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 ***Honor at Daybreak* by Elmer Kelton (review)**

Starr Jenkins

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REVIEW

[View Citation](#)**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviews 175 her multiple sclerosis from her worrisome mother. The mother, who has kept her past a secret from her daughter lest the latter should think of her as a “bad mother,” gradually reveals the real accounts of her childhood in China, her first marriage during the Second World War to an incredibly vicious man, and her romantic rendezvous with her second husband. Particularly interesting is the way she reconstructs her past—selective and logical, in her own superstitious way. Towards the end of the novel when she learns of her daughter’s disease, she creates out of a Chinese myth a guardian goddess, Kitchen God’s Wife, to ward off her daughter’s bad luck. As in her first novel, Tan provides the reader with fascinating details of Chinese traditions, myths and history, all of which serve to elucidate the mindset of the mother. Despite the occasional explanatory digressions, the warm and witty voice of the mother is engaging, and her story vividly illuminating of women’s sufferings in a male-dominated society and also of human psychology, particularly the invisible link between mother and daughter that cuts through cultural differences. In a sense, Amy Tan’s first two novels signal the beginning of a new phase in Asian American writing, the shift from

an aggressive and desperate search for identity, as in Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, to the proclamation of pride and reconciliation. SEIWOONG OH University of North Texas Honor at Daybreak. By Elmer Kelton. (New York: Doubleday, 1991. 390 pages, \$18.95.) Through his realism and understanding of people Elmer Kelton succeeds here in bringing the Western into the automobile age, into the roaring twenties of Model T Fords and red [Stutz?] roadsters in fact. He does this by writing a realistic yet adventurous story of life in the previously sleepy little West Texas cow-town of Caprock, a town that has been suddenly overwhelmed by the oil drilling boom. In comes a rough crowd of laborers, geologists, company drillers and independent (wildcat) drillers, truckers, pipe and tool merchants and some of their families, many living in a tent city that springs up at the edge of the old town. These are accompanied of course by prostitutes, thieves, moonshiners (since Prohibition is loosely on) and eventually a brutal gang of Mafia-type mobsters bent on shaking down all legal and illegal operations going on in the town. More significant than the conflict between the catde economy and the oil economy is the one between the good men and women and the more powerful and really evil bad guys (Big Boy Dougherty and his gang of thugs). Kelton's characters are well drawn and believable; the story moves; the 176 Western American Literature sandy plains, the oil derricks, the grubby slushpits where the tailings are dumped, the tent town on the edge of town, and the mesquite trees are real; and you love the good guys and hate the heinous hyenas with a passion for their evil deeds. You also get the feel of the oil-discovery business from the derrick floor roustabout's-eye view and that of the hardly-ever-successful independent wildcat driller. Kelton also successfully writes a story with two protagonists and interweaves their crime-fighting or job-seeking stories and their love stories well into the whole. These protagonists are: Patrick "Slim" McIntyre, 23-year-old just-laid-off cowboy who comes to this boom-town looking not for oil-work but for cowboy work on what proves to be a false lead. And Sheriff Dave Buckalew (echoing buckaroo), a World War I vet and also an ex-cowboy, struggling to keep his town safe from street fighting as well as major crimes and most of all from a known gang of mobsters who are moving in to feed on the town like leeches. Kelton puts you there, and takes you through the battles in believable fashion. And you feel the heat. © 1991, STARR JENKINS Emeritus, California Polytechnic Institute Our Island Home. By Richard Haddaway. (Mansfield, Texas: Latitudes Press, 1991. 159 pages, \$15.00.) When a novel, particularly an author's first, probes nostalgically into a family life of two or three decades past, tracking joys and pains from the perspective of an...

her multiple sclerosis from her worrisome mother. The mother, who has kept her past a secret from her daughter lest the latter should think of her as a "bad mother," gradually reveals the real accounts of her childhood in China, her first marriage during the Second World War to an incredibly vicious man, and her romantic rendezvous with her second husband. Particularly interesting is the way she reconstructs her past—selective and logical, in her own superstitious way. Towards the end of the novel when she learns of her daughter's disease, she creates out of a Chinese myth a guardian goddess, Kitchen God's Wife, to ward off her daughter's bad luck.

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