

379
N81
No. 6969

WOMEN BECOMING: A FEMINIST CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN AMY TAN'S
THE JOY LUCK CLUB AND THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Carman C. Curton, B.A.

Denton, Texas

December 1993

907

Curton, Carman C., Women Becoming: A Feminist Critical Analysis of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife. Master of Arts (English), December, 1993, 61 pp., bibliography, 56 titles.

This analysis of Tan's first two novels reveals that her female characters suffer from the strains critics like Amy Ling say result from the double paradox of filling the roles of mother or daughter as minority women in a white, male society.

Recognizing this double paradox offers Tan's characters, and her readers, the opportunity to resolve the conflicts between mothers and daughters in The Joy Luck Club. Using the theories of psychologist Kathie Carlson helps readers understand how the protagonist of The Kitchen God's Wife resolves similar conflicts with her daughter and her own mother by seeking support from a mythic mother-figure, a Goddess of her own making.

Copyright by
Carman C. Curton
1993

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	1
THE MINORITY WOMAN AS MARGINALIZED WRITER	
CHAPTER 2	11
PARADOX IN THE MOTHER- DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP	
CHAPTER 3	24
HEALING THE WOUND: THE IRONY OF PARADOX IN <u>THE JOY LUCK CLUB</u>	
CHAPTER 4	36
MYTH-MAKING AS EMPOWERMENT	
CHAPTER 5	45
LADY SORROWFREE: SELF-EMPOWERMENT IN <u>THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE</u>	
CHAPTER 6	54
THE WRITER AS PROPHET	
WORKS CITED	57

CHAPTER 1

THE MINORITY WOMAN AS MARGINALIZED WRITER

Amy Tan's novels, The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, focus on the relationship between mother and daughter. These novels, stories of Chinese American women written by a Chinese American woman,¹ portray in sharp relief the conflicts minority American women face in their daily lives and in their relationships with each other. In patriarchal societies, social expectations of female roles divide mother and daughter. Some critics assert that these forces further separate mothers and daughters who are also members of a racial or ethnic minority because expected female roles are stricter and options for escaping or surpassing these roles are fewer for such women. In these two novels, the female characters come to understand that only by recognizing and accepting the importance of their own mother-daughter relationships can they come to terms with the paradoxes that inform their daily lives, the paradoxes and internal conflicts of women living in a man's world, of non-whites living in a Caucasian world. The viewpoints of Tan's female characters have been honed by their estrangement from American culture--both as women in a patriarchal society and as Chinese Americans in a Caucasian society. Being doubly-outside

¹ As writers including Amy Ling, Merle Woo, and Mitsuye Yamada use the non-hyphenated terms Chinese American and Asian American when referring to themselves and others, I do also.

society has made these characters doubly-suited to make sharp observations and to provide cutting commentary about the inconsistencies, absurdities, and tragedies that fill their lives.

The importance of the mother-daughter relationship is a distinct sub-topic within the realm of feminist literary criticism. Josephine Donovan considers it in her discussion of the tenets of feminist theory (FT 159, 211), and many other writers, essayists, and critics whose works appear in anthologies of writings by ethnic and minority American women focus on the topic as a matter of course. Essays, short stories, and poems addressing the mother-daughter relationship fill collections such as This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color and The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology.

Devoting an entire book, Between Worlds, to Chinese American women writers, Amy Ling theorizes that being outside a culture offers a writer a unique perspective into that culture. She says that being doubly-outside a society, being a woman in a man's world, being a Chinese among Caucasians, offers writers a rare vantage point for examining a culture to which they both do and do not belong (177-9). However, Ling does not focus solely on the unique perspective of the Chinese American female writer. Rather, she emphasizes that, for writers on society's margins, writing is more than mere expression. For the writers Ling examines, writing is "the affirmation of self in opposition to all forms of domination and negation" (170). Ling says the explosion of ethnic and minority women writers onto the contemporary American literary scene results from a "need to voice themselves"

(179) and calls their writing "an act of self-assertion" and of "defiance against the weight of historical and societal injunctions" (1). Ling's recognition of the cultural forces that shape literature fits Elaine Showalter's definition of gynocriticism, that is, criticism that approaches minority women's writing only in context with the dominant culture which must influence it (462, 473).

Some minority women writers utilize their marginal status to examine the mother-daughter relationship and offer a viewpoint from which to reconcile the psychological conflicts that some theorists consider inherent in such a bond. Only from this marginalized a perspective, assert such critics as Mary Daly (G/E 39, 347), Natalie M. Rosinsky (290), and Nan Bauer Maglin (258), can a reconciliation between mother and daughter be recognized, voiced, experienced, and honored.

Tan's first two novels perform all of these tasks by focusing on the vital relationship between mothers and daughters. The Joy Luck Club utilizes the conflict inherent in the paradoxes of this strained relationship to reconcile the differences between mother and daughter. In The Kitchen God's Wife, Tan illustrates how a woman can both empower herself through the act of creating her own mythical goddess and resolve conflicts with her daughter and her own mother, conflicts arising from social and cultural pressures on both women in their roles as mothers and as daughters.

Psychotherapist Kathie Carlson says the "primary" relationship among women is that between mother and daughter (xi). Yet, she says, for many women, this relationship is rife with grief because of the superhuman, even inhumane, expectations

modern American society places on mothers to be flawless role models and acculturators for their daughters. Psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow reaches the same conclusion, asserting that certain cultural factors found in patriarchal societies create an emotional paradox by encouraging women to form strong emotional attachments to their mothers, attachments which are degraded and devalued by other cultural factors. Chodorow says mothers and daughters tend to form closer bonds very early in the daughter's childhood than mothers and sons do, because the women are united by their simultaneous identification with each other as family members and as females. However, this theory assumes that since sons do not form such close ties with their mothers, they do not form them with anyone--mothers or fathers or siblings. These boys, and the men they then become, place little value on such close bonds as those between mothers and daughters and, by association, assign little value to the women who share these bonds as well. The paradox these conflicting attitudes form perverts and distorts the relationships mothers and daughters share.

Does this cross-disciplinary analysis provide a valid paradigm with which to study Tan's first two novels? These social and psychological theories can be unified with the assertion that women's writing is important because it validates the experiences of female existence. Women's writing is "authentic" (Showalter 458; Register 12, 19) if it utilizes experience and emotion to create literature that tells a story relevant to an audience of women. The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, then, will fulfill the requirements of authenticity if they are examined from the perspective of a variety of fields and stand up to the test, demonstrating that they

speak accurately to and about women and the lives of women. By implication, this literature will be free of demeaning stereotypes and imprisoning assumptions of feminine inferiority. Register expresses this belief when, as part of her formula for "prescriptive" criticism, she says, "Rather than being driven to mental breakdown or suicide or immobility, the heroines of new feminist fiction will somehow manage to resist destruction, perhaps with the support and confidence of other women" (24). It is such women-supporting-women relationships, particularly the relationship between mother and daughter, that many feminist theorists see as vital to the stories women tell. Tan's first two novels portray just such strong mother-daughter ties, strained but loving, nurturing, and nourishing, nonetheless. The mothers and daughters in these two stories feel the strength of their bonds and fight to cross the chasm of conflict and misunderstanding that separates them.

Are the feminist theories from the various disciplines cited here solidly linked to feminist literary criticism? A wide variety of scholars assert the answer is "yes." Critic Terry Eagleton is unequivocal in stating that all critical theory is political because it either seeks to transform society or it strains to uphold the status quo (195). He even goes so far as to upbraid literary critics who either desire or claim to be apolitical, since, he argues, any culture's canon can easily be shown to serve the interests of those who are privileged to name that very canon. As Betty Friedan so succinctly states, "aesthetic criticism can't be value-free" (54). Eagleton and Roland Barthes each equate the terms culture and ideology (Eagleton 195; Barthes 81). Barthes says that the critic who claims to practice his or her trade without a political

agenda, doth, like the Queen in Hamlet's play, protest too much. Barthes asserts, "a literary judgement is always determined by the whole of which it is a part, and the very absence of such a system--especially when it becomes a profession of faith--stems from a very definite system" (82). Eagleton affirms this, saying "ideology" is the "connection" between discourse and power (210).

Affirming the link of culture to ideology, both Michel Foucault and Elizabeth Meese assert that truth cannot be determined independently of power. For Foucault, what is "true" depends on who controls the discourse (72-3). Meese follows this reasoning to its logical end by concluding that male domination of discourse, including literary and critical discourse, traps women inside male "truth" (Meese 16). Raman Selden draws the same conclusion, asserting that literary values and conventions have been shaped by men to apply to men's writings (136). Showalter names the sum of these conventions "male critical theory" even as she recognizes that, until the advent of modern feminist criticism, such theory, primarily conceived of and espoused by men for literature by men, was considered "universal" and universally applicable to all literature written by and for all people (46).

Donovan calls feminist political theory "central" to feminist critical theory (FLC, x), and Cheri Register asserts that feminist critical theory is a "new" form of literary analysis founded on the "tenets" of the American women's movement" (1), stating that it is "ultimately" cultural analysis (10). In defining feminist criticism as "rebellion" against and "resistance" to the male bastion of the literary canon (458), Showalter coins the term "gynocritics" (461) and, in calling for a redefinition of

criticism, connects feminist criticism irrevocably to cultural criticism. Thus, by asserting that no literary criticism can remain apolitical, these scholars have established a link with which to connect feminist cultural theory to feminist literary theory.

Since a number of writers, critics, and academicians concur that feminist criticism has its roots in feminist theory, it is important to establish a working definition of feminism. Again, a common definition is difficult to recognize since there exist nearly as many definitions as critics.

The point of agreement among the seemingly myriad of theories of contemporary American feminism is a recognition that women in American society share a "disjunction" separating them, as feminine, from the common culture (Hunt 11). Feminist theorists as diverse as Donovan, Ling, Mary Daly, Ann Wilson Schaefer, and Merle Woo recognize that women's experiences are defined as outside the realm of relevant experiences, outside a reality determined, more precisely, as male reality. Such theorists acknowledge that, for men and women alike, women are always Simone de Beauvoir's "Other" (29).

Donovan calls much feminist literary criticism "corrective criticism." She sees the goal of this criticism as, generally, focusing the theoretical spotlight on "feminine" reality and, specifically, correcting the male bias feminist theorists believe pervades literary criticism (Crit. Inq. 605). Like Donovan, Register also defines feminist criticism as a form of analysis based on the principles of feminist political theory and presents a detailed outline of the male bias she sees in current literary

theory. Register's criticism prescribes standards for writing with a feminist viewpoint (2). The goal of such prescriptive criticism is to provide an impetus for authors to create a new literature and for critics to provide a new literary standard which presents and analyzes valid images of women and women's lives. Register's definition of validity includes a requirement of "authentic[ity]" found in the "realistic representation of 'female experience,' 'feminine consciousness,' or 'female reality.'" Presenting an argument for a phenomenological reading, Register states that one measure of such authenticity "must be the subjective response of the female reader," using, as the yardstick for comparison, the reader's own experience of feminine reality (13). Thus, she asserts, women's literature should "compass the totality of the female life experience" (19). Showalter reaches the same conclusion in her description of feminist criticism as an act of rebellion against existing (read: male) critical theory. Here, she insists that feminist criticism should be based more on women's studies than on English studies (460) and asserts that feminist studies reject supposedly objective standards of literary criticism based on the male canon and male criticism in favor of accepting the "authority" of female experience (458).

From this theoretical base, then, it is a short step to a theory of feminist criticism as, first, a recognition of the validity of women's experiences as well as of whatever mode women use to convey their originality, their uniqueness, and their genuine thoughts (Showalter 461, 473). Alice Walker pays moving tribute to this individuality in general, and to her own mother's in particular, in her widely cited "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (231-243). Donovan goes beyond reverence for

this recognition of women's experiences to call the study of women's literature "empowerment" (Donovan FLC, xiii). This theory of feminist criticism also embraces the idea that certain topics are vital to any valid literary account of women's experiences. Eagleton concurs, asserting of the feminist critic, "She also believes that gender and sexuality are central themes in literature and other sorts of discourse, and that any critical account which suppresses them is seriously defective" (209).

In "Letter to Ma," Woo affirms the importance of bringing strong mother-daughter relationships to light once again. She says it is "crucial" to put women's stories in writing, especially stories of ethnic American women and of the relationships between ethnic American mothers and daughters (146). The messages these stories convey--that many minority mothers and daughters share seemingly irreconcilable differences, that these differences can be used to strengthen this important bond--are part of a growing awareness that women cannot ignore the importance of a mother and of mothering in their lives. Karen Elias-Button says the source of women's self-discovery is a "personal" as well as a "mythological" reexamination of women's relationships, not just with their mothers, but with the mythological figure of the mother-archetype as well (193). Tan's characters in The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife discover new strength and vitality within their own mother-daughter ties. In the process of learning and re-learning about themselves and each other, these women also re-evaluate and re-recognize the value of being mothered, whatever the source of this care and nurturing. Judith Ochshorn documents stories of strong mother-daughter relationships found in ancient Near

Eastern literature and says tales of satisfying relationships between strong and independent women could only have been created in a time when women were "valued" and their relationships to one another considered valid and strong. The message implied in her essay is that literature portraying similar bonds is rarely valued in modern American culture because such woman-to-woman relationships are rarely appreciated (5-14). Daly says, much more emphatically, that "feminism releases the inherent dynamic in the mother-daughter relationship toward friendship, which is strangled in the male-mastered system" (G/E 39).

If Daly further defines feminism as "the journey of women becoming," (G/E 1), then feminist literary criticism could be named the analysis of women's writing that reveals the story of women becoming. The writers, scholars, and theorists presented in this chapter agree that the primary value of women's writing is its presentation of the journey of the female experience, a presentation which needn't be held up to the literary canon of predominantly white, male writers and judged deviant or be analyzed by dominant schools of criticism and judged inferior. Archaeologists are now reconstructing ancient stories and myths that celebrate the power and sensuality and sacredness of women, as females, as sexual beings, and as mothers and daughters (Gadon 285-307). New feminist writers are now reconstructing similar stories in their literature. Donovan believes that power and politics are embedded in all of our actions (x). In The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, author Amy Tan empowers women through the resolution of paradox and the creation of myths that serve today's ethnic American women.

CHAPTER 2

PARADOX IN THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

In a patriarchal society, paradox is a daily part of a woman's life. The traits which American culture values most lie in direct opposition to the American ideal of womanhood. Success and achievement are unbecoming to a woman, and even more so to a woman who is also a mother. Yet the woman who is not a mother, by chance or by choice, is seen as flawed or at least suspect. So central is motherhood to the concept of female in such a society that a childless woman is seen as essentially flawed. Barthes notes in one of his Mythologies essays that a popular French magazine profiling women writers had to resolve the conflict presented in honoring these women's literary accomplishments by listing their achievements side-by-side with a photo of their children. Since achievement and recognition violate societal definitions of femininity, juxtaposing success with children relieves the discomfort a reader might experience about these writers' accomplishments if he or she is not reassured that they are mothers first and writers only after that. Yet in a patriarchal society, the woman who fills the role of mother faces unattainable expectations. It is often a thankless, no-win position, and still a woman must prepare her daughter to become a mother herself if the mother is to fill her own expected role in society.

The ironies inherent in the lives of women are multiplied for the women of color in such a culture. Paradox intensifies when a woman who already holds a

tenuous position within a society is further marginalized and faces additional conflicts in role expectations as a member of an ethnic or racial minority. Women in such circumstances are often poor and undereducated and face conflicting cultural demands from their dual heritages. Pressures on ethnic and minority women to conform to "feminine" roles are even stronger and more numerous than those on their Caucasian counterparts (Rosinsky 280).

This abundance of identity conflicts calls to mind Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's assertion that, since the feminist voice is by definition "a violation" of the feminine role in western society, the only suitable metaphor for the rhetoric of the women's movement is the irony of paradox ("Feminist Approach" 389-402). Campbell notes that the "fundamental" values of American culture--"self-reliance, achievement, and independence"--are in direct opposition to the definition of the female role--"gentle," "soft," and "delicate" ("feminine"), "cute" and "helpless" (Friday 35), passive and compliant (Ellman 78-81; 119-23). For every American woman, then, assuming the role of speaker, using one's voice in speaking or writing, is in itself a paradox.

The core of a paradox, however, is that such an "apparently self-contradictory (even absurd) statement" contains at its center "a truth reconciling the conflicting opposites" (Cuddon 479). What do paradoxes convey, then, except a puzzle? The answer to a paradox, its meaning and purpose, is found within the "truth" of its seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. However, it is not necessary to view such conflicts as negative. A Feminist Dictionary's citation identifies "conflict" as an essential component of growth. This definition also includes the concept of conflict

as a "process" of moving on, or as a transition from an "old" belief to a "new" one (104). Using such a methodology, the many cultural and situational paradoxes within Tan's The Joy Luck Club can be examined. A close reading of these paradoxes offers the reader a new understanding of the many ironies in the lives of the book's eight female characters. Reconciling these paradoxes helps a reader trace a path parallel to that which the Joy Luck Club characters follow as they solve the conflicts bequeathed them by their social and ethnic heritages.

Such conflicts can be found at the heart of the paradoxes that define the roles the Joy Luck Club characters play. These eight characters--four mothers and their four daughters--face seemingly irreconcilable conflicts about their familial roles as well as about their roles in American society as Chinese Americans. These women participate in the process of resolving personal, familial, and cultural dilemmas arising from their positions as Chinese Americans in a Caucasian society and as mothers and daughters in a patriarchal society. By doing this, they resolve the paradoxes of their lives as women and as Chinese Americans.

For the many women who are also mothers, the paradoxes of women's roles grow as these mothers constrict their daughters' growth. Mothers mold their daughters physically and emotionally to the restrictive ideals of femininity that society demands of women for their survival. For the daughters, too, paradoxes abound within their development as they try to form their first ideals of self-identification in opposition to their mothers, their first role models. Daly details conflicts daughters develop with mothers whose societal duties demand that they teach their daughters to

conform to appropriate female roles. In Gyn/Ecology she closely examines the mother's role in preparing her daughter to conform to the restrictive and objectified place to which society relegates her.

Carlson devotes an entire book to the ancient and transcendent mother-daughter relationship, discussing millennia of troubled mother-daughter ties. Carlson describes a view of motherhood where both mother and child have unrealistic, unrealizable expectations for the role of mother as well as for the person filling that role. The paradox here rests in how such a vital role in any society can be so easily reduced to a lose-lose situation. Throughout the pages of In Her Image: The Unhealed Daughter's Search for Her Mother, Carlson argues that the complex and undervalued mother-daughter attachment is further complicated in cultures that do not have a female god-image or archetype which women, mothers and daughters alike, can turn to as a model Mother (73). Carlson explains that cultures which worship a patriarchal god or gods offer to men and boys an alternate father-figure which can serve their emotional and self-identification needs in a variety of ways. First, father-god figures can provide both a model and an ideal toward which fathers within a culture can strive. A second benefit to the men and boys of a society which proffers one or more revered masculine gods is the option of turning to an alternate father-figure. If a son finds his relationship with his own father lacking, he can choose to turn to the father-god and utilize this figure and its surrounding religious institutions as substitutes for the parental nurturing and guidance missing from his life (3). The third and most important benefit of a revered father-god to the men of a culture is the

clear delineation between the father-parent and the father-god for every member of that culture. Carlson's point is that a child doesn't consider a father an archetype--omniscient, all-powerful, responsible for supra-natural matters in life and in death--if another father-figure which models these powers is already present in the culture (10).

Carlson draws on this analytical framework to explore the effects on women of living in a culture where no similar respected and revered female models exist. She asserts that in a society where the concept of Mother and the actual mother are not modeled separately, the two ideas merge. Carlson then outlines why viewing one's mother as indistinct and inseparable from the archetype of Mother is a recipe for failure. Such a merged view of mother and Mother, she says, creates unrealistic expectations of mothers as well as of mothering (3-12).¹

Carlson writes that, in such societies, both a mother and her children hold unattainable ideals of motherhood. The primary result of these unrealistic expectations for a mother is, according to her, guilt. Since no one can be as perfectly loving, giving, and nurturing as a goddess, she argues, every mother in such a society will always carry the burden of her own inadequacy as a mother (65). The "dynamics inherent in the patriarchal" system of child-care, Carlson says, encourage

¹ While some critics would posit the Virgin Mary as an accessible and positive Mother in many cultures, Elinor Gadon presents a detailed account of Christianity's efforts to continually sanctify an image of the asexual Mary. She argues that the cult of the immaculate conception of the Virgin and the miraculous conception of Christ have served to separate the idolatry of Mary from the "sacredness of human sexuality." This contributes to the paradox-filled roles of mother and daughter, since no woman can achieve Mary's purity if that woman were a mother or even aspired to be (189-223).

the child and others to see a mother as the willing "all-fulfiller" of needs who is, ideally, "unselfish" and "infinitely caring." Additionally, if a boy in such a society finds his mother unequal to the task of her idealized role, he can turn to his father or to his father-god figure for guidance about his place within his culture. A daughter in this position, however, has no such alternative (3). The unresolvable conflict in this situation, the paradox here, is that the role of mother is vital to any society that wants to last beyond one generation, yet it is a role whose expectations no single person can ever fill.

Chodorow also considers social and cultural factors primary influences on the mother-daughter relationship. However, Chodorow attributes gender differences in personality development to the tendency in nearly all cultures for women to be responsible for early childhood care. She asserts that by about age three, young male children experience early separation and personality differentiation in identifying themselves as masculine and apart from their mothers. By contrast, Chodorow states, mothers see their daughters as like themselves, and a typical mother begins "to experience her daughter . . . as herself" (46).² She asserts that the mother consequently treats her daughters differently from her sons. Daughters, likewise, view themselves as like their mothers, and so do not experience early separation from their mothers during identity formation, the first self-knowledge which children

² Carlson also recognizes this dual identification among the women she treats in her private practice as a psychologist (23-33).

develop around the age of three (51). In other words, female children, in Chodorow's estimation, are more likely to view themselves, and consequently to value themselves, in relation to perceiving other peoples' needs and feelings (beginning with their mothers') as their own (58-9). Separation conflicts and problems in developing a sense of identity, self, and role seem almost inevitable for girls and women in such families and cultures.

Other mother-daughter conflicts are brought to the fore throughout the process of a daughter's socialization as well. As Carlson, Chodorow, Donovan, and others have noted, mothers have been children's primary caregivers in most of the world's cultures throughout history. Thus, mothers are usually the primary transmitters of a society's definitions of appropriate roles for children of each gender. Berger and Luckmann outline this process of socialization, of how reality and possibility are created, modeled, and enforced for each member of society through children's caregivers, or "significant others" (131). A mother who prepares her son for his role in a patriarchal society where he is expected to mature into a valued and productive member is likely to run into little opposition from him. The mother's obvious problem, then, lies in her responsibility for transmitting the necessary information about the female's lesser status to her daughter. Daly (G/E 41) and Carlson (5) each discuss the de-humanizing effort involved when a mother, knowingly or not, communicates such devaluing and discouraging information to her own daughter. Daly names this relational paradox between mother and daughter the "primordial mutilation" (G/E 41).

Writers as diverse as Maxine Hong Kingston, Nancy Friday, Aurora Levins Morales, Gloria Anzaldúa, Woo, and Walker have all addressed the troubles they consider inherent within the mother-daughter relationship. Given the conflicts embedded in a mother's role as transmitter of cultural values combined with the dilemmas of the unrealistic expectations for the person filling the mother's role in a patriarchal society, it is easy to understand that the theme of frequent and harsh mother-daughter conflicts is common across many cultures.

The strong identification mother and daughter feel for one another is the core of the paradox embedded in a relationship between two women that a society has pitted against one another, by definition of the roles they play. In a patriarchal society, Mary Ellman asserts, a "good" woman is "passive" (78-81). Such a "good" woman accepts her abbreviated societal role as wife and mother only, no more and certainly no less. A "good" mother, then, not only conforms to these stereotypical ideals but teaches her daughter to conform, too. From this argument Rosinsky concludes that the mother-daughter relationship in a patriarchal culture is twisted and perverted by societal demands on "good" mothers and daughters (280). On the topic of compliance with such feminine roles, Rosinsky writes, "[I]t is as treacherously easy for daughters as it is for mothers to internalize misleading norms" (285). Daly calls the instruction mothers provide about feminine thought and behavior the "killing off the self-actualization of their daughters" who, of course, hate them for it rather than hating the "real enemy," the culture which permits them limited roles of seemingly little value (GTF 149). Morales records the information women in her

family passed to another generation through her. She writes of the only role modeled for her in this trans-generational cache of feminine lore, describing women who are:

hating sex and gloating over the hidden filthiness in everything . . .
 Women teaching women our bodies are disgusting and dirty, our
 desires are obscene, men are all sick and want only one sickening thing
 from us. Saying you've got learn how to hold out on 'em just enough
 to get what you want. (53)

Anzaldúa also rebelled against the role her mother tried to mold her to. She describes how she chafed against her mother's reprimands because she "did not act like a nice little Chicanita" and was "a tomboy . . . wearing boots, . . . unafraid of snakes or knives, showing (her) contempt for women's roles" (198).

Like Morales, whose cultural background is Puerto Rican Jewish American, and Anzaldúa, who is a sixth-generation Mexican American, many of the writers and critics who describe and dissect the mother-daughter relationship pay special attention to the ties between ethnic and minority mothers and daughters. Rosinsky considers the stresses on women of living in a sexist and/or explicitly patriarchal culture nearly universal and asserts that the theme of mother-daughter ties strained by such pressures "cuts across time, place, and genre within minority women's writing" (289).

Rosinsky asserts that societal pressure to conform to "feminine" stereotypes in America is stronger on culturally and/or economically oppressed women, such as those who are poor or who belong to ethnic or minority groups. She further states that "the strain placed upon mother-daughter relationships by social definitions of motherhood and 'proper' female behavior is exacerbated by the women's being

members of other oppressed groups" (285). She then theorizes that the "added oppression" of being a minority makes ethnic women writers especially aware of the "tragic destructiveness" of social stresses felt between mother and daughter (280).

Rosinsky (280), Walker (231-43), Moraga (Bridge 23), Morales (56), and Woo (142-3) assert that American ethnic and minority women writers have utilized their doubly-oppressed status as outsiders within American society to gain insights into the complex, burdened mother-daughter relationship. In this view, a woman's recognition of her own mother's undervalued status, as a woman and as a minority, enables the daughter to understand the forces which acted on her mother to devalue her and to force her to prepare the daughter for the devalued role awaiting her. "The real enemy," Rosinsky writes, "appears easier to see when more than one oppression unites the two women" (280-1). Throughout her essay, Rosinsky provides examples of such reconciliations found in the literature of minority American women.

Searching for even the slightest proof of any spirituality in her own mother, Walker found her mother's gardens. She describes these bright havens, lush and colorful repositories of her mother's creative urges, writing, "Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength--in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (243). In "Letter to Ma" Woo uses her doubly-marginal status as an Asian American and as a woman to gain insight into both racism and sexism and to effect social change. "To begin with, we must wipe out the circumstances that keep us down in silence and self-effacement. Right now, my techniques are education and writing" (142-3). In her text of the same title, Amy Ling draws similar conclusions

about Chinese American women writers who find themselves "between worlds." She concludes that for these women, writing is both an act of expression and an assertion of self against the weight of the double oppression of being Chinese and female in America.

Recognizing and reconciling one's marginal position as a woman "between worlds," however, is only part of the paradox an ethnic or minority American woman lives with. Writers such as Ling, Morales, and Kingston emphasize that, for a woman, embracing her ethnic heritage in response to her marginal status in America only drives her toward more conflicts if her ethnic culture is explicitly patriarchal. "[T]he ethnic minority female," Ling writes, "is triply vulnerable: as Chinese in an Euro-American world, as a woman in a Chinese man's world, as a Chinese woman in a white man's world" (15). Linda Hunt notes that such women are "doubly marginal" belonging neither to the dominant race nor to the dominant class (7). Both Ling and Hunt assert that women professing loyalty to such an ethnic culture then face the additional conflict of identifying with, and thus endorsing, a society which, at its core, assigns women very little worth. Additionally, both critics assert that if such a woman denies her ethnic background she risks alienation from part of her cultural heritage.

Daly and Ling each detail the history of misogyny of Chinese society, summarizing the Chinese history of crippling women through footbinding (Daly, *G/E* 134-52; Ling 1). This is part of the culture which Tan's characters share with their American heritage in The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife. Ling also

cites evidence of women's "inferior and even expendable status," demonstrated in the Chinese practices of "concubinage, female slavery, and female infanticide" (1) as well as the suicides and murders of widows (2). Even more ingrained than such overt forms of torture and homicide are the millennia of philosophers' and scholars' writings elaborating and justifying women's second-class status, as well as demeaning sayings, proverbs, laws, and mores which permitted, even regulated, the subjugation of an entire gender in Chinese society. Confucius wrote of the goal of the "perfect submission" of women and of the "subordination" of wives. And, for nearly two thousand years Chinese law decreed that women should always be obedient to men, whether fathers, husbands, or sons (Ling 3; Handlin 13).

Hunt describes the "double-binds" of Chinese American writer Kingston, who attempts to make peace with her Chinese cultural background "which devalues and even insults women" (6), recognizing that "If she identifies with the (Chinese American) community, she must accept and even endorse her own humiliation at their hands" (7). Hunt emphasizes that throughout The Woman Warrior Kingston demonstrates how "she cannot simply overlook the patriarchal biases of Chinese culture" (8). Hunt presents a rhetorical analysis of The Woman Warrior in which she demonstrates that Kingston's overriding theme in this work is that any woman who tries to identify solely with the American oppression of people of her ethnic background is then "denying" the wounds inflicted on herself as well as on other women by Caucasian American men and ethnic American men alike (9).

Kingston details the conflicts of growing up in a Chinese American family,

influenced by a culture which calls women "maggots" (51, 222-3), "dustpan-and-broom" (238), and "slave" (56). Relatives in her home warned each other, "When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls" (62). Recording her attempts to escape such paradoxes within her cultural identity and heritage, Kingston writes, "Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (57). Seeking to reconcile the double paradox of her cultural inheritance as a Chinese woman caught between two patriarchal cultures, Kingston asks, "[W]hen you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother . . . from what is Chinese?" (6).

This chapter and the one that follows are an attempt to add depth, to find a message which connects The Joy Luck Club to the goals of feminist criticism, to identify this text with a class of literature that falls into Showalter's definition of gynocriticism (462, 473)--literature by women and about women. This literature does not flinch from the realities of being an ethnic or a minority woman in America and is a bold, vital, encouraging look at womanhood for women of every color in America today. The next chapter links paradoxes within the actions and feelings of The Joy Luck Club characters to the many paradoxes the writers, critics, philosophers, and psychologists cited here believe fill the lives of women, especially women of color, on a daily basis in our society.

CHAPTER 3

HEALING THE WOUND: THE IRONY OF PARADOX IN THE JOY LUCK CLUB

Like a woman who is the product of two dissimilar cultures, the text of Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club is rich with paradox. The action of this story traces the developmental conflicts of children who are raised by Chinese mothers in a Caucasian world, children raised by women in a men's world. A feminist literary critical analysis of character development in The Joy Luck Club yields a view of the compounding of difficulties experienced by four women who, through their childhood socializations by their mothers, come to identify with caregivers who are Chinese and female in a world dominated by Caucasian men.

Narrated by eight characters in 16 separate stories,¹ The Joy Luck Club describes the seemingly disparate lives of four American daughters and their Chinese mothers. The tales of the daughters, Jing-mei "June" Woo, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Place Jong, and Lena St. Clair, describe their efforts to distinguish themselves from their Chinese mothers and to become wholly American in the process. As June recounts, "all my Caucasian friends agreed: I was about as Chinese as they were" (267), and Rose tells of making deliberate distinctions, saying, "I

¹ Tan actually conceived of the book as a series of short stories and was dumbfounded to discover her agent had sold the idea to a publisher as a book. See Hubbard and Wilhelm 149.

learned to choose from the best opinions. Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was much better" (191). The Joy Luck Club stories told by the Chinese mothers, Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair, describe harsh lives in Chinese society, which granted them second-class citizenship at best, and even that only after fulfilling their familial obligations to produce sons for their husbands' families. Their stories of life after emigrating to America are little better. They are bewildered by a culture they do not understand and remorseful for families left behind in China. They still face discrimination in America, now oppressed not only for their gender, but for the color of their skins and the cast of their features, as well.

The weaving of these stories embraces the efforts of the four American daughters to separate themselves, their obligations, their emotions, their views, their goals, and their lives, from those of their mothers. Waverly Jong fears that her mother's feelings about Waverly's new fiance will replace her own. She says, "I wasn't so much afraid of my mother as I was afraid for Rich. I already knew what she would do, how she would attack him, how she would criticize him. . . . I was afraid that some unseen speck of truth would fly into my eye . . . and transform him from the divine man I thought he was into someone quite mundane . . ." (173-4). Yet, a reconciliation emerges from the pages of The Joy Luck Club, too. The daughters recognize the tragic forces and seemingly well-founded superstitions which shaped their mothers and which forced them to shape their daughters, the best ways

they knew how, into women who would be able to survive, to cope, perhaps even to thrive in the New World, though that world turned out to be little more than a Caucasian version of the Old World, after all.

The paradoxes embedded in the text of The Joy Luck Club, then, represent the ironies which permeate every aspect of living as a minority oppressed on two fronts, as a woman and as a non-white, in the western world. According to Donovan this conflict was at the heart of the modern feminist movement as black, white, Hispanic, and Asian female civil rights activists articulated their outrage at being ignored, patronized, and/or ridiculed by the men who dominated the leadership of the "New Left" (141).

If, as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell asserts, voicing her outrage at oppression breaks the boundaries of a woman's defined social role and is, therefore, a paradoxical action ("Feminist Approach" 390), then, an ethnic or minority American woman may find her social role doubly binding. Ling details American-held stereotypes of Asian American women as either the "dragon lady" or, more commonly, the modest and virginal, yet sexually available "lotus blossom" (11-2) in a twisted version of the Madonna/whore complex. The paradox inherent in such a conflict asserts that the woman who openly embraces her own sexuality is dangerous to men and unfit for motherhood as well. In her work, Ling traces some of the sources of these and similar stereotypes. For example, the stereotypical image of an Asian American woman giggling shyly behind her hand is not a result of endearing modesty, but of the force of Chinese tradition that declares it is rude to show one's teeth in public, for

men and women alike. Ling theorizes that stereotypes explain more about the people who believe them than those who are victimized by them (11-2). It's a small leap of logic to imagine that westerners interacting with Chinese women would shape their opinions of these women from the asexual standards of their own culture's Virgin Mary. What paradox expresses more about the West's conflicting views of sexuality than a "mother" of God who is simultaneously a "virgin?"

Mitsuye Yamada says that being a "middle-class" and "Asian" woman gave her a "double invisibility." This is similar to the "double paradox" Ling notes in the lives and writings of minority and ethnic American women. Yamada then records how shocked her peers were to hear her object to her employer's violation of her rights: "'We don't understand this; this is so uncharacteristic of her; she seemed such a nice person, so polite, so obedient, so non-troublemaking.'" Until this point in her life, working as an Asian American among Caucasians made her "invisible" ("Invisibility" 36-7). For ethnic-American women, then, breaking out of a double paradox to express their wants and needs is more than a metaphor; it is an expression of their existence, a way of life.

The Chinese mothers who tell their stories in The Joy Luck Club understand their subordinate status in Chinese society. And though they hope for more for their daughters in America, they grieve when they recognize that their girls have little self-esteem because these daughters understand their own underrated status, even in

America. An-mei Hsu says:

I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness. . . . And even though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way! Maybe it is because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I was born to my mother and I was born a girl." (215, emphasis added)

This passage eerily echoes an interview with an anonymous 35-year-old woman which Nancy Friday cites in My Mother/My Self. About her mother, the woman says, "All my life, I watched her swallow her anger. . . . I am angry at her because I am like her, because she taught me to be like her. Because she loved me, she taught me to swallow my anger" (308-9).

In the feminist perspective, women come to know and understand their inferior status in a patriarchal society. They may or may not accept that it must always be this way, but they understand this is the way it is now. Schaeff, in her anecdotal analysis Women's Reality, notes that in women's workshops and in group therapy women say they know that "to be born female means to be born innately inferior, damaged, that there is something innately 'wrong' with" them (Schaeff 24). Some feminists assert that being emotionally and intellectually oppressed is as damaging as physical oppression or even torture. These theorists label this attitude "the Original Sin of Being Born Female," and they define it: "To be born female in this culture means that you are born 'tainted,' that there is something intrinsically wrong with you

that you can never change, that your birthright is one of innate inferiority" (Schaefer 27).

The tenets of late-twentieth century feminist theory assert that certain experiences common to nearly all women in all societies converge to create a uniquely female world view (Russ 4; Abrams 209-10; Donovan, FLC 77), a viewpoint from which the reader could examine and reconcile the many paradoxes which color the text of The Joy Luck Club. Some of the common experiences uniting women sociologically and economically, across time and geography, include suffering political oppression and assuming nearly all childcare duties. Nearly all women also share the unique physical experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth (Donovan, FT 172-3). In addition, Chodorow theorized that the tendency of nearly all cultures to define childcare roles as belonging solely to women has produced an emotional separation and maturation process which is nearly universally different for girls from that of boys (43-65). In this view, women in nearly all cultures encourage their sons to form a strong sense of self early in childhood. Mothers see their daughters, however, as the girls they once were. They then discourage the sense of separation and selfhood in their daughters that they encourage in their sons. According to Chodorow this uniquely feminine experience causes a less-than-unique, cross-cultural, cross-temporal mother-daughter relationship in which mothers and daughters identify strongly with each other, even see themselves nearly as one another (46).

The result of this strong mother-daughter attachment is twofold. The first, in

Chodorow's words, is that the daughter "feels a sense of guilt and responsibility for situations that did not come about through her actions and without relation to her actual ability to determine the course of events. This happens, in the most familiar instance, in a sense of diffuse responsibility for everything connected to the welfare of her family . . ." (59). In The Joy Luck Club Rose Hsu Jordan demonstrates an apparently textbook example of a daughter's assumption of responsibility, and of course, guilt, for circumstances beyond her control. Following the accidental drowning of her four-year-old brother, Rose remembers, "I had expected to be beaten to death, by my father, by my mother, by my sisters and brothers. I knew it was my fault" (126). This assumption of guilt seems hideously inappropriate, coming from a fourteen-year-old, until the reader learns from the actions of Rose's mother that she, too, accepts full responsibility for everything that happens to her family and believes she can atone for her guilt, restoring the boy to them. In a wrenching scene of penance, Rose recalls how her mother, An-mei, returned to the site of the drowning and repeatedly begged God's forgiveness for her pride, for her failure as a mother, for having "misplaced" one of "His" blessings. An-mei throws sacrifices of greater and greater value into the ocean, finally offering up a treasured heirloom ring to the unresponsive waves. She never fully accepts her son's death, recording it in the family Bible in less-than-permanent pencil (127-31). In The Joy Luck Club, at least, crushing guilt is cross-generational.

A second effect of gender-related developmental differences is only inferred from Chodorow's conclusions, but Carol Gilligan elucidates both the effect and its

consequences in her analysis of gender differences, A Different Voice. Gilligan asserts that these differences become a "developmental liability" when judged against male standards of separation attachments defined and measured by male psychologists. Gilligan concludes by saying that "[w]omen's failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop" (90). Viewed by feminists, then, the close emotional attachment of the mother-daughter relationship is perpetuated by social and economic realities in nearly all societies. At the same time, these societies universally judge the personality traits resulting from this relationship as guilt-inducing and inferior in their lack of emotional separation. Recognizing this irony is a primary step in understanding the many paradoxes of Tan's text from a feminist viewpoint.

In The Joy Luck Club the central character of the story relates her frustration at her mother's attempts to live vicariously through her successes. June Woo tells of being remade into a Chinese Shirley Temple, of being quizzed to see if she were a child genius, and of a disastrous battle of wills over June's failure to become a piano prodigy. June then recounts a list of failures she chalked up in her efforts to be truly American in her individuality and not an obedient Chinese daughter. She concludes the list with the words, "For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me" (142). Another Joy Luck Club narrator, Ying-ying St. Clair, reveals her close attachment to her daughter when she reflects, "She and I have shared the same body. There is a part of her mind that is part of mine" (242). Later, recalling her relationship with her own mother, the character reveals, "She loved me too much to get angry. I was like her. That was why she named me

Ying-ying, Clear Reflection" (243). Lindo Jong also reveals her reluctance to separate from her daughter when she asks, "How can she be her own person? When did I give her up?" (254).

According to Chodorow's summary of current psychoanalytic thought, when young girls share close emotional ties with and identify with mothers who are not valued by their society, the result is a pattern of low self-esteem, passed from generation to generation of women who recognize their low status in society and, consequently, their lack of control over even the simplest aspects of their lives (65-6). Suyuan Woo recognizes this undervalued self in her daughter, June, and points it out to her. "Everybody else want best quality," Suyuan says. "You thinking different" (208). Another character, Lena St. Clair, says about herself during a budding romance, "All I can remember is how awfully lucky I felt, and consequently how worried I was that all this undeserved good fortune would someday slip away. . . . And I think that feeling of fear never left me, that I would be caught someday, exposed as a sham of a woman" (156).

The Joy Luck Club daughters' sense of self-worth is further threatened by the cultural and ethnic differences which separate them from their friends. Relating her memories of the four sets of parents meeting monthly for their own Joy Luck Club, June remembers, "In those days . . . I imagined Joy Luck was a shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of the Ku Klux Klan or the tom-tom dances of TV Indians preparing for war" (28). Lena St. Clair recalls that the differences she felt were exaggerated by her appearance as a Chinese-American when she says, "And my

eyes, my mother gave me my eyes, no eyelids, as if they were carved on a jack-o'-lantern with two swift cuts of a short knife. I used to push my eyes in on the sides to make them rounder" (104).

For the Joy Luck Club daughters, the combination of many varied stresses--living between two cultures, being female in a male-dominated society, and suffering low self-esteem and strong emotional attachments to others--leads to lives filled with a myriad of troubles, troubles with husbands and lovers and mothers as well as with themselves. All of the daughters believe they have little in common with their mothers, whom they perceive as superstitious, dowdy nags who embarrass them by haggling with the grocer and speaking fractured English. Of the four daughters, one is divorced, one is getting divorced, and one's marriage is failing.² In addition, June believes her life is a long tale of mediocrity, remembering, "That was the night . . . that I realized I was no better than who I was. . . . I was very good at what I did, succeeding at something small like that" (207). Rose Hsu Jordan fears her husband will one day put on new glasses, look her over and say, "Why, gosh, you aren't the girl I thought you were, are you?" (156).

The story of two generations of women who suffer this mother-daughter rift is

² I do not present evidence here of the daughters' disintegrating marriages to fall back on the stereotypical attitude that a woman without a man has no value. These stories, however, recall observations by Daly (*G/E* 346) and Carlson (20, 48, 67) that women often marry in a search for affection they feel they lack in their own unsatisfactory relationships with their mothers. Carlson labels the unhealthy attachments which result from these marriages "neurotic" (67).

painfully exposed on every page of The Joy Luck Club. Plot, character development, and action all work to tell the stories of four Chinese American daughters who cannot resolve the identity conflicts posed by knowing and loving and identifying with mothers whose motives and actions, whose very language, they barely understand. According to Donovan, an important aspect of feminist theory is accepting that when a woman of color denies the cultural heritage of her mother, she denies that which is the mother in her--the non-white, culturally-alienated part of herself (FT 159-60). Yamada postulates that the ethnic woman can resolve conflicts experienced from living in a culture that considers her developmentally backward only through a reconciliation with her mother's culture. Yamada insists that women of color must affirm their cultures through recognition of and respect for their mothers' ethnic roots. Of her own reconciliation, she says, "I . . . have come to know who I am through understanding the nature of my mother's experience" ("Asian" 74). In her moving essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Walker urges ethnic American women to recognize and honor the hardships suffered by their mothers--discrimination, racism, oppression--as part of accepting themselves and understanding the forces which shaped them as women of color in a white man's world. The experiences of these minority women reveal that understanding one's mother, a mother bound by the rules of a racist, patriarchal society, is the first step to understanding oneself.

In The Joy Luck Club, June finds her own peace when she hears, and more importantly, understands the story of her mother's past, of the tragic loss of two

daughters which warped her emotional life. Her father relates this story to June and she reflects, "I lay awake thinking about my mother's story, realizing how much I have never known about her, grieving that my sisters and I had both lost her. . . . I think about all the different ways we leave people in this world. . . . Finding my mother in my father's story and saying good-bye before I have a chance to know her better" (286). Later, she adds, "And now I 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" (288).

Reflecting on her own struggle to come to terms with her mother and her culture, Morales muses, "My mother and I work to unravel the knot. The task is daily: bloody, terrifying and necessary, and filled with joy. . . . The relationship between mother and daughter stands at the center of what I fear most in our culture. Heal that wound and we change the world" (56).

Reconciling the paradoxes that fill the lives of Chinese American women in a patriarchal, Caucasian society is one method both mothers and daughters can use to heal the wound between them. The following two chapters illustrate another way mothers and daughters can cross the gulf that separates them. These two chapters investigate how women can explore their own spirituality and empower themselves by experiencing a connection with a personal goddess through the act of making myth.

CHAPTER 4

MYTH-MAKING AS EMPOWERMENT

By writing The Kitchen God's Wife, Amy Tan has created a story that is true in meaning even if not true in fact. This book fulfills one of Register's prescriptives for feminist literature as writing that has the authenticity of women's experience (12) while it presents, in Russ's words, "the fictional myths growing out of their lives" (19). Bettelheim even asserts that myths, in the form of fairy tales, often feel truer than the truth (191-2). Thus, in writing a novel that feels true in meaning to her audience, Tan is engaging in the powerful process of creating myth.

In The Kitchen God's Wife Winnie Louie, one of the book's two main characters, is overwhelmed by loss, actual and potential. The structure of her life periodically crumbles with the death or disappearance of family members. Winnie responds to the news that her daughter has a debilitating and potentially fatal disease in a number of eminently practical ways. She demands that Pearl see only the "best" doctor, searches out herbal medicines for her, and stays mindful of keeping Pearl warm and well cared-for. But Winnie covers her spiritual bases as well. She removes a small figurine of the demi-god Zhang from a home altar she has given to Pearl and replaces it with a goddess of her own making, the Kitchen God's Wife.

Winnie has told her daughter the story of the Kitchen God's profligate ways and of his cruel behavior toward his wife. She relates how absurd it seems to her that

a man like Zhang was rewarded by being made a god, given respect and offerings and honor, while his dutiful and kind wife is relegated to obscurity. To Winnie, this story clearly parallels the abuse she suffered at the hands of her first husband as well as the injustice of the pain and humiliation she endured for nearly ten years while she tried to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother in the face of an abusive husband and wartime deprivations.

By dethroning Zhang and giving his wife an honored place on the altar in her daughter's home, Winnie honors herself. By revering the wife who performed her duties faithfully, Winnie fills her own very human need for self-respect. Winnie empowers herself by attributing powers to the much-abused Kitchen God's Wife. Simultaneously, she fulfills a personal need for myth-making that many writers, philosophers, artists, psychologists, and critics deem essential. By offering a spiritual resource to her daughter, Winnie opens up to Pearl new pathways to filling her own needs for comfort and to honoring the mother-daughter relationship through a mother-figure in the form of a goddess. Winnie also empowers her daughter to gain a deeper, transcendent view of the mother-daughter relationship by enabling Pearl to distinguish her own mother from the goddess-mother.

By turning to a goddess for hope during her daughter's illness, Winnie participates in what Gadon calls a "growing awareness of the healing power of ritual magic and of the human necessity for personal connection to sacred sites" shared by "primal peoples" (228). This might also be called a growing "re-awareness" of the sacredness of ritual within contemporary societies since Gadon, Mircea Eliade, and

others argue that early peoples were once very aware of such sacredness. Gadon also contends that women turn to the comfort of myth and goddess worship because patriarchal religions tend to ignore their "everyday concerns for the well-being of their families" (178), concerns which, expressed on a daily basis, take on the mantle of ritual and so become "sacred" (179). This, according to Maggie Humm, is the function of myth: "to link rituals of daily life with symbols" (93), to close the gap between experience and meaning. Myth's "portrayal of the informal and the private experience of everyday feminine life" is why Humm argues that it can speak tellingly to women (95).

Anthropologists, psychologists, and critics alike recognize that people need myths today as much as did Gadon's "primal peoples." In his aptly-titled essay "Myth Today," Barthes emphasizes that myth is a system of communication in which anything can become a symbol (109). In Patterns in Comparative Religion, Eliade examines the thousands of symbols which link humanity to its rituals. He closes this volume with the bold statement that separation from symbols and rituals is the source of the "broken and alienated existence" lived by people today (456).

Myth-making is a powerful act, one Carlson terms "vital for our time" (89). Human communication functions through the language of symbols, and few things are more empowering than creating one's own symbols of hope, comfort, and inspiration. For women, then, creating a mythical figure of a goddess, a figure which is unquestionably female, can reflect their hopes and comfort and inspiration in, with, and for themselves. Especially for women whose society offers few or no whole,

healthy female models for respect and reverence, goddess worship is a new and empowering experience. For such an experience to be complete and life-changing, it must influence a woman's daily life. Gadon asserts that creating new symbols is not sufficient to change a life without also living "in accordance with the underlying values they embody" (112). For women, finding or creating a goddess for themselves is often also a process of making a mother-figure. Living, then, by the values presented in a mother-goddess image translates to respecting oneself as a woman and as a mother as well as seeing oneself as the daughter of another mother, a mother to be viewed in a new light--herself worthy of respect.¹

Finding a new source of nurturing from a mother-goddess can help a woman resolve a troubled relationship with her mother. Since the constructs of a contemporary patriarchal society like America's in the 1990s encourage a person to see a mother as a "natural resource" (Dinnerstein 36), as an always-caring, perpetually-available nurturer, the role of mother is guaranteed to be unsatisfactory to all parties involved. Since no human mother can be everything to each of her children all the time, as our society expects her to be, Carlson asserts that nearly all women have troubled relationships with their children (3). As noted in earlier chapters, these troubles are compounded when a mother faces the paradox of nurturing a daughter while repressing some of her most basic needs in the process Berger and Luckmann (130) call "socialization." This process requires that mothers

¹ Both Carlson and Gadon refer to the image embodying female spirituality as either the Goddess or the Mother. As they use these terms interchangeably, I do also.

mold their daughters, physically and mentally, to meet cultural norms, even at the price of suppressing their daughters' desires and aspirations. Maternal relationships are also filled with conflict as daughters understand that their mothers, their first role models, are undervalued in a patriarchal culture. Russ says patriarchal societies see women's experiences as peripheral: "unofficial, minor," an unnecessary or even expendable fraction of "possible human experience" (4). To this argument Gadon adds that women have little worth in such a society because "women's work" is not performed in or for the marketplace and, so, has little monetary value assigned to it (112, 289).

Conflict-filled relationships twist into double paradox for daughters of women who are second- or even third-class citizens in America not only as women, but as women who are ethnic or racial minorities, too. This is true, as Rosinsky points out, because in a patriarchal society such as ours, minority women are even more likely to be poor and less likely to have opportunities for self-affirmation and self-fulfillment than their Caucasian counterparts. As a consequence, these women will face more economic and environmental hurdles as they raise their children than white women in similar situations (280).

This double paradox also encompasses another important psychological barrier between minority mothers and daughters. As a young girl develops a maturing perception of society, she comprehends her mother's lesser importance, as a woman, in its ranks. Such a girl's self-image requires that she define herself as "not-like" her mother in order to distance herself from her own lesser rank. This process requires

that she deny her connection to her first role model, her primary guide to what a woman is. How much more violent must such a separation be for a young minority girl struggling to be "not like" her mother--to be "not like" a woman and "not like" a minority?

Since a woman cannot possibly be the infinite resource for all needs that both society and her daughters expect her to be, opening herself up to nurturing and inspiration from a symbolic goddess-mother can help her resolve problems brought about by the maze of paradoxes found within mother-daughter relationships. For Carlson, a woman may find her goddess through art, meditation, fantasy, dreams, and relationships with other supportive women (112). A spiritual quest, then, is part of the myth making which can strengthen and revitalize women who find new inspiration in a goddess who is, like them, female, and who can therefore reflect and represent their own needs and aspirations. Finding such an "authentic feminine Sourceground" (xii) can, in Carlson's estimation, help women achieve a "transpersonal" (8-9) view of the mother-daughter relationship. This perspective helps daughters see their mothers as people with human limitations, while seeing their own needs as perfectly legitimate, needs which can be filled by other spiritual or mythic sources (3-11, 111). This is a first, vital step in understanding and resolving the troubles many mothers and daughters share.

For a mother, the presence of a goddess which is also a mother-figure offers a model of empowerment. Respect for such a goddess can be the core of respect for herself. In addition, recognition of this goddess reminds a mother that she is not a

goddess, that she has human, economic, and environmental limitations. This knowledge helps a mother understand that her needs are as valid as her daughter's. A goddess's inspiration can remind both women, mother and daughter, that the mother is not a superhuman being, is not a goddess, and that each woman has perfectly legitimate needs that the other may not want to or be able to fill.

If finding one's own inspiration and creating new myths and symbols can assist in smoothing out such a vital relationship as that between mother and daughter, then women must go beyond the patriarchal religious tradition to find meaning in their lives (Gadon xiv). Growing beyond such a tradition encourages women to turn to sources of spirituality which model female roles worthy of respect and reverence. The myths women create from their own lives elevate their experiences to the realm of ritual and the sacred.

Gadon recites the experiences of hundreds of artists who are today bringing forth a new spirituality, "prophets of our time" (232) who are creating their own goddesses and raising female experience to the level of ritual and myth (253). "Art and religion," she says, "were born together from a fundamental human passion to express inner life" (3). Women artists (and writers) who are now creating new myths and telling stories of the Mother and of mother-daughter relationships can help women reconnect to a source of nurturing greater than any human woman. "The role of the artist in our time," Gadon writes, "is to give expression to the feminine consciousness that is emerging in myriad forms after so many centuries of dormancy in the West" (253). Such expression of human spirituality is what modern women writers are

giving voice to today as they present their art in the form of stories of women who discover their own goddesses.

Elias-Button, writing specifically about poets, asserts that women are now transcending difficulties in the mother-daughter relationship by recovering feminine strengths buried in the mythological past. She names this a "reaching-back to the myths of the 'mother' to find the source of (their) own, specifically female, creative powers" (193). Like Gadon's artists, these women, too, are using the energy and self-knowledge gained by examining the mother-daughter relationship to envision a mother-goddess. Such contemporary women poets have created their own goddess motifs as sources of enrichment and inspiration for their own feminine experience. A burgeoning respect for and understanding of such a revered mother-goddess figure is a gift these poets bring to their art as well as to their own relationships with their mothers.

In fiction and non-fiction, in biography and autobiography, in poetry and prose, women writers today are telling the stories of their lives and their mothers' lives. In the repetition of the themes of mother-daughter conflicts and resolutions, a ceremony becomes apparent. Maglin sees in this "the need to recite one's matrilineage, to find a ritual to both get there and preserve it" (258). This recalls Daly's comment that "to act on (one's) own initiative . . . is profoundly mythic" (G/E 47). Women writers, then, who create out of their own time and energy and inspiration such a "ritual" of "matrilineage" are being strengthened not only by the positive and life-affirming stories they tell of goddesses and mothers and daughters,

they are empowered by their very participation in their own myth-making.

Many writers, critics, and artists embrace the belief that creating a figure to serve as the focus for one's own spirituality is, at its core, a powerful, and an empowering, act. For women, creating such a figure in a female form is doubly-strengthening when it models female attributes they wish to make a connection with. They can make such a connection either by experiencing these attributes from this female figure, in the form of love and nurturing for example, or by seeing such attributes modeled by an entity without human limitations--a "perfect" mother. This empowerment is amplified for women who explore their own spirituality through a goddess, or Mother, for the first time because they have felt their own experiences were undervalued in a strongly patriarchal and/or racist society.

The next chapter examines how, in The Kitchen God's Wife, Winnie Louie reaches a place in her life that compels her to create her own goddess-mother and what changes this brings to her relationship with her only surviving daughter, Pearl.

CHAPTER 5

LADY SORROWFREE: SELF-EMPOWERMENT

IN THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE

In The Joy Luck Club Amy Tan has created a story about a daughter coming to terms with her mother and with her experiences as a woman shaped by her mother. The Kitchen God's Wife, however, tells of a mother's journey through understanding herself and her experiences with motherhood on the way to achieving mutual understanding and acceptance with her daughter.

In The Kitchen God's Wife Winnie Louie, an elderly Chinese American woman, reveals the horror of her early life and first marriage in World War II-era China. Winnie tells her daughter, Pearl, secrets she has hidden for forty years: that Winnie's own mother left her family when she was six; that her adoptive family ignored her, leaving her to grow up feeling empty and unloved; that her first husband abused her physically and emotionally almost without respite for nine years; and that she had three children before Pearl, all of whom died tragically. In the course of this tale, Winnie also tells Pearl how hard she struggled all of those years to be the perfect mother society expected her to be, to fill completely her children's needs for physical and emotional nurturing, and to protect them from harm at all costs, even in the face of the difficulties of war and a violent, mentally ill father. Winnie describes to her daughter her constant struggle with the myth of the perfect mother. Each time

Winnie could not protect one of her children from the abusive Wen Fu or from death by accident or disease she lost a battle to that mythical mother. Each injury to one of her children killed some part of Winnie's own image of herself as a mother.

When Winnie learns that Pearl is ill, that she has multiple sclerosis, Winnie experiences the same sense of shock and outrage and failure that she felt with the deaths of each of her previous three children more than forty years earlier. This time, though, as Winnie begins her search for medicines to cure her daughter, she also journeys to a point within herself that allows her to share some of the responsibility of motherhood which she has always before shouldered alone. She creates a Goddess, a Goddess that reflects Winnie's memories of her own mother and that embodies the values Winnie carries within herself as a mother and a nurturer. Winnie then carries her self-knowledge, modeled in her new Goddess, forward to her daughter Pearl, thus empowering herself against the myths of motherhood which have beaten her down while simultaneously showing Pearl a path to her own empowerment.

Although theorists like Bettelheim, Eliade and Joseph Campbell assert that myths are a necessary part of all societies, traditional images portraying a mother who is an all-caring, infinitely nurturing natural resource without needs and wants of her own do not serve women well (Carlson 11). The myth of a woman transformed by the fact of motherhood to an ideal person suitable for constant and unending use by her family is neither an effective nor an inspiring guide for women who do not seek to lose themselves in service and self-effacement.

Although Winnie was raised in pre-World War II China, a culture vastly different from contemporary America's, she still shares the assumed guilt and absolute responsibility for family matters that Chodorow attributes to the unique bonding process most young girls experience with their mothers. Winnie adored her mother and explains how close she felt to her, saying, "My mother used to carry me everywhere, even when I was six years old . . . I always wanted to see the world at her same height, her same way" (89). After her mother's sudden and mysterious disappearance, when Winnie was six, Winnie continued to idolize her. Since her mother left when she was young, Winnie never broke even partially the close emotional ties the two shared. As a result, Winnie's memories of her mother are colored in the soft shades of a fairy tale, shrouded in the gossamer of remembered trust and pleasure. Winnie lost the opportunity to know her real mother, so she never gave up the childhood myth of the perfect Mother which Carlson says all children carry with them (3). Describing her mother, Winnie uses mythic, fairy tale-like imagery, saying, "I think my mother must have been a classic beauty . . . Her skin was the color of white jade. Or maybe it was the color of a summer peach" (101). Trying to determine the reason for her mother's disappearance, Winnie weaves together disparate pieces of questionable information to create a romantic tale of love and revolutionaries. Winnie also tells her daughter that even more than 60 years after her mother has gone, she still feels alone and abandoned, that she is still a little six-year-old girl waiting for her mother to come back to her (109). Winnie creates a myth from her memories of her mother because she has a need for nurturing that has

been empty since her mother's disappearance. This need has left her feeling empty so long that she feels it can never be filled.

According to Chodorow, the unique mother-daughter bonding Winnie and her mother share perpetuates the cycle of women who bond so completely with their daughters that they actually see their daughters as themselves. This early attachment builds within women feelings of responsibility for everything that happens to them as well as to their families. Winnie knows what it's like to be so close to her daughters that physical and emotional boundaries erode. She says about her first daughter, before she is even born, "It moved when I sang. It moved as I walked in my dreams. It moved when I saw a vegetable at the market I wanted to eat. That baby had my same mind" (241). Winnie also seems to have had a supernatural tie to her second daughter, Yiku. About Yiku's death at less than two years of age, Winnie relates:

Her eyes were clear. She did not smile or cry. She did not turn away. She was watching me, listening to me. And I was remembering something I once heard: that right before children die, they become as they would have been had they lived a whole life. They understand their life, no matter how small it has been. And in her eyes I felt she was telling me, "This is my quick life, no worse, no better than a long one. I accept this, no blame." (267)

Winnie also assumes responsibility for all tragedies that befall her family, even those clearly beyond her control. Although she admits that her first daughter might have been stillborn because Winnie didn't have adequate medical care, she also has superstitious reasons for blaming herself for her infant's death. Explaining why she believes her aunt's caution that dropping a pair of scissors brings bad luck she says,

"I don't think I was only imagining this. That's how it happened: The scissors fell, the baby became very still" (242).¹ Months later, Winnie takes another opportunity to shoulder blame by believing that she has again brought bad luck on her family when she knocks over a whole table of scissors and learns immediately afterward that her husband, Wen Fu, has been badly hurt in a car accident. Decades after that, mourning her second husband's death from cancer, Winnie again laments that she didn't change the direction of a life, reciting a litany of precautions she should have taken. Hearing Pearl has multiple sclerosis, Winnie assumes yet again that this is her fault (408) and undertakes the task of curing her. She says, "'How can you say this! 'Nothing you can do'! . . . Tomorrow I am going to Auntie Du's herb doctor. And after that, I will think of a way'" (401).

Neither of the patriarchal religions from Winnie's dual cultural heritage seems capable of filling her spiritual needs. The First Chinese Baptist Church where her second husband was pastor was apparently of little comfort to her during a time of great grief, since she stopped attending it "right after" his death (19). Many years later, Winnie participates seemingly by rote in the Buddhist rituals of a close friend's funeral. When her daughter asks if she believes in the ceremonial sacrifices the funeral requires, she is annoyed, replying, "What's to believe," and adding, "This is respect" (24).

¹ Such warnings to women against harming the spirits of their unborn children in this or a similar manner were apparently quite common in China at one time. See, for example, Ahern 197.

Winnie is filled with anger and sorrow from the tragedy that is her life. Abandoned by her mother, ignored by her adoptive aunts, abused by her husband, misunderstood by her daughter, she is awash in the emotions of the unresolved issues that fill her. Winnie is a prime candidate for the nurturing and values Carlson says many women gain from bringing a goddess, or Mother, into their own lives. Carlson asserts that finding or creating a goddess of one's own can serve a woman's needs, needs which are not met, sometimes not even recognized, by the rituals of our primarily patriarchal society. Having a source of female comfort in addition to her own mother's can help a woman accept her mother's imperfections, her very humanity. For Winnie, finding this source of succor from the Kitchen God's Wife helps her cope with the feelings of being abandoned by her own mother which she still carries with her after more than 60 years.

Finding guidance and acceptance from her own Goddess validates a woman's needs for love and care without devaluing her mother's inability to always provide the perfect nurturing that society demands of a woman who is also a mother. Awareness of a goddess and her connection to both a mother and daughter can, in Carlson's view, help them reconcile their differences. In addition, having the knowledge and ability to distinguish between her human mother and her goddess Mother can help a woman create her own realistic definition of motherhood. In this way, she can also reconcile the unattainable societal demands on her as a mother with her own human limitations and potential. Winnie learns this as she comes to understand that, just as her own mother could not be everything to her, Winnie was not a total failure as a

mother because she could not protect her first three children from illness and death and abuse by their father, Wen Fu. It helps her learn, also, that she is not a failure as she copes with her inability to protect Pearl from yet another tragedy, the onset of multiple sclerosis.

Finally, when a woman accepts that her needs are valid, that her mother's own needs and limitations are valid too, and that her daughter's needs are genuine and valid as well, she can accept and understand that no one person can be all that another person needs. But a woman's needs for love and acceptance and guidance can be met, according to Carlson, when she creates or recognizes a mother-figure of her own and incorporates Her into her own life. In addition, such a woman can lead her daughter toward recognition of this Mother or, perhaps, even toward a discovery of the daughter's own, personal Mother. Although not a panacea, such guidance can reconcile the differences and strengthen the ties of a mother-daughter relationship strained by the demands of a patriarchal society.

Winnie strengthens herself and earns her daughter's respect when she taps into her skills and strengths and memories to make her own Goddess of the Kitchen God's Wife. Winnie utilizes her art of writing banners with sayings "of her own inspiration" (23) to letter her Goddess' name on the porcelain statue she has christened the Kitchen God's Wife. Winnie enjoys these skills, "has always been very proud of those red banners" and "claims these banners are the reasons why (her) Ding Ho Flower Shop has had success flowing through its door all these years" (23).

Blending this talent with her own memories, Winnie gives herself and three

generations of women in her family a kind of immortality by modeling her Goddess after all of them. Winnie points out to Pearl the color of the Goddess' hair, saying, "Look at her hair, how black it is, no worries" (414), recalling her earlier description of her mother's hair: "a color you could feel more than see--very, very black, as black and shiny as water at the very bottom of a deep well" (96). Winnie also describes the Kitchen God's Wife in terms that evoke the mythical capacity of the ideal Mother, remarking that "her smile is genuine, wise and innocent at the same time. . . . She is ready to listen. She understands English. You should tell her everything. . . . But sometimes, when you are afraid, you can talk to her. She will listen. She will wash away everything sad with her tears" (414). This scene is reminiscent of an episode Carlson relates about a woman she was counseling. Shortly after making significant progress getting in touch with her female self and simultaneously resolving lifelong conflicts with her mother, this client reported that "she felt compelled to build a shrine for the Goddess" (123). Carlson reports that this woman followed through with this impulse and created a startlingly elaborate altar filled with totems representing her personal Goddess.

Winnie sees herself in the Kitchen God's Wife's invisibility. This Goddess's unrewarded virtue parallels her own. Winnie claims her right to be finally free of Wen Fu's influence when she says of her Goddess, "no one would call her Mrs. Kitchen God" (414). Instead, Winnie evokes a final triumph in resurrecting the memories of her two deceased daughters by naming her Goddess after them. Winnie gives her Goddess the names of the two daughters she had so poignantly named with

high hopes and good wishes: Lady Sorrowfree, happiness winning over bitterness, a blending of two blessings-as-names.

In sharing this Goddess with her daughter, Winnie helps Pearl to a Goddess she, too, can recognize as a source of nurturing that is a separate ideal apart from her human mother. Winning over the impossible ideal of motherhood, Winnie not only empowers herself, she shares this empowerment with her daughter. In this way, Pearl may experience a model of an empowered women in her own mother and claim her own power in a similar manner.

CHAPTER 6

THE WRITER AS PROPHET

The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife explore the difficulties that are seemingly inherent in mother-daughter relationships in a patriarchal culture. These two books also reveal the efforts of their female characters to reconcile the differences that separate them and to build a path to realistic views of each other within their roles as mothers and daughters as well as to a recognition of female spirituality. Tan's first two novels come together to make a powerful statement about the stresses on a mother-daughter relationship and the rewards of working through the troubles of this essential bond between women. In Elias-Button's words, "by exploring the personal and mythological aspects of this intricate and inescapable mother-daughter bond, [women] are both realizing the need to define [them]selves as 'daughters' in new ways and, at the same time, rediscovering the roots of [their] shared woman's life in all its power and complexity" (194).

In creating the female characters who tell the stories of their lives in The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, Tan has done more than just write interesting stories. She has tapped into the energy and spirit of the modern wave of writers and critics who insist that a new awareness of women's strength and of the special relationships between women, especially between mothers and daughters, is being brought to the surface of our society by women's stories. Novels such as The

Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife present stories of women who overcome the dual stresses of being Chinese women in a Caucasian, patriarchal society. These women face the conflicts that fill their lives to reconcile the differences in their relationships as mothers and daughters, demonstrating the strengths that have carried women through ages of pain and oppression. Doing this makes Tan a writer whose work honors the strength and spirituality of women, as mothers and as daughters. She has joined the women who, in Gadon's words, "have become the prophets of our time" (231-2). The feminist critic who recognizes Tan as such a prophet has fulfilled Donovan's requirement of recognizing that literature is "integral" to life (FLC 80). The duty of such a critic, according to Donovan, is to "retrieve" a "female culture" and to establish a mode of criticism that does not reject "the wisdom and experience of womankind, as developed and transmitted through the ages" (FLC 77).

Critics such as Showalter or Register outline criteria for topics they say women writers must address to make meaningful statements to women. These writers should speak to the needs and issues that fill women's lives. Critics such as Donovan or Ling, on the other hand, assert that the very act of writing, of women putting their thoughts or experiences on paper to be shared with other women, voices a woman's strengths. Women who voice themselves in this way are actually participating in an act of double empowerment, for it enriches the lives of the women who write as well as of those who read these writings. In creating The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, Tan has filled both of these requirements. These novels focus almost solely on the mother-daughter relationship that writers such as Carlson deem the

"primary" relationship among women (xi). In the process of examining the strengths and conflicts within the mother-daughter bond, Tan's novels also address the additional conflicts minority mothers and daughters face in their attempts to fill their socially prescribed roles within the boundaries of a racist, patriarchal society. The struggles of mothers and daughters to see the role of a mother in a realistic manner are also told in these two books, and The Kitchen God's Wife conveys the tale of one woman's personal, painful path to a female spirituality embodied in a Goddess of her own making. This novel concludes by showing Winnie Louie's attempts to strengthen her tie with her daughter by sharing with her this Goddess and the spirituality she brings.

By writing about June Woo's personal journey to a reconciliation with her mother's influence in her life, Tan models a tale of women's strengths, forged within the mother-daughter bond. In telling the story of Winnie Louie's creation of a goddess of her own inspiration, Tan is also empowering herself as a woman. By writing about mothers and daughters, she shows their conflicts within the pattern of their concerns for one another. In The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife, Tan tells stories whose meanings are true to the core about the daily concerns of women, while giving them the power of myth through sweeping narrations that span her characters' lives. She makes these stories worth telling simply because she has told them, adding them to the store of women's information recounting women's experiences. Tan lifts the hopes and cares from the daily lives of her characters and presents them, unflinchingly, as stories of women that are worth telling because they are.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 5th ed. New York: Holt, 1988.
- Ahern, Emily M. "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women." Women in Chinese Society. Ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke. Stanford, CA: Stanford U P, 1975. 193-214.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Prieta." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 198-209.
- Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. Trans. Annette Lavers. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957; New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Trans. H. M. Parshley. 1952. New York: Bantam, 1961.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1967.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Knopf, 1976.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology. New York: Viking, 1962.
- . Myths to Live By. New York: Bantam, 1972.
- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "The Feminist Approach: The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron." Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective. Ed. Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott and James W. Chesebro. Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1989. 388-402.
- Carlson, Kathie. In Her Image: The Unhealed Daughter's Search for Her Mother. Boston: Shambala, 1989.

- Chodorow, Nancy. "Family Structure and Feminine Personality." Woman, Culture, and Society. Ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1974. 43-66.
- Cuddon, J. A. "Paradox." A Dictionary of Literary Terms. Rev. ed. N.c.: Penguin, 1982.
- Daly, Mary. Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation. Boston: Beacon, 1973.
- . Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon, 1990.
- Davidson, Cathy N. and E. M. Bronner, eds. The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy. The Mermaid and the Minotaur. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Donovan, Josephine. "Feminism and Aesthetics." Critical Inquiry 3.3 (1977): 605-8.
- . Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory. 2nd ed. N.p.: U P of Kentucky, 1989.
- . Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- Eliade, Mircea. Patterns in Comparative Religion. Trans. Rosemary Sheed. New York: NAL, 1974.
- Elias-Button, Karen. "The Muse as Medusa." The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Bronner. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980. 193-206.
- Ellman, Mary. Thinking About Women. New York: Harcourt, 1968.
- "Feminine." Webster's Desk Dictionary of the English Language. 1990 ed.
- Foucault, Michel. The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

- Friday, Nancy. My Mother/My Self. New York: Delacorte, 1977.
- Friedan, Betty. Interview. By David Sheff. Playboy Sep. 1992: 51+.
- Gadon, Elinor. The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time. San Francisco: Harper, 1989.
- Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1982.
- Handlin, Joanna F. "Lü K'un's New Audience: The influence of Women's Literacy on Sixteenth-Century Thought." Women in Chinese Society. Ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke. Stanford, CA: Stanford U P, 1975. 13-38.
- Hubbard, Kim and Maria Wilhelm. "The Joy Luck Club has Brought Writer Amy Tan a Bit of Both." People 10 Apr. 1989: 149-50.
- Humm, Maggie. Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics. New York: St. Martin's, 1986.
- Hunt, Linda. "'I Could Not Figure Out What Was My Village': Gender vs. Ethnicity in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior." MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States. 12.3 (1985): 5-12.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts. New York: Vintage-Random, 1975.
- Kramarae, Cheri and Paula A. Treichler. "Conflict." A Feminist Dictionary. 1985. London: Pandora, 1989.
- Lee, Susan K.C. "A Letter for Dar." The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology. Ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Mayumi Tsutakawa, and Margarita Donnelly. Corvallis, OR: Calyx, 1989. 92-8.
- Ling, Amy. Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry. New York: Pergamon, 1990.
- Maglin, Nan Bauer. "Don't Never Forget the Bridge that You Crossed Over On: The Literature of Matrilineage." The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Bronner. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980. 257-267.

- Meese, Elizabeth. Crossing the Double-Cross. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.
- Moraga, Cherríe. "La Güera." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 27-34.
- Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981.
- Morales, Aurora Levins. ". . . And Even Fidel Can't Change That!" This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 53-56.
- Ochshorn, Judith. "Mothers and Daughters in Ancient Near Eastern Literature." The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Bronner. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980. 5-14.
- Register, Cheri. "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction." Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory. Ed. Josephine Donovan. 2nd ed. N.p.: U P of Kentucky, 1989. 1-28.
- Rosinsky, Natalie M. "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group." The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Bronner. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980. 280-90.
- Russ, Joanna. "What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can't Write." Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives. Ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1972. 3-20.
- Schaef, Ann Wilson. Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Harper, 1985.
- Selden, Raman. A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory. Lexington: U P of Kentucky, 1989.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies. Ed. Robert Con Davis and Rondald Schleifer. New York: Longman, 1989. 457-77.
- Tan, Amy. The Joy Luck Club. New York: Putnam's, 1989.
- . The Kitchen God's Wife. New York: Putnam's, 1991.

Walker, Alice. In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose by Alice Walker. New York: Harcourt, 1983.

Woo, Merle. "Letter to Ma." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 140-147.

Yamada, Mitsuye. "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 71-75.

---. "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981. 35-40.