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READER'S
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Edited by
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Exilic or diasporic sensibilities are expressed in Meena Alexander’s Fault Lines (1993) and River and Bridge (1995); Shauna Singh Baldwin’s English Lessons and Other Stories (1996); Lan Samantha Chang’s Hunger (1998); Susan Choi’s The Foreign Student (1999); Le Ly Hayslip’s When Heaven and Earth Changed Places (1989) and Child of War, Woman of Peace (1993); Jade Ngoc Quang Huey’s South Wind Changling (1994); Myung Mi Kim’s Under the Flag (1991) and Dana (1998); Rumi Akin’s Interpreter of Maladies (1989); Wendy Law-Yone’s Ironwaddy Tango (1993); Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s Among the Half-Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands (1996); Rohinton Mistry’s Such a Long Journey (1991) and A Fine Balance (1995); David Mura’s Turning Japanese (1991); Ruth Ozeki’s My Year of Meats (1988); Qui Duc Nguyen’s Where the Ashes Are (1994); S. P. Somtow’s Jasmine Nights (1994); Karen Tei Yamashita’s Brazil Maru (1992) and Tropic of Orange (1997).


As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by WILLIAM FAULKNER. Written in only six weeks, As I Lay Dying is one of Faulkner’s finest novels. The story unfolds in some sixty short sections, each labeled with the name of the character who narrates his thoughts and perceptions through direct interior monologue.

As the story opens, a Mississippi farm woman, Addie Bundren, is dying. The members of her family—her husband, Anse; four sons, Cash, Darl, Jewel, and Vardaman; and a daughter, Dewey Dell—as well as some of her neighbors, individually reveal their relationship to Addie in words and actions. Addie has made Anse promise to take her to Jefferson to be buried, and the major part of the book concerns the Bundrens’ journey with the coffin to the burying ground. Various mishaps beset the family en route: in crossing a flooding river, the mules are drowned, Cash’s leg is broken, and the coffin is upset and rescued by Jewel at the risk of his life. On the other side the family rests at a farmhouse, where Darl sets fire to the barn in an attempt to destroy the by-then putrescent corpse; the coffin is rescued again by Jewel, who is badly burned. The family finally reaches Jefferson, where Addie is buried. Darl is taken without warning to the insane asylum, and Anse acquires a new wife, “duck-shaped” and pop-eyed.

In the course of the narrative it is revealed that Jewel was born of Addie’s affair with Whitfield, a local preacher. Her relationship with Anse had been spiritually and emotionally barren, based on words that were just “shape[s] to fill a lack.” Jewel, the child of Addie’s relationship in which no words were necessary, is significantly silent; a passionate, active man, he lives intuitively and impulsively. Darl, the extreme opposite of jewel, is extraordinarily sensitive and perceptive, but lives in the private world of his mind, several removes from reality and from human contact. Cash is concerned with balance—both in terms of his trade as a carpenter and in his growing ability to balance thought and action, word and fact.

As I Like It, a department conducted by WILLIAM LYNCH. Phelps in Scribner’s Magazine from 1922 to 1936. Phelps wrote about books, plays, and people in a way that won him a large audience; very frequently he judged his book or play secured its success. Selections from these essays appeared under the same title in three books (1923, 1924, 1926).

Asimov, Isaac (1920–1992), novelist, writer on many subjects, especially science. Born in Russia, Asimov earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1948 and taught biochemistry at the Boston University School of Medicine. In 1957 he won the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation award for Building Blocks of the Universe and in 1960 the Howard W. Blakeslee award from the American Heart Association for The Living River (1959), in which he analyzed the chemical composition of blood and related it to other aspects of the universe.

Asimov was a remarkably prolific writer, publishing over 425 books on a wide variety of subjects. For young people there are the Lucky Starr series of adventure stories beginning with David Starr, Space Ranger (1952) and various simple explanations of scientific phenomena, Novels range from I Robot (1950)—which introduced his famous Three Laws of Robotics: robots may not injure a human, or by inaction allow a human to be harmed; robots must obey human orders unless doing so conflicts with the first law; robots must protect their own existence except when doing so will conflict with the first two laws—to The Robots of Dawn (1983). Among story collections is Best Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov (1986). Non-fiction includes The Human Brain: Its Capabilities and Functions (1964); Asimov’s Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology (1964); rev. 1974); To the Ends of the Universe (1967; rev. 1975); Asimov’s Guide to the Bible: Old Testament (Volume I, 1968); New Testament (Volume II, 1969); Asimov’s Guide to Shakespeare (2 v. 1970); Possible Tomorrows: Science Fiction (1972); The Best of Isaac Asimov: 1939–1972 (1973); Birth and Death of the Universe (1975); Asimov’s Guide to Science (2 v. 1975); Asimov on Science Fiction (1981); The Dangers of Intelligence (1986); Did Comets Kill the Dinosaurs? (1987); Unidentified Flying Objects (1988); and Asimov’s Chronology of Science and Discovery (1989). Among his autobiographical works are In Memory Yet Green (1979) and In Joy Still Felt (1980).

Aspens Papers, The (1888), a short novel by HENRY JAMES. According to passages in his notebook, James based The Aspens Papers on a story he had heard concerning the mistress of Byron, then living, who was in possession of several unpublished papers and letters of both Byron and Shelley. The narrator of The Aspens Papers learns that the former mistress of the romantic poet Jeffrey Aspens is still living in Italy and has in her possession a collection of the poet’s papers, which she will not permit to be published. In hope of somehow gaining access to the papers, the narrator rents a room from the old
Ashley, Lady Brett, the neurotic heroine of The Sun Also Rises (1926) by Ernest Hemingway.

Ash Wednesday (1930), poem by T.S. Eliot. The poem is a religious meditation on spiritual regeneration; it plays variations on the idea of turning announced in the first line, "Because I do not hope to turn again." Humans must face the necessity of turning away from earthly considerations in anticipation of the turning to dust that awaits the body as the soul seeks a different level of existence.

Asian-American Literature. Early Asian immigrants arrived in the U.S. in successive waves: Chinese (1850–1882), Japanese (1885–1924), Korean (1903–1905), South Asians (1904–1924), Filipinos (1907–1930). Generally each wave began as a response to labor shortage and ended in legislative exclusion. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned the further immigration of Chinese laborers; those who stayed could not send for their wives in China. The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 likewise curtailed Japanese and Korean laborers, but immigrants could arrange to have their wives or “picture brides” come to the U.S. Other laws included the 1917 Immigration Act, which prohibited Asian Indian immigration; the 1924 Immigration Quota Act, which halted all immigration from mainland Asia; and the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act which restricted Filipino immigration. Immediate concern with survival and the problem of language barriers confined writings by most early Chinese and Japanese immigrants to native languages and literary forms. (Exotics such as Yone Noguchi, Shisei Tsumekishi, and Sadakichi Hartmann were exceptions.) Much of this literature has been collected recently in anthologies such as Wooden-Fish Books: Critical Essays & An Annotated Catalog Based on the Collections in the University of Hong Kong, ed. Leung Pui-Chee (1978); Islands: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940, ed. Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung (1980); Ayumi: A Japanese American Anthology, ed. Janice Mirikitani et al. (1980); Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown, ed. and tr. by Marlon Horn (1987).

Early writings in English consisted mostly of autobiography and autobiographical novels, such as Lee Yan Phou’s When I Was a Boy in China (1887), Yung Wing’s My Life in China and America (1909), Etsu Sugimoto’s Daughter of the Samurai (1925), New Il-Han’s When I Was a Boy in Korea (1928), and Youngill Kang’s Grass Roof (1931) and East Goes West (1937). Most of these books focus on the author’s ancestral lands, a trend that seemed to reflect the taste of the American public. The publications of nisei such as Taro Katayama, Iwao Kawakami, and Toyo Suyemoto, were mostly restricted to the English sections of bilingual newspapers and literary magazines. Two writers devoted to portraying Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, however, were read outside of their ethnic communities. Sui Sin Far, pseudonym of Edith Eaton, an Eurasian whose tales are collected in Mrs. Spring Frugrance (1912), sketches characters that populated the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Toshio Mori excels in capturing Japanese-American life in Seattle; his collection of short stories, Yokohama, California, was slated for publication in 1942, but because of the war did not appear until 1949.

World War II had a mixed impact on Asian-American literature. Because China and the Philippines were American allies in the Pacific, Americans of Chinese and Filipinos descent were suddenly looked upon favorably. Publishers responded to the changes in public attitudes, and works by two American-born Chinese and two Filipino immigrants appeared during or shortly after the war. Pardee Lowe’s Father and Glorious Descendant (1943) and Jade Snow Wong’s Fifth Chinese Daughter (1945), both autobiographies, center on the interaction and conflicts between immigrant parents and American-born children. Carlos Bulosan’s America Is in the Heart (1946), an autobiographical novel, describes the harsh working conditions for Filipino farm laborers and the racial prejudices they encountered; poet Jose Garcia Villa, whose work reflects metaphysical rather than ethnic concerns, received international acclaim for Have Come, Am Hers (1942). These books depicting life in the U.S. were followed by Lin Yutang’s A Chinatown Family (1948), C.Y. Lee’s Flower Drum Song (1957), Louis Chen’s Eat a Bowl of Tea (1961), Virginia Lee’s The House that Tai Ming Built (1963), and Ching Hua’s Crossings (1968). Diana Chang’s Frontiers of Love (1956), though set in Shanghai, is presented from the perspective of a Eurasian born and raised in the U.S.

By contrast, anti-Japanese sentiment prevented most Japanese-American writers from gaining national recognition until almost a decade after the end of the war. An exception was Hisaye Yamamoto, who published five stories in national journals between 1949 and 1952. Recently collected in Seventeen Syllables (1988), her fiction frequently explores the relationship between issei and nisei. Also devoted to this theme are Monica Sone’s Nisei Daughter (1953) and Milton Murayama’s All I Asking for is My Body (1959). The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent internment of people of Japanese ancestry left indelible marks on their creative work and continue to be reprised in literature to this day. The bombing is recalled in Lucky Come Hawaii (1965) by Jon Shirot and in Journey to Washington (1967) by Daniel Insouye with Lawrence Elliott. Works that evoke life in camps include Joy Kogawa’s Obasan (Japanese-Canadian novel, 1981); Edward Miyakawa’s Tule Lake (1979); Mine Okubo’s Citizen 136600 (1946); and Daisuke Kitagawa’s Issei and Nisei (1967), Jeannie Houston and James Houston’s Farewell to Manzanar (1973), Toshio Uchida’s Desert Exile (1982), and Mitsuye Yamada’s Desert Run (1988). John Okada’s No-No Boy (1957) delineates the trauma of a nisei who refuses the draft.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s, when the term “Asian-American” gained currency, fostered a collective identity among Americans of Asian descent and encouraged them to define themselves against externally imposed stereotypes. Furthermore, it led to the development of ethnic studies programs throughout the nation, thereby providing forums for discussing works written by and about Asian-Americans. The resulting
bloom in creativity has been accompanied by growing political consciousness. Writers who emerged after the movement are concerned not only with exposing racial and sexual inequities but also with affirming Asian-American heritage. These concerns are evident in fiction such as Jeffery Paul Chai’s “Jackrabbit” (1974), Frank Chin’s The Chinaman Pacific and Frisco R. R. Co. (1988), Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s Thousand Pieces of Gold (1981), David Masumoto’s Silent Strength (1984), Shawn Wong’s Homebase (1979), and Lawrence Yep’s Dragonwings (1975); in plays such as R.A. Shionoir’s Yellow Fever (1982), Phillip Gotanda’s Fish Head Soup (1986), David Hwang’s FOB (1979), and Wakako Yamauchi’s And the Soul Shall Dance (1982). Interaction between generations remains a popular subject among Asian-American writers, as evident in drama such as Frank Chin’s Year of the Dragon (1981), Momoko Iko’s The Gold Watch (1974), Paul Stephen Lim’s Mother Tongue [n.d.], Darrell Lum’s Oranges Are Lucky (1978); in prose works such as Cynthia Kadohata’s The Floating World (1989), Ronyong Kim’s Clay Walls (1986), Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior (1976) and China Men (1980), Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club (1989), and Yoshiko Ichida’s Picture Bride (1987). Increasingly, writers have also begun to explore interethnic and interracial themes in fiction such as Cecilia Brainard’s Woman with Horns (1988), Jeffery Chan’s “The Chinese in Haifa” (1974), Paulino Lim’s Passion Summer (1988), Maxine Hong Kingston’s Tripmaster Monkey (1989), Susan Nuyen’s A Small Obligation, and in David Hwang’s play M Butterfly (1989).


With the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which abolished the quota system of selecting immigrants by race or national origin, and with the end of the Vietnam War, came a huge number of new Asian immigrants and Southeast Asian refugees. Unlike the early immigrants, who were mostly laborers and farmers, many of the newcomers are professionals and intellectuals from urban areas. Writers such as Meena Alexander, G.S. Shroff Chandra, Zulfiqar Ghose, N.V.M. Gonzalez, Kim Yong Ik, Ko Won, Shirley Lim, Nguyen Mong Giac, Raja Rao, Ninotchka Rosca, Thich Nhat-Hanh, Tran Van Dinh, and Linda Ty-Casper had already achieved literary fame in their native countries. Among the works set in Asia the most widely read has been RICHARD KIN’S The Martyred (1964), an award-winning novel of the Korean War. More recently, other works set in Asia have received a wider readership, including GAIL TSUKUHARA’S The Samurai’s Garden (1994) and HADEN’S Waiting (1999). Works depicting recent immigrant experiences include Wendy Law-Yone’s The Coffin Tree (1983), VED MEHTA’S Sound-Shadows of the New World (1985), BHARATI MUKHERJEE’S Darkness (1985) and The Middleman (1988), Huahing Nieh’s Mulberry and Peach (1981), Bienvenido N. Santos’ The Scent of Apples (1979), and Ty Pak’s Guilty Payment (1983). The themes of exile, loneliness, alienation, and cultural conflict run through many of these works.

Asian-American literature continued to proliferate in the 1990s. While generational differences remained a persistent theme, the decade also witnessed bolder depictions of interracial, gay and lesbian, and transnational encounters. Intergenerational and interracial dynamics can be found in Peter Bacho’s Cebu (1991) and Dark Blue Suit and Other Stories (1997); Lane Chao’s Monkey Bridge (1998); Frank Chin’s Gung Fu Highway (1994); Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Arranged Marriage (1995) and The Mistress of Spices (1997); GISHER’S Typical American: (1991) and Mona in the Promised Land (1996); CHANG-RAE LEE’S Native Speaker (1995) and A Gesture Life (1999); Gus Lee’s China Boy (1991) and Honor and Duty (1994); IL-YEONG LEE’S The Winged Seed: A Remembrance (1995); David Wong Louie’s Pongs of Love (1991) and The Barbarians Are Coming (2000); Tsi-Maan Ng’s Bone (1993); Gary Pak’s The Watcher of Weeping and Other Stories (1992) and A Risepaper Airplane (1998); Lisa See’s On Gold Mountain (1995); Amy Uyematsu’s 30 Miles from J-Town (1992) and Nights of Fire, Nights of Rain (1998); Shawn Wong’s American Knees (1995); Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Saturday Night at the Pahula Theatre (1993) and Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers (1996); Mako Yoshikawa’s One Hundred and One Ways (1999).

The intersections of race, gender, and sexuality are explored in Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogearers (1990) and Gangster of Love (1996); Wanwadee Larsen’s Confessions of a Mail Order Bride: American Life Through Thai Eyes (1989); Russell Leong’s The