



BOOK REVIEWS,  
BESTSELLING BOOKS  
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### CRANES AT DUSK

*Hisako Matsubara, translated by Leila Vennewitz. Dial/Doubleday, \$15.95 ISBN 0-385-27858-6*

As though we view them on a silk-screen, Japanese children launch their kites, old people in the silk weavers' lane smile at the faces in the sky and 10-year-old Saya runs past on her stilts. We are in 1945 Kyoto, its lineaments etched with a calligrapher's art, its story the pitiful one of adjusting to the many varieties of deprivation bred by defeat—not only the physical but the ideological poverty that losing a war engenders. For Saya, who embodies these societal changes, introduction to the English language, to Christianity and to the glib deceits of those she had trusted replaces heretofore clear answers with fearful questions. Daughter of the *guji*, high priest of the Shinto shrine, she watches her father cast the *I-Ching* and shrinks from the bleakness he foresees. Her mother, importunate, rigid, shrilling love and imprecation equally, never lets Saya forget her duty; her father tries to help his child

understand and forgive. The story is narrow in outline, broad in implication; it lights upon many people: an old woman weaving white birds on blue silk to steer her kamikaze son to heaven; Shinigawa, the army-booted air raid warden; Nakamura, the gardener, praying for his son's release; and, most poignantly, Bo, Saya's little brother, who talks to the cranes. Their lives are removed from the ordinary by an author who sees with her heart and gracefully and skillfully conveys what she sees to the reader. Matsubara's first novel was the praised *Samurai*. *January*