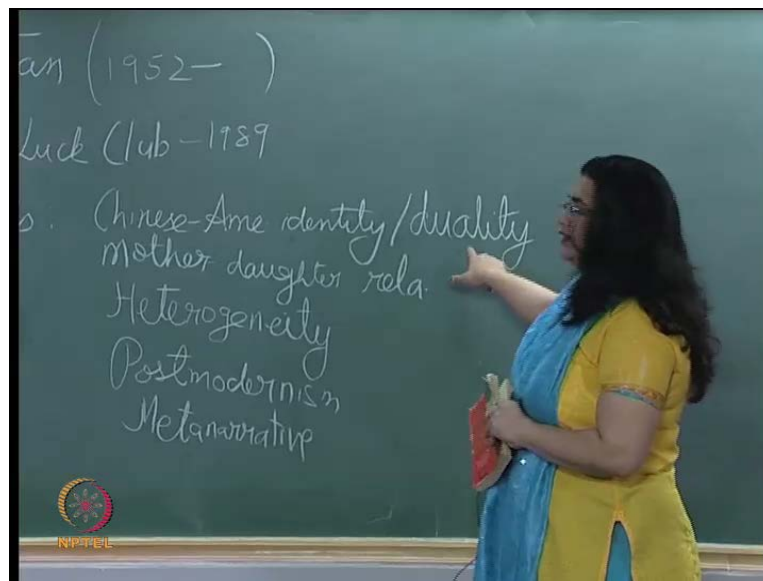


Contemporary Literature
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Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 38

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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 key words, 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 we were talking about in our earlier class, and mother daughter relationships, especially in American context, **ok**. Heterogeneity, this is another, an extension of identity; we were talking about hybridity, multiplicity, heterogeneity. So, all these contracts, they get subsumed under the broader concept of identity. Then, the Joy Luck Club as a postmodernist text, which is 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, meta-narrative. The idea of meta-narrative, the, **the** technique of meta-narrative, as present in the Joy Luck Club. So, then, 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. (()) 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 **Jean-François Lyotard** says in his, Postmodern condition, a text which appeared in 1979. So, he says that, a key concept is metanarrative in Postmodern condition. So, what is a metanarrative? It is an overarching, mythic narratives, 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 overarching 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.

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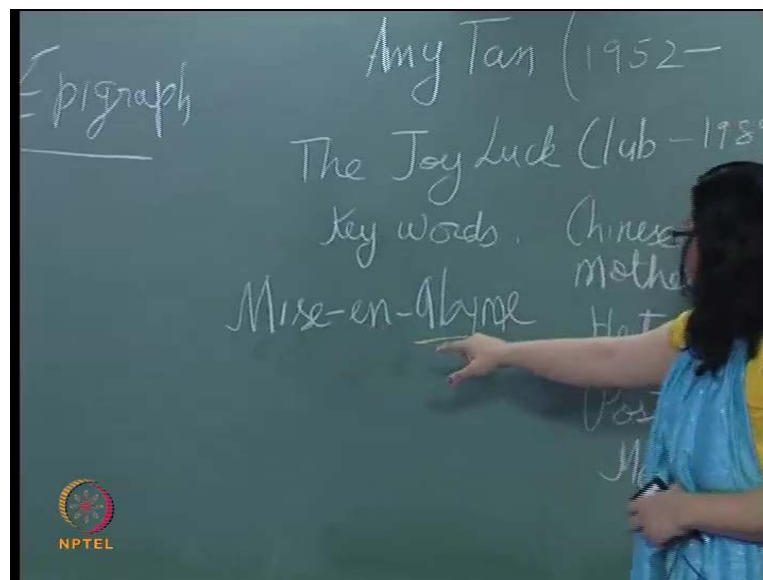


So, therefore, the importance of the epigraph that precedes each section, and as we were talking, they were, they are extremely universal in nature. They are not particularly related to any, **any** specific, and of course, there are Chinese, all the mythology and all the legends of China are captured 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 she, 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, it is, this is mythology, **right**. A modern mind would not accept such things. You cannot put a mirror in front of your marital bed; otherwise, you know, 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 heard such warnings all my life. The mother frowned. Lucky, I can fix it for you; and she pulled out the gilt edged mirror she had brought and she had bought at the Prince club last week; it was her housewarming present. She leaned it against the headboard, on top of the two pillows. You hang it here; the mirrors 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 metanarrative 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 mise-en-abyme, **mise-en-abyme**; mise-en-abyme.

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So, this involves the paradoxical reproduction within the fictional world of the fictional world; **yes**, reproduction of fictional world within fiction. So, fiction within fiction,

which mirrors. So, you see, how cleverly she interweaves 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. This is what she is talking about; Amy Tan is talking about mise-en-abyme. I mean, this is like, you know, it 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 mise-en-abyme.

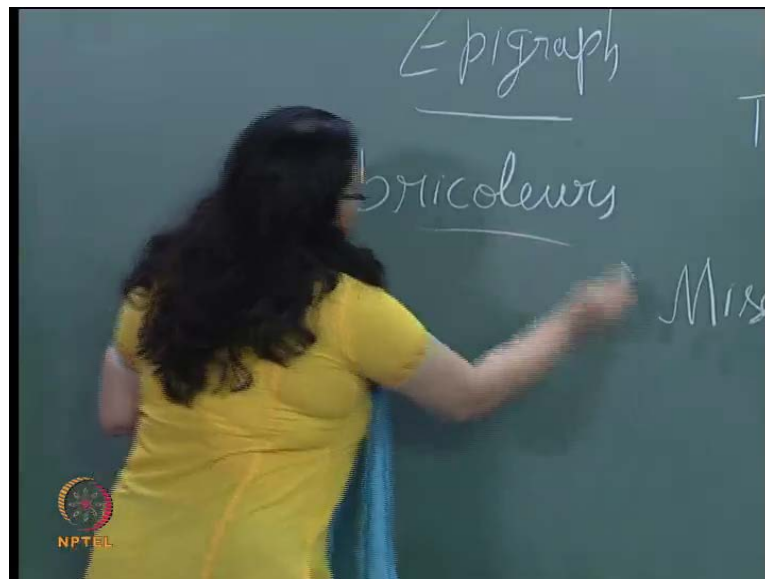
So, through that legend. So, you look at the way she somehow connects a Chinese mythology, a Chinese legend, that you should never have only one mirror at the foot of your bed, with a postmodernist idea; it is a mirror within mirror. **Yes, alright.** So, we will now look at Two kinds, I think you have the text with you. So, just go to Two kinds, page 132 and this is the story of Jing Mei Woo. As I was telling you, there are four daughters, four mothers and Two kinds is the story of Jing Mei Woo. 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 Waverley Jong, who is extremely good; she is a child prodigy, we were talking about, a national chess champion. So, now, there is also competition between the mothers. So, they are not as harmless, innocent beings; that extremely competitive, critical and they love to boast about their daughters. So, Waverley's mother, boasts about her, **her** daughters' chess skills and Jing-Mei Woo's mother wants her to become or come on par with Waverly. So, there is a competition between mothers. So, if her daughter is doing so well, why cannot my daughter do as well; after all, we are in America. Here, we, 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. See, 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, **Auntie** Lindo know; her daughter, she is only best tricky. So, not very good English. But, she is just able to, just about able to

communicate with her daughter; the daughter that 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 the place where things will get better; America is a land of infinite hope and promise. So, all this is reflected here. So, now, Fredric Jameson says, you know, some of you are familiar with the theories of, this postmodernist theories, Fredric 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?

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Recycling previous works and styles. Linda Hutcheon, another postmodern theorist. She also talks about collage; she talks about pastiche. So, bringing, **bringing** together several disparate elements, in order to form a completely new work. And, this is what we are going to see here. Now, she wants to give a new identity; she, **she** wants to make her daughter into something, which she is not, right. 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 you not think so? This, we did not, the mother and

daughter, they did not immediately pick on some kind of prodigy; **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; then, they have competitions, on spelling competitions and all, **yes**. So, they are born with that; they are trained and their skills are honed; but you are, 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 Waverley or we have to compete with Waverley, who was a natural born chess player. So, at first, my mother thought, I could be a Chinese Shirley Temple. Shirley Temple is, was, is a celebrated child actor; she used to star in all those major films with the (()) and 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, though 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 hair style, but it did not suit her and then, what happens on page 133?

You look like Negro Chinese. You do not even looking American; you do not, you are, **you are** not Shirley Temple by a long shot; we just look something else now. The instructor of the beauty training school had to lop off those, these soggy clumps to make my hair even again; Peter Pan is very popular these days. You know, from Shirley Temple, now, you are given a Peter Pan kind of a haircut. You know, what is, who is Peter Pan? That boy, who would never grow up; he had that straight blunt cut, a kind of, you know, a haircut. So, from Shirley Temple, who has a curly mop, beautiful mop on her head, now, you are a Peter Pan; but, still, you know, a famous kid, **yes**. So, those were the ambitions, **ok**.

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, 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; and the idea, that anyone can be famous and successful in America, you know, you 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 your magazines are these? Magazines which mostly housewives read and also, they have an ideology, right. These, all these magazines, they have an ideology; they are not radical readings; what are they? They conform... Jameson gives these as an example for kitsch. Kitsch, yes. So, very kitschy reading; kitschy is like a stereotypical, reinforcing the stereotypical image of good life. What is (()). So, if you read, I mean, my parents are very fond of collecting the old issues of Readers Digest. So, in my family, we have never ever thrown away, any issue of Readers Digest. So, the other day, I was going through and I showed my son, Readers Digest from 1972 (()); and you know, down the years, you have the same kind of articles; 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 spick 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, of an idealized utopian image; what an ideal woman should be; an ideal family should be. So, all Readers Digest, they give, you know, how to save your marriage, for example, yes.

So, marriages have to be maintained; the, 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 a 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 Chinatown. Nairobi, I guessed, saying the most foreign word I could think of. She checked to see if that was possibly one way to pronounce Helsinki, before showing me the answer. So, capital of Finland is and the child does not know; but, what, **what** is being implied here that, she is being forced to turn into something that she is not; **she is not** a machine; 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 were talking about the conflict in mother-daughter relationships. Then, Waverley Jong's story, Four Directions also, we saw how Waverley's talents are curbed; and she could not become, she could not read great heights, because of her mother's constant, you know, fawning and trying to take credit for her success. Although, (()), 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, **who** can, you know, rattle off 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 tests; 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.

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 Ed Sullivan show on TV. What is, what was the Ed Sullivan show? Ed Sullivan 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. On Ed Sullivan show, she saw a Chinese boy, beautifully playing a piano, playing the piano. So, the mother said, now, we have got it; we 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 asked a tutor to come and train her daughter in playing the piano. So, the (()) you have **that, they**, we have to see the both, you know, the, **the** two sides; they lengths 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.

Ok, 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 a piano episode. Why do not you like me the way I am, she asked 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 asked you be genius; only you 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, you know, she does not even appreciate what I am doing for her; no talent and not even discipline. So, enough if, **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's mothers, all daughters, have a story to tell and as framed by the epigraph. So, all they just...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. Storytelling, stories within stories, perhaps, some of you are familiar with The Kite Runner by Khaled

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? Also, Amir, **Amir** and Hassan. So, Amir, from the beginning, he is a storyteller. He likes to construct stories. So, he likes to read stories from 1001 Arabian Nights and all. So, stories within stories, but and he also tells his stories from the Quran, if you remember; sacrificial lamb. And then, you have Hassan's story, who is used as a sacrificial of, you know, a kind of, you know, a symbol for his family. So, story within a story structure, and what does it do, it gives a deeper significance to the local, to the main story, **yes**. So, one theme with, 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 a extremely important theme in most Asian-American writings and then, story telling, of course. You do not have the...

Oh, you have the novel. So, page 24. Look at page 24. Oh, what good stories, got it? Second, third paragraph. Oh what good stories, **stories** spilling out all over the place; we almost laughed 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 the girl who wrote love story, 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. This is the mother's story, as mother, as remembered by Jing-mei Woo; this is the first story, the, when she is introduces us to the idea of the Joy Luck Club. Joy Luck Club is nothing, how, what is the meaning of this title? The, these four mothers, who are all immigrants, first generational American, 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 they, you know, out of desperation, they have come and in hope of making it big, or making it successful in America.

So, when they have, when they had nothing, they formed a small clever group called the Joy Luck Club. So, look at the, you know, club of course; getting together of some people, with the same purpose, and what is the purpose, to bring joy and to bring love. So, that, that is the meaning of the (()); it is a, it is very beautiful title, to give a novel, The Joy Luck Club; because, this four women who had, so, who have gone through so

much of suffering, both personal and all kinds, you know; they have seen the war; they have seen calamities; terrible tragedies, deaths, ruins, and all lost everything. So, but still, they have hopes, and America symbolizes hope. So, they come and 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 motive, in most Asian-American writing. So, these women pride themselves on their culinary skills. So, the idea is 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 and they also play; yes, this is also important; they play a game of poker; yes, what, what does it all do? Playing games, telling stories, cooking; what does it do? A sense of community; yes, inculcates the sense of community and also distracts them from their every day miseries. Ok. So, therefore, the Joy Luck Club. So, at the beginning, they say, you know as Jing-mei Woo remembers her dead mother; Jing-mei Woo is also the protagonist of two kinds; the child who has, who is being forced to become a great pianist, but who could not; now, she is reminiscing on her, you know, mother's life and she say that, this is what my mother told me; oh we use to tell each other stories; we use to cook; people thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week, where, while many people in the city were starving, eating rats and late, later; they are talking about China. Many people in the city were starving and 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, Jing-mei Woo tells us that, whenever my mother would talk about her native land in China, which is called, the place is called Qilin, Qilin. So, she says, whenever she would tell me the stories, the story would get better and better, ok. 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, with every retelling and telling the story would change and if 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 story telling.

Yes, oral, yes, tradition, and 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, so, her name is Suyuan, 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 only think bad things, this is, this is what you are going to end up us; but here, they choose to tell happy stories, so that, it may bring something, you know, it may affect their own stories, or 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, a practice like this dutifully in my own way and then, one day, I heard my mother and her friend Lindo Jong, 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 Waverley, who was about my age, was standing farther down the wall, about five feet away.

I thought she was snooty. Waverley Jong 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, Waverley was snooty; she was also extremely pretty; all things she was famous; she was a prodigy; everything that Jing-mei Woo was not, and her mother, sort of, you know, all though she loved her daughter extremely, deeply, obviously, but, she wants her daughter to become another Waverley; and perhaps, this is this sense of rivalry and competition that makes Jing-mei Woo hate Waverley so much; even (()) 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 Waverley, 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 squared her shoulders and bragged; our problem worsen than yours; if we ask Jing-mei Woo 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, you know. So, and this is something which is very common among most mothers and daughters; you know, an aunt's saying something, an aunt bragging about your cousin, and you see my, you know, my mother does not love me; after all, in case, she likes the other child from me, which is not really the case. Your parents have great wishes and ambitions for you, and therefore, they do this competition. Although they are, 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 culture, children have to be obedient. You cannot have, although, you are an American, in Jing-mei Woo, definitely, she is a 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, there 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 the cruelty, is 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 raising 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 wished, I had never been born; I shouted, I wished 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 backed 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, she knows her mother has already told her that, she has a back story; you know, then, her mother has the past; she was once married to a Chinese man, in, back home in China, in Quilin, 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 raise them back; she lost her babies forever and now, Jing-mei Woo can hurt her mother, she can strike her mother back, in the only way she knows, by referring to those lost babies; and she says 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 will, 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 her; out of venom, out of some sense of vindicating herself, she says 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. And then, many years past, the mother is already dead and then, we meet her.

A few, 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 genius, 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, the, 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 mother and the daughter. But out of some sense of foolish pride, or a sense of, you know, rebellion, most of us rebel against our parents, without actually understanding the depth, to which we could be hurting them; but the, now, in her thirties, she realizes that, her mother meant so well for her; the 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, you know, connects this piano; she, they

never sold it off; although it is an expensive piece of, you know, property. So, material possessions also acquire a life in the novel.

At one place, you will find, when, in the last class, you I was talking about that marriage, where husbands and wife, they maintain separate accounts; the mother, the Chinese mother comes to that household, and asks that, this is unacceptable; husbands and wives should not live, lead this kind of life, where accounts are clearly demarcated; she has to pay for this and he has to pay for that. So, 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; so, **flower vase** becomes a symbol. So, now, the mother says, now, it has fallen down and it cannot be repaired; that, that is not just a flower vase that is being discussed; it is 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, because, she says, I cannot go on like this; everyday, sitting, adding, subtracting, calculating, maintaining; where is the marriage; where is the 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, you know, jettisoned, her mother preserves that, and that, later becomes symbol of, you know, creating a, 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, see, anyway, you know, they have this sense; the Japanese believe, they have the best character; the Indians too. So, do the Chinese. So, the Chinese character is the best character; they are, they are, they have this sense of winning; they have this sense of pride; they have a culture that dates back 1000's 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 (()); 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, right. 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, *The 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 Jing-mei Woo takes a trip to, makes a trip to China, in order to trace her, you know, those step sisters, which her mother always, you know, her mother used to pine for those babies. So, when the mother is dead, Jing-mei Woo takes a trip to China and tries to locate the kids.

So, the story travels between two places and two times. Also, hyperlink; a sense of hyperlink; you know, you have several stories running together. So, all this story, 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 know, what story are you reading, unless and until, you are very careful and attentive. So, that is true of all post modernist literature. You have to, other, if you lose track, then, everything will fall flat. Then also, that, the duality in identities. So, postmodernism is also about schizoid; **schizoid**, you know, the split; the split between, unlike modernism, which is very homogeneous. Postmodernist literature also talks about schizophrenia, the split. Then, of course, fluidity of identities. The mothers would like to remain, you know, the, retain the

Chinese character, among the American circumstances; but it is not possible. So, fluidity; identities are fluid; there is no fixed or a stable sense of identity.

Then, of course, as a post modernist 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, dispirit items. Of course, and like most post modernistic works of literature, it encourages multiple readings. There are multiple layers, the multi layered text, which is one of the most important traits, trait in postmodernist literature. Also, for, even pay attention to its, you know, resistance to closure; most postmodernist writings, they resist closure; you do not find a simplistic solutions to these things. So, the entire novel, what is it about? 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 beautician, the hair stylist Mr. Rody. So, we, we have the mother talking now. Mr. Rody is brushing my hair; everything is soft; everything is black; you look great ma says my daughter; everyone at the wedding 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 all are 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, the study, she may not be upholding my cultures; that, the cultural tradition, 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; the mother, that is epigraph, she looks at a grandchild, and she says, why are you smiling all the time, and the child keeps us smiling and then, the, the grandmother says, yes, this is the way to be; yes, I was like you once, but, I then lost my innocence in America, but still, I live

with the sense that, one has to go on smiling and hope for the best. We are all what we, I mean, where we come from; we are just, perhaps, you will, 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 knowledge. So, with this, we will end. Any questions, remarks? **Alright**, thank you, then.