

Long Paper Outline: Foregrounded Origins in the Immigrant Novel

Intro

- Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* emphasize the primacy of the past in the immigrant's present moment
- The novels' narrative apparatuses depend on bygone circumstances that have brought their second-generation protagonists to points of telling
- What links the two communities, Chinese and Dominican, is this pattern of the embattled background, manifest most plainly in each family's first-generation mother
- Winnie and Laura end up steering narratives they don't initially helm, pulling their offspring's stories into pasts that define them
- This paper will examine the domineering narrative presence of each novel's mother character as an emblem of the past's surprising sway in the immigrant's present. Through flashback and recollection, how do Winnie and Laura narrativize their daughters' lives? How do Tan and Alvarez ventriloquize these older women to innovate the immigrant novel?

Lingering thoughts—some research re: the immigrant novel as a genre

Alvarez

- *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* unfurls the immigrant narrative in reverse
- Although no one member of the family narrates the novel's vignettes, the "four daughters"—condensed in this epithet and in the title—represent a combined protagonist that ends up including Laura, too (as the fifth girl)
- Here, Alvarez nods to the mother's relevance in their development and her power in the plot
- As the narrative rewinds, the mother's cravings, compulsions, etc., recast the earlier chapters about her daughters, whose lives depend on an initially veiled past
- This portion of the paper will focus on "Daughter of Invention," in which Laura's own aspirations (e.g. entrepreneurial success) and fears (e.g. Bellevue) overpower and influence her daughters'; how do we read their later lives with reference to this history?

Lingering thoughts—"The Blood of the Conquistadores" also features Mami; need to finish reading

Tan

- Winnie's confessional history overpowers *The Kitchen God's Wife*, quite literally derailing its narrative
- Although Tan does not regress in Alvarez's precise reverse narration, her novel employs a similar technology, the first-generation history, to reinscribe its second-generation plotline
- This portion of the paper will focus on Winnie's intervention in the novel, her direct address to Pearl about love and life, and the twin revelations parceled into the novel's conclusion

Lingering thoughts—I wonder if I ought to confine my analysis to certain smaller passages that correspond to the two most relevant portions of Alvarez's book

Conclusion

- The ultimate implications of this analysis appear to be feminist: how does each second-generation daughter evolve from her mother, and how do Tan and Alvarez mirror this movement in their craft?
- There seems to be a teleological irony in each story's setup, as though the slowly divulged past preordains the inevitable narrative present
- In each case, the past (seen in the mother) subverts the narrative authority and eminence of the expected protagonist

Lingering thoughts—I'd like to engage the literary allusions in each work; the "great books," for instance, that Sandra quotes in her insanity as well as the titular myth of Tan's work; how are these integrated narratives relevant to those that contain them? In what ways could they also align with the past, the mothers, as controlling forces?