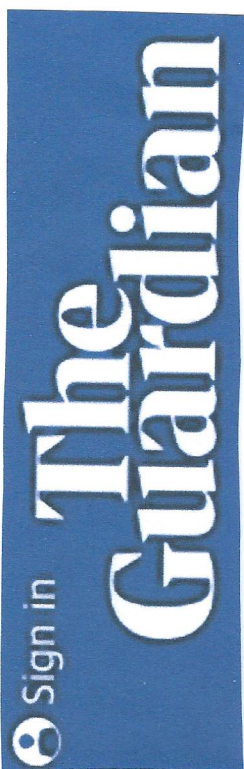


Power and cruelty

Hilary Bailey reviews new fiction



HISAKO MATSUBARA'S *Samurai*, set in the early years of this century, tells of an old family, headed by Hayato. Hayato sends his adopted son to the U.S. to restore the family fortunes, under the mistaken impression that his samurai breeding and good qualifications will command respect and good fortune in the New World. The son obeys reluctantly, for he is in love with his wife, Hayato's real daughter, and she is expecting their first child. The result is tragedy.

The details of the book are picked out and arranged with the economical simplicity of the traditional Japanese garden and the rooms of the house it describes. The story is as clear as water; the facts of the tragedy emerge unemphatically.

At first we may think we are reading the story of lovers parted and disasters brought on because an older, more dignified culture cannot comprehend or cope with the terms of a newer, more vulgar society. Yet, later, for the author is subtle, we realise that the system, which gives the aged male head of a household such power, has no checks on the abuse of that power.

The unselfconscious cruelties of a tyrant are used — the samurai father, Hayato, begins to look monstrous. Because he does not recognise his own villainy the effect is to make the reader sadder, not more angry. *Samurai* is a calm and moving novel.