

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Contact: Linda Netschert
800-821-3874, 406-444-5103
linda.netschert@farcountrypress.com
fax 406-443-5480

CALIFORNIA'S BEST: Two Centuries of Great Writing from the Golden State

EDITED BY: Peter Fish

PUBLICATION DATE: July 2009

SPECS: 360 pages, 6 x 9", softcover

PRICE: \$18.95

Features works by:

Virginia Hamilton Adair	Jack London
Gertrude Atherton	William Lewis Manly
Mary Austin	Wilma McDaniel
Herb Caen	Tom McNeal
J. Smeaton Chase	Joaquin Miller
Louise Amelia Knapp	Max Miller
Smith Clapp	Walter Mosley
Ina Coolbrith	John Muir
Richard H. Dana	Charles Nordhoff
Joan Didion	Frank Norris
Harriet Doerr	Jenny Price
Daniel Duane	Gary Snyder
Dana Gioia	Gary Soto
Mary Edith Griswold	Wallace Stegner
Ron Hansen	John Steinbeck
Bret Harte	George Sterling
Robert Hass	Robert Louis Stevenson
Helen Hunt Jackson	Amy Tan
Robinson Jeffers	Mark Twain
Clarence King	Judy Van der Veer
Anne Lamott	Tobias Wolff

New Anthology

by *Sunset Magazine's* Peter Fish

Experience California as seen through the eyes of forty-one writers spanning two centuries—from early adventurers to contemporary poets—in this long-awaited anthology.

Edited by *Sunset Magazine's* Peter Fish, *California's Best: Two Centuries of Great Writing from the Golden State* features fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, including Tobias Wolff's short story "Desert Breakdown, 1968," Joan Didion's essay "Notes from a Native Daughter," and a selection from Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*.

Excerpts from the works of Wallace Stegner, Jack London, John Muir, Mark Twain, and many others incorporate voices from the past. Contemporary writers include Robert Hass, Daniel Duane, Anne Lamott, and Tom McNeal.

Organized by geographic region, the thoughtfully chosen pieces in this unique collection create a fascinating portrait of California, from its mountains and valleys to the Pacific Coast, Bay Area, and Southern California.

California's Best: Two Centuries of Great Writing from the Golden State is available at local bookstores and gift shops, through online retailers, or from FarCountry Press at 1.800.821.3874, www.farcountrypress.com.

Take a peek inside

By Peter Fish

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS A BOOK OF CALIFORNIA LITERATURE, but let's start with a scene from California, the physical place. Say you've taken a detour out to Santa Cruz Island off the southern California coast. After a few hours of looking for elephant seals, you head back toward Santa Barbara Harbor. From the boat's deck you see the Santa Barbara Channel, shores cheaper than you expect, and the spiky forms of the channel's offshore ridges. Ahead of you runs the white strip of sand that marks the shoreline, then the red roofs of Santa Barbara and the wall of mountains rising behind the city.

Much about the view is modern: the oil platforms, the Hobie Cat sailboats cutting across the waves in front of you, the buzz of traffic on US 101 as you near shore. But something essential is timeless—ocean, land, sky, sun. The sense, very strong here, of being someplace set apart. "In the first place, it was a beautiful day, and so warm that we had to wear our duck trousers, and all the summer gear," Richard Henry Dana Jr. wrote when he arrived in January of 1835.

Dana had sailed here from Boston, a Harvard boy attempting to gain health and a little adventure by signing on as a common seaman aboard the brig *Pilgrim*. At times during the six-month voyage around Cape Horn, he must have thought he'd made a mistake. He was an ill-prepared sailor, and *Pilgrim's* captain was brutal. There were floggings, and one man fell overboard and drowned. Now, at last, after 150 days at sea, the *Pilgrim's* sails make their first California landfall. As they did, Dana admitted the beauty of Santa Barbara's natural setting: "The town is certainly finely situated, with a bay in front, and an amphitheater of hills behind." He marked this new world's distance from the world he knew: "Well, D—"

INTRODUCTION

the second mate called to him, "this does not look much like Cambridge college, does it?" It did not.

Dana returned to Boston and in 1840 published his *Two Years Before the Mast*, which became for most Americans a first introduction to the distant, Mexican-ruled land that was California. Dana went on to become an expert in maritime law and a diplomat. Yet at the end of his life he was said to regret that his youthful moment of a voyage to California overshadowed all his other accomplishments. His regrets, too, hit on something essential about California: it is a way of putting other places in its shadow.

In these pages you will find forty-one writers, starting with Dana in mid-nineteenth-century California and ending with Lemmy Price in modern-day Los Angeles. They include poets and novelists and journalists. All but Dana were or are residents. One writer (Joseph Miller) was convicted of being a horse thief. One was a Nobel laureate (John Steinbeck). Many are well known, and some are not but should be.

The anthology is organized by region. California's regions exert annual power, which is why at various times citizens have tried to break up the state into smaller pieces: north and south, coast and inland. You can consider those movements have brained without denying that they've hit on an underlying truth: The California you experience in Laguna Beach is a world away from the one you see in Lone Pine. Berkeley exists in a different universe from Alhambra. The writing from each place is different, too.

So we start with the Pacific, following Dana to the Santa Barbara coast and Jack London across San Francisco Bay, riding with the indefatigable British traveler J. Smeaton Chase up through the Malibu that existed long before beach houses and golf-tennis-dollar homes. Then the mountains: the Sierra Nevada, limned in poetry by Gary Snyder; the Cascades, serenaded by Joseph Miller; and San Diego County's Cuyamaca, painted by rancher and writer Rudy Van Der Veer. The valley, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Owens, and Death. We finish with California's two larger-than-life metropolitan areas: San Francisco and the Bay Area—from Bret Hartley's ode to a San Francisco "suffragette for sale" to contemporary poet Robert Hask's sassy ode to Berkeley—and Los Angeles and Southern California.

It is a lot of territory to cover—a lot of people, a lot of years. Any anthology is subjective. You want to include everything but end up

FROM THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Winfield said, "Pa, I wanna get out."
Tom looked over at him. "Might's well let everbody out. You see settle down to dinner tonight." He slowed the car and brought it to a stop. Winfield scrambled out and unrolled at the side of the road. Tom leaned out. "Anybody else?"

"We'll hold on our water up here," Uncle John called.
Pa said, "Winfield, you crawl up on top. You put my legs to sleep a settin' on 'em." The little boy buttoned his overalls and obediently crawled up the back board and on his hands and knees crawled over Grandma's mattress and forward to Ruthie.

The truck moved on into the evening, and the edge of the sun struck the rough horizon and turned the desert red.
Ruthie said, "Winfield's leave you set up there, huh?"

"I didn't want to. It wasn't no nice as when Grandma lie down."
"Well, don't you bother me, a-squawkin' an' a-talkin'," Ruthie said. "Cause I'm goin' to sleep, an' when I wake up, we gonna be there!" Cause Tom said so Grandma seem funny to see pretty country.

The sun went down and left a great halo in the sky. And it grew very dark under the tarpaulin, a long cave with light at each end—a flat triangle of light.

Connie and Rose of Sharon leaned back against the cab, and the hot wind rambled through the tent struck the backs of their heads, and the tarpaulin whipped and drummed above them. They spoke together in low tones, pitched to the drumming canvas, so that no one could hear them. When Connie spoke he turned his head and spoke into her ear, and she did the same to him. She said, "Seems like we won't never gonna do nothin' but move. I'm so tired."

He turned his head to her ear. "Maybe in the mornin'. How'd you like to be alone now?" In the dusk his hand moved out and stroked her hip.

She said, "Don't. You'll make me crazy as a loon. Don't do that." And she turned her head to her his response.

Maybe—when ever body's asleep?
"Maybe," she said. "But wait till they get sleep. You'll make me crazy, an' make be they won't get to sleep."

"I can't hardly sleep," he said.

By John Steinbeck

Selection from *The Grapes of Wrath*

THE TRUCK TOOK THE ROAD and moved up the long hill, through the broken, rotten oak. The engine bled steam and Tom slowed down and took it easy. Up the long slope, winding and twisting through dead country, burned white and gray, and no hint of life in it. Once Tom stopped for a few moments to let the engine cool, and then he traveled on. They tapped the pans while the sun was still up, and looked down on the desert—black under mountains in the distance, and the yellow sun reflected on the gray desert. The little staked bushes, sage and greasewood, threw bold shadows on the sand and bits of rock. The glaring sun was straight ahead. Tom held his hand before his eyes to see at all. They passed the crest and coasted down to cool the engine. They coasted down the long sweep to the floor of the desert, and the fan turned over to cool the water in the radiator. In the driver's seat, Tom and Al and Pa, and Winfield on Pa's knee, looked into the bright descending sun, and their eyes were stony, and their brown faces were damp with perspiration. The burnt land and the black, cinder hills looked the even distance and made it terrible in the reddening light of the setting sun.

Al said, "Jesse, what a place. How'd you like to walk across here?"

"People done it," said Tom. "Tans a people done it, an' if they could, we could."

"Tans must a' done it," said Al.

"Well, we ain't come out exactly clean."

Al was silent for a while, and the reddening desert swept past. "Think we'll ever see them Willams again?" Al asked.

Tom flicked his eyes down to the oil gauge. "I got a hunch nobody ain't gonna see 'em Willams for long, but a hunch I got."

About Farcountry Press

Farcountry Press is the descendant of American and World Geographic Publishing, the book-publishing arm of Montana Magazine. The company was formed in 1980 and is based in Helena, Montana.

Farcountry specializes in softcover and hardcover color photography books showcasing the nation's cities, states, national parks, and wildlife. Farcountry also publishes several popular children's series, as well as guidebooks, cookbooks, and regional history titles nationwide.

The staff produces about 25 books annually; the backlist has grown to more than 300 titles.

www.farcountrypress.com, 800.821.3874

California's Best: Two Centuries of Great Writing from the Golden State is available at local bookstores and gift shops, through online retailers, or from Farcountry Press at 1.800.821.3874, www.farcountrypress.com.

For a press kit (cover image, interior photos, author contact information) contact **Linda Netschert**, 406-444-5103, linda.netschert@farcountrypress.com.



About the Editor

Peter Fish was born in Santa Barbara, California, and grew up in Ventura. He received a B.A. in history from Yale University, where he focused on the history of the American West. He was a Mirrieles Fellow in creative writing at Stanford University and a Hoyns Fellow in fiction at the University of Virginia. He has written and edited for *Sunset Magazine* for many years and is currently *Sunset's* editor-at-large. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, Nancy, and son, Joseph.

Praise for California's Best:

"With this book, Peter Fish has managed to pull together famous and lesser-known writers from across the years and landscapes to create a picture of California that is both timeless and surprising. The strength of *California's Best* is that it gives you a renewed appreciation for the magnetic pull this state has had over the people who have lived and written here. It's a great read."

—KATIE TAMONY, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, *SUNSET MAGAZINE*

"Armchair travelers will find that *California's Best* provides them with the services of an ideal tour guide. Peter Fish marshals sharp wisdom and deep knowledge to forge a book that offers a memorable journey through California's extraordinary landscapes and histories. With each poem, memoir, short story, or essay, Fish steps aside to let a remarkable array of writers take over the tour. Readers will finish the journey not only with an enhanced appreciation for California but also with heightened powers of observation and reflection to bring to bear on every place they land."

—PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK, AUTHOR OF *DESERT PASSAGES* AND *THE LEGACY OF CONQUEST* AND NATIVE OF BANNING, CALIFORNIA

"Jack London, Wallace Stegner, Gary Snyder, John Steinbeck and Joan Didion, Mark Twain and Tobias Wolff, Robert Hass and so many excellent others—*California's Best* is a terrific regional anthology, elegantly organized, with brilliant selections. Don't miss this one."

—WILLIAM KITTREDGE, CO-EDITOR, WITH ANNICK SMITH, OF *THE LAST BEST PLACE*