Daughter-Text/Mother-Text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan's "Joy Luck Club"

Author(s): Marina Heung

Source: *Feminist Studies*, Autumn, 1993, Vol. 19, No. 3, Who's East? Whose East? (Autumn, 1993), pp. 596-616

Published by: Feminist Studies, Inc.

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178102

REFERENCES
Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:
https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178102?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents
You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Feminist Studies, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Feminist Studies*

151.55.243.111 on Sun, 11 Apr 2021 09:02:38 UTC

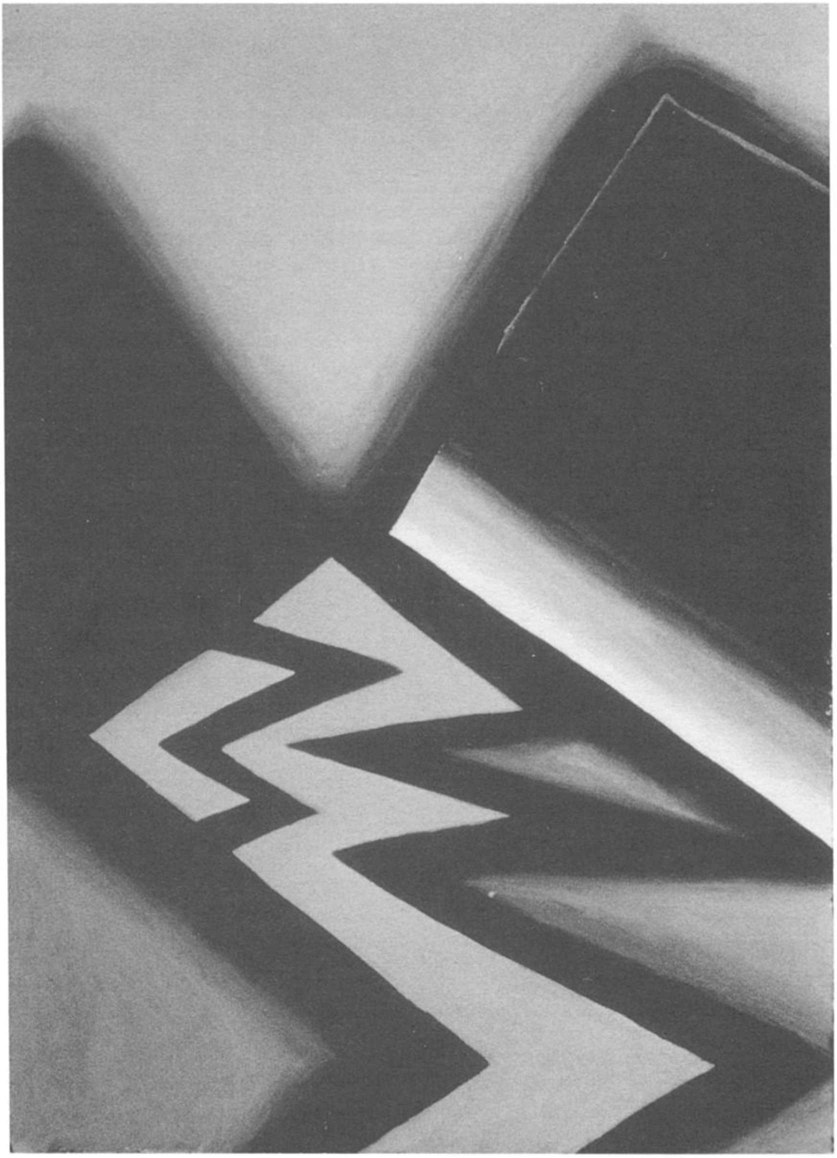
DAUGHTER-TEXT/MOTHER-TEXT: MATRILINEAGE IN AMY TAN'S *JOY LUCK CLUB*

MARINA HEUNG

The critical literature on matrilineage in women's writings has already achieved the status of a rich and evolving canon.[1] At the same time, in recognizing race, class, and gender as crucial determinants in writings by women of color, some critics have indicated the need to develop a distinct framework for understanding these works. For example, Dianne F. Sadoff has examined the literature by African American women to note that "race and class oppression intensify the black woman writer's need to discover an untroubled matrilineal heritage." Referring to Alice Walker's adoption of Zora Neale Hurston as a literary foremother, Sadoff shows how "in celebrating her literary foremothers . . . the contemporary black woman writer covers over more profoundly than does the white writer her ambivalence about matrilineage, her own misreadings of precursors, and her link to an oral as well as written tradition."[2] Readers like Sadoff[3] suggest that, although matrilineage remains a consistent and powerful concern in the female literary tradition, the recognition of culturally and historically specific conditions in women's lives requires that we appropriately contextualize, and thereby refine, our readings of individual texts.

In the realm of writings by Asian Americans, this work has begun. Although it does not focus explicitly on the idea of matrilineage, Amy Ling's *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* is the first book to outline the literary tradition of one group of Asian American women. Her effort, Ling says, is inspired by Walker's "search for our mothers' gardens."[4] Similarly, in a recent essay, Shirley Geok-lin Lim identifies Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* as a "mother text" for Joyce Kogawa's *Obasan*. In discussing these authors, Lim enumerates literary characteristics shared by Asian American and Asian Canadian women writers, such as "multiple presences, ambivalent stories, and circular and fluid narra-

Feminist Studies 19, no. 3 (Fall 1993). © 1993 by Feminist Studies, Inc.



Betty Kano, "River Red," 1991. Acrylic on paper, 18 x 25 inches.

tives."[5] Lim's analysis points toward a commonality between Sone and Kogawa and two other writers, Maxine Hong Kingston and Chuang Hua.[6] In Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and Hua's *Crossings,* antirealistic narrative strategies and a provisional authorial stance correlate with experiences of cultural dislocation and of destabilized and fluid identities.[7] Thus, the works of Sone, Kogawa, Kingston, and Hua collectively define an emerging canon cohering around concerns with racial, gender, and familial identity and the concomitant rejection of monolithic literary techniques.

In *Nisei Daughter, Obasan, The Woman Warrior,* and *Crossings,* the theme of matrilineage revolves around the figure of the daughter. With the exception of *Crossings* (which focuses on a daughter-father relationship), each of these works depicts how a daughter struggles toward self-definition by working through the mother-daughter dyad. The daughter's centrality thus places these writings firmly in the tradition delineated by Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism.* Examining women's fiction from the eighteenth century through postmodernism, Hirsch notes the predominance of the daughter's voice and the silencing of the mother. This inscription of the "romance of the daughter" forms part of the feminist revision of the Freudian family plot.

> It is the woman as *daughter* who occupies the center of the global reconstruction of subjectivity and subject-object relation. The woman as *mother* remains in the position of other, and the emergence of feminine-daughterly subjectivity rests and depends on that continued and repressed process of *othering* the mother. . . . Daughter and mother are separated and forever trapped by the institution, the function of motherhood. They are forever kept apart by the text's daughterly perspective and signature: the mother is excluded from the discourse by the daughter who owns it.

Interestingly, Hirsch's few examples of departures from this pattern are drawn only from the writings of African American women. As she suggests, the scantiness of this sampling of "corrective" family romances, incorporating rather than repressing maternal discourse, reinforces the argument that feminist writers need to construct a new family romance to move the mother "from object to subject."[8]

Published in 1989, Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club,* is about four Chinese American daughters and their mothers.[9] Like *The Woman Warrior* and *Crossings,* the novel contains autobiographical elements. In an interview, Tan describes how she was moved to establish a dialogue with her mother: "When I was writing, it was so much for my mother and myself . . . I wanted her to know what I thought about China and what

I thought about growing up in this country. And I wanted those words to almost fall off the page so that she could just see the story, that the language would be simple enough, almost like a little curtain that would fall away."[10] But despite Tan's explicit embrace of a daughter's perspective, *The Joy Luck Club* is remarkable for foregrounding the voices of mothers as well as of daughters. In the opening chapter of the novel, Jing-Mei Woo (also known as June) stands in for her recently deceased mother at an evening of mah-jong held by the Joy Luck Club, a group of elderly aunts and uncles. On this evening, three of her "Joy Luck aunties" give her money to fly to China to meet two half-sisters, twins who were abandoned by her mother during the war. In the last chapter of the novel, June makes this trip with her father. Her story (taking up four chapters) is told in her voice. The rest of the chapters are similarly narrated in the first person by three of June's coevals (Waverly Jong, Rose Jordan Hsu, and Lena St. Clair) and their mothers (Lindo Jong, An-Mei Hsu, and Ying-Ying St. Clair). Thus, totaling sixteen chapters in all, the novel interweaves seven voices, four of daughters, and three of mothers. In the way that it foregrounds maternal discourse, *The Joy Luck Club* materializes Marianne Hirsch's vision of a mother/daughter plot "written in the voice of mothers, as well as those of daughters . . . [and] in combining both voices [finds] a double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness.[11] But because the maternal voices in the novel bespeak differences derived from the mothers' unique positioning in culture and history, the subjectivities they inscribe, in counterpointing those of the daughters, also radically realign the mother/daughter plot itself.

In the chapter, "Double Face," in *The Joy Luck Club,* a scene implicitly illustrates the incompleteness of a model of the mother/daughter dyad defined only from the daughter's perspective. Here, the central motif is a mirror reflecting a mother and a daughter. Interweaving the themes of vision, recognition, and reflection, this scene shows the limits of viewing identification as an issue problematic for the daughter alone. The scene is set after Waverly has persuaded her mother to get her hair cut. Lindo is seated before a mirror as Waverly and Mr. Rory (the hairdresser) scrutinize her hairstyle. Sitting silently, Lindo listens to the two discuss her "as if [she] were not there." Her daughter translates Mr. Rory's questions for her, even though Lindo can understand English perfectly well. When Waverly speaks directly to her, she does so loudly, "as if [Lindo has] lost [her] hearing." But because this scene is narrated from Lindo' s perspective, her vision and subjectivity are in fact in control. Even as her daughter seems determined to nullify her presence, Lindo sees the superficial social ease between Waverly and Mr. Rory as typical of how "Americans don't really look at one another when talking." Despite her silence and apparent acquiescence, she interposes herself nonverbally through her smiles and her alternation between her "Chinese face" and her "American face" ("the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand") (p. 255).

The scene turns on Mr. Rory's sudden exclamation at seeing the uncanny resemblance between mother and daughter reflected in the mirror. Lindo notes Waverly's discomfiture: "'The same cheeks.' [Waverly] says. She points to mine and then pokes her cheeks. She sucks them outside in to look like a starved person" (p. 256). Waverly's response exhibits her "matrophobia," defined by Adrienne Rich as the daughter's fear of "becoming one's mother."[12] Feminists have analyzed the daughter's ambivalence toward identification with the mother,[13] but Lindo's response in this scene allows us to consider identification from a maternal perspective. Much as Lindo possesses a "double face," she also has access to a "double vision." Seeing herself mirrored in her daughter, she recalls her own mother in China.

> And now I have to fight back my feelings. These two faces, I think, so much the same! The same happiness, the same sadness, the same good fortune, the same faults.
>
> I am seeing myself and my mother, back in China, when I was a young girl. (P. 256)

With her "double vision," Lindo is not threatened by her daughter's attempted erasure of her; in fact, she is moved by her daughter's resemblance to her, even as she registers Waverly's response. Lindo's perspective is informed by her personal history and by her ability to bridge time and cultures. At the same time, Lindo's knowledge of family history provides one key to her sense of ethnic identity. As critics have noted, in writings by Asian American women, issues of matrilineage are closely bound with those of acculturation and race. Thus, Shirley Lim writes: "The essential thematics of maternality is also the story of race . . . [The mother] is the figure not only of maternality but also of racial consciousness."[14] But in presenting the mother as the potent symbol of ethnic identity, Lim implicitly adopts the perspective of the daughter. In her scheme, the mother's primary role is to set into motion the daughter's working through toward a separate selfhood and a new racial identity. Yet this elevation of the daughter as the figure around whom the "dangers of rupture and displaced selves" converge[15] marginalizes maternal subjectivity and voicing. But surely the issues of identification, differentiation, and ethnic identity have meaning for mothers as well, and this meaning must to a significant degree devolve from their relationships with their own mothers. As exemplified in this episode in "Double Face," *The Joy Luck Club* moves maternality to the center. It locates subjectivity in the maternal and uses it as a pivot between the past and the present. In so doing, it reclaims maternal difference and reframes our understanding of daughterly difference as well.

Recent feminist revisions of the Freudian Oedipal family romance assume a culturally and historically specific model of the nuclear family. In her influential book, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,* Nancy Chodorow shows how the institution of motherhood based on childcare provided by women sustains the central problematics of separation and differentiation for daughters.[16] Using a paradigm that is white, middle-class, and Western, Chodorow's analysis is not universally applicable. In this vein, Dianne F. Sadoff and Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley show how the Black family, distorted through the history of slavery in particular, needs to be understood through alternative models.[17] Such a culturally specific critique needs to be applied to the traditional Chinese family as well. Because of their historical devaluation, women in the Chinese family are regarded as disposable property or detachable appendages despite their crucial role in maintaining the family line through childbearing. Regarded as expendable "objects to be invested in or bartered," the marginal status of Chinese women shows itself in their forced transfer from natal families to other families through the practice of arranged marriage, concubinage, adoption, and pawning.[18] The position of women–as daughters, wives, and mothers–in Chinese society is therefore markedly provisional, with their status and expendability fluctuating according to their families' economic circumstances, their ability to bear male heirs, and the proclivities of authority figures in their lives.

This pattern of radical rupture within families is illustrated by the family histories of An-Mei, Lindo, and Ying-Ying in *The Joy Luck Club.* As a child, An-Mei is raised by her grandmother; she has only confused memories of her mother. One day, when her grandmother is dying, her mother appears and removes her to Shanghai; An-Mei is then adopted into a new family where her mother is the fourth concubine of a wealthy merchant.

In contrast to An-Mei, Lindo is removed from her natal family through marriage, not adoption. At age two, Lindo is engaged to a young boy who is a stranger to her. A bride in an arranged marriage at sixteen, Lindo finally succeeds in freeing herself through a ruse by which she convinces her husband's family to find a concubine for him.

Like Lindo, Ying-Ying is chosen as a bride by a stranger, a man who associates deflowering her with the act of *kai gwa* ("open the watermelon"). A "wild and stubborn" girl in her youth, Ying-Ying's spirit is destroyed in this brutal marriage. Later, when she is pregnant, her husband leaves her for another woman; she decides to get an abortion.

In *The Joy Luck Club,* family allegiances are complicated and disrupted within a kinship system in which blood ties are replaced by a network of alternate affiliations. When Lindo is engaged to the son of the Huang family, for instance, her family relationships are immediately reconfigurated. Her mother starts treating her "as if [she] belonged to someone else," and she begins to be referred to as her future mother-in-law's daughter.

For An-Mei, the breakage and realignment of relationships involving parents and siblings are even more radical and arbitrary. When her mother removes her from her grandmother's household, her brother–her mother's first son–is left behind because patrilineal claims on male children cannot be challenged. After her adoption into her new family, An-Mei is introduced to three other wives in the family–each a potential surrogate mother. For instance, her mother tells her to call the Second Wife "Big Mother." She also acquires a new brother, Syaudi, who now becomes her "littlest brother" (p. 230). But An-Mei has to undergo one final upheaval when she finds out that Syaudi is truly her brother by blood and not adoption. This happens when her mother's attendant tells her how An-Mei's mother was forced into concubinage and bore a son; this son was then adopted by the Second Wife as her own. In this way, An-Mei makes a shocking discovery: "That was how I learned that the baby Syaudi was really my mother's son, my littlest brother" (p. 237).

Unlike Lindo and An-Mei, Suyuan Woo (June's mother) sees her family dispersed as a result of cataclysmic historical events. During the Japanese bombardment of Kweilin during the war, she is forced to flee south without her husband; discarding her possessions along the way and desperate for food, she finally abandons her twin daughters on the road. Later in America, her new daughter, June, grows up with the knowledge of a truncated family, haunted by her mother's words: "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies" (p. 26).

These stories of disrupted family connections, of divided, multiplied, and constantly realigned perceptions of kinship, constitute a pattern clearly diverging from the monolithic paradigm of the nuclear family. In *The Joy Luck Club,* their experiences of broken and fluctuating family bonds inspire Lindo, An-Mei, and Ying-Ying to construct stories of bonding with the mother precisely in answer to their memories of profound rupture and abandonment. Speaking from their experiences of mother loss, these immigrant mothers offer altered versions of the "romance of the daughter." Whereas typical versions of this romance highlight generational conflict and the repression of the mother, An-Mei, Lindo, and Ying-Ying construct consoling tales enacting a fantasy of symbiosis with the maternal. Recalling her first sight of her mother after a long separation, An-Mei describes how their exchange of gazes locks them into instant identification: "[My mother] looked up. And when she did, I saw my own face looking back at me" (p. 45). An-Mei also privileges her mother's story about two turtles joined through suffering; from this parable of shared grief, An-Mei derives a message connecting her to her mother: "That was our fate, to live like two turtles seeing the watery world together from the bottom of the little pond" (p. 217). In this way, An-Mei transforms common experiences of pain and victimization into testimonials of mother/daughter bonding. Similarly, instead of feeling outrage at her mother's collaboration in her arranged betrothal and marriage, Lindo actually chooses collusion with her mother, behaving as the proper daughter-in-law so that her mother will not lose face (p. 55).

However, years later, in America, Lindo's assertion of instinctive bonding with her mother is contested by new realities. She comes to regret how her mother "did not see how [her] face changed over the years. How [her] mouth began to droop. How [she] began to worry but still did not lose [her] hair. . ." (p. 257). Acknowledging these inevitable changes in herself, Lindo implicitly admits the loss of symbiosis. Her transplantation into American culture and her advancing age have made her face no longer a perfect match of her mother's. Quite simply, her new "double face" reflects her changed cultural identity: "I think about our two faces. I think about my intentions.Which one is American? Which one is Chinese? Which one is better? If you show one, you must also sacrifice the other" (p. 266).

At the same time, Lindo's recognition of her own doubled identity has implications for how she understands her relationship with her daughter. Like her, Waverly is the product of two cultures, but Lindo sees that Waverly's experience of cultural mixing is different from her own: "Only her skin and hair are Chinese. Inside—she is all American-made" (p. 254). The otherness of her daughter's hybridized self for Lindo makes it unlikely that mother and daughter can achieve perfect identification: the burden of differences in personal history and cultural conditioning is too great. Yet, in *The Joy Luck Club,* the mothers' ability to accept their own loss of the maternal image also enables them to separate from their daughters. As

Ying-Ying says: "I think this to myself even though I love my daughter. She and I have have shared the same body. There is part of her mind that is part of mine. But when she was born, she sprang from me like a slippery fish, and has been swimming away from me since" (p. 242). Thus, in Tan's novel, the maternal experience of generational conflict and differentiation takes into account the realities of cultural difference; through this awareness, the Joy Luck mothers can negotiate their ambivalences about their daughters' desires for cultural assimilation and autonomous selfhood.

As the essential medium of subjectivity, language is the ground for playing out cultural differences. Gloria Anzaldúa has written about her language use as an insignia of her "borderlands" identity situated between Mexico and America: "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity–I am my language. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself." The speaker of this "language of Borderlands," Anzaldúa suggests, has the freedom to "switch codes" at will; it is a "bastard" language located at the "juncture of culture [where] languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized."[19] In *The Joy Luck Club*, the language of the mothers–their border language–marks their positioning between two cultures. However, in exposing linguistic limits, the novel also argues for reclaiming language as an instrument of intersubjectivity and dialogue, and as a medium of transmission from mothers to daughters.

In the novel, the daughters understand Chinese, but they speak English exclusively. The mothers, in contrast, speak a version of Anzaldúa's "language of the Borderlands," a *patois* of Chinese and English that often confuses their daughters. Observing her aunties, June thinks: "The Joy Luck aunties begin to make small talk, not really listening to each other. They speak in their special language, half in broken English, half in their own Chinese dialect" (p. 34). Embarrassing at times to the daughters, this language is a form of self-inscription in an alien culture, a way of preserving significance in the new reality of America. For one, the nuggets of foreign words incorporated into this speech duplicate aspects of self-identity that have no equivalent in another language. Words like *lihai, chuming,* and *nengkan* must remain in their original Chinese in order to retain their power and meaning. For Ying-Ying, the essence of her youthful character before she became a lost soul, a "ghost," is contained in the word *lihai*: "When I was a young girl in Wushi, I was *lihai*. Wild and stubborn. I wore a smirk on my face. Too good to listen" (p. 243). Her confidence in her special knowledge is expressed by *chuming,* referring to her "inside knowledge of things" (p. 248). For Rose, *nengkan* expresses her mother's ability to act on pure will and determination, as shown in An-Mei's summoning of her son's spirit after he has drowned at the beach (pp. 121-31). On another occasion, An-Mei's command of this hybrid language enables her to articulate, on her daughter's behalf, Rose's disorientation during her divorce. When An-Mei complains that Rose's psychiatrist is making her *hulihudu* and *heimongmong,* Rose ponders: "It was true. And everything around me seemed to be *heimongmong.* These were words I have never thought about in English terms. I suppose the closest in meaning would be 'confused' and 'dark fog'" (p. 188).

In discussing the use of "multilanguedness" in women's writings, Patricia Yaeger suggests that the "incorporation of a second language can function . . . as a subversive gesture representing an alternative form of speech which can both disrupt the repressions of authoritative discourse and still welcome or shelter themes that have not yet found a voice in the . . . primary language."[20] Although Yaeger is concerned with specific narrative strategies used in women's texts, her analysis has resonance for the significance of maternal speech in *The Joy Luck Club.* Without being overtly political or subversive, the mothers' bilingualism in the novel is nonetheless strategic. Switching from English to Chinese can express rejection and anger, as when June's mother berates her for not trying hard enough at her piano playing: "'So ungrateful,' I heard her mutter in Chinese. 'If she had as much talent as she has temper, she would be famous now'" (p. 136). Or, the switching of codes may initiate a shift into a different register of intimacy, as when the same mother speaks in Chinese when making her daughter a gift of a jade pendant (p. 208). To express her resentment against an American husband who persistently puts English words in her mouth, Ying-Ying uses Chinese exclusively with her daughter (p. 106). Deliberate deformations of language, too, are used to convey veiled criticisms, as when Ying-Ying snidely refers to her daughter's profession as an architect as "arty-tecky" (p. 242), and An-Mei dismisses Rose's psychiatrist as "psyche-tricks" (p. 188). Finally, the use of Chinese is a form of resistance to a hegemonic culture. In the following exchange, initiated when Waverly slyly asks about the difference between Jewish and Chinese mah-jong, Lindo's use of Chinese is self-reflexive; her switch from English to Chinese in itself expresses her sense of cultural difference and superiority.

> "Entirely different kind of playing," she said in her English explanation voice. "Jewish mah jong, they watch only for their own tile, play only with their eyes."

> Then she switched to Chinese: "Chinese mah jong, you must play using your head, very tricky. You must watch what everybody else throws away and keep that in your head as well. And if nobody plays well, then the game becomes like Jewish mah jong. Why play? There's no strategy. You're just watching people make mistakes." (P. 33)

In *The Joy Luck Club,* "multilanguedness" bears the imprint of their speakers' unique cultural positioning, but this assertion of difference is also vexed by its potential to confuse and exclude. For the daughters, the special meaning of maternal language requires translation. After her mother's death, June thinks: "My mother and I never really understood each other. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more" (p. 37). Another question is how effectively maternal language functions as a medium of transmission between generations. The mothers in the novel worry that the family history and knowledge preserved in their hybrid language will be elided after their deaths. At one point, June comes to understand how important it is for her aunties to preserve the meaning of "joy luck": "They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope from generation to generation" (pp. 40-41).

Hybrid in its origins, maternal language in *The Joy Luck Club* possesses multiple, even contradictory, meanings. As an assertion of cultural identity, it both communicates and obfuscates. At the same time, it stands in counterpoint to maternal silence. To the daughters, maternal silence hints at "unspeakable tragedies" (p. 20), and the maternal injunction to "bite back your tongue" (p. 89) binds daughters and mothers in a cycle of self-perpetuating denial. Yet both daughters and mothers resist this bind. The Joy Luck aunties, after all, plead frantically with June to tell her mother's–and, by implication, their own–history ("Tell them, tell them"). Similarly, Lena is aware of the power of the unspoken: "I always thought it mattered, to know what is the worst possible thing that can happen to you, to know how you can avoid it, to not be drawn by the magic of the unspeakable" (p. 103). Finally, it is the incomprehension enforced by silence that keeps mothers "othered" in the eyes of their daughters. An-Mei, for instance, is dismissed by Suyuan as a woman with "no spine" who "never thought about what she was doing" (p. 30), and Ying-Ying is seen by June as the "weird aunt, someone lost in her own world" (p. 35). As for Lindo, her special insight allows her to understand why her daughter and her friends see her as a "backward Chinese woman" (p. 255).

In the tradition of breaking silence that has become one of the shaping myths in the writings of women of color,[21] maternal silence in the novel is transformed from a medium of self-inscription and subjectivity into an instrument of intersubjectivity and dialogue. For the mothers, storytelling heals past experiences of loss and separation; it is also a medium for rewriting stories of oppression and victimization into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment. For the Joy Luck mothers, the construction of a self in identification with a maternal figure thus parallels, finally, a revisioning of the self through a reinterpretation of the past.

In Lindo's case, the brutality of a forced marriage is transformed, through its retelling, into a celebration of courage and resistance. She recalls looking into a mirror on the day of her wedding and being surprised at seeing her own purity and strength: "Underneath the scarf I still knew who I was. I made a promise to myself: I would always remember my parents' wishes, but I would never forget myself" (p. 58). Through a clever scheme, Lindo escapes from her marriage. After arriving in America, she chooses her second husband, getting him to propose by inserting a message inside a fortune cookie. Because all her jewelry was taken from her during her first marriage, she makes sure that she receives genuine gold jewelry from her husband and as gifts that she buys for herself: "And every few years, when I have a little extra money, I buy another bracelet. I know what I'm worth. They're always twenty-four carats, all genuine" (p. 66).

For An-Mei and Ying-Ying, self-articulation remedies early teachings in silence and self-denial. Both begin to recall painful memories when they see how their speech can save their daughters. Ying-Ying is stirred to speak directly to Lena when she sees her daughter's unhappy marriage. At one time a "tiger girl" who gave up her *chi* ("breath" or "life-force") in an unhappy marriage, Ying-Ying now recognizes that her daughter has "become like a ghost, disappear" (p. 163). The emptiness of Lena's life—with her fancy swimming pool, her Sony Walkman, and cordless phone—is apparent to her. Watching Rose go through a difficult divorce, An-Mei recalls her own mother's dying words, that "she would rather kill her own weak spirit so she could give me a stronger one" (p. 240). In the end, An-Mei and Ying-Ying find their voices: Ying-Ying to "wake up" Rose (p. 240) and Lena to "penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved" (p. 242).

The stories of their lives are the mothers' gifts to their daughter in the spirit with which the Joy Luck Club was originally founded. Years ago, June's mother formed the club in Kweilin in order to transmute the painful history of women like herself into a communal expression of defiance and hope, so that "each week [they] could forget past wrongs done to us . . . hope to be lucky" (p. 25). In breaking silence, these mothers reproduce the past as tales of "joy" and "luck." Like the scar on An-Mei's neck that her mother rubs in order to bring back a painful memory (p. 48), these narrations effect a passage from pain to catharsis, moving their tellers from inward knowledge to intersubjective dialogue. Significantly, each of the mother's stories suspends its mode of address between "I" and "you."[22] Thus, the closing sentence in Lindo's story is: "I will ask my daughter what she thinks" (p. 266). In inviting the daughters' interjections, the shift from interior monologue to dialogue enables the mothers to discover how they will mediate between the past and the present for their daughters. Their choices take them on the path, described by Kim Chernin, by which mothers can become "co-conspirator[s]" with their daughters to stand "outside the oppressive system, united in some common effort." Chernin suggests that a mother must ally herself with her daughter's struggle by first acknowledging that she too has passed "knowingly through a similar time of urgency and [has] been able to develop beyond it." She concludes that a mother's entry into collaboration with her daughter involves a commitment to speech. She must be willing to "admit her conflict and ambivalence, acknowledge the nearness or actuality of breakdown, become fully conscious of her discontent, the hushed, unspoken sense of her life's failure."[23] After all, as Adrienne Rich proposes, "the quality of the mother's life–however embattled and unprotected–is her primary bequest to her daughter." Thus, the determination to provide models of "courageous mothering," as envisioned by Rich,[24] is finally the subtext of the stories told by stories in *The Joy Luck Club.* Not the least of this maternal courage is the mothers' reclaiming of storytelling as an act of self-creation, one by which they enact, with a full complement of ambivalence and doubt, their passage from loss and dispossession to hope and affirmation.

In the opening story of the novel, June represents her recently deceased mother at a meeting of the Joy Luck Club. Feeling out of place, she imagines that the three Joy Luck aunties "must wonder now how someone like me can take my mother's place" (p. 27). The three aunties give her $1,200 to travel to China to meet her twin half-sisters, saying, "You must see your sisters and tell them about your mother's death. . . . But most important, you must tell them about her life" (p. 40). But until the moment of the meeting, June asks herself: "How can I describe to them in Chinese about our mother's life?" (p. 287).

The four stories told from June's point of view constitute pure family romance, in which family members are separated, lost, and reunited. The guiding spirit of this myth is June's mother, Suyuan. However, as told by June, the story is unmistakably the daughter's version of the family romance, in which a mother's death opens up the space for a daughter's recuperation of a lost maternal image.[25] Even while protesting that she doesn't know enough to tell her mother's story, June nevertheless proves correct her aunties' insistence: "Your mother is in your bones! . . . her mind . . . has become your mind" (p. 40). She starts cooking the same dishes for her father as her mother did; one evening she finds herself standing at the kitchen window, in imitation of her mother, rapping at a neighborhood cat (p. 209). Arriving in Shenzhen, China, just over the border from Hong Kong, she starts to feel different: "I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, My mother was right. I am becoming Chinese" (p. 267). Earlier she imagines that by dying her mother has left her, "gone back to China to get these babies" (p. 39). But as it turns out, it is she who is returning to China as her mother's emissary. Arriving in China with her father, she hears the final episode of her mother's story: how her mother was forced to abandon her twin babies and continued her search for them through the years. Turning to her father for this history, June urges him to tell it in Chinese: "No, tell me in Chinese. . . . Really, I can understand" (p. 281).

During the scene of June's reunion with her sisters, the rebounding of mirror images enacts a climactic moment, binding mother to daughter and sister to sister.

> Somebody shouts, "She's arrived!" And then I see her. Her short hair. Her small body. And that same look on her face. She has the back of her hand pressed hard against her mouth. She is crying as though she had gone through a terrible ordeal and were happy it is over.
>
> And I know it's not my mother, yet it is the same look she had when I was five and had disappeared all afternoon, for such a long time, that she was convinced that I was dead. And when I miraculously appeared, sleepy-eyed, crawling from underneath my bed, she wept and laughed, biting the back of her hand to make sure it was true.
>
> And now I see her again, two of her, waving, and in one hand is a photo, the Polaroid I sent them. As soon as I get beyond the gate, we run toward each other, all three of us embracing, all hesitations and expectations gone. (P. 287)

In this encounter, sisterly and maternal identities are blurred, and through the recovery of lost sisters, the foundling myth is conflated with the romance of the daughter. Looking into her sisters' faces, June also sees mirrored in them part of her own ethnic identity: "And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go" (p. 288).

At the beginning of the novel, while representing her mother at the Joy Luck Club, June muses: "And I am sitting at my mother's place at the mah jong table, on the East, where things begin" (p. 41). June's story ends with her further east still in China, where there is yet another beginning. The meeting of the three sisters makes their generation whole again; resembling their mother as well as each other, the sisters' mutual identification recuperates maternal loss. Now June remembers her mother's remark to her: "Our whole family is gone. It is just you and I" (p. 272). With June's reunion with her sisters, however, the continuity of the family–but through the female line of descent–is reestablished. And finally, since the word the sisters speak upon recognizing each other–"Mama, Mama"–has common currency across cultures, matrilineage here signifies not only the possibility of a nurturing sisterhood but also the melding of cross-cultural linkages.

Although June's story matches the pattern of the idealized family romance, the overall structure of the novel offers such closure as a provisional possibility only. As we have seen, although maternal speech in the novel turns in the direction of intersubjectivity, this movement is tentative and incomplete. The narratives by Lindo, An-Mei, and Waverly shift from "I" to "you," but the absence of a reciprocal progression in their daughters' stories (from a daughterly "I" to the maternal "you") suggests the truncation of a truly dialogic process. Further, the novel's overall structure consciously resists any attempt to shape it definitively. As Valerie Miner has noted, the novel is "narrated horizontally as well as vertically."[26] Thus, June's symbolically complete and symmetrical story is contained within an overarching framework wrapping around a grouping of other stories whose arrangement is neither causal nor linear. Thus, although June's story offers closure in its progression from loss to recuperation, the other narratives are grouped in loose juxtaposition with each other. The mothers' stories are included in the first and last of the four main units in the novel and recount incidents in China; the daughters' stories appear in the middle two sections and are set in the immediate past or proximate present.

On closer reading, even the autonomy of each story as a clear-cut unit begins to dissolve, giving way to a subterranean pattern of resonances and motifs erasing the definite boundaries between individual narratives. Under this scrutiny, actions and motifs mirror each other from story to story, undermining absolute distinctions of character and voice. Thus, the formative moment of Lindo's story, when she looks into the mirror on her wedding day and pledges "never to forget" herself, is duplicated by June's standing in front of a mirror as a teenager, contemplating her self-worth under the assault of her mother's expectations: "The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. This girl and I were the same. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won'ts. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not" (p. 134). Similarly, Ying-Ying learns from the Moon Lady that the woman is "yin [from] the darkness within" and the man is "yang, bright with lighting our minds" (p. 81). Ying-Ying's lesson about the yin and the yang is echoed in Rose's description of her marriage: "We became inseparable, two halves creating the whole: yin and yang. I was victim to his hero. I was always in danger and he was always rescuing me." Or, to cite a final example of how the novel converges particular motifs: just before Rose's divorce, An-Mei tells her daughter that her husband is probably "doing monkey business with someone else" (p. 188); Rose scoffs at her mother's intuition, but a later discovery proves her mother right. Elsewhere, Lena similarly remarks on her own mother's "mysterious ability to see things before they happen"; in her case, Ying-Ying's uncanny foresight, like An-Mei's, predicts the collapse of Lena's marriage.

Signaling the author's intent to undermine the independence of individual narrative units, even the chapter titles, by connecting motifs between disparate stories, seem interchangeable. The title of Rose's story, "Half and Half," is echoed at the end of a story narrated by June when, turning to the piano she has abandoned for many years, she plays two old tunes and realizes that they are "two halves of the same song" (p. 144). The theme of "half and half" is continued in the story told by Waverly, in which her mother tells her that she has inherited half of her character traits from each parent: "half of everything inside you is from me, your mother's side, from the Sun clan in Taiyuan" (p. 182). In another illustration of how thematic echoes proliferate in the novel, this same story, entitled "Four Directions," encourages us to trace its various motifs elsewhere. Waverly's "good stuff" that she has inherited from her mother reiterates the theme of "best quality" that is continued in another story told by June: in "Best Quality," June's mother chides her for not wanting the best for herself. Meanwhile, the theme of "Four Directions" takes us back to the first story in the novel, where we find June and her aunties seated at the mah-jong table, each occupying one of its four directions.

Obviously, the notion of "four directions" is emblematic of the novel's centrifugal structure. At one point, Lena asks: "How can the world in all its chaos come up with so many coincidences, so many similarities and exact opposites?" (p. 154). Or, as June intones, in a more complaining mood, "It's the same old thing, everyone talking in circles" (p. 21). With its mirrored motifs and interchangeable characterizations, *The Joy Luck Club* demands a reading that is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic. Aligning itself with the modernist tradition of spatial form in narrative,[27] the novel defeats any effort to read it according to linear chronology alone. Instead, the reader's construction of interconnections between motif, character, and incident finally dissolves individualized character and plot and instead collectivizes them into an aggregate meaning existing outside the individual stories themselves.

The multivalent structure of *The Joy Luck Club* resists reduction to simple geometric designs; nevertheless, two figures–the rectangle and the circle–help to chart Tan's play on the theme of maternality. As the novel begins, June takes her place with three Joy Luck aunties around the mahjong table. Her position at one of the table's cardinal points determines the direction of her journey east which ends in China. At the end point of June's story, the trope of the rectangle merges with that of the circle: June's arrival in China brings her full circle to the place where her mother's story began, and her meeting with her half-sisters sets into motion a circulation of mirrored relationships blurring identities, generations, and languages. Because it repudiates linearity and symmetry, the circle is a privileged motif in feminist writings, one that suggests the possibility of reconfiguring traditional familial dynamics and dismantling the hierarchical arrangements of the Oedipal triangle and the patriarchal family. For instance, in her book on the reclamation of the pre-Oedipal in women's novels, Jean Wyatt envisions "the possibility . . . of imagining alternative family relations based on preoedipal patterns–family circles whose fluidity of interchange challenges the rigid gender and generational hierarchies of the patriarchal family." In Wyatt's analysis, there persists, in women's writings, the fantasy of a nurturant family where "family members come forward to share the work of fostering others' development [so that] the responsibility for nurturing [is extended] to a whole circle of 'mothering' people."[28]

In *The Joy Luck Club,* the discrete identities of familial members are woven into a collectivized interchangeability through the novel's parataxis–its use of contiguous juxtapositions of voices, narratives, and motifs.[29] Through the novel's interweaving of time frames and voices, three generations of women are included within a relational network linking grandmothers, mothers, daughters, aunts, and sisters. For these women, however, mutual nurturance does not arise from biological or generational connections alone; rather, it is an act affirming consciously chosen allegiances. As Wyatt suggests, mothering as a "reciprocal activity" generally presupposes "a strong mother figure who has a central position in the family," but even "when the mother is not there, the circle remains, its diffuse bonds extends to a circle of equals who take turns nurturing each other."[30] In *The Joy Luck Club,* the death of June's mother, Suyuan, invites the Joy Luck aunties to step into the circle of "mothering reciprocity"; indeed, it is Suyuan's absence that inaugurates the meeting between June and her half-sisters, when they confirm their mutual identification as each other's sisters *and* mothers.

As we have seen, the maternal voices in *The Joy Luck Club* begin to shift from "I" to "you" to engage the discrete subjectivities of mother and daughter in a tentative exchange of recognitions and identifications. In the same way, the novel's resonant structure and its use of parataxis effectively write the reader into the text as a crucial participant in the making of meaning.[31] The reader of *The Joy Luck Club* is a weaver of intricate interconnections who must, like Suyuan's unraveling of an old sweater, randomly "pull out a kinky thread of yarn, anchoring it to a piece of cardboard, [roll] with a sweeping rhythm, [and] start [a] story" (p. 21). This way of engaging the reader as an active constructor of meaning allows the feminist novel to project a community of sisterly readers.[32] In tracing a family history that blurs the demarcations between the roles of mothers, daughters, and sisters, *The Joy Luck Club* breaks down the boundary between text and reader in order to proffer the notions of sisterhood as a literary construction and as a community constituted through the act of reading. At once disintegrative and constructive in its operations, the novel holds its dual impulses in unresolved suspension and fulfills its fundamentally transformative project–a mutation from daughter-text to mother-text to sister-text.

NOTES

1. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985). For a useful survey of the critical literature on this subject, see Marianne Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters," *Signs* 7 (Autumn 1981): 200-222.

2. Dianne F. Sadoff, "Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston," in *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives,* ed. Micheline R. Malson, Elisabeth Mudimbe-

This content downloaded from 151.55.243.111 on Sun, 11 Apr 2021 09:02:38 UTC

Boyi, Jean O'Barr, and Mary Wyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 198.

3. Marianne Hirsch reminds us of the need for "Western" frameworks to be "modified, reconstructed, and transformed" in considering the works of African American women writers. See Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley, *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners* (New York: Holmes Meier, 1984), 144-63; Natalie M. Rosinsky, "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature,* ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980), 280-90.

4. Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), xi. See also Elizabeth J. Ordoñez, "Narrative Texts by Ethnic Women: Rereading the Past, Reshaping the Future," *MELUS* 9 (Winter 1982): 19-28.

5. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Japanese American Women's Life Stories: Maternality in Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan,*" *Feminist Studies* 16 (Summer 1990): 290-91.

6. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), originally published in 1975; Chuang Hua, *Crossings* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), originally published in 1968.

7. See Malini Schueller, "Questioning Race and Gender Definitions: Dialogic Subversions in *The Woman Warrior,*" *Criticism* 31 (Fall 1989): 421-37; Amy Ling, "A Rumble in the Silence: *Crossings* by Hua," *MELUS* 9 (Winter 1982): 29-36.

8. Hirsch, 136-37, 6-8, 11, 178-91 (Hirsch's examples are *Sula* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"), 12. The emphasis on daughters' narratives in writings by Asian American women is reflected in Helen M. Bannan's essay, "Warrior Women: Immigrant Mothers in the Works of Their Daughters," *Women's Studies* 6 (1979): 165-77.

9. Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989). All references are to this edition; subsequent citations appear in parentheses in the text.

10. Amy Tan, "How Stories Written for Mother Became Amy Tan's Best Seller," interview by Julie Lew, *New York Times,* 4 July 1989, 19(N).

11. Hirsch, 161.

12. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), 237.

13. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Jane Flax, "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978): 171-89; Christine Olivier, *Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother,* trans. George Craig (New York: Routledge, 1989); Rich, 218-58.

14. Lim, 293. Rosinsky (p. 280) writes: "Members of racial, ethnic, sexual, and economic minority groups, in particular, have delineated their apprehension of the social forces which intervene between mother and daughter. Perhaps because the added oppression of minority group membership exacerbates this often painful relationship, these writers seem particularly aware of its tragic destructiveness." Mary Dearborn has also written about how generational conflict is felt by many historians of ethnicity to be the most striking feature of ethnic American identity. See Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 72-73.

15. Elise Miller, "Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: The Object of Autobiographical Relations," in *Compromise Formations: Current Directions in Psychoanalytic Criticism,* ed. Vera J. Camden (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1989), 148.

16. See Chodorow.

17. See Sadoff, 203; Perry and Brownley, 160. Hirsch similarly warns (p. 10) against the "androcentric and ethnocentric" biases inherent in the Freudian model of the family. For two critiques of Chodorow's analysis, see Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 83-113; Elizabeth Abel, "Race, Class, and Psychoanalysis? Opening Questions," in *Conflicts in Feminism,* ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn

Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 185-204.

18. Sue Grunewold, *Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China, 1860-1936* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985), 38, 37-45. See also Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: The Social History of a Chinese Custom* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), 66-99.

19. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/"La Frontera": The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Book Co., 1987), 59; Preface, unpaginated.

20. Patricia Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 40, 44. For a discussion of a second language as an alternate form of self-inscription, see David Leiwei Li, "The Naming of a Chinese American 'I': Cross-Cultural Sign/ifications in *The Woman Warrior*," *Criticism* 30 (Fall 1988): 515; Shirley K. Rose, "Metaphors and Myths of Cross-Cultural Literacy: Autobiographical Narratives by Maxine Hong Kingston, Richard Rodriguez, and Malcolm X," *MELUS* 14 (Spring 1987): 3-15. Michael M.J. Fischer has discussed the use of bilingualism and "interlinguistic play" in relation to ethnic autobiography; see "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*," ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 218.

21. Roberta Rubenstein states, "If women are typically muted within their own culture even when they constitute a demographic majority, then women of ethnic minority groups are doubly muted. Both gender and ethnic status render them 'speechless' in patriarchy." See Roberta Rubenstein's *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 8. See also Lim, 302; King-Kok Cheung, "'Don't Tell': Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior*," *PMLA* 103 (March 1988): 162-74; and the selected writings by women of color in *Making Face, Making Soul/"Haciendo Caras": Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990), 179-220.

22. Lindo's narratives interweave first-person discourse with second-person address throughout. Her first story, "The Red Candle," begins with her addressing Waverly directly, beginning: "I once sacrificed my life to keep my parents' promise. This means nothing to you, because to you promises mean nothing" (p. 49). In her second story, "Double Face," she addresses Waverly by referring to "My mother–your grandmother . . ." (p.256) and asking "Why do you always tell your friends that I arrived in the United States on a slow boat from China? . . . Why do you always tell people that I met your father in the Cathay House . . . This is not true! Your father was not a waiter, I never ate in that restaurant" (p. 259). Ying-Ying begins her story, "The Moon Lady," in the third person; she ends her second story, "Waiting between the Trees," with the declaration that "now I must tell my daughter everything" (p. 252). An-Mei's story, "Magpies," is the most distinctive in its clear shift from first-person narration to second-person address. When the story begins, she describes her daughter Rose's psychiatric treatment: "She lies down on a psychiatrist couch, squeezing tears out about this shame" (p. 215). At the end of the same story, she addresses Rose directly: "You do not need a psychiatrist to do this. A psychiatrist does not want you to wake up" (p. 241).

23. Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating, and Identity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 82, 51, 86.

24. Rich, 250.

25. The process by which a mother's death inspires women writers to begin to explore the meaning of the maternal has been written about by a number of scholars. In discussing women's writings in the 1920s, Hirsch has noted (p. 97) a pattern by which works by women artists "are not composed by the daughters until the mothers are dead. Only then can memory and desire play their roles as instruments of connection, reconstruction, and reparation." Similarly, Bell Gale Chevigny has examines how Margaret Fuller imagined her mother's death in her fiction in order to be able to "contemplate her mother's life much more freely than before." See her "Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography," *Feminist Studies* 9 (Spring 1983): 86. See also Judith Kegan Gardiner, "A Wake for Mother: The Maternal Deathbed in Women's Fiction," *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978): 146-65.

26. Valerie Miner, "The Daughters' Journeys," *The Nation,* 24 Apr. 1989, 66.
27. See Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment,* ed. Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, 1958), 379-92; and Jeffrey R. Smitten and Ann Daghistory, eds. *Spatial Form in Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
28. Jean Wyatt, *Reconstructing Desire: The Role of the Unconscious in Women's Reading and Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 3, 201 (I am indebted to an anonymous reader of the manuscript of this essay for referring me to this book).
29. Eric S. Rabkin, "Spatial Form and Plot," in *Spatial Form in Narrative,* 96-97.
30. Wyatt, 201.
31. As Eric S. Rabkin notes (p. 99), the "notion of spatial form directs our attention most specifically to works . . . in which the ultimate point of view must be foisted on the reader by the parataxis of the text."
32. This strategy has emerged as a signature of some recent fiction by women of color. See Deborah E. McDowell's discussion of Alice Walker's construction of a sisterhood of readers in *The Color Purple* in "'The Changing Same': Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists," *New Literary History* 18 (Winter 1987): 297; Gayle Greene's analysis of the participatory reading elicited by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," *Signs* 16 (1991): 318; and Wendy Ho's characterization of *The Woman Warrior* as a "self-talking story" that insists on writing as "something to be decoded and reconstructed through the reader's or listener's collaborative efforts" in her essay, "Mother/Daughter Writing and the Politics of Race and Sex in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior,*" in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives,* ed. Shirley Hune, Hyung-chan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, and Amy Ling (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991), 236. See also Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," 232.