

# New Statesman

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Hisako Matsubara's *Samurai* achieves a moving portrait of conflicts generated by the clash between the old values of the Japanese aristocracy and the new realities of the inter-war years, when America was becoming the nation's idol. It does not matter that the characters in this novel are two dimensional. Because they carry symbolic import and represent something much wider than themselves, their drama has the proportions of tragedy. Throughout, Matsubara uses symbolism unashamedly, but with a sure touch. For example, Hayato, who embodies the classic values of the Samurai class, after his impoverishment, immerses himself for hours in the training of his bonsai trees so that they become shaped exactly to his will.

By imposing his macho idealism, and by refusing to take heed of the new conditions of the era and of the personalities of his children, he ruins their lives. His final act of benevolence according to his principles, in reality amounts to a vile betrayal of his loyal son and the prostitution of his daughter. However, although the repressive values of the old order are exposed as corrupt and abusive, Hayato himself, despite his degradation, is painted with compassion.