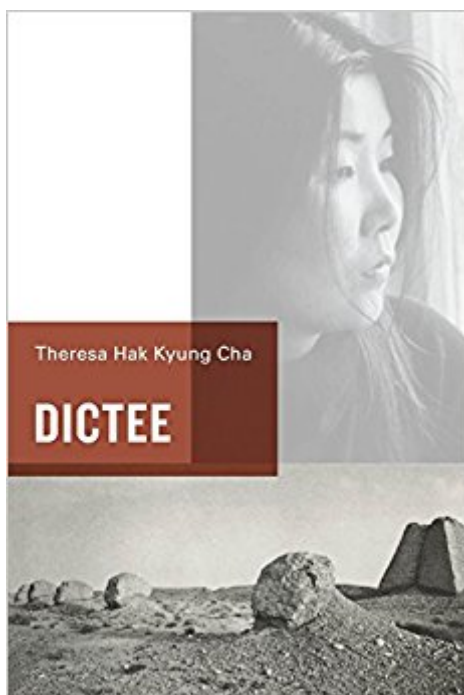


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Dictee



Synopsis

Dictee is the best-known work of the versatile and important Korean American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. A classic work of autobiography that transcends the self, *Dictee* is the story of several women: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Demeter and Persephone, Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo (a Korean born in Manchuria to first-generation Korean exiles), and Cha herself. The elements that unite these women are suffering and the transcendence of suffering. The book is divided into nine parts structured around the Greek Muses. Cha deploys a variety of texts, documents, images, and forms of address and inquiry to explore issues of dislocation and the fragmentation of memory. The result is a work of power, complexity, and enduring beauty.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's work of poetry *Dictee* has received due critical attention (most recently from poet Juliana Spahr), her artist's books and other art works are less well known. *Dictee* will be re-released this October, along with *The Dream of the Audience*, a book documenting a travelling exhibition dedicated to the Korean-American Cha (1951-1982). In addition to excellent reproductions of Cha's handbound texts and images from her performances, the book includes essays by Berkeley Art museum curator Constance Lewallen, Whitney Museum of American Art curator Lawrence Rinder and critic and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha. Copyright 2001 Cahnors Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Cha takes the reader to a word with odd syntax and diction, with lovely imagery and sounds. This book is a great read. It provides historical context through narrative, and provides a great look on a minority culture(s). I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who wishes to read something not following a cliched formula.

As a piece of art perhaps it would work, but as a piece of literature it stands as a scathing indictment of postmodernity, in love with its own disjointed voice. Its lack of punctuation and dodging between languages and fragmented "stories" seems to purposeless expression. Professors of graduate literature programs and Asian Studies programs will likely make you suffer through this at some point, and gush about its commentary on disenfranchised Asian-Americans.

I read this book for my Asian American lit class and found it excruciating painful to read. It's certainly inventive, but that's the only positive thing I can say about it. It's difficult to read, there are no characters to love. The French side by side is misleading since the translations are not exact. I would not call this a book, but rather a piece of contemporary art: It has a great concept but isn't actually very nice to read.

In total ignorance, just happened upon "Dictee" at a local garage sale. Incredible blessed find! Beyond others' benedictions, only to note that the prose-poem aspects of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's writing offer IMHO a useful and liberating meditation on language and thought and the ever-shimmering hallucinogenic bond and border between them. A marvelous work. If you're reading "Dictee" as an obligatory Asian lit assignment, you might pass through it in dismissive haste, like speeding through Mecca en route to a shopping spree in Abu Dhabi. Allow yourself time with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

The poet Charles Simic says, "Long drawn-out works conflict with the fragmentariness of our consciousness. What is recorded in a notebook is the sense of the unique and unrepeatable experience of the rare moments of clarity." "Dictee" is this kind of book, a collection in nine parts of mixed writing styles including short passages in French and English, journal entries, stories and dreams, even a handwritten letter. And more. Theresa Hak Cha's book, which has been called both fiction and autobiography, also contains photographs, film stills, diagrams, and other black and white images. "Electric" only begins to describe the structure and style of "Dictee." Cha's writing doesn't come without risk--"Dictee" seems thematically and structurally difficult. But it's with this style, actually a process-of-writing style, that Cha shows us how her mind works. It's in her "fragmentariness" that elements of profound meaning rise to the surface, what Simic meant by "rare moments of clarity." Cha's imagination on the page, her explorations into language and poetic lyricism--with connections to nationalist and feminist themes--help us feel her genuine struggle with Korea as a victim of the Cold War. This message is her legacy; it's a kind of Presence in her writing. And we sense her triumph.

"Dictee" is a seminal work that has strongly influenced those poets lucky enough to have read it in the decades since it first appeared. It has had an underground reputation for decades, and now is beginning to be known to the mainstream. Yes, "Dictee" is rooted in the specifics of her family's immigrant experience, in the specifics of Korea and of America, in the specifics of gender, but it explodes across time, space and cultures, it transcends form, and ultimately it transforms the reader's consciousness of what can be done with writing and how you can perceive your life. I am tempted to say "if Cha had lived longer she would have been one of our major writers" but in fact she *is* one of the major writers of the second half of the 20th century, on the strength of this one work alone. I am delighted that "Dictee" is soon to appear in an edition with more of Cha's work.

The autobiographical work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, "Dictee," is both a challenging and unique experience to read. Her provocative blend of prose, poetry, narrative and historical pieces, among other genres, reveal a voice that purposely avoids a "typical" patriarchal discourse that is refreshing although disarming. Her words, contextually somewhat difficult for the (this) reader not previously aware of the complexities and truths of Korean history (both in Korea and America), are at once powerful and insightful...poetic, yet raw. Cha is able to use her gift to offer a glimpse into one woman's history and journey; one that ended much too soon on this planet for this talented artist.

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Dictee

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