

Bestsellers: National fiction

Matsubara, Hisako
Cranes At Dusk
Dial, 253p., \$15.95

Cranes At Dusk is a novel about Japan in transition during the post-World War II era. Hisako Matsubara uses her third novel as an autobiographical sketch to explain the imminent changes facing defeated Japan.

Matsubara focuses on a wealthy family in the ancient city of Kyoto to illustrate what happened to the empire's smashed war machine. Seen more specifically by 10-year-old Saya, the daughter of a Shinto priest, the "hairy" Americans occupy Japan's sacred soil. Matsubara grew up as a daughter of a Shinto priest in war-torn Kyoto. The Americans set up a Christian church in the city, which Saya attends to learn English. Saya's friends and elders are fearful, but yet intrigued by the Yankee's strange foods and customs.

It is the end of an era in the oriental land. The unspeakable has happened: Japan has been defeated. Strong nationalism fades; free thinking and self expression become the new trend. Saya's mother, a samurai, represents the old Japan with its strict class system and tight rituals. Saya's father—the Guji, a high Shinto priest—advises her to flow with the unknown adventures she would soon face in the changing society.

Cranes At Dusk's greatest asset is that it gives the reader a clear insight of how the people reacted to a historic event. By focusing on a specific group of people, Matsubara greatly illustrates how an entire land was changing. She lifts the mysterious veil usually surrounding the Japanese, and shows their strengths and weaknesses.

JOHN McDONOUGH, *Glassboro State College.*