



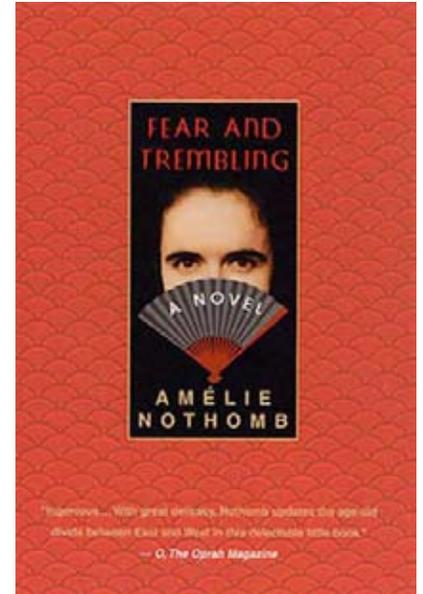
Reading Group Gold

Fear and Trembling

by Amélie Nothomb

Introduction to *Fear and Trembling*

According to ancient Japanese protocol, foreigners deigning to approach the emperor did so only with fear and trembling. Terror and self-abasement conveyed respect. Amélie, our well-intentioned and eager young Western heroine, goes to Japan to spend a year working at the Yumimoto Corporation. Returning to the land where she was born is the fulfillment of a dream for Amélie; working there turns into comic nightmare.



ISBN: 978-0-312-28857-0 | 2002

Alternately disturbing and hilarious, unbelievable and shatteringly convincing, *Fear and Trembling* will keep readers clutching tight to the pages of this taut little novel, caught up in the throes of fear, trembling, and, ultimately, delight.

Praise for *Fear and Trembling*

“Elegantly written . . . Nothomb demonstrates a shrewd understanding of the intricate ways Japanese relationships are made and spoiled.” – *The New York Times Book Review*

“[A] polished little satire.” – *The Wall Street Journal*

“A scathingly funny novella.”—*Newsday* (New York)

“Amélie Nothomb adds humor, the ingredient most often missing in other writers from France of her generation, the ingredient most difficult to translate.” – *Los Angeles Times*

“An utterly charming, humorous tale of East meets West . . . Nothomb is a terrific writer whose writing style is simple, honest, and elegant. Very highly recommended.” – *Library Journal*

“A sharp, satiric new novel . . . Readers are sure to be won over by her spare, self-deprecating and wise tale.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“Highly entertaining . . . *Fear and Trembling* (a perfect title) is filled with both droll observations and wry bitch gags.” – *Kirkus Reviews*



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“There can be no doubt about Amélie Nothomb’s talent: her imagination, energy, facility, fertility, her edgy use of language all prove that she is a writer of enormous gifts. Her writing is as sharp as a whip, the perfect antidote to sleep-inducing novels. She wakes you up. She shakes you up . . . *Fear and Trembling* will keep readers entertained and on the edge of their seats until the final page.” – *Le Figaro*

“More than anything this is a beautiful love story—in which Sappho meets the Marquis de Sade.” – *Le Nouvel Observateur*

“*Fear and Trembling* is Nothomb at her finest. Never has she been so daring or inspired . . . This book is a small miracle. On second thought, no ‘small’ about it; it is plain and simple a miracle.” – *Le Point*

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. The novel is a portrait of life in a Japanese office from the point of view of a Westerner. What seems peculiarly “Japanese” about the Yumimoto Corporation, and what things might or might not have happened in a company with headquarters in Chicago or Houston?
2. The relationship between Amelie and Fubuki Mori is central to the book. Discuss what bonds them and, eventually, what repels them. Are some of these reasons the same?
3. The novel gradually but inexorably becomes a battle of wills between Amelie and Fubuki, each refusing to back down and admit defeat. At the core is the whole issue of “face,” particularly the importance of not losing it. How do you feel “face” relates to what happens in the story?
4. Amelie wants desperately to become Japanese, according to her definition of what this means. Does she succeed by the end?
5. Halfway through the novel Amelie provides a long description of what Japanese women have to endure in their culture, and how their quest for perfection both drives and dooms them. Do you think women living in this country – particularly women working within corporate structures – share their dilemmas?
6. Why is Amelie so drawn to windows? Is she suicidal? And is Amelie a victim or does she bring about her own downfall?
7. Japanese women are held to high behavioral standards. Are Japanese men held to the same standards? Consider all the men in the novel, from the maniacal bully Mr. Omochi to the saint-like Mr. Saito. Does the strict adherence to hierarchy render them in some way powerless? After all, even the supreme Mister Haneda can only stand aside and let the excruciatingly embarrassing drama between Fubuki Mori and Amelie run its course.
8. This novel is based on a true story. What do you think the original Miss Mori, whoever and wherever she is, might have felt while reading *Fear and Trembling*?



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About the Author

Belgian by nationality, Amelie Nothomb was born in Kobe, Japan, and currently lives in Paris. She is the author of eight novels, translated into fourteen languages. *Fear and Trembling* won the Grand Prix of the Academie Francaise and the Prix Internet du Livre.