

# Booklist ONLINE

**Matsubara, Hisako.** *Cranes at dusk.* Tr. from the German by Leila Vennewitz. 1985. 253p. Doubleday/Dial, \$15.95 .

(0-385-27858-6).

YA

In a beautifully understated novel about Japan in 1945, 10-year-old Saya, the daughter of a Shinto priest, sees her family and the people in the silk-weavers' district of Kyoto face uncertainty and defeat. As news of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki filters through, the people cope with hunger, cold, and disease; in one family a son returns from the war, and in another the mother of a kamikaze pilot goes mad. For Saya, her friends, and her beloved little brother, Bo, all is not bleakness; traditional festivals, stories, and kite flying are still rich with meaning. Saya explores ideas and values with her wise and humane father, who has always opposed the war and who encourages her to learn English and attend the Christian church, since "no religion is enough to answer all the questions of mankind." He contemptuously dismisses as empty form the traditional social hierarchy and ceremonies to which Saya's mother rigidly clings, and Saya feels burdened as her mother tries to wrest her from her father. The author, who writes in German, is herself the daughter of a Kyoto Shinto priest, and the quiet narrative integrates the communal and personal grief with authentic power. HR.

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