



## Japanese Tale Juxtaposes Religions

**CRANES AT DUSK.** By Hisako Matsubara. Doubleday-Dial. \$15.95.

Reviewed by  
**TOM C. ARMSTRONG**

Hisako Matsubara is a Japanese novelist who came to America to get her M.A. at Pennsylvania State University and now lives in Germany (her husband's homeland).

She writes in German but spends about four months each year in Japan in order to maintain her Japanese roots.

*Cranes At Dusk*, her third novel, is rendered through the perspective of Saya, the 10-year-old daughter of a Shinto priest. The book is set in Kyoto, Japan, in the turbulent period just before and after the end of World War II and is a study of cultural and familial conflict.

I particularly enjoyed the juxtaposition (and insights therefrom) of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and

Shintoism, in Saya's early life. Saya's father, the Guji, although overly idealized, touched and impressed me with his wisdom and his combination of stoicism and compassion.

Matsubara's first novel, *Broktrausch*, was critically acclaimed and translated internationally. The English translation of *Cranes At Dusk* is by Leila Vennewitz. I already admired Vennewitz because of her brilliant translation of works by the great German novelist and Nobel Laureate Heinrich Boll.

The world's first recorded novel may have been written by a Japanese lady (Murasaki Shikibu Nikku, *The Tale of Genji*, circa 1005) and Hisako Matsubara is continuing the tradition.

I bow, for different reasons, to both of them.

*Tom C. Armstrong is a Nashville poet and playwright.*