Support your response with references to the text. See, in particular, 4.3.63–66 and 4.3.84–85.

4. In what ways is Emilia a dramatic foil for Desdemona?

Act V

1. Why does Othello say, "Put out the light, and then put out the light" (5.2.7)?
2. How does Othello feel about killing Desdemona as he prepares to do so? See his soliloquy at 5.2.1–22.
3. How does Othello's speech at 5.2.302–24 reflect the extent of his fall?
4. What is Othello's motivation to kill Desdemona? What flaw in his character leads him to fall into Iago's trap?
5. In your opinion, why, after having explained his motives in soliloquies and conversations earlier in the play, does Iago now (5.2.348) say, "From this time forth I never will speak word"?
6. In what sense is Othello's death a triumph? Has he managed to retain any of his former dignity?

Crafting Arguments

1. Write an essay in which you examine Iago's motivation and argue that there is or is not any adequate motive that can explain the intensity of his malevolence.
2. Analyze the means by which Iago poisons Othello's mind, examining both Iago's techniques and Othello's gullibility.
3. Examine in detail the change Othello undergoes. How does jealousy change not only his attitude toward Desdemona and Cassio but also his language, his sleep, and his attitudes toward his work as a soldier—his entire personality?
4. Discuss in detail how imagery defines one or more of the major characters—Iago, Desdemona, Othello, or Cassio.
5. In *Poetics*, Aristotle describes the tragic hero as a good man who holds a high position and falls because of a flaw within himself. Write an essay in which you attempt to prove that Othello fits this definition, supporting each of your claims with examples and quotations from the play.

Casebook on Amy Tan

The two excerpts from Amy Tan's novels *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are excellent examples of the theme of vulnerability. They are connected to each other through the characters and Tan's physical, emotional, and cultural experiences that determine the revelations about the self. The three articles will allow you to write critically about this theme using both primary and secondary sources. They will also provide insight into Chinese and Chinese American feelings of alienation.

Amy Tan (b. 1952)

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California, several years after her mother and father emigrated from China. Tan graduated with honors from San Jose State University, where she later earned an M.A. in linguistics. In 1989 her first novel, The Joy Luck Club, *was published and became a surprise best-seller.* The Joy Luck Club *received numerous awards and was adapted into a film in 1994. Tan is also author of* The Kitchen God's Wife *(1991),* The Hundred

Secret Senses *(1995)*, The Bonesetter's Daughter *(2002)*, *and* Saving Fish from Drowning *(2005). She has also written a number of short stories and essays as well as two children's books:* The Moon Lady *(1992) and* The Siamese Cat *(1994). Along with fellow writers Stephen King, Dave Barry, and Scott Turow, Tan occasionally performs with the musical group called the Rock Bottom Remainders in order to raise money for literacy programs.*

Young Girl's Wish (1996)

1 My first morning in China, I awake in a dark hotel room in Guilin and see a figure leaning over my bed, staring at me with the concentrated look of a killer. I'm about to scream, when I hear my sister Kwan saying, in Chinese, "Sleeping on your side—so *this* is the reason your posture is so bad. From now on, you must sleep on your back. Also, do exercises."

2 She snaps on the light and proceeds to demonstrate, hands on hips, twisting at the waist like a sixties P.E. teacher. I wonder how long she's been standing by my bed, waiting for me to waken so she can present her latest bit of unsolicited advice. Her bed is already made.

3 I look at my watch and say, in a grumpy voice, "Kwan, it's only five in the morning."

4 "This is China. Everyone else is up. Only you're asleep."

5 "Not anymore."

6 We've been in China less than eight hours, and already she's taking control of my life. We're on her terrain; we have to go by her rules, speak her language. She's in Chinese heaven.

7 Snatching my blankets, she laughs. "Libby-ah, hurry and get up." Kwan has never been able to correctly pronounce my name, Olivia. "I want to go see my village and surprise everyone. I want to watch Big Ma's mouth fall open and hear her words of surprise: 'Hey, I thought I chased you away. Why are you back?'"

8 Kwan pushes open the window. We're staying at the Sheraton Guilin, which faces the Li River. Outside it's still dark. I can hear the *trnnng! trnnng!* of what sounds like a noisy pachinko parlor. I go to the window and look down. Peddlers on tricycle carts are ringing their bells, greeting one another as they haul their baskets of grain, melons, and turnips to market. The boulevard is bristling with the shadows of bicycles and cars, workers and schoolchildren—the whole world chirping and honking, shouting and laughing, as though it were the middle of the day. On the handlebar of a bicycle dangle the gigantic heads of four pigs, roped through the nostrils, their white snouts curled in death grins.

9 "Look." Kwan points down the street to a set of stalls lit by low-watt bulbs. "We can buy breakfast there, cheap and good. Better than paying nine dollars each for hotel food—and for what? Doughnut, orange juice,

10 I recall the admonition in our guidebooks to steer clear of food sold by street venders. "Nine dollars, that's not much," I reason.

11 "Wah! You can't think this way anymore. Now you're in China. Nine dollars is lots of money here, one week's salary."

12 "Yeah, but cheap food might come with food poisoning."

13 Kwan gestures to the street. "You look. All those people there, do they have food poisoning?"

14 Kwan is right. Who am I to begrudge carrying home a few parasites? I slip some warm clothes on and go into the hallway to knock on my husband's door. Simon answers immediately, fully dressed. "I couldn't sleep," he admits.

15 In five minutes, the three of us are on the sidewalk. We pass dozens of food stalls, some with portable propane burners, others with makeshift grills. In front of the stalls, customers squat in semicircles eating noodles and dumplings. Kwan chooses a vender who is slapping what look like floury pancakes onto the sides of a blazing-hot oil drum. "Give me three," she says, in Chinese. The vender pries the pancakes off with his blackened fingers, and Simon and I yelp as we toss the hot pancakes up and down like circus jugglers.

16 "How much?" Kwan opens her change purse.

17 "Six yuan," the pancake vender tells her.

18 I calculate the cost is a little more than a dollar, dirt cheap. By Kwan's estimation, this is tantamount to extortion. "Wah!" She points to another customer. "You charged him only fifty fen a pancake."

19 "Of course! He's a local worker. You three are tourists."

20 "What are you saying! I'm also local."

21 "You?" The vender snorts and gives her a cynical once-over. "From where, then?"

22 "Changmian."

23 His eyebrows rise in suspicion. "Really, now! Who do you know in Changmian?"

24 Kwan rattles off some names.

25 The vender slaps his thigh. "Wu Ze-min? You know Wu Ze-min?"

26 "Of course. As children, we lived across the lane from each other. I haven't seen him in over thirty years."

27 "His daughter married my son."

28 "Nonsense!"

29 The man laughs. "It's true. Two years ago. My wife and my mother opposed the match—just because the girl was from Changmian. But they have old countryside ideas, they still believe Changmian is cursed. Not me, I'm not superstitious, not anymore. And now a baby's been born, last spring, a girl, but I don't mind."

30 "Hard to believe Wu Ze-min's a grandfather. How is he?"

31 "Lost his wife twenty years ago, when they were sent to the cowsheds for counter-revolutionary thinking. They smashed his hands, but not his mind. Later he married another woman, Yang Ling-fang."

32 "That's not possible! She was the little sister of an old schoolmate of mine. I still see her as a tender young girl."

33 "Not so tender anymore. She's got *jiaoban* skin, tough as leather, been through plenty of hardships, let me tell you."

34 Kwan and the vender continue to gossip while Simon and I eat our pancakes. They taste like a cross between focaccia and a green-onion omelette. By now Kwan and the vender act like old friends, and he advises her how to get a good price on a driver to take us to Changmian.

35 "All right, older brother," Kwan says, "how much do I owe you?"

36 "Six yuan."

37 "Wah! Still six yuan? Too much, too much. I'll give you two, no more than that."

38 "Make it three, then."

39 Kwan grunts, settles up, and we leave. When we're half a block away, I whisper to Simon, "That man said Changmian is cursed."

40 Kwan overhears me. "*Tst!* That's just a story, a thousand years old. Only stupid people still think Changmian is a bad-luck place to live."

41 I translate for Simon, then ask, "What kind of bad luck?"

42 "You don't want to know."

43 I am about to insist she tell me, when Simon points to an open-air market overflowing with wicker baskets of thick-skinned pomelos, dried beans, cassia tea, chilies.

44 I inhale deeply and imagine that I'm filling my lungs with the very air that inspired my ancestors, whoever they might have been. Because we arrived late the night before, we haven't yet seen the Guilin landscape, its fabled karst peaks, its magical limestone caves, and all the other sites listed in our guidebook as the reasons this is known in China as "the most beautiful place on earth."

45 Looking up toward cloud level, we see the amazing peaks, which resemble prehistoric shark's teeth, the clichéd subject of every Chinese calendar and scroll painting. But tucked in the gums of these ancient stone formations is the blight of high-rises, their stucco exteriors grimy with industrial pollution, their signboards splashed with garish red and gilt characters. Between these are lower buildings from an earlier era, all of them painted a proletarian toothpaste-green. And here and there is the rubble of prewar houses and impromptu garbage dumps. The whole scene gives Guilin the look and stench of a pretty face marred by tawdry lipstick, gapped teeth, and an advanced case of periodontal disease.

46 "Boy, oh boy," whispers Simon. "If Guilin is China's most beautiful city, I can't wait to see what the cursed village of Changmian looks like."

47 We catch up with Kwan. "Everything is entirely different, no longer the same." Kwan must be sad to see how horribly Guilin has changed over the past thirty years. But then she says, in a proud and marvelling voice, "So much progress, everything is so much better."

48 A couple of blocks farther on, we come upon a bird market. Hanging from tree limbs are hundreds of decorative cages containing singing finches, and exotic birds with gorgeous plumage, punk crests, and fan-like tails. On the ground are cages of huge birds, perhaps eagles or hawks, magnificent, with menacing talons and beaks. There are also the ordinary fowl—chickens and ducks, destined for the stewpot.

49 I see a man hissing at me. "*Ssssss!*" He sternly motions me to come over. What is he, the secret police?

50 The man solemnly reaches underneath a table and brings out a cage. "You like," he says, in English. Facing me is a snowy-white owl with milk-chocolate highlights. It looks like a fat Siamese cat with wings. The owl blinks its golden eyes and I fall in love.

51 "Hey, Simon, Kwan, come here. Look at this."

52 "One hundred dollar, U.S.," the man says. "Very cheap."

53 Simon shakes his head and says in a weird combination of pantomime and broken English: "Take bird on plane, not possible, customs official will say stop, not allowed, must pay big fine—"

54 "How much?" the man asks brusquely. "You say. I give you morning price, best price."

55 "There's no use bargaining," Kwan tells the man in Chinese. "We're tourists. We can't bring birds back to the United States, no matter how cheap."

56 "Aaah, who's talking about bringing it back?" the man replies in rapid Chinese. "Buy it today, then take it to that restaurant, over there. For a small price, they can cook it tonight for your dinner."

57 "Oh, my God!" I turn to Simon. "He's selling this owl as food!"

58 "That's disgusting. Tell him he's a fucking goon."

59 "You tell him!"

60 "I can't speak Chinese."

61 The man must think I am urging my husband to buy me an owl for dinner. "You're very lucky I even have *one*. The cat-eagle is rare, very rare," he brags. "Took me three weeks to catch it."

62 "I don't believe this," I tell Simon. "I'm going to be sick."

63 Then I hear Kwan saying, "A cat-eagle is not that rare, just hard to catch. Besides, I hear the flavor is ordinary."

64 "To be honest," says the man, "it's not as pungent as, say, a pangolin. But you eat a cat-eagle to give you strength and ambition, not to be fussy over taste. Also, it's good for improving your eyesight. One of my customers was nearly blind. After he ate a cat-eagle, he could see his wife for the first time in twenty years. The customer came back and cursed me: 'Shit! She's ugly enough to scare a monkey. Fuck your mother for letting me eat that cat-eagle!'"

65 Kwan laughs heartily. "Yes, yes, I've heard this about cat-eagles. It's a good story." She pulls out her change purse and holds up a hundred-yuan note.

66 "Kwan, what are you doing?" I cry. "We are *not* going to eat this owl!"

67 The man waves away the hundred yuan. "Only American money," he says firmly. "One hundred

68 Kwan pulls out an American ten-dollar bill.

69 "Kwan!" I shout.

70 The man shakes his head, refusing the ten. Kwan shrugs, then starts to walk away. The man shouts to her to give him fifty, then. She comes back and holds out a ten and a five, and says, "That's my last offer."

71 "This is insane!" Simon mutters.

72 The man sighs, then relinquishes the cage, complaining, "What a shame, so little money for so much work. Look at my hands, three weeks of climbing and cutting down bushes to catch this bird."

73 As we walk away, I grab Kwan's free arm: "There's no way I'm going to let you eat this owl. I don't care if we are in China."

74 "Shh! Shh! You'll scare him!" Kwan pulls the cage out of my reach. She gives me a maddening smile, then walks over to a concrete wall, overlooking the river and sets the cage on top. She meows to the owl. "Oh, little friend, you want to go to Changmian? You want to climb with me to the top of the mountain, let my little sister watch you fly away?" The owl twists his head and blinks.

75 I almost cry with joy and guilt. Why do I think such bad things about Kwan?

76 "See that?" I hear Kwan say. "Over there." She's pointing to a cone-shaped peak off in the distance. "Just outside my village stands a sharp- headed mountain, taller than that one, even. We call it Young Girl's Wish, after a slave girl who ran away to the top of it, then flew off with a phoenix who was her lover." Kwan looks at me. "It's a story, just superstition."

77 I'm amused that she thinks she has to explain.

78 Kwan continues, "Yet all the girls in our village believed in that tale, not because they were stupid but because they wanted to hope for a better life. We thought that if we climbed to the top and made a wish, it might come true. So we raised little hatchlings, and when the birds were ready to fly we climbed to the top of Young Girl's Wish and let them go. The birds would then fly to where the phoenixes lived and tell them our wishes." Kwan sniffs. "Big Ma told me the peak was named Young Girl's Wish because a crazy girl climbed to the top. But when she tried to fly, she fell all the way down and lodged herself so firmly into the earth she became a boulder. Big Ma said that's why you can see so many boulders at the bottom of that peak—they're all the stupid girls who followed her kind of crazy thinking, wishing for hopeless things."

79 I laugh. Kwan stares at me fiercely, as if I were Big Ma, the aunt who raised her. "You can't stop young girls from wishing. No! Everyone must dream. To stop dreaming—well, that's like saying you can never change your fate. Isn't that true?"

80 "I suppose."

81 "So now you guess what I wished for."

82 "I don't know. What?"

83 "Come on, you guess."

84 "A handsome husband."

85 "No."

86 "A car."

87 Kwan laughs and slaps my arm. "You guessed wrong! O.K., I'll tell you." She looks toward the mountain peaks. "Before I left for America, I raised three birds, not just one, so I could make three wishes at the top of the peak. I told myself, If these three wishes come true, my life is complete, I can die happy. My first wish: to have a sister I could love with all my heart, only that, and I would ask for nothing more from her. My second wish: to return to China with my sister. My third wish"—Kwan's voice now quavers—"for Big Ma to see this and say she was sorry she sent me away."

88 This is the first time Kwan's ever shown me how deeply she can resent someone who's treated her wrong. "I opened the cage," she continues, "and let my three birds go free." She flings out her hand in demonstration. "But one of them beat its wings uselessly, drifting in half-circles, before it fell like a stone all the way to the bottom. Now you see, two of my wishes have already happened: I have you, and together we are in China. Last night, I realized my third wish would never come true. Big Ma will never tell me she is sorry."

89 She holds up the cage with the owl. "But now I have a beautiful cat-eagle that can carry with him my new wish. When he flies away, all my old sadnesses will go with him. Then both of us will be free."

90 Actually, Kwan is my half sister, but I never mention that publicly. That would be an insult, as if she deserved only fifty per cent of my love. She was born in China. I was born in San Francisco, after our father immigrated there and married my mother.

91 Mom calls herself "American mixed grill, a bit of everything white, fatty, and fried." She was born in Moscow, Idaho, where she was a champion baton twirler and once won a county-fair prize for growing a deformed potato that had the profile of Jimmy Durante. She told me she dreamed she'd one day grow up to be different—thin, exotic, and noble, like Luise Rainer, who won an Oscar playing O-lan in "The Good Earth." When Mom moved to San Francisco and became a Kelly girl instead, she did the next-best thing. She married our father. Mom thinks that her marrying out of the Anglo race makes her a liberal. "When Jack and I met," she still tells people, "there were laws against mixed marriages. We broke the law for love." She neglects to mention that those laws didn't apply in California.

92 None of us, including my mom, even knew that Kwan existed until shortly before my father died, of renal failure. I was not quite four when he passed away. But I still remember the last day I saw him in the hospital.

93 I was sitting on a sticky vinyl chair, eating a bowl of strawberry Jell-O cubes that my father had given me from his lunch tray. He was propped up in bed, breathing hard. Mom would cry one minute, then act cheerful. The next thing I remember, my father was whispering and Mom leaned

in close to listen. Her mouth opened wider and wider. Then her head turned sharply toward me, all twisted with horror.

94 "Your daughter?" I heard my mom say. "Bring her back?"

95 What I remember after that is a jumble: the bowl of Jell-O crashing to the floor, Mom staring at a photo, then me seeing the black-and-white snapshot of a skinny baby with patchy hair.

96 It turned out that my father had been a university student in Guilin. He used to buy live frogs for his supper at the outdoor market from a young woman named Li Chen. He later married her, and in 1944 she gave birth to a daughter. In 1948, my father's first wife died, of a lung disease, perhaps t.b. He went to Hong Kong to search for work and left Kwan in the care of his wife's younger sister, Li Bin-bin, who lived in a small mountain village called Changmian. He sent money for their support—but in 1949, after the Communists took over, it was impossible for my father to return. What else could he do? With a heavy heart, he left for America to start a new life and forget about the sadness he left behind.

97 Eleven years later, while he was dying in the hospital, the ghost of his first wife appeared at the foot of his bed. "Claim back your daughter," she warned, "or suffer the consequences after death!"

98 Looking back, I can imagine how my mom must have felt when she first heard this. Another wife? A daughter in China? We were a modern American family. We spoke English. Sure, we ate Chinese food, but takeout, like everyone else. And we lived in a ranch- style house in Daly City. My father worked for the Government Accounting Office. My mother went to P.T.A. meetings. She had never heard my father talk about Chinese superstitions before; they attended church and bought life insurance instead.

99 After my father died, my mother kept telling everyone how he had treated her "just like a Chinese empress." She made all sorts of grief-stricken promises to God and my father's grave. My mother vowed never to remarry. She vowed to teach us children to do honor to the family name. She vowed to find my father's firstborn child, Kwan, and bring her to the United States. The last promise was the only one she kept.

100 I was nearly six when Kwan arrived.

101 We head to the hotel, in search of a car that will take one local, two tourists, and a cat-eagle to Changmian village. By nine, we've procured the services of a driver, an amiable young man who knows how to do the capitalist hustle. "Clean, cheap, fast,"he declares, in Chinese. And then he makes an aside for Simon's benefit.

102 "What'd he say?" Simon asks.

103 "He's letting you know he speaks English."

104 Our driver reminds me of the slick Hong Kong youths who hang out in the trendy pool halls of San Francisco, the same pomaded hair, his inch-long pinkie nail, perfectly manicured, symbolizing that his lucky life is one without backbreaking work. He flashes us a smile, revealing a set

of nicotine-stained teeth. "You call me Rocky," he says, in heavily accented English. "Like famous movie star." He opens the door with a flourish, and we climb into a black Nissan, a late-model sedan that, curiously, lacks seat belts and safety headrests. Do the Japanese think Chinese lives aren't worth saving? "China has either better drivers or no liability lawyers," Simon concludes.

105 Rocky happily assumes we like loud music and slips in a Eurythmics tape, a gift from one of his other "excellent American customers." And so, with Kwan in the front seat and Simon, the owl, and me in back, we start our journey to Changmian, blasted by the beat of "Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves."

106 Rocky's excellent American customers have also taught him select phrases, which he recites to us: "Where you go? I know it. Jump in, let's go." "Go faster? Too fast? No way, José." "How far? Not far. Too far." "Park car? Wait a sec. Back in flash." "Not lost. No problem. Chill out."

107 Rocky explains that he is teaching himself English so he can one day go to America.

108 "My idea," he says, in Chinese, "is to become a famous movie actor, specializing in martial arts. Of course, I don't expect a big success from the start. Maybe I'll have to take a job as a taxi-driver. But I'm hardworking. In America, people don't know how to be as hardworking as we Chinese. We also know how to suffer. What's unbearable to Americans would be ordinary for me. Don't you think that's true, older sister?"

109 Kwan gives an ambiguous "Hmm." I wonder whether she is thinking of her brother-in-law, a former chemist, who immigrated to the States and now works as a dishwasher because he's too scared to speak English, lest people think he is stupid. Just then Simon's eyes grow round, and I shout, "Holy shit!" as the car nearly sideswipes two schoolgirls holding hands. Rocky blithely goes on about his dream.

110 "When I live in America, I'll save most of my money, spend only a little on food, cigarettes, maybe the movies every now and then, and, of course, a car for my taxi business. My needs are simple. Even if I don't become a movie star, I can still come back to China and live like a rich man."

111 He looks at us through the rearview mirror and gives us a thumbs-up. A second later, Simon grips the front seat, and I shout, "Holy Jesus shit!" We are about to hit a young woman on a bicycle with her baby perched on the handlebar. At the last possible moment, the cyclist wobbles to the right and out of our way.

112 Rocky laughs. "Chill out," he says. And then he explains, in Chinese, why we shouldn't worry. Kwan turns around and translates for Simon: "He said in China if driver run over somebody, driver always at fault, no matter how careless other person."

113 Simon looks at me. "This is supposed to reassure us? Did something get lost in the translation?"

114 "It doesn't make any sense," I tell Kwan, as Rocky veers in and out of traffic. "A dead pedestrian is a dead pedestrian, no matter whose fault it is."

115 "*Tst!* This American thinking," Kwan replies. The owl swings his head and stares at me, as if to say, Wise up, gringa, this is China, your American ideas don't work here. "In China," Kwan goes on, "you always responsible for someone else, no matter what. You get run over, this my fault, you my little sister. Now you understand?"

116 We drive by a strip of shops selling rattan furniture and straw hats. And then we're in the outskirts of town, both sides of the road lined with mile after mile of identical one- room restaurants. Some are in the stages of being built, their walls layers of brick, mud plaster, and whitewash. They advertise the same specialties: orange soda pop and steamy-hot noodle soup. Idle waitresses squat outside, watching our car whizz by.

117 A few miles farther on, the restaurants give way to simple wooden stalls with thatched roofs, and, even farther, peddlers, without any shelter, stand by the road, yelling at the top of their lungs, waving their string bags of pomelos, their bottles of homemade hot sauce.

118 As the stretches between villages grow longer, Kwan falls asleep, her head bobbing lower and lower. She half awakens with a snort every time we hit a pothole. After a while, she emits long, rhythmical snores, blissfully unaware that Rocky is driving faster and faster down the two-lane road. Each time he accelerates, the owl opens his wings slightly, then settles down again in the cramped cage. I'm gripping my knees, then sucking air between clenched teeth whenever Rocky swings into the left lane.

119 We are now tailgating a truck filled with soldiers in green uniforms. They wave to us. Rocky honks his horn, then swerves sharply to pass. As we go by the truck, I can see an oncoming bus bearing down on us, the urgent blare of its horn growing louder and louder. "Oh, my God, oh, my God," I whimper. I close my eyes, and Simon grabs my hand. The car jerks back into the right lane. I hear a *whoosh*, then the blare of the bus horn receding.

120 "That's it," I say in a tense whisper. "I'm going to tell him to slow down."

121 "I don't know, Olivia. He might be offended."

122 I glare at Simon. "What? You'd rather die than be rude?"

123 He affects an attitude of nonchalance. "They all drive like that."

124 "So mass suicide makes it O.K.?"

125 "Well, we haven't seen any accidents."

126 Simon stares at me. At that moment, Rocky brakes abruptly. Kwan and the owl awake with a flutter of arms and wings. Rocky rolls down the window and sticks out his head. He curses under his breath, then starts punching the car horn with the heel of his hand.

127 After a few minutes, we see the source of our delay: an accident, a bad one, to judge from the spray of glass, metal, and personal belongings that litters the road. The smells of spilled gasoline and scorched rubber hang in the air. Just as I am about to say to Simon, "See?" our car inches past a black minivan, belly up, its doors splayed like the broken wings of a squashed insect. A tire lies in a nearby vegetable field. Seconds later, we go by the other half of the impact: a red-and-white bus. The large front

window is smashed, the hound-nosed hood twisted and smeared with a hideous swath of blood. About fifty gawkers, farm tools still in hand, mill around, staring and pointing at various parts of the crumpled bus as if it were a science exhibit. And then I see a dozen or so injured people, some clutching themselves and bellowing in pain, others lying quietly in shock. Or perhaps they are already dead.

128 "Shit, I can't believe this," says Simon. "There's no ambulance, no doctors."

129 "Stop the car," I order Rocky, in Chinese. "We should help them." Why did I say that? What can I possibly do? I can barely look at the victims, let alone touch them.

130 "*Ai-ya.*" Kwan stares at the field. "So many yin people." Yin people? Kwan believes she can see ghosts, those who have died and now dwell in the World of Yin. Is she now saying there are dead people out there? The owl coos mournfully, and my hands turn slippery-cold.

131 Rocky keeps his eyes on the road ahead, driving forward, leaving the tragedy behind us. "We'd be of no use," he says, in Chinese. "We have no medicine, no bandages. Besides, it's not good to interfere, especially since you're foreigners. Don't worry, the police will be along soon."

132 I'm secretly relieved he isn't heeding my instructions.

133 "You're Americans," he continues, his voice deep with Chinese authority. "You're not used to seeing tragedies. You pity us, yes, because you can later go home to a comfortable life and forget what you've seen. For us, this type of disaster is commonplace. We have so many people, no room left for pity."

134 "Would someone please tell me what's going on!" Simon exclaims. "Why aren't we stopping?"

135 "Don't ask questions," I snap. "Remember?"

136 When we get back on the open road, Kwan gives Rocky some advice. He solemnly nods, then slows down.

137 "What'd she say?" Simon asks.

138 "Chinese logic. If we're killed, no payment. And in the next life, he'll owe us big time."

139 Another three hours pass. I know we have to be getting close to Changmian. Kwan is pointing out landmarks. "There! There!" she cries huskily, bouncing up and down like a little child. "Those two peaks. The village they surround is called Wife Waiting for Husband's Return. But where is the tree? What happened to the tree? Next to that house, there was a very big tree, maybe a thousand years old."

140 She scans ahead. "That place there! We used to hold a big market. But now look, it's just an empty field. And there—that mountain up ahead! That's the one we called Young Girl's Wish."

141 Kwan laughs, but the next second she seems puzzled. "Funny, now that mountain looks so small. Why is that? Did it shrink, washed down by the rain? Or maybe the peak was

running up there to make a wish. Or maybe it's because I've become too American and now. I see things with different eyes, everything looking smaller poorer, not as good."

142 All at once, Kwan shouts to Rocky to turn down a small dirt road we have just passed. He makes an abrupt U-turn, knocking Simon and me into each other, and causing the owl to shriek. We are rumbling along a rutted lane, past fields with pillows of moist red dirt. "Turn left, turn left!" Kwan orders. She has her hands clasped in her lap. "Too many years, too many years," she says, as if chanting.

143 We approach a stand of trees, and then, as soon as Kwan announces, "Changmian," I see it: a village nestled between two jagged peaks, their hillsides a velvety moss-green with folds deepening into emerald. More comes into view: crooked rows of buildings whitewashed with lime, their pitched tile roofs laid in the traditional pattern of dragon coils. Surrounding the village are well-tended fields and mirrorlike ponds neatly divided by stone walls and irrigation trenches. We jump out of the car. Miraculously, Changmian has avoided the detritus of modernization. I see no tin roofs or electrical power lines. In contrast to other villages we've passed, the outlying lands here haven't become dumping grounds for garbage, the alleys aren't lined with crumpled cigarette packs or pink plastic bags. Clean stone pathways crisscross the village, then thread up a cleft between the two peaks and disappear through a stone archway. In the distance is another pair of tall peaks, dark jade in color, and beyond those the purple shadows of two more. Simon and I stare at each other, wide-eyed.

144 I feel as though we've stumbled on a fabled misty land, half memory, half illusion. Are we in Chinese Nirvana? Changmian looks like the carefully cropped photos found in travel brochures advertising "a charmed world of the distant past, where visitors can step back in time." There must be something wrong, I keep warning myself. Around the corner we'll stumble on reality: the fast-food market, the tire junkyard, the signs indicating this village is really a Chinese fantasyland for tourists.

145 "I feel like I've seen this place before," I whisper to Simon.

146 "Me, too. Maybe it was in a documentary." He laughs. "Or a car commercial."

147 I gaze at the mountains and realize why Changmian seems so familiar. It's the setting for Kwan's stories, the ones that filter into my dreams. There they are: the archways, the cassia trees, the hills leading to Thistle Mountain. And being here, I feel as if the membrane separating the two halves of my life has finally been shed.

148 From out of nowhere we hear squeals and cheers. Fifty tiny schoolchildren race toward the perimeter of a fenced-in yard. As we draw closer, the children shriek, turn on their heels, and run back to the school building, laughing. After a few seconds, they come screaming toward us like a flock of birds, followed by their smiling teacher. They stand at attention, and then shout all together, in English, "A-B-C! One-two-three! How are you! Hello goodbye!"

149 We continue along the path. Two young men on bicycles slow down and stop to stare at us. We keep walking and round a corner. Kwan gasps. Farther up the path, in front of an arched gateway, stand a dozen smiling people. Kwan puts her hand to her mouth, then runs toward them. When she reaches the group, she grabs each person's hand between her two palms, then hails a stout woman and slaps her on the back.

150 "Fat!" Kwan says. "You've grown unbelievably fat!"

151 "Hey, look at you—what happened to your hair? Did you ruin it on purpose?"

152 "This is the style! What, have you been in the countryside so long you don't recognize good style?"

153 "Oh, listen to her, she's still bossy, I can tell."

154 "You were always the bossy one, not—"

155 Kwan stops in midsentence, transfixed by a stone wall. You would think it's the most fascinating sight she's ever seen.

156 "Big Ma," she murmurs. "What's happened? How can this be?"

157 A man in the crowd guffaws. "Ha! She was so anxious to see you she got up early this morning, then jumped on a bus to meet you in Guilin. And now look—you're here, she's there. Won't she be mad!"

158 Everyone laughs, except Kwan. She walks closer to the wall, calling hoarsely, "Big Ma, Big Ma." Several people whisper, and everyone draws back, frightened.

159 "Uh-oh," I say.

160 "Why is Kwan crying?" Simon whispers.

161 "Big Ma, oh, Big Ma." Tears are streaming down Kwan's cheeks. "You must believe me, this is not what I wished. How unlucky that you died on the day that I've come home." A few women gasp and cover their mouths.

162 I walk over to Kwan. "What are you saying? Why do you think she's dead?"

163 "Why is everyone so freaked?" Simon glances about.

164 I hold up my hand. "I'm not sure." I turn back to her. "Kwan?" I say gently. "Kwan?" But she does not seem to hear me. She is looking tenderly at the wall, laughing and crying.

165 "Yes, I knew this," she is saying. "Of course, I knew. In my heart, I knew all the time."

166 In the afternoon, the villagers hold an uneasy homecoming party for Kwan in the community hall. The news has spread through Changmian that Kwan has seen Big Ma's ghost. Yet she has not announced this to the village, and since there is no proof that Big Ma has died, there is no reason to call off a food-laden celebration that evidently took her friends days to prepare. During the festivities, Kwan does not brag about her car, her sofa, her English. She listens quietly as her former childhood playmates recount major events of their lives: the birth of twin sons, a railway trip to a big city, and the time a group of student intellectuals was sent to Changmian for reëducation during the Cultural Revolution.

167 "They thought they were smarter than us," recounts one woman, whose hands are gnarled by arthritis. "They wanted us to raise a fast-growing rice, three crops a year instead of two. They gave us special seeds. They brought us insect poison. Then the little frogs that swam in the rice fields and ate the insects, they all died. And the ducks that ate the frogs, they all died, too. Then the rice died."

168 A man with bushy hair shouts, "So we said, 'What good is it to plant three crops of rice that fail rather than two that are successful?'"

169 The woman with arthritic hands continues: "These same intellectuals tried to breed our mules! Ha! Can you believe it? For two years, every week, one of us would ask them, 'Any luck?' And they'd say, 'Not yet, not yet.' And we'd try to keep our faces serious but encouraging. 'Try harder, comrade,' we'd say. 'Don't give up.'"

170 We are still laughing when a young boy runs into the hall, shouting that an official from Guilin has arrived in a fancy black car. Silence. The official comes into the hall, and everyone stands. He solemnly holds up the identity card of Li Bin-bin and asks if she belonged to the village. Several people glance nervously at Kwan. She walks slowly toward the official, looks at the identity card, and nods. The official makes an announcement, and a ripple of moans and then wails fills the room.

171 Simon leans toward me. "What's wrong?"

172 "Big Ma's dead. She was killed in that bus accident we saw this morning."

173 Simon and I walk over and each put a hand on one of Kwan's shoulders. She feels so small.

174 "I'm sorry," Simon stammers.

175 Kwan gives him a teary smile. As Li Bin-bin's closest relative, she has volunteered to perform the necessary bureaucratic ritual of bringing the body back to the village the next day. The three of us are returning to Guilin.

176 As soon as Rocky sees us, he stubs out his cigarette and turns off the car radio. Someone must have told him the news. "What a tragedy," he says. "I'm sorry, big sister, I should have stopped. I'm to blame—"

177 Kwan waves off his apologies. "No one's to blame. Anyway, regrets are useless, always too late."

178 When Rocky opens the car door, we see that the owl is still in his cage on the backseat. Kwan lifts the cage gently and stares at the bird. "No need to climb the mountain anymore," she says. She sets the cage on the ground, then opens its door. The owl sticks out his head, hops to the edge of the doorway and onto the ground. He twists his head and, with a great flap of wings, takes off toward the peaks. Kwan watches him until he disappears.

179 As Rocky warms the engine, I ask Kwan, "When we passed the bus accident this morning, did you see someone who looked like Big Ma? Is that how you knew she'd died?"

180 "What are you saying? I didn't know she was dead until I saw her yin self standing by the wall."

181 "Then why did you tell her that you knew?"

182 Kwan frowns, puzzled. "I knew what?"

183 "You were telling her you knew, in your heart you knew it was true. Weren't you talking about the accident?"

184 "Ah," she says, understanding at last. "No, not the accident." She sighs. "I told Big Ma that what *she* was saying was true."

185 "What did she say?"

186 Kwan turns to the window, and I can see the reflection of her stricken face. "She said she was wrong about the story of Young Girl's Wish. She said all my wishes had already come true. She was always sorry she sent me away. But she could never tell me this. Otherwise, I wouldn't have left her for a chance at a better life."

187 I search for some way to console Kwan. "At least you can still see her," I say.

188 "Ah?"

189 "I mean as a yin person. She can visit you."

190 Kwan stares out the car window. "But it's not the same. We can no longer make new memories together. We can't change the past. Not until the next lifetime." She exhales heavily, releasing all her unsaid words.

Questions for Engagement, Response, and Analysis

1. What is the point of view in the story? What is the effect of this point of view on the theme and tone?
2. Describe the street scenes in Guilin. What does Olivia mean when she says that the city of Guilin was "a pretty face marred by tawdry lipstick, gapped teeth, and an advanced case of periodontal disease"?
3. List some of the foreshadowing elements and explain what they foreshadow.
4. What is the tale of the "Young Girl's Wish"? What are Kwan's three wishes?
5. Who are "yin people"? What other Chinese legends does the story include?
6. How does Kwan know that Big Ma is dead before anyone else does?
7. Why doesn't Kwan brag about her American possessions after Big Ma's death?
8. Explain the importance of the "cat-eagle" and of the owl?

Heart (2001)

1 These are the things I must not forget.

2 I was raised with the Liu clan in the rocky Western Hills south of Peking. The oldest recorded name of our village was Immortal Heart. Precious Auntie taught me how to write this down on my chalkboard. *Watch now, Doggie,* she ordered, and drew the character for "heart": *See this*