

**GOVERNMENT ARTS COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS),
COIMBATORE – 18
POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**WOMEN'S WRITING – UNIT V – FICTION
SEMESTER – II**

NON-DETAILED

5.1. AMY TAN'S *JOY LUCK CLUB*

The Joy Luck Club contains sixteen interwoven stories about conflicts between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-raised daughters. The book hinges on Jing-mei's trip to China to meet her half-sisters, twins Chwun Yu and Chwun Hwa. The half-sisters remained behind in China because Jing-mei's mother, Suyuan, was forced to leave them on the roadside during her desperate flight from Japan's invasion of Kweilin during World War II. Jing-mei was born to a different father years later, in America. Suyuan intended to return to China for her other daughters, but failed to find them before her death.

Jing-mei has taken her mother's place playing mahjong in a weekly gathering her mother had organized in China and revived in San Francisco: The Joy Luck Club. The club's other members—Lindo, Ying-ying, and An-mei—are three of her mother's oldest friends and fellow immigrants. They tell Jing-mei that just before Suyuan died, she had finally succeeded in locating the address of her lost daughters. The three women repeatedly urge Jing-mei to travel to China and tell her sisters about their mother's life. But Jing-mei wonders whether she is capable of telling her mother's story, and the three older women fear that Jing-mei's doubts may be justified. They fear that their own daughters, like Jing-mei, may not know or appreciate the stories of their mothers' lives.

The novel is composed of four sections, each of which contains four separate narratives. In the first four stories of the book, the mothers, speaking in turn, recall with astonishing clarity their relationships with their own mothers, and they worry that their daughters' recollections of them will never possess the same intensity. In the second section, these daughters—Waverly, Jing-mei, Lena, and Rose—relate their recollections of their childhood relationships with their mothers; the great lucidity and force with which they tell their stories proves their mothers' fears at least partially unfounded. In the third group of stories, the four daughters narrate their adult dilemmas—troubles in marriage and with their careers. Although they

believe that their mothers' antiquated ideas do not pertain to their own very American lifestyles, their search for solutions inevitably brings them back to their relationships with the older generation. In the final group of stories, the mothers struggle to offer solutions and support to their daughters, in the process learning more about themselves. Lindo recognizes through her daughter Waverly that she has been irrevocably changed by American culture. Ying-ying realizes that Lena has unwittingly followed her passive example in her marriage to Harold Livotny. An-mei realizes that Rose has not completely understood the lessons she intended to teach her about faith and hope.

Although Jing-mei fears that she cannot adequately portray her mother's life, Suyuan's story permeates the novel via Jing-mei's voice: she speaks for Suyuan in the first and fourth sections, the two "mothers' sections," of the novel. Suyuan's story is representative of the struggle to maintain the mother-daughter bond across cultural and generational gaps; by telling this story as her mother's daughter, Jing-mei enacts and cements the very bond that is the subject of Suyuan's story. When Jing-mei finally travels to China and helps her half-sisters to know a mother they cannot remember, she forges two other mother-daughter bonds as well. Her journey represents a reconciliation between Suyuan's two lives, between two cultures, and between mother and daughter. This enables Jing-mei to bring closure and resolution to her mother's story, but also to her own. In addition, the journey brings hope to the other members of the Joy Luck Club that they too can reconcile the oppositions in their lives between past and present, between cultures, and between generations.

As early as Amy Tan's dedication to her mother and grandmother, it is clear that *The Joy Luck Club* is a tribute to intergenerational and intercultural connections. Tan writes: "To my mother / and the memory of her mother / You asked me once / what I would remember. / This, and much more." In dedicating her novel this way, Tan both personalizes and universalizes it. She writes for her own readers--all, that is, who understand the special bonds between women. The Joy Luck Club is set primarily in modern-day San Francisco's Chinatown, but much of it occurs in the form of flashbacks to the mothers' lives in China. As a result, we become familiar with three different times and venues: China, where the mothers grew up, contemporary San Francisco, where the daughters and mothers live, and America in general.

The novel is divided into four. The book comprises four sections, each of which comprises four chapters. This arrangement represents the four seats at the Mah Jong table. Each chapter in a section is devoted to one mother or daughter, and their stories eventually intertwine to the point that the story of Jing-mei and Suyuan Woo becomes a symbol of fulfillment for all of them. The mothers approach their daughters as they do the game of Mah Jong; they know the best strategy is to make any and all moves secretly so that the revelation comes at the last minute. In this way, the mothers shape their unknowing daughters, imparting precious wisdom while seeming blunt and at times even ignorant. At the same time, the daughters are aware of their mothers' cleverness, which they alternately fear, love, resent, and imitate. In the first section, "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away," we learn that the mothers are sending Jing-mei to China to find the two daughters Suyuan abandoned during World War II. Then each mother tells a story about her own childhood in China. An-mei Hsu remembers watching her mother scar her own flesh, cutting a piece out of her arm to make a curative soup for An-mei's grandmother. Lindo Jong describes how she used superstition to escape her arranged marriage to a sour, spoiled boy and his controlling mother while preserving her family's honor. Ying-ying St. Clair explains how, when she was a little girl, she got separated from her family at the Moon Festival and found actors performing the story of the Moon Lady. When she went to tell the Moon Lady her secret wish, she found out that the person was really just a man in makeup. Though she grew up with many privileges, Ying-Ying learned early on that women are expected to keep their hopes and desires to themselves--secondary to men's.

In the second section, "The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates," the daughters tell stories from childhood. Waverly Jong remembers how she became a national chess champion--but then publicly humiliated Lindo by yelling at her to stop showing her off. Lena St. Clair recalls wishing she could bring Ying-ying back from the deathlike depression into which she sank after a miscarriage. Rose Hsu Jordan explains that despite the fact that her little brother Bing drowned as a child, An-mei still waits patiently for his return. Jing-mei remembers how Suyuan tried to turn her into a Chinese Shirley Temple and piano prodigy. After failing, she simultaneously triumphed over and wounded Suyuan by telling her she wished she were dead like the babies Suyuan abandoned in China.

In the third section, "American Translation," the daughters tell current stories about their mothers. Lena is afraid Ying-ying will see how her marriage is crumbling--since the woman has always been able to predict disaster--which she does. Waverly finally comes to terms with her mother when, despite her fianc 's terrible first impression, Lindo seems to

approve of him and acts proud of her daughter. Rose Hsu Jordan receives divorce papers from Ted Jordan; she realizes that while her mother may not approve of divorce, she wants Rose to be strong and free like the wild overgrowth in her garden. Jing-mei recalls that Suyuan gave her a jade pendant the night that she finally let Jing-mei know how proud she was of her for being herself.

In the fourth section, "Queen Mother of the Western Skies," the mothers tell current stories about their daughters, and Jing-mei finally visits China. An-mei wants Rose to stand up for herself in her relationship with Ted just as An-mei stood up to First Wife after her own mother's suicide. In the same vein, Ying-ying wants Lena to fulfill her legacy by standing up to Harold, because she let her own spirit fade away when she got married. At the hair salon, Lindo acknowledges that Waverly is ashamed of her, but when they look in the mirror, neither can deny how much they are alike. The novel ends with Jing-mei and her sisters in China, all marveling at how they look like Suyuan.

Each mother-daughter pair struggle with cultural and generational differences. The daughters tend to see their mothers as old-fashioned, overbearing, out-of-touch, and even threatening. In turn, the mothers are exasperated over their daughters' lack of understanding of Chinese culture, attitudes towards men, and satisfaction in "unglamorous" jobs. It is in moments of conflict with one another and with others that each mother or daughter realizes the validity of the other's perspective. To some extent, they are able to step into one another's skins. The climax of the novel comes when Jing-mei travels to China for the first time to meet her long-lost sisters. It was Suyuan Woo's specific wish to be reunited with her long-lost daughters, but the essence of this wish lives in all the mothers--to be truly connected in spirit to their daughters. Therefore, at the end of the novel, Jing-mei has fulfilled not only her own mother's legacy, but also those of all the members of the Joy Luck Club.

CHARACTERS

Suyuan Woo

Mother of Jing-Mei "June" Woo. She starts the Joy Luck Club in Kweilin, China, and then in San Francisco. When the Japanese approach Kweilin, she is forced to flee and eventually abandon her twin infant daughters. She marries Canning Woo, immigrates to America, and raises Jing-mei. Only after her death from an aneurysm is it revealed that she spent her whole life trying to find her lost daughters. It is then up to Jing-mei to fulfill her "long-cherished wish" of reuniting with them in China.

An-mei Hsu

Mother of Rose Hsu Jordan. As a young girl in China, she goes to live with her mother, who is a concubine to the rich merchant Wu Tsing. After witnessing her mother's suicide, she learns never to let others derive joy from her sorrow. As an adult, she believes in *nengkan*, the power to do anything one sets one's mind to. Her faith in her own powers is so strong that she can never quite admit that her dead son, Bing, will never return.

Lindo Jong

Mother of Waverly Jong. As a young girl, she was promised to a spoiled and unfeeling boy named Tyan-yu. When her family's land is ruined in a flood, she moves in with him and his cruel and overbearing mother, Huang Tai Tai. She devises a clever escape plan and immigrates to San Francisco, where she works in a fortune cookie factory and meets her husband, Tin Jong, and the other members of the Joy Luck Club.

Ying-ying St. Clair

Mother of Lena St. Clair. She grows up in a privileged family and is raised by her Amah. She believes in reading signs to determine the future and sees that Lena's marriage is doomed. She thinks her daughter's spirit is too weak and wants to instill some of her own "tiger spirit" or *chi* in her so that she will be strong enough to choose happiness over the comfort of routine.

Jing-mei "June" Woo

Daughter of Suyuan Wu. Her mother has recently died, and her father has asked her to take her mother's place in the Joy Luck Club. The ladies of the Joy Luck Club charge her with traveling to China to meet her long-lost sisters. Jing-mei feels inadequate for this mission, being afraid that she can never live up to her mother's expectations.

Rose Hsu Jordan

Daughter of An-mei Hsu. She is in the midst of divorcing Ted Jordan, with whom she has had a strained and unpassionate marriage. She has been denying her true wild, strong spirit in order to accommodate his meticulousness and pettiness. Rose has always been afraid of letting things happen without being able to stop them. This fear stems from her brother Bing's death at the age of four; he died on her watch, though she was not blamed.

Waverly Jong

Daughter of Lindo Jong. She is named after the street where she grew up, Waverly Place. As a child, she was pegged as a chess prodigy and became a local celebrity. She has a daughter, Shoshana, by her first marriage (to Marvin Chen). She lives with Rich Shields and is a tax attorney. Even as an adult, she is boastful and often tactless.

Lena St. Clair

Daughter of Ying-ying St. Clair. She is married to Harold Livotny, whom she encouraged to found his own architectural firm, Livotny & Associates. She works as an associate, earning seven times less than her husband. She has adapted to his ideas about how they should live, although this makes her unhappy.

Huang Tai Tai

Lindo Jong's first mother-in-law. She treats Lindo like a servant and blames her for not producing any grandchildren. She lets Lindo leave her household only because Lindo convinces her that her son, Tyan-yu, will die if he stays married to Lindo.

Tyan-yu

Lindo Jong's first husband, promised to her when they were both toddlers. He is spoiled and treats Lindo like a servant. He refuses to have sex with her, and because of this they have no children. Lindo thinks he is not interested in women because he never grew up, but there is also the slight implication that he is gay.

Amah

Ying-ying St. Clair's childhood nanny. She abandoned her baby son to be Ying-ying's nanny. She raised Ying-ying even though her mother was present, and tried to teach her how to be a proper lady.

Vincent and Winston Jong

Waverly Jong's older brothers. After Vincent receives a chess set as a Christmas present, Waverly is the one who rises to fame as a chess star. As she becomes more accomplished, Vincent and Winston are forced to make concessions such as doing her chores and sleeping in the living room so she can have her own room.

Bing

Rose Hsu Jordan's youngest brother. When he is four years old, he falls into the ocean and drowns on Rose's watch. Despite her best efforts, Rose's mother (An-mei) cannot recover his body. However, she never completely gives up hope of finding him. In the "Deaths" section of her Bible, she pencils his name in lightly, as though he may someday return and she may be able to erase it.

Old Chang

Jing-Mei Woo's piano teacher. He is deaf, so he does not notice when she plays the wrong notes. Jing-Mei takes advantage of his deafness by playing however she likes.

Ted Jordan

Rose Hsu Jordan's husband, a dermatologist. His losing in a medical malpractice lawsuit is the catalyst for their marriage's decline, and he eventually leaves Rose.

Arnold

When she is a young girl, Arnold is the boy Lena St. Clair is terrified she will end up marrying. She tries to use superstition to kill him, thinking that by leaving grains of rice in her bowl, she will make him so pockmarked that he will die. Five years later, Arnold dies of rare complications from the measles. Lena is convinced she caused his death.

Rich Shields

Waverly Jong's fiance and second husband-to-be. He is short, stocky, red-haired and freckled. They met at the tax firm where they both worked. He does not understand Chinese customs, and as a result he is constantly making social mistakes in front of Waverly's parents. He is the only man with whom Waverly has experienced so pure a love.

Shoshana

Waverly Jong's four-year-old daughter from her first marriage to Marvin Chen. Lindo and Tin Jong's only grandchild. She lives with her mother and Rich Shields.

Tin Jong

Lindo Jong's husband and Waverly Jong's father. Also the father of Vincent and Winston Jong. He is a quiet but jolly man.

Canning Woo

Husband of Suyuan Woo and father of Jing-mei Woo. Now that he is a widower, he has asked Jing-mei to take her mother's place in the Joy Luck Club.

An-mei Hsu's Mother

After An-mei's father dies, she is tricked into becoming Wu Tsing's Fourth Wife and moves to his house in Tientsin. When An-mei is nine, she returns home to nurse Popo on her deathbed. Then she takes An-mei with her to Tientsin, where she lives unhappily in her unprivileged position, being used by Wu Tsing and Second Wife. She finally poisons herself to death.

Wu Tsing

A rich merchant of Tientsin, who tricks An-mei Hsu's Mother into becoming his Fourth Wife. He is a fat man who lives in great Western luxury and treats his wives badly, especially An-mei Hsu's Mother.

Yan Chang

Servant to An-mei Hsu's mother, who she thinks deserves a better life than she has in Wu Tsing's household. She is An-mei's only childhood friend after she moves into Wu Tsing's estate.

Second Wife

Wu Tsing's most prominent and favored wife, who gets what she wants by manipulating others and threatening suicide. She tricks An-mei Hsu's Mother into becoming Fourth Wife, and claims the son the latter bears as her own. She begins to lose her sway only when An-mei finally stands up to her.

Clifford St. Clair

Husband to Ying-ying St. Clair and father to Lena St. Clair. An American man with a jolly personality. He wooed Ying-ying when they were both living outside Shanghai, and has died before the time of the novel.

Marvin Chen

Waverly Jong's first husband, her high school sweetheart with whom she eloped and had a daughter, Shoshana.

Harold Livotny

Lena St. Clair's husband. After Lena encourages him, he starts his own architectural firm, Livotny & Associates, where she works under him. He insists they have separate bank accounts, and cannot manage to give himself over to her completely.

Teresa

A sweet but mischievous girl who lives next door to Lena St. Clair when she is a child. Every night, she can be heard having terrible fights with her mother. Lena feels lucky in comparison to Teresa, whom she supposes lives a painful life.

Mei Ching

A peasant woman who found and raised Jing-mei's long-lost sisters.

Chwun Yu

One of Jing-mei's long-lost sisters. She was born first, so her name means "Spring Rain."

Chwun Hwa

One of Jing-mei's long-lost sisters. She was born second, so her name means "Spring Flower," which comes after the rain.

5.2 MARGARET LAWRENCE'S *THE DIVINERS*

The Diviners is the story of an independent woman who refuses to abandon her search for love. It is the story of the 48-year-old Morag Gunn as she struggles to finish another novel. As she works, she reminisces about her life. It's her own story, but it's also the story of the men and women who have fostered her, for good and bad: her parents, who died when she was only at the age of five; her eccentric stepfather Christie Logan, the despised town scavenger and his peculiar and very inactive wife Prin; Morag's overbearing and repressive husband Brooke Skelton, who tried to obliterate her dreams to write; and her sensuous but unreliable Native lover Jules Tonnerre, who inspires her, with whom she bears a daughter and with whom she is never happy because she does not share her life with him. She is not able to found a family and to give her daughter a real family life with father and mother at her side.

Morag also has a difficult relationship with her daughter Pique.

For Morag Gunn, growing up in a small town on the Canadian prairie, Manawaka, in Manitoba, is a toughening process – putting distance between herself and a world that wanted no part of her. But in time, the loneliness that had once been forced upon her becomes a precious right – relinquished only in her overwhelming need for love. Again, and again, Morag is forced to test her strength against the world – and finally, after having made many experiences and after having escaped from her unhappy marriage, she achieves the life she had determined to be hers, when she returns to rural Canada in hopes of coming to terms with the past.