



Between the Eagle and the Sun: Traces of Japan

Ihab Hassan

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An invitation to voyage east leads Ihab Hassan to reflect on his origins in Egypt, on his home in America, and on his host country, Japan. Part memoir, part cultural perception, *Between the Eagle and the Sun* records a journey, echoing the "wanderers of eternity." The result is not a book about "them," some alien people living on a distant island, but rather a book about the author himself, living among others, living and seeing himself sometimes as another, assaying always to read the hieroglyphs of his past in the scripts of Japan.

Lucid as it is intensely felt, at once lyrical and critical, the work offers a beguiling vision of Japan and, by tacit contrast, of America. For writing, the author says, is more than praise or blame, it is also knowledge, empathy, and delight. These attributes are evident in Hassan's treatment of Japanese culture, its people and scenes. Indeed, the people, rendered in vibrant portraits throughout the book, abide when all the shadows of romance and exasperation have fled.

True to its moment, the work also reinvests the forms of memoir, travel, and quest. Cultural essays, travel anecdotes, autobiographical meditations, portraits of Japanese friends, a section titled "Entries, A to Z," fit into a tight frame, with clear transitions from one section to another. The style, however, alters subtly to suit topic, occasion, and mood.

Japan may not hold the key to this planet's future; no single nation does. Yet the continuing interest in its history, society, and people and the increased awareness of its recent trends and growing global impact engage an expanding audience. Avoiding clichés, sympathetic to its subject yet analytical, unflinching in judgment, and withal highly personal, *Between the Eagle and the Sun* offers a unique image of its subject by a distinguished and well-traveled critic, at home in several cultures.

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