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Madame Butterfly And A Japanese Nightingale: Two Orientalist Texts



Synopsis

Madame Butterfly (1898) and A Japanese Nightingale (1901) both appeared at the height of American fascination with Japanese culture. These two novellas are paired here together for the first time to show how they defined and redefined contemporary misconceptions of the "Orient." This is the first reprinting of A Japanese Nightingale since its 1901 appearance, when it propelled Winnifred Eaton (using the pseudonym Onoto Watanna) to fame. John Luther Long's Madame Butterfly introduced American readers to the figure of the tragic geisha who falls in love with, and is then rejected by, a dashing American man; the opera Puccini based upon this work continues to enthrall audiences worldwide. Although Long emphasized the insensitivity of Westerners in their dealings with Asian people, the ever-faithful Cho-Cho-San typified Asian subservience and Western dominance. A Japanese Nightingale takes Long's revision several steps further. Eaton's heroine is powerful in her own right and is loved on her own terms. A Japanese Nightingale is also significant for its hidden personal nature. Although Eaton's pen name implied she was Japanese, she was, in fact, of Chinese descent. Living in a society that was virulently anti-Chinese, she used a Japanese screen for her own problematic identity, and A Japanese Nightingale tells us as much about the author's struggle to embrace her Asian heritage as it does about the stereotypes she contests.

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Customer Reviews

The story, Madame Butterfly, is the most famous of these two, mainly due to Puccini using it as a basis for his opera by the same name. The opera is outstanding and many people think it is his

best. But of the two stories in this book, it is, by far the inferior. If I could rate the two stories separately, I would rate it two or three stars. The main reason is the pigeon english used by the author does not seem authentic, and is hard to understand. This makes sense because the author had little understanding of the Japanese culture, as pointed out clearly in the editor's introduction. The second story, A Japanese Nightingale, is much better, even night and day better. It also uses pigeon english, but that is much more believable and understandable, even though that author, also, had little understanding of the Japanese culture. You know just what Yuki is saying! If I could rate it separately, it would be five stars. It is an engaging story. Recommend! Thus, I would recommend reading the second story first, and if you have time, struggle through the first later.

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