, which individuals and societies tell, in order to situate their particular time and place, within the context of a larger story. The idea is to give their stories a deeper significance. therefore, the importance of the epigraph that precedes each section.

And as we were talking, they are extremely universal in nature. They are not particularly related to any, any, and of course, there are Chinese, all the mythology and

all the legends of China are captured in those epigraphs, but still they are universal in nature. For example, in 26 malignant gates, we were just talking about, mother asks the daughter, do not go outside the gate, and then the daughter meets with an accident as soon as she steps out. I am reading you this epigraph from American translation, where the mother says, and the mother tells her daughter, you cannot put mirrors at the foot of the bed, all your marriage happiness will bounce back and turn the opposite way. So, this is mythology.

A modern mind would not accept such things. You cannot put a mirror in front of your marital bed, otherwise all your conjugal blessings will bounce back at you, you would not find peace. So, well, that is the only place it fits, said the daughter, irritated that her mother saw bad omens in everything. She had heard these warnings all her life. So, daughter says that, you know, this is my mother.

She sees bad omens in, she reads bad omens in everything. So, I have had such warnings all my life. The mother frowned, lucky, I can fix it for you, and she pulled out the guilt edged mirror she had brought, she had bought at the prince club last week. It was her house warming present. She leaned it against the headboard on top of the two pillows.

You hang it here. The mirror sees that mirror, multiply your peach blossom luck. So, mirror will look at a mirror. So, put a mirror in order to counter that particular mirror, put another mirror in front of it. So, mirror and mirror between two mirrors.

So, now, this is extremely, I mean, I am sure that Amy Tan was thinking of something like this, you know, a meta narrative and the entire idea of mirroring, which is so important in postmodernist literature. So, I will also introduce you to this construct or this idea of Mies or beam. So, this involves the paradoxical reproduction within the fictional world of the fictional world, reproduction of fictional world within fiction. So, fiction within fiction, which mirrors. So, you see how cleverly she intervenes this mirror legend, mirror within mirror.

So, she puts two mirrors. They will, the reflection will be one mirror will reflect what the other mirror is showing. So, this is what she is talking about. Amy Tan is talking about Mies or beam. And I mean, this is like, you know, is a visual experience of standing between two mirrors, seeing an infinite reproduction of one's image, it is believed to bring luck and this technique is called Mies or beam.

Through that legend, you look at the way she somehow connects a Chinese mythology, a Chinese legend that you should never have only one mirror at the foot of your bed with

a postmodernist idea. So, mirror within mirror. Yeah, alright. So, we will now look at two kinds. I think you have the text with you.

Just go to two kinds, page 132. And, this is the story of Jing Mei Wu. As I was telling you, there are four daughters, four mothers and two kinds is the story of Jing Mei Wu. It begins like, my mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. Now, what are we talking about? We have great American dream.

You could be anything in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich.

You could become instantly famous. Of course, you can be prodigy too. You can be best anything. What does auntie Lindo know? Her daughter, she is only best tricky. The reference is to Beverly Jeong who is extremely good.

She is a child prodigy. We were talking about a national chess champion. Now, there is also competition between the mothers. So, they are not as harmless innocent beings. They are extremely competitive, critical and they love to boast about their daughters. So, Waverly's mother boasts about her daughter's chess skills.

And, Jing Mei Wu's mother wants her to become or come on par with Waverly. So, there is a competition between mothers. If her daughter is doing so well, why cannot my daughter do as well? After all, we are in America. Here there are no hierarchies. Here you can be anything you want.

So, living the American dream through her daughter. And then, also look at the language. The language we were talking about is the big barrier. It is a big source of barrier between mothers and daughters between two generations.

You can be best anything. What does auntie Lindo know? Her daughter, she is only best tricky. So, not very good English, but she is just about able to communicate with her daughter. The daughter has always looked down upon her mother's English. She is ashamed in several ways. America was where all my mother's hopes lay.

She had come here in 1949 after losing everything in China, her mother and father, her family home, her first husband and two daughters, twin baby girls, but she never looked back with regret. There were so many ways for things to get better. So, see this is another trope of Asian American literature, always hoping for the best because the worst is behind us. So, America is a place where things will get better. America is a land of

infinite hope and promise.

So, all this is reflected here. So, now, Frederick Jameson says, you know, some of you are familiar with the theories of this postmodernist theories. Frederick Jameson who says that postmodern artists cannot invent new perspectives and new modes of expressions. Instead, they operate as bricoleurs. Are you familiar with this term? Bricoleurs, recycling previous works and styles. Linda Hutcheon, another postmodern theorist, she also talks about collage.

She talks about pastiche, bringing together several disparate elements in order to form a completely new work. This is what we are going to see here. Now, she wants to give a new identity. She wants to make her daughter into something which she is not. So, now, we look at this concept of bricoleur, a pastiche, bringing several parts together and giving a new identity to her American daughter.

So, we did not immediately pick the right kind of prodigy. See prodigy, this is very ironical. Do not you think so? Because mother and daughter, they did not immediately pick on some kind of prodigy. This is there is an inherent contradiction in this sentence. How can you pick and choose to become a prodigy? Either you are one or you are not.

You are born with a talent. Maybe you can spell the way you know. You have all these American children who can spell long words and all. They have competitions on spelling competitions and all. So, they are born with that. They are trained and their skills are honed.

But in order to become a prodigy, you have to be born with talent. But here, we decided what kind of prodigy should I be because we have to compete with Waverly who was a natural born chess player. At first, my mother thought I could be a Chinese Shirley Temple. Shirley Temple is a celebrated child actor. She used to star in all those major films with the wish.

She was a crowd puller. People would go to watch only Shirley Temple because they and she would be like you know, she had curly wavy hair almost like novels and she would have a smile like that and she could sing and she could dance. She was known as a prodigy. So, the mother says let us turn our child into a Shirley Temple, a TV star, a movie child star and then they give her that kind of hairstyle, but it did not suit her. And then, what happens on page 133? You look like Negro Chinese.

You do not even look American. You do not know Shirley Temple by a long shot. You just look something else. Now, the instructor of the beauty training school had to lop of

these soggy clumps to make my hair even again. Peter Pan is very popular these days. From Shirley Temple, now you are given a Peter Pan kind of a haircut.

You know who is Peter Pan, the boy who would never grow up and he had that straight blunt cut kind of haircut. So, from Shirley Temple who has a curly mop, beautiful mop on her head, now you are Peter Pan, but still you know a famous kid. So, those were the ambitions. In fact, in the beginning, I was just as excited as my mother, maybe even more so. I pictured this prodigy part of me as many different images trying each one on for size.

I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtains waiting to hear the right music that would send me floating on my tiptoes. I was like the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger crying with holy indignity. I was Cinderella stepping from my pumpkin carriage with a sparkly cartoon music filling the air. In all of my imaginings, I was filled with a sense that I would soon become perfect.

You get it? Bricoleur, she is all these things. She wanted to be all these because the desire to be famous and successful was so intense the idea that anyone can be famous and successful in America. You know everyone has equal opportunity. So, why not? Any comments that you would like to make here? And then, immediately after that, every night after dinner, my mother and I would sit at Formica kitchen table. She would present new tests taking her examples from stories of amazing children she had read in Ripley's Believe It or Not or Good Housekeeping, Reader's Digest and a dozen other magazines. So, what are these magazines? I mean Reader's Digest, Good Housekeeping, Believe It or Not, Ripley's.

What kind of magazines are these? Magazines which mostly housewives read and also they have an ideology. All these magazines, they have an ideology. They are not radical readings. What are they? They conform -

Yes, very kitschy reading. Kitschy is like a stereotypical, reinforcing the stereotypical image of good life. What is a good life? I mean my parents are very fond of collecting the old issues of Reader's Digest. So, in my family, we have never ever thrown away any issue of Reader's Digest. So, the other day, I was going through and I showed my son Reader's Digest from 1972, and you know down the years, you have the same kind of article, Good Housekeeping. My mother was very fond of reading Good Housekeeping also.

This is the way a house should be kept. So, it should be spic and span. Everything should be neat and orderly in its place. So, they all, these magazines strive to create a

certain kind of image of an idealized utopian image. What an ideal woman should be, an ideal family should be. So, all Reader's Digest, they give you know how to save your marriage for example.

So, marriages have to be maintained, you know the sanctity of family, these things have to be maintained, how to become a role model for your children. You know we still have those kinds of articles and they were still there in 1960s also. So, that is what. So, this, I mean here Amy Tan is actually, in other words, she is like you know, it is a very ironic kind of a statement. To read these magazines and then aspire to become, keep these models, keep these magazines as kind of role models and aspire to become what these magazines you know tell us to do, which is unrealistic.

Page 134, the first night she brought out a story about a three year old boy who knew the capitals of all the states and even most of the European countries. So, my mother asked me looking at the magazine story, what is the capital of Finland? All I knew was the capital of California because Sacramento was the name of the street we lived on in a Chinatown. Nairobi, I guessed, saying the most foreign word I could think of. I checked to see if that was possible one way to pronounce Helsinki before showing me the answer. So, capital of Finland is and the child does not know, but what is being implied here that she is being forced to turn into something that she is not.

She is not an, she is like most of us, you know, a good kid who is willing to work hard, that is it, but she is not a prodigy. She is not born with some kind of an exceptional talent, which is what her mother wants her to be. So, this again gives birth or gives rise to that. We are talking about the conflict in mother-daughter relationships. Then Waverly Jones' story, Four Directions also we saw how Waverly's talents are curved.

She could not become, she could not reach great heights because of her mother's constant mourning and trying to take credit for her success. Although in a where, you know, she does not mean bad, she does not mean anything wrong, but mothers being what they are and daughters, they always fail to understand their mothers. So, here too the mother is doing her best to make her daughter successful, but it is not possible. Skip down, I mean, just come down a bit. The tests got harder, multiplying numbers in my head, finding the queen of hearts in a deck of cards, trying to stand on my head without using my hands, predicting the daily temperatures in Los Angeles, New York and London.

So, all these exercises were given to her, so that she could appear on TV and become a star and that is what happens usually, you know, you have child stars who can, who can remember, you know, rattle of capitals of all the countries, major countries of the world

spellings and all and this is one way to get famous. And after seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside of me began to die. I hated the test. She raised hopes and the raised hopes and failed expectations. Before going to bed that night, I looked in the mirror above the bathroom sink and when I saw only my face staring back and that it would always be this ordinary face, I began to cry, such a sad, ugly girl.

So, all these raised expectations, what did they do? She could not achieve anything, but it instilled in her a lack of self-esteem, whatever respect she had for herself, even that got eroded. Page 135, 135, two or three months had gone by without any mention of my being a prodigy again and then one day my mother was watching the ad salaven show on TV. What is, what was the ad salaven show? Ad salaven is also one, you know, like Oprah. He was like Oprah Winfrey, a major TV host, a talk show person. Who would bring guests and exceptionally talented people and introduce them to the world? And on ad salaven show, she saw a Chinese boy beautifully playing a piano, playing the piano.

So, the mother said, now we have got it. You are going to be a pianist. Now the family is poor, you know, they do not have that kind of money, but somehow they skim through and buy, get a piano for themselves and the mother who is a cleaning, who works as a cleaning lady in American houses, she in exchange for, you know, her services, she asks a tutor to come and train her daughter in playing the piano. So the, I mean, you have, we have to see the both, you know, the, the two sides, the lens to which a mother would go to make her child successful. In her child's eyes, what her mother is doing is just raising expectations and then since she is unable to fulfill those expectations, her self-esteem gets eroded and she blames her mother for this, that you have turned me into a mess, but they do not notice the hard work, the sacrifices parents go through, you know, help them achieve these things.

Page 136, page 136 is the piano episode. Why do not you like me the way I am? She asks her mother. I am not a genius. I cannot play the piano and even if I could, I would not go on TV if you paid me a million dollars.

My mother slapped me. Who ask you be genius? Only ask you be your best. For you sake, you think I want you be genius? What for? Who ask you? So ungrateful. I heard her mutter in Chinese. If she had as much talent as she has temper, she would be famous now. A typical mother's outburst, she all, you know, she does not even appreciate what I am doing for her.

No talent and not even disciplines are enough. If only she would discipline herself, she would become famous now, but she does not want to. So, now, see, we have been looking at this, this kind of, you know, narrative technique throughout, telling stories.

So, all mothers, all daughters have a story to tell and as framed by the epigraph. So, all these, so storytelling becomes a major theme in the Joy Luck Club and perhaps it is a very, it is a major theme in most Asian American writings also. Story telling, stories within stories, perhaps some of you are familiar with the kite runner by Khalid Hosseini.

If you have read, I am not talking about the movie, the movie does not come anywhere near the novel. Have you read the novel? Have you? Good. How many stories are there within the story, within the novel? Yeah, and also Amir, Amir and Hassan. So, Amir from the beginning, he is a story teller.

He likes to construct stories. So, he likes to read stories from 2001 Arabian Nights and all. So, stories within stories, but and he also tells stories from the Koran, if you remember, sacrificial lamb and then you have Hassan's story, who is used as a sacrificial, you know, kind of, you know, symbol for this family. So, story within the story structure and what does it do? It gives a deeper significance to the locals, to the main story. So, one theme, recurring theme in Asian American writing is one is translating language.

It becomes a very major theme. American dream, as we have been talking, that is an extremely important theme in most Asian American writings and then story telling, of course, you do not have the novel. So, page 24. Look at page 24. What good stories, you got it? Second, third paragraph.

What good stories, stories spilling out all over the place. We almost laugh to death. A rooster that ran into the house is screeching on top of dinner bowls, the same bowls that held him quietly in pieces the next day and one about a girl who wrote love letters for two friends who loved the same man and a silly foreign lady who fainted on a toilet when fire crackers went off next to her. People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many people in the city were starving. The mother story, as mother as remembered by Jing-me-woo.

This is the first story when she introduces us to the idea of the Joy Luck Club. Joy Luck Club is nothing, what is the meaning of this title? These four mothers who are all immigrants, first generational Chinese American ladies, they have very few materialistic possessions, material possessions. They have very few belongings. They have all lost whatever they had. They have lost their families. Some of them have lost their husbands and children during the war and out of desperation, they have come in hope of making it big or making it successful in America.

When they had nothing, they formed a small club, a group called the Joy Luck Club. Club is of course, getting together of some people with the same purpose. What is the

purpose? To bring joy and to bring luck. So, that is the meaning of the, it is a very beautiful title to give a novel, the Joy Luck Club because these four women who had gone through so much of suffering, both personal and all kinds, they have seen the war, they have seen calamities, terrible tragedies, deaths in ruins and all, lost everything, but still they have hopes and America symbolizes hope. So, they have come together and form a club called the Joy Luck Club, where every week they come together and they cook.

All, you see, cooking is another major motif in most Asian American writings. So, these women pride themselves on the culinary skills. So, the idea that every week they will meet, they will tell each other stories, they will cook and they will bring special dishes cooked with great love and affection for each other and then they will discuss cooking recipes. What does it do? They also play, this is also important, they play a game of poker. What does it all do? Playing games, telling stories, cooking, what does it do? A sense of community, inculcates a sense of community and also distracts them from their everyday miseries.

So, therefore, the Joy Luck Club. So, at the beginning they say, you know, as Jing-mei Wu remembers her dead mother, Jing-mei Wu is also the protagonist of two kinds, a child who is being forced to become a great pianist, but who could not. Now, she is reminiscing on her mother's life and she says that this is what my mother told me. Oh, we used to tell each other stories, we used to cook. People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many people in the city were starving eating rats and later, they are talking about China. Many people in the city were starving eating rats and later the garbage that the poorest rats used to feed on, but we still had hope and on page 25, it is given clearly that hope was our only joy and that is how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck.

So, very important feature coming together, telling stories and cooking together, feeding each other and that somehow gave them the strength to meet the, you know, the demands of everyday life. So, the life they left behind and when they came to America, also the courage to go on in a new land. So, she, Jing-Mei Wu tells us that whenever my mother would talk about her native land in China, which is called, the place is called Kuilin. So, she says whenever she would tell me the stories, the story would get better and better.

So, it was not always the same. So, she would begin the same way, you know, this is the story, but then it would change and with every retelling and telling, the story would change and the end would become happier and happier. So, the story became happier. So, it also talks about, what does it tell you about? The healing power of storytelling, you know, it is there in, you know, the healing power of especially oral storytelling, oral

tradition. If you look carefully, this is a common motive that runs through most Asian American writings. So, it, it almost appears to the daughter that in retelling happy stories, in a way, the mother who is no longer there, her name is Su Yeon, she is repeatedly choosing her own happiness because if you are happy, if you think happy, perhaps it influences.

It brings you luck. If you think tragic, if you think only bad things, this is, this is what you are going to end up as, but here they choose to tell happy stories, so that it may bring some, you know, it may affect their own stories, their own lives. We will move on to page 138 now. Page 138, Two Kinds Continued. So, now, she is being trained to become an expert pianist. Over the next year, I practiced like this dutifully in my own way and then one day I heard my mother and her friend Lindo Jeong, both talking in a loud bragging tone of voice.

It was after church and I was leaning against the brick wall, wearing a dress with stiff white petticoats. Auntie Lindo's daughter Waverly, who was about my age, was standing farther down the wall about 5 feet away. I thought she was a snooty. Waverly Jeong had gained a certain amount of fame as Chinatown's littlest Chinese chess champion.

Now, look at the alliteration also, there is almost music there. So, Waverly was snooty, she was also extremely pretty, all things she was famous, she was a prodigy, everything that Jingmi Wu was not and her mother sort of, you know, although she loved her daughter very extremely deeply, obviously, but she wants her daughter to become another Waverly. And, perhaps this is the sense of rivalry and competition that makes Jingmi Wu hate Waverly so much, even as kids they hated each other. She bring home too many trophy, lamented Auntie Lindo that Sunday. All day she play chess, all day I have no time, do nothing, but dust off her winnings.

She threw a scolding look at Waverly, who pretending not to see, who pretended not to see her. You lucky you do not have this problem, said Auntie Lindo with a sigh to my mother. So, it is a sense of, you know, fake modesty, you would see, she makes me work so hard, I have to polish the trophies that she brings home. And my mother is squared her shoulders and bragged, our problem worser than yours. If we ask, Jingmi wash dish, she hear nothing but music, it is like you cannot stop this natural talent.

And, right then I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride. So, this is what, and this is something which is very common among most mothers and daughters, you know, an aunt saying something, an aunt bragging about your cousin. And you see, you know, my mother does not love me after all, she likes the other child for me, which is not really the case. Your parents have great wishes and ambitions for you and therefore, they do

this competition, although they do not realize that how hurtful they may be through, you know, these comparisons. But the fact remains that they love you deeply and therefore, they are making such comparisons.

We will go, move on to now, page 142. We are told that she appeared in a concert where she performed extremely badly, she just went totally off key and then she got very bad reviews, nobody liked her performance and that was the end, she stopped, she did not want to continue her piano practice. So, page 142. You want me to become someone that I am not, I sobbed, I will never be the kind of daughter you want me to be. Only two kinds of daughters she shouted in Chinese, those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind, only one kind of daughter can live in this house, obedient daughter.

So, this is another trope of Chinese, you know, culture, children have to be obedient. You cannot have, although you are in a, Jingmi Wu, definitely she is the second generation Chinese, she is born and brought up in China, she speaks, sorry, in America, she speaks perfect English, she is imbued in American culture, you cannot force her to be what you want her to become, but that is the Chinese culture. And what Amy Tan is trying to tell us is that, you know, somehow mothers know best, whether it is a Chinese mother or an American mother or whatever, but mothers know best. However deeply one may resent them at the moment for their cruelties, little acts of, you know, criticisms and cruelties, but they know best. It was as if I had said the magic word, I am sorry, and I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point, I wanted to see it spill over and that is when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about. Then I wish I had never been born, I shouted, I wish I were dead like them, it was as if I had said the magic words and her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack and she begged out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless.

Now, what do you make of this? She knows, her mother has already told her that she has a back story, you know, that mother had the past, she was once married to a Chinese man in back home in China, in Qilin and after the outbreak of the war, she lost her husband who died in that war and the babies, you know, she could not bring them, somehow she could not bring the twin daughters that she had. So, they were being raised by someone, but she could not trace them back, so she lost her babies forever and now, Jingmi Wu can hurt her mother, she can strike her mother back in the only way she knows, by referring to those lost babies and she said that, I hope, I mean, your babies for all I know are dead and I hope I am dead as well and that sort of, you know, finishes the mother off. Why I mean, you know, the idea is very clear that for a mother nothing is more important than her children, whether it is the child who is with her right now or

whether the children she has lost, whatever tragedy, but a mother would always love her children so much and that is the best way to attack a mother, you know, you attack her children and that is it. So, all her ambitions are not for herself, but for her child, but the child does not understand that. So, out of venom, out of some sense of vindicating herself, she sees these cruel words to her and then, mother, how is she described? Like a small brown leaf, thin and brittle, which can easily be blown away and broken.

Then many years pass, the mother is already dead and then, we meet her. A few years ago, it is on page 143, she offered to give me the piano for my 30th birthday. I had not played in all those years. I saw the offer as a sign of forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed. No, this your piano, always your piano, you only one can play.

You pick up fast, said my mother, as if she knew this was certain. You have natural talent, you could be ingenious if you want to. No, I could not. You just not trying, said my mother and she was neither angry nor sad. She said it as if to announce a fact that could not be disproved, take it.

So, this is how you know this particular chapter ends. Although the mother has given her several things, Chinese silk dresses, jewelry and all, but this piano becomes a symbol of their life together. This piano symbolize something that gave great hope to both the mother and the daughter, but out of some sense of foolish pride or you know sense of rebellion. Most of us rebel against our parents without actually understanding the depth to which we could be hurting them.

But now, in her thirties, she realizes that her mother meant so well for her. Her mother wished her so well. Her mother had some aspirations for her and therefore, it was not out because she wanted something for herself, but she still connects this piano. They never sold it off, although it is an expensive piece of property. So, material possessions also acquire a life in the novel. At one place, you will find when in the last class, I was talking about that marriage where husbands and wife, they maintain separate accounts.

The mother, the Chinese mother comes to that household and ask that this is unacceptable. Husbands and wife should not live, lead this kind of life where accounts are so clearly demarcated. She has to pay for this and he has to pay for that. And they maintain such records. So, why do that? And then, the chapter ends, the story ends with breaking down of a, breaking into pieces of a flower vase.

The flower vase becomes a symbol. So, now, the mother says now it has fallen down and it cannot be repaired. That is not just a flower vase that is being discussed. It is the death of a relationship. Mother is telling her daughter, leave this man. Your relationship

is beyond repair and that is what she does.

She leaves him because she says I cannot go on like this, every day sitting, adding, subtracting, calculating, maintaining. Where is the marriage? Where is love in this relationship? The husband does not understand and the flower vase breaks into pieces. So, that becomes a symbol. Piano becomes a symbol of something. The chess board that Waverly in her foolish pride has a, you know, jettison, her mother preserves that and that later becomes a symbol of, you know, creating, building the bridge between them.

We were also talking about the duality identities and dualities in the Joy Luck Club. I want you to, I will read out a passage from the novel. This is the mother talking. I wanted my children to have the best combination, American circumstances and Chinese character.

That is the best combination. Chinese character, most Chinese, Asian Americans, anyway, you know, they have this sense. The Japanese believe they have the best character.

The Indians too. So, do the Chinese. The Chinese character is the best character. They are, they have this sense of winning. They have this sense of pride. They have a culture that dates back thousands of years ago, but American circumstances are also important. You have to have that kind of opportunity and our kind of character. So, the deadly combination could be the mixing of the two.

How could I know these things, these two things do not mix and this is what the mothers realize. This is what I hoped for that with our character and with American circumstances, you know, things could only get better and better. How was I to know that these things do not go together? Chinese character, that means, Chinese identity cannot remain pure in American circumstances. That culture would not, although we would love to, you know, in an ideal world, we would love to have that sense of continuation, the same sense of caliber, but that is not possible in American circumstances.

You become an American, you assimilate, you just, you do not continue the tradition. If you are born poor here, it is no lasting shame. In America, nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you. She learned these things, but I could not teach her about Chinese character. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face, so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities, why Chinese thinking is best. So, this is what the mother feels, but the daughter, the Chinese character is that keep your feelings hidden, do not show your expressions and feelings on

your face, but that is American trait. They are very transparent, they show everything, their hopes, their joys, their anger, the tempers, everything is extremely visible, not in China, but how do I teach these things to my daughter.

She has developed an American character, which is a loss. So, there is always a sense of, you know, instead of continuing, she has lost the tradition and culture. So, if you look at now coming to this point, *Joy Luck* by Joy Luck Club as a post modernist novel, so what are the, one is of course, the fragmented writing style, the fragmented narrative, the non-linear narrative. We were talking about it because stories go back and forth in space and time. Some parts take place in China, even Jingmi Wu takes a trip to, makes a trip to China in order to trace her, you know, those stepsisters, which her mother always, you know, her mother used to pine for those babies.

So, when the mother is dead, Jingmi Wu takes a trip to China and tries to locate the kids. So, the story travels between two places and two times. Also hyperlink, sense of hyperlink, you know, you have several stories running together. So, all stories, all daughters and all mothers, they have a story to tell. So, you have this sense of, you know, several parallel stories running.

So, it is difficult to keep track of you, you know, what story are you reading, unless and until you are very careful and attentive. So, that is true of all postmodernist literature. You have to, if you lose track, then everything will fall flat. Then also, the duality in identity. So, postmodernism is also about schizoid, s-c-h-i-z-o-i-d, you know, the split, the split between, unlike modernism, which is very homogeneous.

So, postmodernist literature also talks about schizophrenia, the split. Then of course, fluidity of identities. The mothers would like to remain, you know, retain the Chinese character among American circumstances, but it is not possible. So, fluidity identities are fluid. There is no fixed or stable sense of identity. And of course, as a postmodernist text, it is highly inter-textual, full of pastiches and collages. Several stories intermingling with other stories and also making references, allusions and all to popular culture, to music, to ancient Chinese art, culture, culinary skills and all those things.

So, it becomes a collage of several, you know, disparate items. Of course, unlike most postmodernist works of literature, it encourages multiple readings. There are multiple layers, the multilayered text, which is one of the most important traits in postmodernist literature. Also you can pay attention to its resistance to closure.

Most postmodernist writings, they resist closure. You do not find a simplistic solution to these things. The entire novel, what is it about? It deals with the idea of generation

gap, identities, the construct of American dream, but there are no simple solutions provided. At the end, you go back to where you started, except that perhaps what the novel tries to tell you and you have the novel, please go to page 265. Page 265 and this could perhaps be taken as the message of the Joy Luck Club.

Here, we are looking at the mother's point of view. The mother is taken to a beauty parlor by her daughter and the hairstylist Mr.

Rory. So, we hear the mother talking now. Mr. Rory is brushing my hair. Everything is soft. Everything is black. You look great, ma'am, says my daughter. Even at the wedding, we will think you are my sister.

I look at my face in the beauty parlor mirror. I see my reflection. I cannot see my faults, but I know they are there. I gave my daughter these faults, the same eyes, the same cheeks, the same chin, her character. It came from my circumstances. I look at my daughter and now it is the first time I have seen it. So, what is, how does it end? That we know, you know, perhaps we are all a part of an ongoing tradition.

My daughter, my American daughter, she may be an American, but she has so many of my faults, so many of my features. So, there is a sense of continuation. She will, you know, this tradition may not be upholding my culture, the cultural culture, but still in her form, I will go on living in some way. So, that is the last epigraph of this novel as well. The mother looks at the grandchild. It is the mother that is the epigraph. She looks at a grandchild and she says, why are you smiling all the time and the child keeps smiling and then the grandmother says, yeah, this is the way to be.

I was like you once, but then I lost my innocence in America. But still I live with the sense that one has to go on smiling and hope for the best. So, we are all what, I mean, where we come from, we are just perhaps, you know, we continue a sense of tradition of our ancestors, but we are also individuals in our own right and that has to be accepted by both generations. So, perhaps that is the idea of the Joy Luck Club.

However, the author avoids the satisfactory closure to the novel. So, with this we will end. Any questions, remarks? All right. Thank you then. Bye bye. Thank you.