



The Hundred Secret Senses

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Like *THE JOY LUCK CLUB* (1989) and *THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE* (1991), this book revisits familiar territory with the dual settings of the United States and China, and a protagonist struggling with two disparate cultures. Olivia Yee Bishop, the California daughter of a Chinese father and an Anglo mother, is an unhappy woman who has separated from her husband Simon and has desensitized herself to all feeling except pain. She agrees to travel to China at the urging of her Chinese half-sister Kwan, even though she suspects rightly that Kwan is using the journey as an excuse to bring her together with Simon.

The present action is paralleled by Kwan's ongoing account of her previous life as a one-eyed girl in nineteenth century China during the Taiping Rebellion. In addition, Kwan believes she can see ghosts from the World of Yin with her "yin eyes" and talk to them. Olivia treats these stories with good Western skepticism, but shadows from the past will affect her life in ways she cannot yet understand.

Funny, awkward, incredibly loyal Kwan continues in Tan's tradition of plucky Chinese women, becoming a kind of foster mother, guide and protector to Olivia. She teaches Olivia to feel, not only with her emotions, but with what Kwan calls the hundred secret senses. Tan's central theme, the search for self, is obvious not only through Olivia, but also through Simon and many others from Kwan's ghostly past life.

Amy Tan knows how to twist plot threads into a pattern the reader does not expect. Her narrative skill evokes scenes of rural China that glisten with sensory detail. *THE HUNDRED SECRET SENSES* is an intriguing, sometimes chilling book.

Suggested Readings

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Publishers Weekly. CCXLII, September 11, 1995, p. 73.

San Francisco Chronicle. October 15, 1995, p. REV1.

Shapiro, Laura. Review of *The Hundred Secret Senses*, by Amy Tan. *Newsweek*, November 6, 1995: 91-92.

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