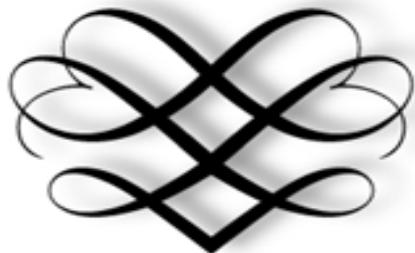

ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE: LEAVENING THE MOSAIC

BY SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM



U.S. novelist Henry James once noted that it takes a lot of history to produce the flowering of literature. In that light, the speed with which new Asian American literature is surfacing might be considered a form of encapsulated history, an enthusiastic response from mainstream U.S. literary circles to the belated appearance of Asian Americans on the U.S. consciousness. At the same time, it suggests that the task of evaluation is both urgent and complex.

Evaluation of a marginal yet emerging and rapidly transforming tradition should avoid definitive criteria drawn from different literary traditions. This does not imply that evaluation is not useful or possible. On the contrary, because emerging literatures are more conflict-situated, provisional and transitory, they must incorporate their own self-reflexive, interrogative, critical discourses -- in other words, a self-evaluation.

A survey of the publishers' lists on Asian American writing shows that in the 1990s, this discipline became, to use a colloquial phrase, a "hot property." Its popularity in the early days of the new century can be generally linked to the success of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, to such African American authors as W.E.B. Du Bois of the early 20th century and Toni Morrison of more recent vintage, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1994. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1978), the first Asian American work to receive wide

acclaim, and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), which established that writer as a best-selling author, have given rise to other writers whose works are of such a range of appeal as to be found in supermarkets and college bookstores alike.

Scholarly and popular interest in Asian American literature is of recent vintage, finding its direct roots in student activism at San Francisco State and the University of California at Berkeley, among other places in the United States in the late 1960s, that led to the creation of interdisciplinary ethnic studies programs. Today, courses in Asian American literature are common throughout U.S. higher education. As a result, this body of writing has expanded not only in visibility, but also -- more significantly -- in achievement.

Journals such as *Bridge* in New York City, and *Amerasia*, created at the University of California at Los Angeles, were vital forces in increasing awareness of selected Asian American writers. This interest, which intensified in the last two decades among mainstream U.S. readers and publishing houses, has brought with it renewed opportunities and, ironically, a crisis of representation. One sign of this crisis is the internal debate that swirls around efforts to define a "canon" of texts -- a list of the best or most significant writing -- and to agree upon a fixed curriculum. In that regard, as discussions revolve around provisionality and temporality, Asian American literature is a particularly shifting, oft-contested field.

How, at the outset, does one define the boundaries of Asian American literature? Three early anthologies, *Asian-American Authors* (1972), *Asian-American Heritage* (1974) and *Aiiieeeee!* (1975), suggested that the "melting pot" paradigm was inadequate to an understanding of Asian American cultural identity. At the same time, influenced by the 1960s black civil rights movement, the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* -- who later published plays, novels, short stories and poetry -- argued that Asian American "sensibility" was an American phenomenon distinctively different from and unrelated to Asian cultural sources. But this point of view evaporated over the years, in the face of increased Asian immigration during the last quarter of the 20th century.

Thanks to that influx, the Asian percentage of the U.S. population has increased from 0.5 percent to more than three percent. Interestingly, *Aiiieeeee!* focused only on Chinese and Japanese-American authors, almost all of them male. By comparison, in the 25 years since the groundbreaking anthology appeared, U.S. bookstores have been filled with the works of Americans of Filipino, Malaysian, Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Korean and other descents, with women widely and notably represented.

Usually, Asian American literature has been assessed by reviewers and critics from the single perspective of race. In other words, the literature is read as centered on the identity position of Americans of Asian descent and within the context of Asian American immigration histories and legislative struggles against unjust policies and racial violence. The truth is that different immigration histories of national-origin communities give rise to writings reflective of cross-generational concerns and styles. Chinese-language poems written by immigrant Chinese on the barracks walls of Angel Island (the site of immigrants' arrivals on the U.S. West Coast) between 1910 and 1940, and Issei (first-generation Japanese American) *tankas* (Japanese verse form) have been translated. Each has added to the archival "canon" of Asian American literature. The stories and essays of Edith Eaton (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, 1910), who took the pen name of Sui Sin Far to signify her adoption of the Chinese half of her ancestry, focused on the problems facing Chinese and those of "mixed race," or as she calls them

"Eurasians," in the United States of the early 20th-century. Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946) follows a Filipino immigrant as he and other migrant workers struggle for social justice and acceptance. Each is part of the Asian-American tradition.

In the period before the burst of new writing of the postwar era and even later, memoirs were the favored genre with immigrant and first-generation writers. (This is true of other ethnic literature as well.) Younghill Kang's *The Grass Roof* (1931), Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) satisfied a mainstream audience's curiosity about the strangers in its midst. Indeed, Japanese American World War II internment experiences were a major subject for memoirs and autobiographical poetry across the postwar decades, as reflected in Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1956), Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), and Mitsuye Yamada's poems in *Desert Run* (1988).

But the Asian American writing communities were far from limited to one era and venue, and to one discipline of literature. Writers communicated, and continue to communicate, across a range of genres -- including fiction, poetry, drama and oral history.

The first novel published by a U.S.-born Japanese American (or Nisei) was John Okada's *No No Boy* (1957), one year after Chinese American Diana Chang's *The Frontiers of Love* received respectful attention. The swift pace of literary production since then indicates that the trajectory of the Asian American literary tradition is still in formation -- imaginatively so.

The range of achievement in recent years is quite impressive. After the awards garnered by Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, other Asian American works found welcome readers and audiences. Cathy Song's novel *Picture Bride* and Garrett Hongo's collection of verse, *The River of Heaven*, helped solidify the reputation of the Asian American writing community

in the 1980s, as did *M. Butterfly*, David Henry Hwang's startling theatrical piece, and Philip K. Gotanda's drama, *The Wash*.

As Tan emerged with *The Joy Luck Club* and Kingston continued her rise with *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989), other writers like Bharati Mukherjee (*Jasmine*) came to the fore. Debut novels by Chinese American Gish Jen (*Typical American*), Korean American Chang-rae Lee (*Native Speaker*) and Vietnamese American Lan Cao (*Monkey Bridge*) all were warmly received. In 1999, Chinese American writer Ha Jin won the National Book Award for *Waiting*, his first novel, set against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution. In short fiction, such writers as David Wong Louie (*Pangs of Love and Other Stories*, 1991), Wakako Yamauchi (*Songs My Mother Taught Me*, 1994) and Lan Samantha Chang (*Hunger*, 1998) have been similarly acclaimed.

This range of achievement speaks to the diversity of thematic concerns in Asian American literature that parallels contemporary Asian American heterogeneity. Asian American works are not situated in, nor do they contribute to, a cohesive and united tradition. Rather, certain cultural elements appear to be shared by authors from varying histories and origins. Similar concerns may be seen to arise from a particular East Asian world view, from patriarchal constructions of kinship and gender, and from shared experiences of struggle and isolation in the new world of the United States. And yet, no single tradition underlies the variant strategies and techniques that characterize the achievement of Asian American literature.

The fact is that heterogeneous representations -- in literature as in society -- help to overturn the stereotype of "inscrutable" Asian Americans. (When Filipina-American Jessica Hagedorn titled her recent anthology of Asian American literature *Charlie Chan Is Dead*, there was more than a touch of irony in this reference to the heroic, yet stereotypical Asian American detective protagonist in the 1930s era novels of Anglo-American writer Earl Derr Biggers and their film adaptations.)

Until recently, Asian American studies accepted a limited psychosocial notion of the stereotype. Psychologists such as Stanley Sue argued that Euro-

Americans historically justified their discrimination against Asian Americans on popular prejudices that denigrated immigrants as inferior, diseased, and unwelcome. This unfortunate 19th-century negative stereotype has given way in our day to a positive stereotype of the Asian American as educated, hard-working and successful, a model minority, a depiction that is finding a growing presence in literature as well, even as it is the subject of continued debate within the community.

Another theme, operating alongside race analysis, is gender analysis, with many works recounting Asian American women's struggles against traditional patriarchal attitudes. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is one example -- a complex series of narratives about growing up in a community structured along gender and race lines.

As in most traditional societies, gender roles in Asian American communities have tended to be fixed and communally scrutinized. The tensions these strictures have caused surfaced over the past decade in such anthologies of Asian American writing as *Home to Stay* (1990) and *Our Feet Walk the Sky* (1993). Generally, the high esteem centering on male children brought loftier economic and social expectation of sons. Daughters were expected to marry and to become part of their husbands' households. Indeed, the dominant view throughout East Asian societies was that women were subject first to fathers, then to husbands, and then -- if widowed -- to their sons.

Immigration to the United States, a society in which male and female roles are more fluidly and more freely defined, put traditional social values under stress. It follows that this development has affected literature. The works of the younger generation, such as Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996) and Vietnamese-American writer Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge* (1997), express the confusions arising from the gap between their desires for self-reliance and individual happiness and their immigrant mothers' expectations. But even at an earlier date, just after World War II, Jade Snow Wong and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, in writing about growing up female, had made similar reflections about gender bias in their families.

It is true, of course, that gender roles often are presented as a function of culture. South Asian

American women writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Bapsi Sidhwani (*An American Brat*, 1994) have focused on the cross-cultural tensions that arise when crossing national borders. Asian American male characters face a crisis in understanding the significance of manhood — in books such as Louie's *Pangs of Love* and Gus Lee's *China Boy* (1991). In love or in the family unit, therefore, Asian Americans have had to negotiate conflicting ideals of male and female identities.

Another major theme in Asian American writing is the relationship between parents and children. This, too, has an historical and social underpinning. In years past, because of the language barriers that faced immigrant Asian Americans, the point of view of the American-born, second-generation Asian American sons and daughters usually prevailed in their literature. As early as 1943, Lowe's autobiography, *Father and Glorious Descendant*, gave U.S. readers the character of a dominant father within a strong, cohesive ethnic community.

While second-generation children often reject their parents' social expectations, immigrant parents are not simply flat representations of static societies. They are also individuals who had broken away from their original communities in moving to the United States. As a result, the U.S.-born Asian American writers portray complex parental characters who are themselves double figures. Works by Yamamoto and Yamauchi depict mother-daughter relationships that are prone to conflict and tensions that are not only familial, but also gender-based. Lan Samantha Chang's evocative short stories in *Hunger* further exemplify such writing.

Parent-child relationships are not merely signified as a set of themes but also as patterns of narrative strategies — points of view, plots, characters, voices and language choices. Who the center of consciousness is in the poem or story affects the flow of identity for the reader. The range of voices and tones given to the speakers tells us whether the parents are non-English-speaking immigrants or bilingual speakers, and whether or not the children differ vastly from their parents in cultural attitudes and values. What is seldom in doubt is the central significance of the parent-child relationship in these

works, illuminating the primary social role that families play in Asian American communities.

Some of these works are also pegged to regions. For example, the narratives of Okada, Toshio Mori and Kingston are set specifically in enclaves on the U.S. West Coast, while Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) takes place in New York City's Chinatown, a continent away. Works emanating from Hawaii, such as Milton Murayama's novel *All I Asking for Is My Body* (1975), and Lois-Ann Yamanaka's poems and fictions in *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (1993) and *Blu's Hanging* (1998), express a strong island identity and use English registers and dialect resources specific to Hawaiian colloquialism. Similar island-identified themes and stylistic registers are evident in anthologies and titles published by Hawaii's Bamboo Ridge Press.

Invariably, there has been a move toward postmodernist techniques present as well in recent years. Works by younger contemporary authors, such as novelist Cynthia Kadohata's *In the Valley of the Heart* (1993) and the dramas of playwrights Hwang and Gotanda match Kingston's tour-de-force novel *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989). They experiment with such on-the-edge techniques as parody, irony and pastiche to challenge the interlocking categories of race, class and gender, and to include sexual identity as one of the central themes of identity. Using similar techniques, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), set in the Philippines, critiques historical U.S. colonialism and the Marcos regime while celebrating Filipino cultural fusions.

Single-genre anthologies offer a wide spectrum of styles and voices. *The Open Boat* (1993) and *Premonitions* (1995) indicate new directions in poetry. *Charlie Chan Is Dead* (1993) and *Into the Fire* (1996) introduce readers to recent fiction. And two 1993 anthologies, *The Politics of Life* and *Unbroken Thread*, record what is happening in drama. There is a healthy heterogeneity evident as well in recent anthologies focusing on individual national origins, such as *Living In America* (1995), the reflections of South Asian Americans, and *Watermark* (1998), a collection of writings by Vietnamese Americans, as well as a newly-published volume, *Southeast Asian American Writing: Tilting the Continent* (2000). And certainly there is a rich variety of communal identities, genres and styles to

be found in recent general anthologies, including Shawn Wong's *Asian American Literature* (1996).

Taken together, the goal of these anthologies is to provide satisfactory access to the provocative, challenging and original works produced in the last century. Striking a balance between well-known, acclaimed works and newer writing, the selections typically reflect considerations of both historical and thematic significance and literary quality, a criterion that often is the subject of healthy and vociferous debate. Together, though, the diversity of styles, genres, and voices testifies to the vitality of Asian American writing.

Ultimately, this diversity has, at its core, transnationalism -- a global movement of cultures, people and capital. This new phenomenon has caused writers to create new identities for people -- and for themselves. The Asian American rubric is a melange of emigres, refugees, exiles and immigrants who have been coming to the United States for decades, continuing to write and be published here. Until recently, though, a number had maintained their identities of origin and even had returned to their native lands later in life. An example is the well-known Chinese writer and Columbia University scholar Lin Yu-Tang, who returned to Taiwan after his retirement from teaching. Despite having written a novel set in the United States, *Chinatown Family*, a half-century ago, he has not been classified as an Asian American author.

Today, clearly, these national identity borders are viewed as more porous, a result of and contributing factor toward a globalization of cultures and of the world's economies under the forces of free market operations, paralleled by a shift toward a greater transnational construction of U.S. identity. Émigré, migrant or transnational writers such as Korean Americans Chang-rae Lee and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Indonesian American Li-Young Lee, Malaysian American Shirley Geok-lin Lim, South Asian Americans Meena Alexander, Chitra Davakaruni

and Bapsi Sidhwā – as well as Hagedorn and Cao – are constructing strikingly new American identities that contrast sharply with, for example, the Eurocentric model of capitalism in its early stages that J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur described more than 200 years ago in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). The transnational identities of the 21st century emerge, by contrast, at a moment of capitalism in its maturity, and are dependent upon global exchanges.

The novels of Lee, Cao and Jin require consciousness of bicultural, binational aesthetics and linguistic formation. The fictions of Jin (who arrived in the United States in 1985), for example, set in China of the past 30 years, while new, are different from the newness of U.S.-born writers such as Kingston, whose attempts to recover an ethnic history result in explorations of reverse migrations, from the United States to a China she had never seen.

In reading Asian American literature, then, we are reminded that critics and teachers must mediate between new texts and historically constructed U.S. literary traditions, between social locations and literary identities of the communities for and to which the texts are speaking. Together, recent works of Asian American authors -- transnational, immigrant and native Americans alike -- underscore the phenomenon of rapid publication and the continuous reinvention of Asian American cultural identity. In deliberately placing these writers of varied origins together, the growing canon of Asian American writing suggests a collective set of new American identities that are flexibly transnational and multicultural and that help leaven the multinational mosaic that has historically shaped the United States. ■

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PROFILE:

CHANG-RAE LEE -- THE CAST OF HIS BELONGING

For Chang-rae Lee, it all began with his father.

"My father came first," the lauded Korean-American novelist said in a recent *New York Times* interview, describing his family's migration to the United States slightly more than 30 years ago.

Everything else -- transit eastward to a new world with his mother and sister, considerable educational opportunities at private schools and Yale University, the decision to forsake a promising financial career to fulfill his creative impulses as a writer, his well-received first two novels, his naming by *The New Yorker* magazine as one of the 20 most promising writers for the 21st century, and the numerous honors he has attained -- followed the choice his father made. (The older Lee was a physician in Korea; he became a psychiatrist in the United States after learning English.) And Lee has accomplished all of this before reaching his middle 30s.

Lee's 1995 debut novel, *Native Speaker*, gained the young author -- then under 30 -- the prestigious Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for a first novel. It focused on a Korean immigrant's son who works as a privately employed corporate spy, wrestles with an imperiled marriage and the death of a son, and becomes involved in political intrigue. His estranged wife describes him as politically and emotionally alien, and he is, truthfully, a man living in two worlds yet belonging to neither of them.

Gish Jen, herself a rising Asian American writer, called *Native Speaker* "beautifully crafted, enlightening and heart-wrenching...a brilliant debut and a tremendous contribution to Asian American literature." *The New York Times Book Review* hailed it as "rapturous." And the attention and awards began to flow his way.

The book was quite an accomplishment for a writer who has acknowledged, in a number of interviews, the overwhelming power of the word for him. "Word choices are life and death for me," he told *Newsday* in September 1999, noting that until he entered grade school, he spoke only Korean. "Over the course of two years, I went from one language, lost it,

picked up another." As flawless and as lyrical as his writing is, he still fears that he isn't using English correctly.

Yet he prevails. His most recent book is *A Gesture Life*. Published in the fall of 1999, it presents, again, an outsider as protagonist. Told in two timeframes, it introduces readers to Franklin Hata, a Japanese-American of Korean birth, who is carving out a life for himself as a pharmacist in the suburban United States in the postwar years, albeit amidst family tensions. But there is another side to his history -- his service as a medical officer during World War II that entangled him in some of that era's horrors. And as the two facets of his experience come together, so do the two worlds of the immigrant do as well.

"There is something exemplary to the sensation of near perfect lightness," Hata observes of his dichotomous state, "of being in a place and not being there, which seems of course a chronic condition of my life but then, too, its everyday unction, the trouble finding a remedy but not quite a cure, so that the problem naturally proliferates until it has become you through and through. Such is the cast of my belonging, molding to whatever is at hand."

This time, critics were even stronger in praising his work. *The New York Times'* Michiko Kakutani called the novel "wise and humane," and Leslie Brody, in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, described Lee as "an original."

Today, as he directs the master of fine arts program at Hunter College, part of the City University of New York, he is working on his third novel, set in the 1950s among a group of U.S. soldiers in Korea during the war there. For him, he says, it represents an opportunity to consider anew people who find themselves in places possibly not of their own choosing, and who must determine how to make a life there for a period of time. It represents for him, he told a *New York Times* interviewer, "that feeling of both citizenship and exile, of always being an expatriate -- with all the attendant problems and complications and delight."

-- Michael J. Bandler



OTHER ASIAN AMERICAN WRITERS

Vietnamese American novelist and law professor **LAN CAO**, 28, has drawn on her heritage to write both fiction and nonfiction. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *Monkey Bridge* (1997), describes the flight to freedom in the United States by a mother and her teenage daughter at the end of the Vietnam War, depicting how each deals with the challenges of a new life. The book distinctly mirrors Lan Cao's experiences; her family was among those anti-Communist Vietnamese airlifted to safety. New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani noted Cao's "sensitive job of delineating the complicated relationship between a mother and a daughter," concluding that "Cao has . . . made an impressive debut." The author also collaborated with Hilmilce Novas on *Everything You Need to Know About Asian American History* (1996), a nonfiction work providing information on Asian and Pacific Islander groups in the United States.

JESSICA HAGEDORN was born in the Philippines in 1949 and grew up there during the rule of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, immigrating to the United States during her teens. A poet and novelist, she also worked as a performance artist in New York City. Much of her poetry adapts the Beat style of Allen Ginsberg and others from the 1960s, and easily lends itself to performance. Hagedorn is known for her graphic poetry and prose, which focuses on life's more disturbing aspects, and her characters are often women or Asians alienated from society. An anthology, *Danger and Beauty*, representing nearly a quarter-century of her work, was published in 1993. Her first novel, *Dogeaters* (1987), an unflinching portrayal of Philippine life, was nominated for the National Book Award, and her second novel *Gangster of Love*, followed in 1996. In 1993, Hagedorn edited *Charlie Chan is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*.

Award winning poet **GARRETT HONGO** is the author of two books of verse, *Yellow Light* (1982) and *The River of Heaven* (1988), that explore the experiences of Asian Americans in U.S. society. Hongo, an American of Japanese descent, was born on Hawaii and raised in Los Angeles. Booklist's Donna Seaman notes that Hongo was "estranged from his culture, his homeland, and his family history until he returned to his place of birth." In *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawaii* (1995), Hongo describes his return to his birthplace in Hawaii to begin a quest to connect with his heritage and his past. In a conversation with Contemporary Authors, Hongo observed, "My project as a poet has been motivated by a search for origins of various kinds, a quest for ethnic and familial roots, cultural identity, and poetic inspiration...." Nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1989 for *The River of Heaven*, Hongo has also edited several collections of poems and a book of essays on the Asian American experience.

GISH JEN -- also known as Lillian Jen -- was born in New York City in 1955. Her parents, who emigrated from China, worked hard to give their children the opportunities they were denied in China. While in high school she adopted the name "Gish" -- after the actress Lillian Gish. It took Jen a while to find her voice as a writer. She struggled through her first year of business school before realizing that she "had to become a writer or die." *Typical American* (1991), her first novel, was a resounding success and finalist for a National Book Critics Circle award. It, and its followup novel, *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), recount the often funny and sometimes tragic story of the immigrant Chang family, tracing how they slowly adjust to the United States and are transformed by changes that eventually drive them apart. Her latest volume, *Who's Irish?* (1999), is a collection of eight short stories that observe not only her own Chinese American ethnic group, but other U.S. ethnic groups as well.

DAVID WONG LOUIE was born in a suburb of New York City in 1954, the son of first-generation Chinese immigrants. His short stories were being published by some of the most prominent literary journals in the United States prior to the publication of *Pangs of Love* and *Other Stories* in 1991. *Pangs of Love* was

received with much praise, winning the Los Angeles Times First Fiction Award and the Ploughshares First Book Award. It included Louie's widely acclaimed 1989 short story, "Displacement," in which an immigrant cleaning woman feigns ignorance of English as she silently suffers the verbal diatribes of her employer. Louie's new novel, *The Barbarians Are Coming*, which tells the story of a son's edgy relationship with his Chinese-American parents, is to be published in March 2000. Louie currently teaches creative writing and literature at the University of California at Los Angeles.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE, an Indian immigrant to the United States, has captured evocatively the South Asian -- particularly the Indian --immigrant experience in the United States in her dozen-plus novels, collections of short fiction, essays and works of nonfiction. Her early novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975), tell the story of the isolation of Indian expatriates. In these earlier works Mukherjee was seen as an Indian writing in English, but in her third book, a collection of short stories titled *Darkness* (1985), she began to write with the voice of a North American immigrant author. With *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1989), Mukherjee's shift in point of view is complete, as she paints an even broader portrait of the North American immigrant experience. In *Jasmine* (1989), she explores female identity through an Indian

peasant woman whose travels to different locales in the United States increasingly solidify her identity in this country. *The Holder of the World* (1993), said to be her most accomplished recent work, turns to the subject of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Mukherjee is a professor at the University of California at Berkley.

BAPSY SIDHWA has been called Pakistan's leading English-language novelist. Born in Karachi in 1938, she moved to the United States in 1983. Her first three novels -- *The Crow Eaters* (1983), *The Bride* (1983) and *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989) -- take place in her homeland, exploring the post-colonial Pakistani identity. Anita Desai has said that Sidhwa has "a passion for history and for truth telling" -- and this passion is exhibited in each of her first three novels, as she tries to understand the dramatic events leading to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the subsequent birth of Pakistan as a nation. Her "richly comic" fourth novel, *An American Brat* (1994), looks at the immigrant experience in the United States as she chronicles a young Parsi girl's exposure to American culture in the late 1970s. Sidhwa's short stories and articles have been published in numerous anthologies.

-- S.D.

